

## **INTEGRATION OF A SIMPLE ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK FACTORS WITH PHYSICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Joan Burton, BSc, RN, MEd. Manager, Health Strategy, IAPA, Mississauga, ON

The concept of psychosocial hazards is one that is not an easy sell to many businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs – subject matter experts). There is often a need to demonstrate to employers the link between psychosocial factors and more traditional indicators of health and safety.

A very simple assessment tool for psychosocial risks has been developed and validated by Health Canada, called the Stress-Satisfaction Offset Score (SSOS). This tool consists of four questions about demands, control, effort and rewards in a job, and when scored mathematically, gives a simple quantitative measure of the degree to which workplace stressors and satisfiers are working for or against the health of an individual, and, in aggregate, against the health of a business.

The Industrial Accident Prevention Association (IAPA) in Canada has integrated this tool into broader health & safety audits or ergonomic assessments, and has found a striking correlation between the SSOS score and other health and safety effects, such as back pain. While this correlation does not imply or prove causation, it provides a rather dramatic visual connection that is useful to start a conversation with the employer about the issues surrounding back pain or other physical complaints.

This instrument could be used by small and medium-sized enterprises to assess the level of psychosocial risk in the enterprise, and the predictable effects on health and safety. Or, it could be used by internal or external consultants to draw attention to the fact that physical pain or injuries may be influenced by psychosocial factors that must be addressed at the same time as physical factors.