



2013 Annual Conference Report
Sick Workplaces – Sick Workers

Workshop Report WS5 – Tackling negative attitudes towards Mental Health and Wellbeing in the workplace

Mental health problems cost employers in the UK £30 billion a year through lost production, recruitment and absence - so why aren't we doing more about it?

The answer is straightforward. Despite the fact that it is very common - one in four of us will suffer mental health problems during our lives - we find it very difficult to talk about the subject.

It often seems too personal, too deep and too complex. You might feel very happy to tell a colleague about a physical injury you've sustained, but when it comes to your mental health, where do you start?

We began with a short introduction and presentation.

<p>WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?</p> <p>It is the mental and emotional state in which we feel able to cope with the normal daily stresses of life</p> <p>When we feel good about ourselves, we work better, interact well and make valuable contributions in daily tasks</p> <p>One might feel in good mental health generally but still also suffer stress or anxiety at times</p> <p>It can range from feeling 'down' to common disorders such as anxiety and depression or in limited cases to more severe mental cases including bipolar disorder and schizophrenia</p> <p style="text-align: right;">2</p>	<p>THE BACKGROUND</p> <p>Mental illness is common. It affects thousands of people in the UK, and their friends, families, work colleagues and society in general.</p> <p>One in four people will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lives.</p> <p>Around one in ten children experience mental health problems. Depression affects around one in 12 of the whole population.</p> <p>It costs UK employers £30 billion a year through lost production, recruitment and absence</p> <p>Rates of self-harm in the UK are the highest in Europe at 400 per 100,000.</p> <p>450 million people world-wide have a mental health problem.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">3</p>
<p>COMMON MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS</p> <p>Mental ill health feels just as bad or worse than any other illness – trouble is you can't see it</p> <p>It often seems too personal, too deep and complex to discuss with work colleagues</p> <p>If you cannot talk about it, maybe you find it difficult to listen too?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">4</p>	<p>SICKNESS ABSENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19% of workers take a day off sick because of stress, but 90% of them give a different reason for their absence. • 10% of workers have resigned their job because of Stress, and 25% are thinking about it. • 20% of workers feel they cannot tell their boss if they feel overly stressed at work. • Over 50% of managers would like to do more to improve mental wellbeing in their workplace, but 46% report it is not a priority for their organisation. <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">Mind Research findings 2013</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5</p>

<p>PROMOTING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK</p> <p>Spot the signs – being observant, listening, being aware to situations, choosing the right moments to intervene and raise questions</p> <p>Engage with the problem – there are good practical steps to take to aid coping strategies, also legal obligations to bear in mind. Making reasonable adjustments to the working environment and practices</p> <p>Keeping a watching brief. Not just passive observation, but at times that may be the best option. Promoting awareness and creating a culture in which there is openness and employees may feel able to talk. Maintaining good open communication channels</p>	<p>ACAS AND MINDFUL EMPLOYER GUIDANCE</p> <p>http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/j/2/Promoting-positive-mental-health-at-work-accessible-version.pdf</p> <p>MINDFUL EMPLOYER is a UK-wide initiative run by Workways, a service of Devon Partnership NHS Trust. Tel: 01392 677064 www.mindfulemployer.net</p> <p>Mind is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales. It campaigns to create a better life for everyone with experience of mental distress. Tel: 0300 123 3393 www.mind.org.uk</p> <p>Rethink is the largest national voluntary sector provider of mental health services with 340 services and more than 130 support groups. It helps over 48,000 people every year through its services, support groups and by providing information on mental health problems. Helpline: 0300 5000 927 www.rethink.org</p>
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WHAT INFLUENCES MENTAL HEALTH?

Many managers will be concerned that by addressing mental health issues they may get drawn into areas of difficulty and for which they are not qualified. The self-perpetuating cycle associated with mental illness is that we don't know much about it and so we don't talk about it

Mental wellbeing: what influence does a manager have?

