

# Finding solutions to the workplace mental health crisis

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With depression or anxiety estimated to affect up to 20 per cent of the population in advanced societies, addressing mental health in the workplace has become increasingly critical. Mental health issues can significantly affect workplace productivity through absenteeism and presenteeism.

Absenteeism occurs when staff miss work because of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression or stress. This not only reduces the workforce available for daily tasks but can also disrupt team dynamics and project timelines. For instance, studies indicate that 12 billion working days are lost each year globally because of depression and anxiety, costing the world economy some US\$1 trillion annually in lost productivity.

Conversely, presenteeism refers to employees who come to work despite mental health challenges but are less productive because of their symptoms. They might be physically present yet mentally distracted, leading to errors and reduced quality of work.

Research shows that 40 per cent of business leaders report decreased revenue stemming from mental health issues among employees. Both absenteeism and presenteeism underscore the need for effective mental health support in the workplace.

Creating a workplace culture that prioritises mental health can normalise discussions around it, reducing stigma and encouraging employees to seek help. By investing in mental wellness initiatives, companies can enhance employee loyalty. Research indicates that 42 per cent of employees with access to mental health benefits are less likely to leave their jobs compared to 27 per cent without such access.

Prioritising mental health does not merely involve one-off workshops. It requires creating a supportive environment where colleagues feel safe to share their challenges.

Given that we spend about one-third of our lives at work, fostering a mental health-friendly environment is crucial. Employers should cultivate a culture that positively affects mental health. They can regularly review policies and promote sustainable work practices. Training line managers to identify and support staff facing mental health challenges is essential.

Furthermore, two years into the pandemic, a study found that about 58 per cent of employees reported that work had a considerable impact on their mental health, highlighting the need for proactive measures. On this World Mental Health Day, let's remember that prioritising mental health leads to healthier, more engaged employees and a stronger, more effective organisation.