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The Mental Health Crisis Facing Workers

It is always an important time to shine a light on the growing mental health challenges facing workers. While the mental health toll on healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic was well described, adverse mental health impacts on other essential workers and those in precarious employment have often gone overlooked.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the mental health of healthcare workers, with high rates of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and psychological distress reported. More broadly, workers from ethnic minority groups facing job insecurity and workers with physical health problems appear to have been similarly affected by the COVID pandemic, though data on these populations are more limited.

Research has shown that work-related stress is a contributor to mental health issues. The following factors may affect mental health:

- Excessive workload
- Job insecurity
- Lack of work-life balance
- Stressful relationships with managers and colleagues

Researchers at the Occupational Health Branch continue to highlight differences in mental health outcomes among California workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recently released publication focuses on the unmet mental health needs among workers, adding to last year's publication that focused on increases in prevalent depressed mood and suicidal ideation among workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employers should consider the following mental health interventions:

- Educating workers about the signs and symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation,
- Providing resources, including employee assistance programs that offer counseling and referrals to mental health services, and
- Incorporating policy considerations like flexible work scheduling, adequate paid leave, comprehensive insurance coverage for behavioral health conditions, and expanded access to telehealth services .

Resources

- Suicide and Crisis Hotline: Help is available. Speak with someone today. Dial 988. Hours: Available 24 hours per day in English and Spanish.
- Occupational Mental Health Toolkit – California Department of Public Health
- Mental Health in the Workplace – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Learn more about reducing stigma surrounding mental health visits – National Alliance of Mental Health
- Mental Health Services and Programs – California Department of Health Care Services
- Take Action for Mental Health – California Mental Health Services Authority
- National Alliance of Mental Health – California Chapter
- Health Topics – National Institute of Mental Health
- Information about Toxic Stress –Stress Health with the Center for Youth Wellness

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