Spotting mental health risks in the workplace

Dr. Dan Bilsker

- Research Consultant
  
  *Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health & Addiction, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver*

- Private Practice
  
  *Evaluating & treating mental health problems associated with occupational disability*
Spotting MH Risks

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT
MH Risks are costly to all parties

![Percent of Active Claims Graph](chart.gif)

- **Back Disorders**
- **Depression**

- 1997: 10%
- 1998: 12%
- 1999: 14%
- 2000: 13%
- 2001: 15%
- 2002: 16%
Identification of risks allows prevention of MH Dysfunction & Disability.
How to spot mental health risks

At the organizational level
Primary prevention

At the individual level
Secondary/tertiary prevention
Spotting Risks

AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL
Monitoring organizational risks to mental health

- Various tools have been developed, e.g. by UK Health and Safety Executive
- A Canadian tool has been developed, with support by the Great West Life Centre for Mental Health: [www.guardingmindsatwork.ca](http://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca)

Guarding Minds @ Work

- Online survey tool
- Free to use
- Evaluates 12 well-supported risk factors
- Gives feedback for organizational improvement
• 2009 National online survey (Ipsos Reid)
• 7000 respondents
• Relationships between GM@W factors and dependent variables:
  – Depression (PHQ-2)
  – Anxiety (GAD-2)
  – Risky Drinking (AUDIT-4)
  – Presenteeism (Adaptation of Stanford Presenteeism Scale)
Prediction of Depression by Risk Factors

- Psychological protection
- Worklife balance
- Engagement
- Workload management
- Involvement & influence
- Growth
- Job fit
- Civility & respect
- Clear leadership
- Organizational culture
- Psychological Support

Men vs Women

$t$ value
Next stage: An integrated approach to workplace mental health

- Funded by the Mental Health Commission of Canada
- Review of organizational practices for reducing MH risk
- Employer Guide to Improving Mental Health in the Workplace
Spotting Risks

AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL
From Risk to Dysfunction to Disability

Workplace MH Risks + Individual Vulnerability → Coping Overwhelm → Psychological Dysfunction/Disorder → Disability
Identifying risks from individual cases

• Disability absence related to mental health problems may be the canary in the coal mine, indicating organizational risks.

• Organizations need mechanisms to capture this data, e.g.,
  – independent disability assessment to identify contributing risk factors (in addition to usual focus on diagnosis and treatment).
  – feedback to employers via third-party disability managers, especially when there have been several disability cases in a specific workplace.

• Analogous to workers’ compensation feedback regarding physical risks (e.g., insufficient safeguards on machinery) or Cockpit Resource Management.
Conclusion

• Risks to employee mental health are costly and significantly preventable

• Innovative strategies are needed to identify risks in order to act preventively