Factors you can control in work: • Workload • Work variety • Work relationships • Involvement • Culture of disclosure • Communication • Bullying

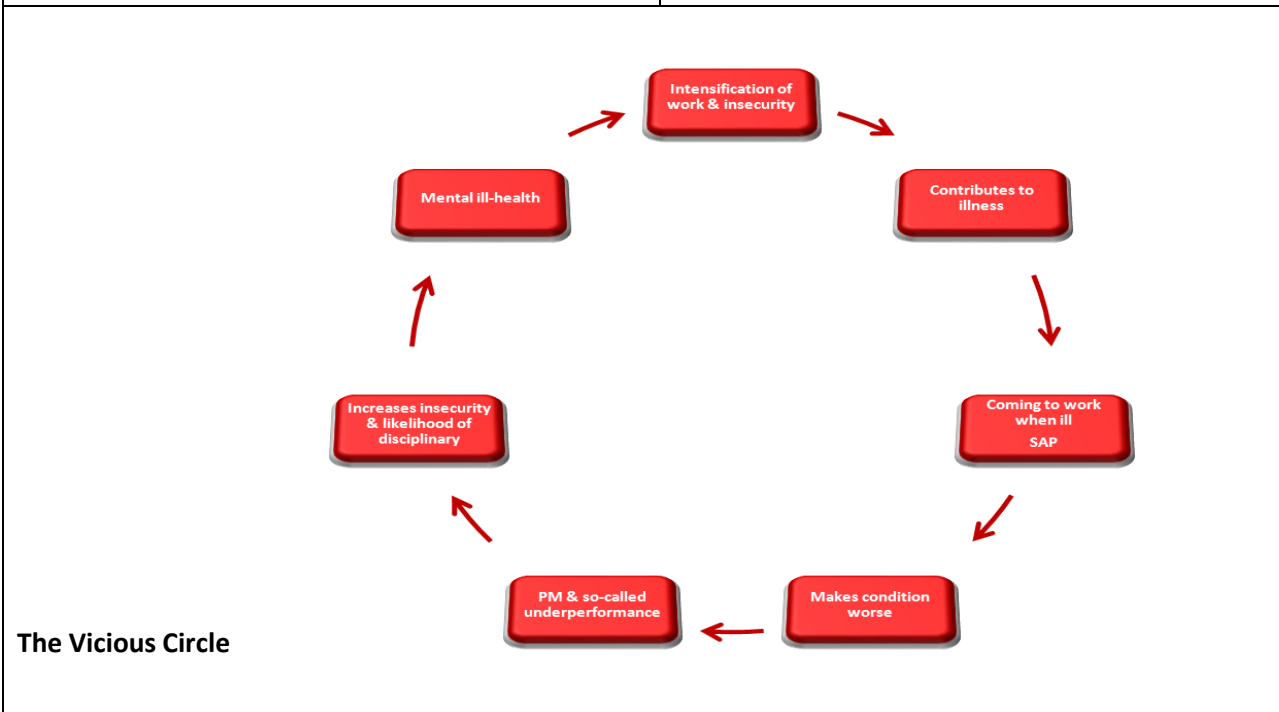
Overlapping factors you can try to influence: • Money • Status • Friendships • Sense of purpose • Stress • Coping strategies • Lifestyle choices

Factors you cannot control outside work: • Childhood experiences • Family relationships • Addiction problems • Finances • Genetics • Crime • Housing • Bereavement

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE

CIPD research has shown that

- 37% of sufferers are more likely to get into conflict with colleagues
- 57% find it difficult to juggle multi-tasking
- 80% find concentration difficult
- 62% take longer to complete tasks
- 50% are potentially less patient with customers/clients



A brief round the table introduction from delegates set the scene in which a variety of attitudes towards Mental Health in the workplace was reported. In many cases it was a failure to recognise the problem or to sweep it under the carpet. In some others an agreed system was in place to support workers although most reported ignorance and lack of understanding.

Activity One

In your group discuss how the issues of mental illness in the workplace and wellbeing are regarded by workers, managers, the employer as an organisation, the trade union branch, trade union officers and officials

- *Make a list of the negative and positive factors about the way in which stress and mental health together with wellbeing are regarded and treated in the workplaces represented in the group*
- Findings from 4 groups

