



# WELL-BEING

## Column

## Harassment: when work becomes a source of stress and concerns

Good news for Canadian workers: several provinces require employers to protect their employees from psychological harassment. In addition, in early 2013, the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the *Bureau de normalisation du Québec* and the CSA Group officially published Canada's first national standard designed to help workplaces improve occupational psychological health and safety. These changes enable each employee to enjoy a healthy workplace that is respectful of people.

However, harassment is insidious and often sets in without any warning. It is a fact that, according to several studies on this topic, psychological harassment affects no less than a third of all workers, a phenomenon that is nothing new since, in 75% of cases, the problem has existed for more than six months.

### Identifying harassment

First, it is important to know the definition of workplace harassment in order to detect it quickly if applicable. It is defined as "any vexatious behaviour in the form of repeated and hostile or unwanted conduct, verbal comments, actions or gestures that affect an employee's dignity or psychological or physical integrity and that result in a harmful work environment for the employee".

Psychological harassment comes in many forms. It may be related to an altered form of communication when, for example, a person cannot talk, is constantly interrupted or rejected. The employee may also be isolated, marginalized or no longer invited to meetings. Similarly, his work may be discredited or devalued. In addition, harassment can jeopardize the worker's health through the various forms of intimidation, threats and physical violence that may be directed towards him. Suddenly, false rumours about the employee begin to surface and unrealistic expectations may be placed on him, which diminish his self-esteem.

Psychological harassment is a form of violence in its own right, and the impact on victims remains even after the behaviours that caused it have stopped.

### What is a sick company?

It is a company that requires increased performance from its employees while denying them independence, support or recognition. However, employees must be able to have a say and participate in decisions that affect their working conditions. They also need to feel a sense of belonging and be able to count on the strengths of their colleagues, in addition to being recognized and feeling involved in the company, for example, by being informed of its profits, opportunities for promotion and advancement, etc. It is important to establish healthy communication with your colleagues and boss and to bring up any uneasiness right at the start.

### Conclusion

If you think you are being harassed in your workplace in any way, do not hesitate to ask for help. The support services offer you additional help and active listening. We will discuss your situation and give you the tools you need to confront it.

Remember that harassment can be sneaky and you must stay alert.