



#MENTALHEALTHMATTERS



**SIOPSA**

SCIENCE FOR INDUSTRIAL &  
ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY OF SA

proudly supports

# **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH OCTOBER 2020**



**Identity**



**Hope**



**Connection**

Compiled for SIOPSA by:



**Senzekile Shongwe**

Registered Mental health Counsellor

Mental health Educator

078 503 8330

## Mental health in the workplace: A complete guide

The rate of mental illnesses in the work place have increased over the years, mental illness in the workplace leads to decreased productivity, absenteeism, poor work quality and a negative attitude from employees. This article is aimed at employers and employees, to encourage prioritizing mental health well-being in the workplace for a better workplace environment and better performance results.

### Importance of mental health in the workplace

**Improve work performance-** When the employees are happy and healthy, their work usually shows positive results and they are more productive.

**Creates a healthy workflow-** Employees work well together as a team to achieve the desired outcomes.

**Reduces pressure** – Employees gain better working skills.

**Breaks Mental health stigma-** There is still a lot of stigma around mental health and when employers take the necessary stand to view mental health related issues in the workplace it makes it easier for employees to open up.

### How managers can make mental health matter in the workplace.

**Open door policy** - Managers should allow their subordinates to have the flexibility and confidence to come to them should they have any concern or worry. This can be done by creating a good relationship with employees, treating them well and having the best interest at heart for them.

**Have enough staff** - When you have enough staff to take on the required job, employees are not expected to take on more than they can manage which then reduces stress.

**Talent management** - Make sure that every employee has certain work tasks designated to them according to their strong points. When the employee is good at what they do, they are most likely to enjoy it which causes less anxiety and stress with regards to work performance.

**Accessibility to Mental health resources-** Providing resources that promote awareness can help to create an accessible and positive workplace environment, one that fosters engagement and attracts talent.

**Mental health Education-** Employees spend 60% of their time in the workplace which means that 60% of their lives have to do with multiple workplace stressors such as deadlines, workload, pressure, anxiety related to job security etc. It is therefore important that employees get on-going mental health education, this can help address issues before they become debilitating.

**Employee Assistant Programs** - Employers can reduce the impact caused by mental illness in the work place when they put the necessary measures in place, this can include a HR system, a counselling helpline, a psychologist or a counsellor that is accessible to employees.

## Common challenges that affect employees mentally in the workplace

### **Having a difficult boss and dealing with office bullies**

In an ideal world, we would all have fantastic managers; bosses who helped us succeed, who made us feel valued and who were just all-around great people however that is not always the case. Many people are being bullied in the workplace and some bullies are not even aware that their behavior is bullish.

Whether the person you work under is a micromanager, has anger management problems, shows favoritism towards one person, or lacks competence, you still need to make the best out of the situation and get your job done.

- **How to deal with a difficult boss:**

- Firstly we need to **make sure** that your boss is being difficult and try to establish why this is the case, take a few days to evaluate his/ her behavior, try to imagine why she would behave like this, is it purposeful or is it something that is out of his/her control?
- No matter how bad your boss is, **do not let it affect your work**, try to stay on good terms with other leaders in the company and keep your head up.
- **Stay one step ahead**, especially if your boss is a micro-manager. Know what you need to do and do it ahead of time; do not wait for your boss to tell you what you need to do especially if you have clear guidelines on your daily tasks.
- **Set clear boundaries** and distance yourself from the unwanted behavior.
- **Express your emotions**; do not assume that your boss knows how you feel about how he/she has been treating you, speak up and express how you feel. Do so in a calm manner and try to set a formal meeting, make sure that you are both calm and express yourself.
- **Identify triggers**; most of the time employees like certain things done in a certain way and when things are not done in that manner they get irritated. Try to stick to scope and identify some of the things that trigger your boss.

**Being underpaid and overworked**- When employees feel overworked and underpaid, they are never fully invested in the company, they are always on the lookout for other jobs which also reduces productivity and causes stress.

**Struggling with time management** – Poor time management means that one cannot plan accordingly which causes procrastination and always working under pressure which leads to poor work performance causing depression, burnout, fatigue and anxiety.

**Poor communication and management practices**- It is important for expectations to be clear so that employers can be able to do what they need to do how they are expected to do it. Employees should also be given enough time to do their designated tasks for better results.

**Low levels of support for employees**- HR plays a big role in offering support for employees, it is important for employees to have a space where they can report problems and have them solved.

**Inflexible working hours**-This causes physical stress and tiredness.

## Typical signs of work related stress and anxiety

**Low mood** - Experiencing a loss of excitement and passion for your job, losing interest in the work that you do and not being positive about going to work and being in the workplace.

