

Guidelines for preventing common mental disorders in the workplace

Who we are

We are a team of researchers from the Centre for Youth Mental Health and the Melbourne School of Population Health at the University of Melbourne and the School of Management at the University of Tasmania (please see below for more details).

What we are doing

The aim of this project is to develop guidelines for organisations on how to prevent common mental disorders in the workplace. These guidelines will be used to improve the advice to organisations as they aim to reduce the risk of job stress and mental disorders.

Why we're doing it

The 2007 Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (NSMHWB) estimated that mental disorders affect as many as one in five people in a 12-month period. Research has shown that mental disorders can significantly affect workplace productivity due to absenteeism and presenteeism (being unproductive at work). The ability to work plays a critical role in mental and physical wellbeing. There is strong evidence that a poor psychosocial work environment can increase the risk of mental disorders, particularly depression. There is also evidence that job-stress interventions, particularly those that use a 'systems approach' (targeting both working conditions and individual skills and behaviours) can result in health benefits. The workplace is increasingly recognised as an important setting for health promotion, not only to address disorders caused by work, but also to address non work-related problems that may become visible or be exacerbated within the working environment. However the evidence base for the prevention of mental disorders in the workplace is relatively limited.

Furthermore, researchers, policy-makers and employers typically have different goals and priorities, and opportunities for interaction remain relatively rare. We believe that there is a need for greater interaction between stakeholders, including researchers, policy-makers, service providers, employers, professional organisations and employees regarding workplace mental health interventions. The development of these guidelines will facilitate greater interaction between such stakeholders to determine feasible and helpful strategies for organizations to follow in order to assist in the prevention of depression. This research is funded by the Institute for Safety, Compensation and Recovery Research (<http://www.iscrr.com.au/>).

How we're doing it

The guidelines will be formed on the basis of expert consensus. The strategies that are included will be those that the majority of experts rate as the most important in preventing common mental disorders. Expert opinion will be surveyed via online surveys, with summaries of consensus levels fed back to the panel members.

Who we're looking for

We are inviting Australians (aged 18 years and over) who have expertise in mental health and employment to be panel members. People who are being invited to become panel members are considered to have an expert level of knowledge about mental health through their experience as a mental health professional, representative of an employer organisation or as a mental health consumer advocate.

In order to participate, we require experts to be:

- Able to complete 3 online questionnaires. Questionnaire completion involves: providing some general details such as age, gender and experience with mental health; rating basic prevention strategies to be carried out by an organisation. There are three separate questionnaires, done on separate occasions. Each questionnaire takes between 30 and 60 minutes to complete.

- Have an excellent understanding of the issues involved in workplace prevention of mental disorders
- Have an excellent understanding of the mental health problems in employees; the issues that they are likely to encounter and how these can be avoided
- Aged 18 years or over and have a good understanding of written English language

Given your expertise in the field, we would be grateful if you would consider being involved, as well as nominating other colleagues with similar expertise. We encourage you to forward this information to all relevant contacts who you believe meet the criteria and might be interested in participating.

Are there any risks?

Some people may find that reading statements about mental health problems upsets them, or may remind them of their own experiences. However, in our previous studies using this method only a very small number of people reported feeling upset. Many people in our previous studies have said they felt proud and happy to be able to contribute to a better understanding of how to help others. We advise anyone who finds themselves feeling upset to talk to their support people and decide whether they wish to continue with the questionnaire or stop.

If you feel you want to talk to someone about feeling upset, please call one of the recommended helplines:

Life Line: 13 11 14 (24hrs)
beyondblue: 1300 224 636

If you change your mind

Participation in this project is voluntary. If you change your mind about participating, you are free to withdraw from the project at any time and you may also withdraw your data if you wish, simply by contacting the researcher at the address provided below.

Your privacy

Any data we collect from you will be held under password protection and not divulged to others. We are interested in the consensus views of the panel, rather than the views of individual members, so your individual answers will never be reported. We will only present the results in statistical summary form. Due to research code requirements, we will be storing the information collected for 5 years after the study, but none of your information will be identifiable or be able to be traced back to you.

If you are interested in participating or require further information

If you would like further information before deciding to participate or you are interested in participating, please contact Nicola Reavley at the below contact details.

If you have concerns about the project

If you have concerns about the *scientific aspects of the study*, please contact the coordinator of the project, Dr Nicola Reavley,
email: nreavley@unimelb.edu.au,
phone: +61-3-9035 7628.

This project has been approved by the The University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns about the *ethics of the study*, please contact: The Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073; fax 9347 6739

Project Team

Dr Nicola Reavley Ph +61-3-9035 7628 nreavley@unimelb.edu.au
Prof Tony Jorm Ph +61-3-9035 7799 ajorm@unimelb.edu.au
A/Prof Tony LaMontagne Ph +61 3 8344 0708 alamonta@unimelb.edu.au
Dr Angela Martin Ph +61 3 6226 2713 Angela.Martin@utas.edu.au