

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE- A FOCUS ON MEN

We have previously discussed mental health as a subject in business, both in relation to business leaders and employees. However, what we'd like to focus on in the following guide is the relevance of mental health in the workplace, focusing on men. Why? Because at any one time, research has demonstrated that one in six male workers are believed to be struggling with mental health issues.

What's more, a staggering 91 million workdays are believed to be lost due to mental health problems each year. Moreover, work is one of the biggest contributors of mental health problems according to a survey undertaken by Mind.



MEN AND MENTAL HEALTH

Research suggests that one in eight men suffer from a mental health problem. However, men tend to be far more reluctant to seek help and support due to the stigma attached to mental health issues. This is also true of women; however, this is far more common in men and male workers.

There are societal expectations about how men should behave and what masculinity traditionally 'looks like'. There is the traditional expectation that men should be the breadwinners of the family unit and should display characteristics such as control, strength, support and dominance.

Research suggests that behaving in a way which conforms to these expectations, can be associated to poor mental health - The flip-side being that because men are 'expected' to be the stronger sex, they should not show signs of weakness and are therefore less likely to talk about their emotions, leading to exacerbated mental health conditions.



Work as a contributor to poor mental health

Reportedly, 200 000 men a year report feeling anxious, stressed or depressed as a result of work. This accounts for 1.2% of men in the workplace. Work can certainly affect everyone in a negative way at times, but when does it get past the point of being unmanageable to such a degree that it is affecting an employee's ability to cope and ability to function properly?

DEFINING THE CONDITIONS

Mental health issues encompass a wide range of conditions. These include the following:

Anxiety

We all feel anxious at times, but some people find it hard to control their worries. Their feelings are more consistent, intense and can affect their daily lives. There are many different types of anxiety including Generalised Anxiety, Panic Disorders, Phobias and PTSD - the list goes on.

Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that affects the way you think, feel, and behave. It causes feelings of sadness or hopelessness that can last anywhere from a few days to a few years.

Stress

Feeling under so much emotional or mental pressure that it is difficult to cope. Symptoms include low energy levels, muscle tension or pain, and sleep problems.

OCD

OCD is characterised by intrusive thoughts, like worrying about dirt and germs, and repetitive actions, like washing and cleaning.

Eating Disorders

Such as Anorexia, Binge Eating and Bulimia.

Seeking help - General

Men may also be less able to recognise symptoms of poor mental health and so are therefore less likely to seek help when they need it the most. Men only make up 36% of referrals to mental health services. Sadly, men are also less likely to disclose mental health issues to their friends and family. It's also common for men to use potentially harmful coping methods and self-medicate with harmful substances such as alcohol, drugs and/or cigarettes.



SEEKING HELP IN THE WORKPLACE

It's common for men to fear the reaction of managers if they are to show any signs of 'weakness'. They often feel that their managers and peers would look on them less favourably if they were to open-up about any mental health issues.

It's important to note here that if men feel comfortable and they are aware of how to access help, they will use these services and seek help. So, as a business, it's important your leaders and managers are aware of potential issues and able to pinpoint these. They should always be on the lookout and ensure they are approachable. This will ensure that if any of your male employees are facing any of the aforementioned problems, you are giving them ample opportunity to divulge and work towards helping them to work-through any issues.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Poor mental health and stress issues are a huge contributor when it comes to sickness absence and so to help prevent these issues from escalating:

1. Encourage employees to talk

This centres around your company culture. If you create a culture of openness and support amongst employees and employees and managers, those employees who are seeking support at their time of need will be more likely to open-up. In addition, create safe spaces for employees to talk to one another or to their managers.

Think how this space feels and looks.

2. Raise awareness in general

Linked to the first point, make it known that good mental health is at the top of your agenda. Think about how you communicate this around the business and via which channels. Again, linked closely to company culture.

3. Highlight the importance of the work/life balance

As technology progresses and businesses begin to acknowledge the importance of outputs as opposed to inputs, a better message is being sent to your workforce. They no longer have to be at their desks seven hours a day, five days a week. Instead, they can work remotely and flexibly and fit in better with the demands of their home-life.

4. Realistic objectives

It's also important that the demands of a role are achievable. Do your employees have realistic objectives and do they have the support and training required to successfully undertake their role and contribute to the success of the business. If the role is too demanding and they start to drown, this is when mental health issues can begin to creep-in, and the vicious cycle begins.

5. Lead by example

It's imperative that if you're expecting your employees to work in a certain way, your leaders and managers are also working in this way. So, for example, if you take a lunchbreak, leave on time and take your annual leave, your workforce are more likely to emulate your behavior and as a result, stress levels should decrease considerably.

6. Training

In addition, ensure that your managers and leaders, as mentioned previously, are effectively trained. Do they know how to spot issues, and do they then know how to tackle and deal with them as a result? It's also good idea to appoint a wellbeing or mental health champion/s and communicate this around the business so everyone is aware of who they can turn to if the need arises. These individuals can complete specific mental health training.

7. Create a wellbeing program

A wellbeing program emphasises the equal importance of good mental and physical health, and investment in people management capability, which means that organisations can expect employees to not only be happier and healthier, but more engaged and productive.

8. Update relevant policies

Update the Health and Safety policy to include Mental Health - visit the Health and Safety Executive website for guidelines.



Mental health isn't just a relevant topic for men – it relates to each and every person. However, there is a strong stigma attached to men and poor mental health and so we wanted to highlight this issue in particular. If you require assistance with implementing a mental health/wellbeing program, we'd love to hear from you on: **01453 297557** or email **enquiries@peepshr.co.uk**.