**Irritability** - Being easily irritated by small things in the workplace and in your personal life.

**Consuming a lot of caffeine or substances** - Feeling that you need to take caffeine or substance to be able to function in your work or personal life is not good for your physical and mental health.

**Regular absence and a higher sickness rate** - Taking time off work regularly without a proper notice could mean that you are not coping.

**Procrastination** - Never being on time and always missing your deadlines.

**Feeling overwhelmed at work** - Feeling like work is consuming your life and not having time to practice self-care.

## Effects of an unhealthy working environment

### Emotional Effects

#### Decreases self-esteem and confidence

This can include doubting your abilities, believing that somebody else is better than you or not thinking that you can do the job well. The way you feel about yourself directly affects your productivity and job performance which then affects your career success.

It is important to keep your head held up no matter what because this could affect your entire career.

#### Causes Anger and Irritability

Workplace anger is not only potentially harmful to the organization, but it can also cause serious health problems, including chronic anxiety, high blood pressure and heart disease. Learning to deal with your anger constructively will improve your well-being and make you a more desirable and promotable

employee. When you feel angry or irritated try to take deep breaths, slowly count to 10, avoid tensing up your muscles, go get fresh air and come back once you have calmed down.

### **Uncontrollable mood swings**

The frequency, duration and intensity of stress you perceive in the workplace can influence your mood, and how you respond to stress impacts your emotions.

You need to however learn how to deal with your mood; the better you manage your mood, the better you will be at curbing negative thinking and behaviors that negatively affect productive work time.

## **Psychological effects**

### **Panic and Anxiety**

There are so many job aspects that can cause anxiety; having tight deadlines, trying to harmonize a work/life balance, dealing with office gossip and politics etc.

Most people who work will experience some anxiety at some point but it becomes a problem when your workplace makes you feel this way on a regular basis.

- Symptoms of an anxiety disorder includes:
  - Increased muscle tension
  - Impaired concentration
  - Irritability
  - Difficulty sleeping
  - Fatigue
  - Burn-out
  - Fatigue

### **Alcoholism**

Employees who drink or who abuse alcohol can undermine a workforce's overall health and productivity. Alcohol is a depressant which means when drinking due to stress, or at any time, it slows down the brain and the central nervous system's processes.

So while alcohol may help with stress in the short term, in the long run it can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety and makes stress harder to deal with.

It is better to use healthier coping mechanisms.

## **Physical effects**

### **Muscle tension**

Muscle tension is usually caused by stress and anxiety. This is when your muscles are unable to relax normally. The condition can affect any of the muscles in the body especially the neck and the shoulders.

## **Heart-palpitations**

This can come across as either a panic attack or a heart attack. It is a very scary feeling either way because you feel like you are dying.

## **Hyper-tension**

Your body produces a surge of hormones when you are in a stressful situation. These hormones temporarily increase your blood pressure by causing your heart to beat faster and your blood vessels to narrow.

## **Headache**

Headaches are more likely to occur when you are stressed. Stress is a common trigger of tension-type headaches and migraine, and they can trigger other types of headaches or make them worse.

## **Physical stress and tiredness**

Physical symptoms of stress include low energy, headaches, upset stomach which includes diarrhea, constipation and nausea.

# Treatment

## **In the work-place**

### **EAP**

An employee assistance program is an employee benefit program that assists employees with personal problems and/or work-related problems that may impact their job performance, health, mental and emotional well-being.

If you have an EAP at work, utilize it to minimize the vulnerability to mental illness.

### **HR**

Speak to HR about your concerns; there are high chances that your workplace has systems in place to assist you.

## **Self-help techniques**

- Self-Care
- Take time out
- Exercise
- Socialize
- Have boundaries
- Meditate
- Sleep enough

- Have better time-management techniques
- Plan ahead
- Trust your work
- Communicate better

### **Psychological Treatment**

- Registered Counsellor
- Psychologist
- Life-Coach

### **Conclusion**

I think organisations that are not people-centered and who do not make mental health a priority undermines their capacity to attain and maintain quality standards, high performance and competitiveness. I hope this article helped both the employer and the employee to understand the effects that an unattended mental illness can have in the workplace and on the members of the organization. Mental illness can be prevented and there is a possibility for better working environments.

### **References:**

- Adler DA, McLaughlin Tj, Rogers WH, Chang H, Lapitsky L, Lerner D: Job performance deficits due to depression. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 2006, 163:1569
- Karasek R, Theorell T (1990). *Healthy work: stress, productivity and the reconstruction of working life*. New York, Basic Books.
- Schriber JB, Gutek BA (1987). Sometime dimensions of work measurement of an underlying aspect of organizational culture. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 7:624–650.
- Siegrist J, Marmot M (2004). Health inequalities and the psychosocial environment – two scientific challenges. *Social Science and Medicine*, 58:1463–1473.