

Depression costs European businesses \$130 billion

13 March 2014, by Seil Collins



(Medical Xpress)—Employers need to take a more proactive approach to employees with depression in the wake of figures showing the illness now costs European workplaces an estimated £77 (\$130) billion a year.

The greatest economic loss is through absenteeism and lost productivity, according to a new report by King's College London and the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The report, published in *PLOS ONE*, reveals that although 30 million people in Europe – and 350 million people worldwide – struggle with [depression](#), many workplaces seriously underestimate its impact.

In a recent survey of 500 UK employers, over half believed that [employees](#) suffering from stress and depression could still work effectively, contradicting new data from a study of 7,000 people.

Dr Sara Evans-Lacko from the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP) at King's and Professor Martin Knapp from LSE analysed a large cross-European survey which encompassed seven European countries.

The other major findings are:

20-55 per cent of employees diagnosed with depression in Europe take time off work due to the illness;

Female, divorced, part-time workers are more likely to suffer depression;

University-educated professionals are less likely to take time off work when depressed and, if they do, are reluctant to tell their employer the reason why; 20% of employed people report having a previous diagnosis of depression.

Italians are less likely to reveal a prior diagnosis of depression compared to people in the UK and Turkey;

Managers in Denmark are more sympathetic towards depressed employees and less likely to discriminate against them than their European counterparts;

Managers in France and Spain are the most likely to recommend that the employee seek help from a healthcare professional for their depression.

Dr Evans-Lacko, from the Department of Health Services and Population Research at the IoP at King's, said: "Managers have an important role to play by creating supportive working environments that promote social acceptance. By doing so, their employees will feel more secure discussing any potential mental health issues."

Professor Knapp said: "According to the World Health Organisation, depression has become the leading cause of disability worldwide and has significant economic consequences. Despite a lot of publicity surrounding mental illness, it is worrying to see that there is still a major stigma associated with depression and many employers are not dealing with it adequately."

Being offered flexible working hours and time off is

not necessarily the best strategy – especially in isolation –the report finds, because it doesn't promote social inclusion, which is what a depressed person needs.

A better option to tackle mental illness in the workplace is for managers to offer direct help to depressed employees.

Managers who avoid discussing an employee's depression are only adding to the general ignorance of [mental illness](#) and not helping either the company or the staff member, the report says.

More information: Evans-Lacko S, Knapp M (2014) "Importance of Social and Cultural Factors for Attitudes, Disclosure and Time off Work for Depression: Findings from a Seven Country European Study on Depression in the Workplace." *PLoS ONE* 9(3): e91053. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0091053](#)

Provided by King's College London

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