

## About PSR9: Workload Management

### What is Guarding Minds @ Work?

Guarding Minds @ Work (GM@W) is an evidence-based strategy that assists employers in protecting and promoting psychological safety and health in the workplace. GM@W provides a comprehensive set of resources employers can use to effectively address the impact of 12 psychosocial risk (PSR) factors known to have a powerful impact on organizational health, the health of individual employees, and the financial bottom line. The PSRs were identified by researchers from the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (COMH) in the SFU Faculty of Health Sciences on the basis of extensive research and a comprehensive review of empirical data related to national and international best practices. The determination of the factors also reflects existing and emerging Canadian case law and legislation.

### What is PSR9 – Workload Management?

Guarding Minds @ Work defines PSR9, workload management, as present in a work environment where tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available. This is the risk factor that many working Canadians describe as being the biggest workplace stressor (i.e., having too much to do and not enough time to do it). Research has demonstrated that it is not just the amount of work that makes a difference but also the extent to which employees have the resources (time, equipment, support) to do the work well.

### Why is PSR9 – Workload Management important?

Most employees are not only willing to work hard, but experience a 'good day's work' as fulfilling and rewarding. Workload management is important because there is a unique relationship between job demands, intellectual demands and job satisfaction. Job demands reduce job satisfaction, whereas intellectual demands, or decision-making latitude, increase job satisfaction. Even when there are high demands, if employees also have high decision-making ability, they will be able to thrive. Having high decision-making latitude also allows for positive coping behaviours to be learned and experienced.

### What happens when employees can't manage their workload?

If any system is subject to excess load without respite it will break. This is as true for people as it is for equipment. Increased demands, without opportunities for control, result in physical, psychological and emotional fatigue, and increase stress and strain. This has a negative influence on performance. Emotionally fatigued individuals also have a diminished sense of personal accomplishment and an increased sense of inadequacy. One of the main reasons employees are negative about their jobs and their employers is excessive workload.

### How can I improve workload management?

Start by having the organization or work team conduct the Guarding Minds @ Work Assessment (Organizational Audit, Initial Scan and/or PSR-12 Employee Survey) and reviewing the resulting reports. If workload management is identified as an area of concern, refer to the relevant Action Tools for a practical strategy and evidence-based and effective suggestions that can improve workload management. It is also important to discuss the findings with concerned employees within the organization to gain a further understanding of the results and to obtain input and participation in determining useful corrective actions. Also, consider the information in the readings and resources identified below. Finally, refer back to the GM@W website on occasion for new ideas about how workload management can be enhanced.

**Further information about workload management can be found at:**

- Barnes, C., & Van Dyne, L. (2009). 'I'm tired': Differential effects of physical and emotional fatigue on workload management strategies. *Human Relations*, 62(1), 59-92. <http://hum.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/62/1/59>
- Lardner, R., Amati, C., & Briner, R. (2002). Stress management standards for workload. <http://www.keilcentre.co.uk/Data/Sites/1/Workload%20-%20Stress%20Management%20StandardsFinal.pdf>
- The Great-West Life Assurance Company. (2009). PSR9: Workload management. In Centre resources by risk factor. <http://www.gwlcentreformentalhealth.com/english/slides.asp?l1=3&l2=157&l3=159&l4=169&d=159&scroll=9>
- The Great-West Life Assurance Company. (2009). Workload and workplace. In *Creating healthier workplaces*. <http://www.gwlcentreformentalhealth.com/english/display.asp?l1=4&l2=43&l3=45&d=45>
- Health and Safety Executive. (n.d.). Work related stress: Health and safety in the workplace. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>
- Karasek, R. (1979). Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(2), 285-308. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2392498>
- Top 5 reasons for employee negativity. (2007, January). Office Solutions. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/IOURL?locID=ubcolumbia&ste=6&prod=BCRC&docNum=A159080098>

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