

Depression hampers women's job performance

An online survey among 2,800 working women across South Africa found that depression may be the culprit behind absenteeism and workplace blunders. The survey was conducted by a provider of central nervous system (CNS) pharmaceuticals, Pharma Dynamics.



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According to the results, depression has been named as one of the top three barriers to success in the workplace. Respondents rated depression, alongside child-care responsibilities and bureaucratic structures, as a primary barrier to career success, and 66% of women said it hampered their overall job performance. Depression interfered with work in various ways. Almost 65% of women reported that depression caused them to be quiet and reserved, and 41% said they were more prone to making job-related mistakes due to lack of concentration and sleep.

Impossible workloads

Mariska Fouche, spokesperson for Pharma Dynamics says it's not just perfectionists and workaholics who tip over the edge. "Depression is an issue that is becoming more evident in SA following widespread retrenchments that have left the remaining staff to cope with impossible workloads, too afraid to object for fear they'll be next in the firing line. With more women working overtime and on top of that still having to deal with child-care responsibilities at home, it is no surprise that many are bordering on the brink when it comes to their physical and mental health.

"Women are also more prone to burn-out and depression because they are more likely than men to be people-pleasers who often ignore their own needs," says Fouche. Nearly 40% of women surveyed admitted to suffering from depression, 33% felt unable to face work, 29% generally avoided contact with other colleagues and almost a quarter of the sample said they took more sick leave as a result of symptoms related to depression. One in ten women reported having resigned or lost a job mainly due to symptoms of depression.

Few receive treatment

"It's important to note depression is not merely feeling sad because you've had a bad day at work," says Fouche. "Depression is prolonged and severe despondency and dejection, usually accompanied by feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy. It is a mental condition that manifests itself typically in a lack of energy and difficulty in maintaining concentration and an interest in life." Of the 1,057 women diagnosed with depression, only 464 are currently being treated, of which 65% are on medication and 35% are undergoing psychotherapy.

Besides the personal struggle, women living with depression also have to deal with other people's perceptions of depression, many of which aren't true. Even though the stigma associated with the condition is decreasing, it continues to be a major factor in preventing women from seeking help. "What you choose to share in a workplace setting, however, is controversial when it comes to depression. If you tell your colleagues that you suffer from depression, you could experience a combination of social stigma and discrimination or get passed over for a promotion, but hiding signs of depression can be stressful too," she warns.

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