

Mental Health In the Workplace

Employers are increasingly aware of the impact of mental health issues in the workplace, recognizing the significant costs of mental health care. Mental health expenses have been rising steadily, with depression treatment alone costing \$110 billion annually, half of which is covered by employers.

There has been a substantial increase in suicide rates, particularly among younger workers. Despite the prevalence of mental illness, there is still reluctance to openly discuss these conditions. Mental illnesses can significantly affect daily functioning and are believed to be influenced by genetic, social, and environmental factors. Anxiety and depression are among the most common mental health conditions.

The Center for Workplace Mental Health at the American Psychiatric Association Foundation has reported that 77 percent of counties in the U.S. do not have enough psychiatrists. The shortage is attributed to reasons such as low reimbursement rates, burnout, and administrative burdens. According to a survey by Mercer, approximately 75 percent of employers with workforces of 5,000 people or more have expressed concerns about access to behavioral health care in some or all of their locations. Half of all employers have bolstered their employee assistance programs, while just over one-third have introduced a tele-therapy program.

Most people's reluctance to discuss mental illness belies the diseases' prevalence. Nearly one in five U.S. adults experience some form of mental illness every year, the APA reports. Such diseases cause changes in emotions, thinking or behavior that can lead to problems carrying out basic functions.

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is the uneasiness that individuals feel when thinking about a future event they fear won't end well. However, to be diagnosed with one of the several disorders such as a phobia, the fear must be



out of proportion to the situation or age-inappropriate, while also hindering the patient's ability to function normally. Individuals suffering from anxiety disorders often try to avoid situations that trigger or worsen their symptoms, potentially risking their job performance and personal relationships. Anxiety disorders are the most common type of mental illness, affecting nearly 30 percent of adults at some point in their lives.

Major Depressive Disorder

This condition affects how patients feel, think and act, leading to a variety of emotional and physical problems. Symptoms can include a loss of interest in once-enjoyed activities; changes in appetite; dwindling energy; feelings of worthlessness; and difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions. Symptoms may resemble those of grief and sadness. However, depression symptoms usually last for weeks, while grief and sadness come in waves. Depression affects about one in 15 adults annually, and one in six people will experience it during their life.

Bipolar Disorders

Bipolar disorders are brain disorders that cause "mood episodes," or extreme and intense emotional states that occur at distinct times and can cause changes in a person's behavior, energy level and ability to function. Such episodes are generally interspersed with normal moods.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a chronic brain disorder that affects less than one percent of the U.S. population. Symptoms can include delusions, hallucinations, trouble with thinking and lack of motivation. Contrary to common perceptions, the condition does not cause a split personality or multiple personalities and most people with the disease are not dangerous or violent.

Continued on Next Page

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a terrorist act, combat, or a violent personal assault can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Symptoms include intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to the experience that last long after the situation has ended. People with PTSD may feel sadness, fear, or anger and may become estranged from others. Roughly 11 percent of the U.S. population will be diagnosed with PTSD in their lifetime.

Eating Disorders

People with eating disorders develop disturbing eating habits and become preoccupied with their food and body weight. People with anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa—common eating disorders—tend to be perfectionists with low self-esteem who are extremely critical of themselves and their bodies. They usually “feel fat” and see themselves as overweight, sometimes despite life-threatening semi-starvation. Eating disorders most often affect women between the ages of 12 and 35.

Addiction/Substance Abuse

Addiction is a complex brain disease manifested by compulsive substance use despite harmful consequences. People with addiction have an intense focus on using an item such as alcohol or drugs, to the point that it takes over their lives. They often forsake school, jobs and personal relationships to fuel their habit.

In the workplace, mental illness remains a largely taboo subject, with many employees fearful that speaking out about mental health issues could harm their job security. Despite this, more people are sharing their stories, signaling a potential shift in the stigma. Prominent figures such as Toms Shoes founder, Blake Mycoskie, Olympian Michael Phelps, and British royalty have openly discussed their mental health struggles, encouraging others to seek help. The recent high-profile suicides of Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade have also brought attention to the importance of addressing mental health issues. This moment presents an opportunity to continue the conversation and support those in need.

Employees with mental health conditions are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for them. Employees are not required to provide extensive details about their conditions, but disclosing more information can help employers provide better support. Companies are training their employees to be sensitive to signs of mental illness, and proactive discussions about mental health are becoming more common in the workplace. Many companies are creating employee resource groups and training programs to support colleagues coping with mental health issues. If you need any assistance to work with employees experiencing mental health issues, please contact TPM.

FIVE ESSENTIALS FOR WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Protection from Harm - Workers should be protected in these ways:

- Allowed adequate rest
- Normalized and supported mental health
- Prioritized workplace physical and psychological safety
- Operationalized DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility) norms, policies, and programs

Connection & Community - Components of connection and community include:

- Cultures of inclusion and belonging
- Cultivate trusted relationships
- Foster collaboration and teamwork

Work-Life Harmony - Here are key components to achieve that balance:

- Increase paid leave access
- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible



Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

Mattering at Work - A few other components to consider:

- Engage workers in workplace decisions
- Build a culture of gratitude and recognition
- Connect individual work with organizational mission

Opportunity for Growth Consider these opportunities for growth:

- Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback
- Offer quality training, education, and mentoring
- Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement

From: <https://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/workplace-mental-health> Posted by Seraine Page