

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS



Many people experience mental health problems at some time in their lives.

People with mental health problems may be reluctant to disclose their impairment because they fear that it would impact negatively on their chances of getting a job and perhaps of keeping a job once employed.

People with mental health problems may or may not be covered by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). This will depend on the severity of their problems and how it affects their lives.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists report that at some point in their life about one in five women and one in ten men will suffer from depression. One in twenty adults are experiencing a serious major depression at any given time.

A Labour Force Survey: Statistics from September to December 2006

- Only 25.8% of people with depression, bad nerves or anxiety who are of working age are actually in work.
- Only 13.5% of people with mental illness, phobias, panics or other nervous disorders who are of working age actually work.
- People with mental health problems have the lowest employment rate of all disabled people of working age at only 21%.

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's quarterly labour market outlook survey report of autumn 2007, 61% of employers, who are hired staff with a history of mental ill-health, rated their experience as positive. Only 15% reported a negative experience.

According to an Unum Provident survey published in March 2007:

- The sectors that registered the highest level of mental health related illness were public administration, education and health while the lowest level was found in construction.
- Ten million working days were lost due to stress, depression and anxiety in 2006/07.

A good working life is a positive thing. It offers people a way to feel valued to reach their full potential and also to maintain or develop valuable social networks. This is also true for people with mental health problems. With the correct help and support, together with adjustments, they can also enjoy the benefits of work along with other people.

THE EMPLOYER'S DUTY OF CARE

"Anyone who feels they are suffering from mental health issues should not be put off from approaching their employer. Your employer owes you a duty of care and cannot normally be held accountable unless you make them aware of any problems you are having. Duty of care means that they are responsible for ensuring that you are cared for at work and do not have to work in unsafe or unhealthy conditions. This can include protection against bullying or stress. An implied duty of care exists in all contracts of employment".

STRESS:

When a person feels they don't have the resources to cope with the demands of life placed on them. Symptoms may be emotional i.e. irritability, tearfulness and physical aches and pains, high blood pressure etc. The person can find it difficult to make decisions, concentrate, perform tasks or may be unable to cope with attending work.

DEPRESSION:

Comes in forms from mild to severe. Symptoms can take the form of low moods plus lack of energy. Motivation may also be affected and some may have thoughts of life not being worth living, in some cases this can lead to suicidal behaviour.

ANXIETY:

This can become a problem as feelings of fear and tension prevent people carrying out every day life. Extreme cases can suffer panic attacks or phobias or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) anxiety where people have recurrent intrusive thoughts. They may feel forced to act on fears of contamination leading to repetitive hand washing.

BIPOLAR DISORDER/MANIC DEPRESSIVE ILLNESS:

Where a person may swing between extreme low moods and depressive symptoms to being high or elated. During a manic episode they may have high energy levels, grand or unrealistic ideas; they may also become reckless, taking risks overspending.

SELF HARM AND SUICIDE:

A person may hurt themselves deliberately to deal with a problem or emotions. Methods may include self neglect, cutting, burning or overdosing. Suicidal behaviour may occur when a person feels they have no other options, it may be a cry for help, a mistake or a deliberate act.

In general, many people with mental health problems will have conditions that fluctuate. It may be that they can go for long periods without having any particular difficulties. Each person will experience mental health problems differently even if its the same condition in name. People will employ different techniques to help them manage the mental health problem. This may include use of medical services, secondary mental health support services, counsellors plus getting help from their family, friends and colleagues. It means that many more people with mental health problems can retain or obtain employment successfully. Provided employers are positive about developing the inclusive work culture to focus on supportive solutions, the work environment is improved for everyone.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.

There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can create a 'buzz' and be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive.

A certain amount of stress is a good thing it could lead to:

- An increased zest for life
- Motivation to keep going
- Creativity
- Removal of boredom
- Less frustration
- Effective performance

What can cause stress?

- Doing boring or repetitive work
- Having too much to do in too little time
- Not enough training for your role
- Poor environment
- Demanding or unreasonable targets

- Poor relationships with other employees, managers
- Bullying, racial or sexual harassment
- Lack of respect from others
- Inflexible work schedules
- Taking work home
- Unsocial hours
- Unable to 'switch off'
- Management Attitudes: Lack of control over activities, Poor communication, Negative culture
- Lack of support for individuals to develop skills and knowledge

Things to look out for:

- Short Temper
- Fatigue
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Sleeping badly
- Unable to cope
- Feeling stretched beyond your limits
- Drinking & smoking more
- Feeling that you've achieved nothing at the end of the day

If prolonged, stress can lead to:

- Poor mental health
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Menstrual problems
- Asthma attacks
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Suppressed immune system
- Erectile dysfunction
- Alcohol / Drug abuse
- Domestic violence

Everyone is vulnerable to becoming stressed through work but there are ways of dealing with it before it gets more serious.

- Manage your time
- Be more assertive
- Keep a 'Stress Diary'
- Positive thinking
- Is it possible to alter your role to reduce stress?
- Try to channel your energy into solving the problem, rather than just worrying about it.
- Don't take too much on – just say NO!
- Try to alternate boring tasks with interesting ones during the day.
- Don't take work home
- Eat healthily (avoid fried breakfasts, for example!)
- Stop smoking
- Watch your alcohol consumption – alcohol acts as a depressant.
- Tea, coffee and soft drinks (eg cola) can make you more anxious.
- Be physically active – it stimulates you and gives you more energy.
- Try some relaxation techniques – some people find it helps them cope with pressure.
- Have regular breaks through the day
- Develop self-confidence
- Develop a support network
- Accept that emotions are OK
- Regular & open two-way communication
- Express positive feelings as well as negative
- Anger management
- Have regular 'me time' sessions
- Have a laugh
- Share thoughts
- Take time to reflect

Never be afraid to talk to health professionals or mental health organisations, they can help and advise on coping techniques before it manifests into something more serious.

This fact-sheet has been deliberately designed to demystify some of the stigma attached with stress. Everyone goes through stress and everyone responds differently. Some people even thrive on it! In all seriousness though, this fact-sheet will help you identify signs of stress and some ways that you can, maybe, deal with it to defuse the symptoms.

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USEFUL INFORMATION & LINKS

CWU (Communication Workers Union)
Equal Opportunities Department
150 The Broadway
London, SW19 1RX

DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

Support network for people with depression.
Website: www.dealingwithdepression.co.uk

SUPPORT LINE

Helpline offering advice on mental health and other issues.

Website: www.supportline.org.uk

Email: info@supportline.org.uk

Telephone: 01708 765200

MIND

Expert advice on mental health issues.

Website: www.mind.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 3393

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