Workplace stress a growing health hazard

August 25 2011

Sunday Azagba and Mesbah Sharaf, doctoral candidates in the Concordia Department of Economics, have examined the impact of job stress to health-care costs. Credit: Concordia University

Job-related stress is catching up with the Canadians. A new study by Concordia University economists, published in *BMC Public Health,* has found that increased job stress causes workers to increasingly seek help from health professionals for physical, mental and emotional ailments linked to job stress. Indeed, the number of visits to healthcare professionals is up to 26 per cent for workers in high stress jobs.

"These results show that people in medium-to-high stress jobs visit [family doctors](#) and specialists more often than workers with low job stress," says first author Sunday Azagba, a PhD candidate in the Concordia Department of Economics.

To reach their conclusions, the economists crunched nationally representative data from the Canadian National Population Health Survey (NPHS). All NPHS figures were restricted to adults aged 18 to 65 years — the bulk of the labour force — and included statistics on the number of healthcare visits, chronic illnesses, marital status, income level, smoking and drinking habits.

"We believe an increasing number of workers are using medical services to cope with job stress," says co-author Mesbah Sharaf, a PhD candidate in the Concordia Department of Economics.

"There is medical evidence that stress can adversely affect an individual's immune system, thereby increasing the risk of disease," Sharaf continues. "Numerous studies have linked stress to back pain, colorectal cancer, infectious disease, heart problems, headaches and diabetes. Job stress may also heighten risky behaviours such as smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, discourage healthy behaviours such as physical activity, proper diet and increase consumption of fatty and sweet foods."

Cost of stressful workplaces

Previous research has found that aging populations and prescription drugs increase the price of healthcare. Yet few studies have so far correlated workplace stress rates on healthcare costs. "Healthcare spending in Canada, as a percentage of gross domestic product, increased from seven per cent in 1980 to 10.1 per cent in 2007," says Azagba.

In the United States, recent polls found that 70 per cent of American workers consider their workplace a significant source of stress, whereas 51 per cent report job stress reduces their productivity. "It is estimated that healthcare utilization induced by stress costs U.S. companies $68 billion annually and reduces their profits by 10 per cent," says Sharaf.

Total health care expenditures in the U.S. amount to $2.5 trillion, or $8,047 per person. "That represents 17.3 per cent of the 2009 gross domestic product — a nine per cent increase from 1980," says Azagba.

Less stress means more savings

The economists caution that easing workplace stress could help governments reduce soaring health budgets and bolster employee morale.

"Improving stressful working conditions and educating workers on stress-coping mechanisms could help to reduce health care costs," says Azagba. "Managing workplace stress can also foster other economic advantages, such as increased productivity among workers, reduce absenteeism and diminish employee turnover."

The occupations analyzed as part of the Canadian National Population Health Survey included seven categories: mechanical, trade, professional, managerial, health, service and farm.

More information: www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/11/642

Provided by Concordia University

Citation: Workplace stress a growing health hazard (2011, August 25) retrieved 4 May 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-08-workplace-stress-health-hazard.html