



**TRIVIALIZING  
MICRO-AGGRESSIONS  
NO MORE!**

We have to change our perceptions about the impact of **micro-aggressions** and **violence in the workplace**.

If you work in a youth centre, CRDI, or CHSLD,<sup>1</sup> you're more at risk of being the target of micro-aggressions. While micro-aggressions are not work accidents requiring time off, they are nonetheless incidents<sup>2</sup> whose physical and psychological repercussions are very real and can sometimes be disabling. Micro-aggressions must be reported and analyzed to help us identify the risks<sup>3</sup> involved and find appropriate solutions to avert employment injuries.

<sup>1</sup> CRDI: Rehabilitation centre for clientele with intellectual disabilities; CHSLD: residential and long-term care centre.

<sup>2</sup> Bélanger, Louise, ASSTSAS advisor, *Enquête et analyse d'un événement accidentel*, PowerPoint presentation, October 2019, p. 5: "An incident is defined as an undesirable event that under slightly different circumstances might have resulted in injury or caused material or production losses."

<sup>3</sup> Bélanger, Louise, ASSTSAS advisor, *Enquête et analyse d'un événement accidentel*, PowerPoint presentation, October 2019, p. 5: A work hazard is anything that may result in an accidental event;  
- probability of an accident occurring;  
- severity of an accident's consequences.

## MICRO-AGGRESSIONS CAN BE:

**VERBAL**

threats,  
intimidation

verbal  
insults

insulting  
gestures

death  
threats

threats with  
a weapon

**OR PHYSICAL**

spitting

pinching

physical contact/  
altercations

scratches,  
lacerations

slapping

biting

punching

kicking

hitting with  
an object

sexual  
molestation

throwing  
objects

pushing,  
shoving

## **OUR PERCEPTIONS OF MICRO-AGGRESSIONS INFLICTED BY VIOLENT SERVICE USERS: MYTHS TO DEBUNK**

Too often trivialized by employers (and sometimes even by employees), micro-aggressions and their impact on health (e.g., burnout, fatigue) need to be seriously assessed. They also end up affecting the quality of life at work by causing compassion fatigue, loss of empathy, loss of productivity, “presenteeism” (i.e., being physically present at work but unable to work optimally), and a poorer work climate.

Some workers maintain that violence simply goes with the job and that seeking help is a sign of weakness or vulnerability. They are wrong. Micro-aggressions and violence are not part of the job description for any APTS members, whatever their job title.



## **DIVERSE EFFECTS OF MICRO-AGGRESSIONS ON HEALTH**

In their work, many health and social services employees find themselves in situations where they are exposed to displays of frustration, extreme anxiety and exasperation on the part of service users. This exposure wears employees down psychologically and physically in the medium and long term, and can jeopardize their health, safety and security.

# THE FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY OF MICRO-AGGRESSIONS HAVE AN IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES' HEALTH

## PHYSICAL IMPACT

- Fatigue and insomnia
- Digestive problems
- Nausea
- Headache
- Lower back pain, neck pain
- High blood pressure

## PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

- Touchiness, irritability, cynicism
- Lower self-esteem
- Diminished desire to laugh and enjoy life
- Less desire to communicate, greater isolation
- Mistrust of co-workers
- More rigid attitudes
- Alcohol or drug abuse

Left untreated, these warning signs and symptoms may lead to more serious physical or psychological health problems.

**MICRO-AGGRESSIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON HEALTH ALSO AFFECT THE EMPLOYER:**

Absenteeism

Presenteeism  
(present at work but unable to work optimally)

Unhealthy work climate

Lower productivity

Heavier workload  
for co-workers

**HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS INVOLVING MICRO-AGGRESSIONS THAT ARE ENCOUNTERED BY HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES PROFESSIONALS AND TECHNICIANS.\* FOR MANY, THESE INCIDENTS OCCUR ON A DAILY BASIS.**

- Anick works as a medical electrophysiology technologist and is having a particularly demanding day. A patient decides that he's fed up with waiting. He grabs Anick by the arm and insults her. Her physical and psychological health are on the line.
- Josiane works as a specialized educator in a residence with continuous assistance (RAC - *résidence à assistance continue*). Early one morning, she sees that a

\* All names are fictional.

service user is very agitated, and she has to deal with him. During the lunch break, the service user tries to grab her glasses in a threatening manner, and decides to charge straight at her at the end of her shift. Her morale is at an all-time low and she is exhausted.

