

## Mental Health and the Workplace

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Mental illness is an affliction that is difficult to broach even in this Information Age. One in five Canadians experiences mental illness in any given year. We experience challenges in life which makes us vulnerable and potentially impacts our mental health.<sup>4</sup> Most of us pull through with the support and caring of our loved ones and our community.<sup>2</sup> There are more resources available to us than ever before but they still do not come anywhere near meeting the need.

Workers spend approximately one third of their adult working life in the workplace so colleagues can be an asset or a liability. As Convener for Employment & Economy, I urge employers and workers to inform themselves about the issues related to stress management, respectful workplaces, safe work environments, peer support programs as ways to promote mental well-being.

Employers can begin to change by setting an example of courtesy and respect, express appreciation and invite feed-back so the whole team of workers will feel each one is a valued employee contributing to significant, meaningful output. Such workplaces are likely to benefit from increased loyalty and productivity which can in turn translate in a pleasant work atmosphere where creativity thrives and which can impact positively the bottom line.

There exists a range of in-service workshops that deal workplace challenges: How to create a positive motivating atmosphere; respect for human rights can eliminate sexism, racism - celebrating diversity, instead; establish progressive human resources policies; how to deal with employees who may be experiencing family violence; workshops on mood disorders, depression/suicide prevention, etc.

New domains to explore in the modern workplace include the stress of 24-hour accessibility through technology; hazards of social media, harassment, the importance of work-family balance, policy regarding workplace relationships, and the notions of power and consent, to name a few.

<sup>1</sup> Smetanin et al (2011). The life and economic impact of major mental illnesses in Canada: 2011-2041

<sup>2</sup> Mental Illness and Addictions: Facts and Statistics, [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health web-site: http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/about\\_camh/newsroom/for\\_reporters/Pages/addictionmentalhealthstatistics.aspx](http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/about_camh/newsroom/for_reporters/Pages/addictionmentalhealthstatistics.aspx)

The terms 'mental illness' and 'addiction' refer to a wide range of disorders that affect mood, thinking and behaviour. Examples include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, as well as substance use disorders and problem gambling. Mental illness and addictions can be associated with distress and/or impairment of functioning. Symptoms vary from mild to severe.