

Depression and Work

Depression is a ubiquitous disorder and one of the most prevalent throughout the Western world. It could thus be expected to have a significant impact on the profits of companies, who are likely to hold a number of employees suffering the illness. A number of authors attest to the negative effects of depression such as impaired performance, increased absenteeism, and higher susceptibility to other physical illnesses. Severe costs—for individuals, companies, and government—are therefore associated with depressive illness.

There are a number of work-related factors that may cause depression. Research suggests that although burnout and depression are separate entities, they are related (Iacovides, Fountoulakis, & Kaprinis, 2003). Iacovides, Fountoulakis, and Kaprinis (2003) found in their meta-analysis of depression studies that clinical depression is related to work-environment and well-being, which in turn is also related to suicidality. It also appears that low social support, low decisions latitude, high psychological demands, and stress due to inappropriate job environments are all predictors of subsequent depression (Niedhammer, Goldberg, Leclerc, & Bugel, 1998). It is thus evident that unfavourable working conditions are a significant contributor to depressive illnesses.

Wang, Beck, Berglund, McKenas, Pronk, Simon, & Kessler (2004) studied the effects of various illnesses (allergies, arthritis, back pain, head aches, asthma, high blood pressure, and depression) on dimensions of work performance including task focus and productivity. They found that depression was the only condition significantly related to decrements in both dimensions of work performance. Stewart, Ricc, Chee, Hahn, & Morganstein (2003) observed a link with depressive episodes lost

productive time, such that depressed employees reported significantly more lost productive time due to both lost productivity while at work and absenteeism.

A number of possible interventions have been implemented to determine if work-related mental illness can be reduced or assisted. Heany, Price and Refferty (1995) examined interventions to increase coping resources at work, social support, and improve work team functioning on mental health. Compared to the control group, the intervention group reported more supportive feedback, more ability to cope, and better work-team functioning climate. Furthermore, those undergoing the intervention reported reduced depression. It thus appears that a supportive working environment assists to reduce the experience of depression in employees. Similar findings have been reported in ensuing research (Michie & Williams, 2003).

It is important that companies foster a supportive working environment for their employees to reduce the experience of depression. Further, factors such as overwork, burnout, and role conflict have a significant impact on the experience of depression and should be systematically monitored throughout company staff.

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