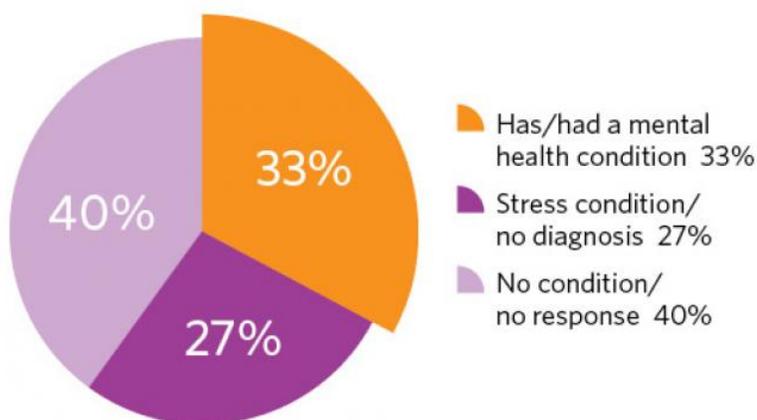


The impact of workplace mental health on business

A recent national survey conducted by Morneau Shepell indicates that one in three working Canadians reports having, or having had, a mental health condition such as depression or an anxiety disorder. In addition to the 33 per cent¹ of employees who report a mental health condition, the survey found that another 27 per cent of employees report significant stress symptoms. This and other recent studies suggest that the one in five number often quoted as the lifetime prevalence for mental health condition among Canadians may be substantially underestimated!



Undue stress is bad for business

The survey shows that the impact of employee stress is significant for business. The majority (58 per cent) of employees said their productivity has been negatively impacted by stress at work, while nearly half (45 per cent) revealed that they have thought about leaving their job due to workplace stress and its impact on them. As well, almost one-third (31 per cent) of employees have taken time off work because of workplace stress and one-quarter (25 per cent) indicate that they have become ill in the last six months due to workplace related stress.

A mentally healthy workplace is good for business

Overall, the survey further showed a strong connection between a mentally healthy workplace and the achievement of business objectives. Employee respondents overwhelmingly indicate that a psychologically healthy workplace is a productive one, with 90 per cent of employees indicating that managing employee mental wellness is important for employee productivity. In fact, the survey showed that nearly all employees (87 per cent) believe that a mentally healthy workplace impacts the ability to meet business needs, 86 per cent believe it impacts loyalty and 83 per cent believe it impacts talent attraction and retention. Furthermore, the vast majority (83 per cent) believe that stress itself is not universally negative, asserting that workplace stress can be positive or negative depending on how the workplace supports and responds to the employee.

The survey shows that the workplace has an influence on whether stress is perceived as positive or negative. In addition, employers who were rated favourably on psychological health and safety in the workplace were also rated better on several measures of workplace effectiveness:

- lower absence rates,

- less presenteeism²,
- higher employee engagement, and
- lower personal stress among employees.

The survey revealed, however, some disconnects between employer and employee perceptions on how mental wellness is being handled in the workplace. Employers generally believe they are doing a better job at addressing psychological health in the workplace than their employees believe they are.

Stigma is a big challenge

In taking steps to improve workplace mental health, stigma clearly remains an area of concern. The survey found that in many instances, employees are actually tougher on individuals with mental illness than their employers, and some significantly negative attitudes toward mental illness remain prevalent. In fact, one in five employees (19 per cent) believes that whether someone becomes mentally ill is fully within their control.



Self-stigma and perceptions of stigma by treatment providers are known to prevent people from seeking care. Workplace stigma first influences whether someone leaves work, and then how quickly and successfully one returns to work after an absence due to mental health.

With this in mind, it is clear that stigma has a financial cost for employers – but given the other findings, it is also clear that employers have an opportunity to influence levels of absence, productivity and engagement by promoting a mentally healthy workplace.

The initial survey findings were presented at Morneau Shepell's Employers Connect seminars for Workplace Mental Health. Contact us at research@morneaushepell.com for a copy. A report on the complete survey findings, which also include perspectives from employers and physicians, will be published as a special insert in *Benefits Canada and Avantages* in May 2015.

¹ The margin of error in the survey was +/- 3.09%

² Presenteeism is when employees still show up for work even when they're sick, injured, in distress or can't concentrate because of a personal problem or issue. The result is lost productivity and a possible threat to the health and safety of others in the workplace.