

■ OF SOUND MIND

# Employment no guarantor of mental wellness

**W**e hear it a lot more often, it seems, during a recession: "That person should just be happy they still have a job."

True, that modern day adage does carry some weight, especially now. Current unemployment figures tell the tale of many good and qualified persons struggling to find a job. And this area has seen more than its fair share of factory closures, downsizing, and layoffs.

So sure. Be happy - or at least relieved - if you do have a job.

But if you're one of the luckily employed, it certainly doesn't guarantee you're basking in a state of strong mental health. Ironically, having a job right now can actually contribute to mental health challenges.

Because there are other figures that tell another tale: statistics that were gathered before the most recent economic upheavals. According to a 2008 survey by one of the CMHA's major supporters, Desjardins Financial, almost 75% of employees report that they're overworked, while 89% figure that those who are working are suffering from anxiety, depression or other mental health problems.

Maybe the extra hours you're putting in to make up for that co-worker who got laid off is weigh-



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ing you down. Possibly, your employer - who's also dealing with his or her own stress - is more aggressive, demanding (or demeaning) than usual. And those customers, who never really seemed to get under your skin before, are now putting you over the edge.

Creating that healthy balance between family and work can, at the best of times - economic and otherwise - be a challenge. Throw in the prospect of working harder for less, or the very real threat of losing your own job, and that work/life tightrope can be even more precarious to negotiate.

The earlier you catch that mental health problem, the sooner you can recover. Karen Liberman, the executive director of the Mood Disorder Association of Ontario puts it this way: "It's okay to feel bad when bad things happen; but if it continues and you're depressed about everything, that's a sign that something's wrong."

So, there. If you're reading this at work - or after a long day of it -

and your stress level still hasn't yet receded, you're not alone. In fact, you're part of a majority - a silent majority, unfortunately. And probably a majority that feels guilty, too. Because, well, you have a job, and so you're not allowed to feel stress, anxiety or depression. Well, the CMHA is here to tell you that you are allowed to feel these symptoms of mental health at work. It's normal, really. But so should seeking help.

And we want to offer help. It could be through one of our lunch-and-learn workplace seminars - where we can go to your place of business and provide you with some tools on how to deal with those co-workers, bosses and customers who are compromising your sense of well being. Or it could be a referral to one of our many educational support group sessions. Together, we'll find a way to help. Because at your CMHA, we're always open for business and always will be - regardless of the state of the economy.

*Naresh James is the executive director of the Canadian Mental Health Association in the Kawartha Lakes. You can learn more about the lunch-and-learn workplace seminars by calling (705) 328-2704 or visiting [cmhakawarthalakes.ca](http://cmhakawarthalakes.ca)*

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