Negative points	Positive Points
Generally MH is seen as a weakness and some managers will prey on that weakness	Some employers have systems and policy in place but pay lip service only and fail to follow through
Unreasonable Targets promoting negative well-being	Occupational health - if exists and with good line managers can help in sustained time in work
Ageism at work promotes negative MH issues	Some employers have MH awareness and Training, but often after the event when it is too late
Stigma attached to MH – managers often see it as a negative factor	Limited numbers of Line Managers who know their staff and recognise the symptoms and the need for positive supportive action
Occupational Health seen as a management tool to remove unsatisfactory performers by some employers	Good Occupational Health providers and early involvement of TU support at the right stages
Can't/won't see the problem	Good sick pay arrangements and systems
Blame cultures/Stigma attached to MH	Senior Managers and bottom layers recognise the problem, others don't
Longer to recover due to poor recognition	Sometimes good team support
Not qualified to support and lack of support for managers	Sometimes safeguards in place
Outsourced Occ Health is not supportive and mostly about money	Some places make a positive attempt to recognise and address the MH issue
Try to hide MH issues in the workplace	Recognition and appropriate open dialogue
Intimidatory Management styles and attitudes	Wellbeing agendas in place
No follow up or further support on MH training	Health & Safety Committees tuned in
All too easily linked to Capability	Occupational health being positive and supportive
Middle Managers often ignorant of issues, solutions, legal obligations etc.	FBU multiple use centres allow access to other services for support
Policies not working	(Trained) Safety Reps
MH seen as a weakness and people suffering from Stress MH issues seen as a problem and moved rather than supported	Mental Health First Aid in place and supported by appropriately trained nurses
Like walking on eggshells – don't know what to say to Stress/MH sufferers or how to approach the subject	Union Learning Courses and training for understanding

Black humour used to conceal misunderstanding; high levels of suicide not uncommon	Having confidence in Reps/Branch/Stewards
Minimal TUF and rep support to assist in casework	Duty of Care awareness and acceptance
MH is completely ignored in many workplaces	
It is a sign of weakness and not seen as a priority	
Budget cuts mean getting rid of good practice and support measures	
Lack of knowledge, training and understanding by managers	
Well-being agenda used to hide MH problems	
Lack of care for staff	
Occupational Health referred incorrectly and to wrong services	
Senior Managers fail to acknowledge MH issues	
Colleagues and peers perceptions not good	
Lack of Reps understanding and willing to learn	

Activity Two

- *In your groups consider the essential requirements of an effective policy and procedure for ensuring that stress and mental health issues alongside wellbeing factors are taken seriously*

Effective Policy development and implementation and ensuring effective recognition of MH	
Clear acceptance/commitment throughout the organisation from the very top	Open and transparent policy and its application
Collective agreement based on meaningful consultation and negotiation	Clear implementation strategies
Constant regular review and evaluation – making the policy a living working document	Not just an ‘on the shelf’ tick box exercise
Appropriate referral systems and processes open to workers at all levels	Distinct identifiable policy
Entirely separate from disciplinary and capability polices and procedures	Effective training by qualified personnel provided and taken seriously
Clear and open communications to all staff	Ownership of the policy in joint employer/employee hands – H&S Committee and/or Joint Negotiating Committee across the entire workforce
Clearly stated aims and objectives	Ensuring that legal obligations are incorporated especially in diversity and equality
Full effective and purposeful consultation at appropriate levels across the organisation; employee representatives and managers and Unions fully involved	Focus on early recognition and interventions

Not a 'one size fits all' – should be enforceable, adhered to but allowing for an encouraging necessary discretion and flexibility	Constant overview, review and training and awareness updates
Practical tools for guidance and implementation	Proper and effective referral pathways
Training in use of policy and procedures	Mental Health First Aid provision – effective recognition and responses
Application of HSE Management Standards as appropriate to support MH strategies and support and protect vulnerable workers	Training in use of policies
Support for managers	Full involvement of Unions in the organisation
Referrals for support through appropriate systems and channels with early and unrestricted access to support	Consistent but individual applications to suit specific needs of individual cases
Effective Training throughout the organisation, regularly reviewed and revised as necessary	Common awareness training for all levels of participants – management and unions
Regular peer group meetings; support networks involving trained peer group members	Free to access Helplines; Stress Contacts; Occupational Health input; Stress Audits and Risk Assessments as required
Good clear signposting to assistance	Regular review and revision of policy and processes
Joint Management/Union steering group	

The workshop concluded that the broader issue of Mental Health in the Workplace was largely ignored or misunderstood. Much meaningful supportive work was necessary at all levels, to ensure that those with MH issues either longer term or short term were acknowledged as needing support and not being treated as outside the fold and hopeless cases to be moved out.

Workplaces that have good equality and diversity procedures and systems in position would be best placed to ensure that all aspects of MH were properly recognised and responded to.

Useful resources

ACAS AND MINDFUL EMPLOYER GUIDANCE

<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/j/2/Promoting-positive-mental-health-at-work-accessible-version.pdf>

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