

Fact sheet 1-A: “Job and work context” indicator



Supplement to the Tool for Identifying Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Workplace

Indicators included in the tool

1- Work context and prevention measures in place

A. Job and work context

- B. Illness absenteeism and presenteeism
- C. Occupational health activities or policy
- D. Activities or policy against violence and harassment
- E. Return-to-work activities or policy
- F. Work/life-balance activities or policy

2- Key components of work organization

- A. Workload
- B. Recognition at work
- C. Social support of immediate supervisors
- D. Social support of colleagues
- E. Decision-making autonomy
- F. Information and communication

What is job and work context?

This first indicator of the tool is designed to determine the scope of both job insecurity and current or planned organizational changes that threaten jobs. Change is now commonplace in organizations, be it to enable them to carve out a place for themselves on existing markets, capture new market shares or become more efficient, effective or innovative.

Work reorganization, restructuring, mergers, delocalization, adoption of new work organization methods and new management techniques and the acquisition of new technological tools are all changes that affect an employee’s job and work context. These changes, which can be observed in both the private and the public sector, often have repercussions on work intensification, the casualization of labour and, therefore, the health and safety of workers.

Here are some examples of factors that point to a context of job insecurity:

- Elimination of positions
- Current or projected layoffs
- Frequent use of employment agencies, temporary placement agencies or outsourcing
- Temporary or casual positions
- Intermittent work

Why be concerned about this?

The Québec Survey on Working and Employment Conditions and Occupational Health and Safety (EQCOTESST) found, among other things, that a large proportion of Québec workers (35.8%) experience job insecurity.

Several studies have shown that casualization of labour and job insecurity are associated with an increased risk of work accidents and psychological, musculoskeletal and heart problems among workers. Irregular and unpredictable work schedules make it more difficult to achieve work/life balance. In addition, workers who experience job insecurity are more vulnerable to psychological harassment, sexual harassment and physical violence.

Research suggests that temporary employment found through agencies can pose an even greater risk to workers' health. This type of employment is usually intended for younger, inexperienced workers, who are placed in riskier, non-skilled occupations, where assessment and prevention are insufficient.

Certain groups of workers are more affected than others by job insecurity and are at greater risk of developing health problems. For example, a study by Scott-Marshall (2009) revealed that the health of aging workers who do not have a retirement pension declines more rapidly than that of workers in the same age group who have a pension.

What practices should be implemented?

Organizations find it difficult to take action in regard to the context in which their employees work because they are faced with situations or an external context over which they have little or no influence, such as market globalization, competition and declining demand. Nevertheless, concrete measures can be taken to improve employees' job and work context:

- Create permanent jobs and limit the number of casual and temporary positions
- Ensure that employees are entitled to priority placement in vacant jobs
- Temporarily reassign workers to other jobs or entrust them with new duties when there is not enough work in order to avoid having to lay off or dismiss employees
- Limit the use of outsourcing and temporary placement agencies
- Plan work so as to improve the likelihood of stable jobs

References and useful links

1. Cloutier, E., K. Lippel, N. Boulianne, J.-F. Boivin (2011). "Description des conditions de travail et d'emploi au Québec" in *Québec Survey on Working and Employment Conditions and Occupational Health and Safety* (EQCOTESST) Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec and Institut de la statistique du Québec - Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail, Chapter 2.
2. Quinlan, M., P. Bohle (2009). *Overstretched and unreciprocated commitment: Reviewing research on the occupational health and safety effects of downsizing and job insecurity*, International Journal of Health Services, Vol. 39(1), p. 1–44.
3. Scott-Marshall, H. (2009), *The social patterning of work-related insecurity and its health consequences*, Social Indicators Research, Vol. 96(2), p. 313–337.