

21,000 Victorians suffer from work-related depression

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Almost one in six cases of depression among working Victorians are caused by job stress. This means more than 21,000 cases of preventable depression are caused by job stress each year, a new University of Melbourne study shows.

Stressful working conditions in this study were defined as a combination of high job demands and low control over how the job gets done (or 'job strain').

The study, led by Associate Professor Tony LaMontagne from the McCaughey Centre: VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing at the University of Melbourne with research partners from Monash and British Columbia universities is published this month in the international journal *BMC Public Health*.

It estimates that:

-- More working women than men experience job stress, and job stress is more likely in lower skilled occupations;

-- Job stress exposure patterns were then combined with previous research showing that job stress doubles the risk of depression to estimate the proportion of depression caused by job stress among working people;

-- Nearly one in five (17 per cent) working women suffering depression can attribute their condition to job stress and more than one in eight (13 per cent) working men with depression have problems due to job stress;

-- This translates to 21,437 working Victorians suffering from preventable depression caused by job stress;

-- By comparison, 30-times fewer workers receive workers' compensation for stress-related mental

disorders, suggesting that workers' compensation statistics grossly under-represent the true extent of the problem.

National Depression Initiative beyondblue estimates that at least one in five Australians will experience depression or another mental illness at some stage in their lives.

Researchers analysed job stress data collected from a 2003 survey of 1100 Victorian workers.

Numbers of prevalent depression cases among working Victorians were estimated from the National Mental Health survey and workers' compensation statistics were obtained from a national database.

Associate Professor LaMontagne said women and those in lower-skilled occupations are more likely to experience job stress, and so bear a greater share of job stress-related depression.

"This represents a substantial and inequitably distributed public health problem," Associate Professor LaMontagne said.

"The burden of mental illness in the general population follows a similar demographic pattern, suggesting that job stress is a substantial contributor to mental health inequalities," he said.

Associate Professor LaMontagne said that solutions are available to address this problem.

"The evidence shows that improving job control, moderating demands, and providing more support from supervisors and co-workers makes a difference," he says. "Our hope is that a better understanding of the scale of this problem will lead to more support for employees, particularly for lower-skilled workers and working women."

VicHealth CEO, Todd Harper said the study shows

that workplaces need to do more to prevent workplace related mental health problems.

"Given so many people spend a large part of their day at work, we need to find the best ways workplaces can promote good health rather than cause health problems," Mr Harper said.

"Workplaces provide an important setting to prevent illness through strategies to reduce stress, as well as programs that address nutrition, physical inactivity and smoking," Mr Harper added.

Source: University of Melbourne

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