- Joelle is a social worker in a psychiatric unit. All day long, a woman receiving services in the unit insults Joelle, following her around and yelling that Joelle is incompetent because she doesn't help the woman.
- Alexandre works in a residential resource with continuous assistance (RAC). While encouraging a service user to tidy up his room, another service user enters the room holding a chair, which he throws at Alexandre. The chair comes within an inch of hitting him in the head. This incident that leaves Alexandre with his heart pounding in his chest doesn't, however, necessitate time off from work. Yet every day he faces the risk of a work-related accident and in the long run, these incidents affect his physical (cardiovascular) health and his psychological health.
- Emilia works in a CHSLD. As a physiotherapist, she has to encourage a service user to get up and walk, following surgery. In addition to the woman's physical challenges, she also suffers from a type of dementia that alters her personality. Emilia has to endure the service user's comments and insolent remarks. The woman refuses to make any effort to walk, and makes comments like "Leave me alone!" and "Stop hurting me, you cow!" Emilia sees how much these insults end up affecting her over time. She is frustrated at not being able to work with the service user the way she'd like to.
- Catherine is a social worker in youth mental health services. In a session with a young boy, the boy's parents continually contest the comments and suggestions she makes to improve the relationship between the child and his parents. Midway through the session, the father threatens Catherine because he thinks she wants to have his child custody revoked. The father glares at her, and Catherine feels threatened.

**If you were in their position, would you report the incident?**

## UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD YOU REPORT AN INCIDENT?

Despite the number of workers who see violence as such a normal part of their work that they trivialize it, any form of violence, including micro-aggressions, must be reported to the employer. If no incident report is filed, neither the joint health and safety committee nor the manager or employer will be able to tackle the root of the problem. Reporting is a crucial first step in eliminating the root causes of micro-aggressions in the workplace.

The *Act respecting occupational health and safety* strongly encourages workers to “participate in the identification and elimination of risks of work accidents or occupational diseases.”<sup>4</sup> Reassessing the organization of work and analyzing the causes of micro-aggressions can help eliminate problems of violence in the workplace.

Any adverse event that has (or may have) affected workers’ health or safety in performing their duties, and any violent incident witnessed or experienced by workers must be reported by filling out the appropriate form, even if the incident doesn’t result in time off from work.



## HOW TO REPORT AN INCIDENT?

You have to fill out a form to report an incident. If the employer doesn’t provide employees with a form, use the following model that’s based on material developed by the ASSTSAS.

<sup>4</sup> Section 49(5), CQLR c. S-2.1



# FORM FOR REPORTING A DANGEROUS SITUATION (MICRO-AGGRESSION)

## EMPLOYEE IDENTIFICATION

Last name:

First name:

Gender:  M  F

Employee no.:

Job title:

Dept./service:

Work shift:  D  E  N

Status:  FT  PT  PTC

How long have you held this position? Since (year/month):

## INFORMATION ON THE ACCIDENTAL EVENT

Date of the event:

Time of the event:

Facility:

Exact location of the event:

Date of the report:

Time of the report:

Person notified:

Title of the person:

First and last names of the witness(es):

## EMPLOYEE'S DESCRIPTION OF THE ACCIDENTAL EVENT

**PLEASE DESCRIBE THE SITUATION (MICRO-AGGRESSION):**

**MATERIAL DAMAGE(S) (SPECIFY):**

## TYPE OF AGGRESSION

### VERBAL

- Threat/intimidation
- Verbal insult
- Insulting gesture
- Death threat
- Threat with a weapon
- Other:

### PHYSICAL

- Spitting
- Pinching
- Altercation
- Scratches/lacerations
- Slapping
- Biting
- Punching
- Kicking
- Hitting with an object
- Throwing an object
- Pushing/shoving
- Sexual molestation

### OTHER

- Vandalism
- Theft
- Other:

## REMEDIAL MEASURES

### SUGGESTIONS FOR REMEDIAL MEASURES:

## SIGNATURES

\_\_\_\_\_  
Worker

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employer's representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date





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