



Mental health promotion in the workplace

A summary of a good practice report

What is mental health promotion?

Mental health promotion (MHP) includes all the actions that contribute to good mental health. This leads to the question: 'What is mental health?' According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is 'a state of wellbeing' in which an individual:

- 'realises his or her own abilities;
- can cope with the normal stresses of life;
- can work productively; and
- is able to make a contribution to his or her community' (!).

The primary aim of MHP is to focus on what maintains and improves our mental wellbeing. It is important to highlight that optimally effective MHP should include a combination of both risk management and health promotion.

Protective factors at work for good mental health are:

- social support;
- a feeling of inclusion and meaningful work;
- finding sense in one's work;
- being able to decide on a course of action during work;
- being able to organise work according to your own pace.

Why invest in mental health promotion?

Across a number of EU Member States, absenteeism, unemployment and long-term disability claims due to work-related stress and mental health problems are increasing. In particular, it is estimated that depression will soon be the leading cause of sick leave in Europe. Besides absenteeism, the consequences of mental ill health have been linked to numerous other detrimental impacts for organisations, such as employees' diminished performance levels and productivity, decreased motivation and high turnover.

European employers are legally obliged to manage all types of risks to workers' health and safety including risks to workers' mental health. However, it is important to note that good MHP should include both aspects — risk management and health promotion. There are numerous benefits to organisations (such as better performance and productivity) from investing in the mental health and wellbeing of employees. A company's reputation can also be enhanced. There are numerous workplace awards all over Europe for outstanding company performance regarding health and safety at work, which may further enhance the company's reputation and profile both nationally and internationally.

(!) <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/>



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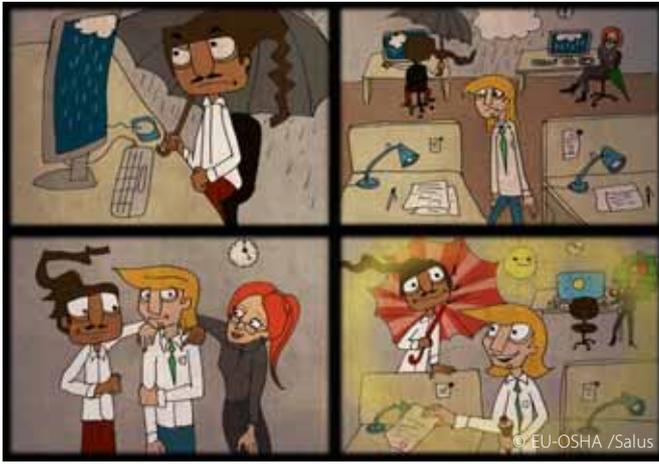
What can be done? Practical approaches

A number of factors (occupational, social, family, personal, etc.) can contribute to mental ill health.

The working environment and the way in which work is organised and managed can have an effect on employees' mental health. Work can be beneficial to mental health through an increased sense of social inclusion, status and identity and by providing a time structure. However, conversely, many psychosocial risk factors at work have been found to increase the risk of anxiety, depression and burnout.

Several approaches are typically taken when implementing measures for improving MHP at work:

- 'health circles' to detect and discuss problems and to find solutions based on employee participation;
- setting up policies on mental health and related issues like violence and harassment at work, or integrating mental health issues in the general OSH policy within the company;



- providing training for management on how to recognise stress symptoms in employees and how to find good solutions for diminishing employees' stress;
- conducting a staff survey, using anonymous questionnaires, to find out what employees worry about at work;
- evaluation of measures and programmes implemented by getting feedback from employees;
- web portals informing all staff members on all the measures and programmes that are being carried out in the workplace aimed at enhancing mental wellbeing;
- courses/training for employees on how to cope with stressful situations;
- free counselling on diverse issues regarding private or working life for all employees, ideally available during the working day.

Innovative approaches to mental health promotion

In 2009, a case study collection on mental health at work was conducted by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). The report that this factsheet summarises is based on this collection of good-practice examples. In the report you can find information on how to integrate MHP into a comprehensive approach to enhancing and promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of employees at work. Several of the case studies are particularly interesting because of their innovative and creative approaches.

The story-telling approach

Hedensted Kommune, Denmark, successfully developed and implemented a series of health policies through the active involvement of employees. Hedensted Kommune used a story-telling approach as a way to encourage employees to participate in the programme. As part of this approach, employees were invited to an 'inspiration day' and encouraged to share stories of their working life that they felt were important regarding their own health, especially at work. Based on this input, the policies were set up. Those policies are based on the stories and general recommendations, but strict rules are not implemented. Rather, the life stage and situation of each employee is taken into account when deciding upon methods for aiding employees.

Fitting the job to the person

Creativ Company, Denmark, was founded in 2000 with the aim of creating a totally different workplace. The main idea in Creativ Company is that the job can be designed according to a person's skills instead of fitting the person to an already existing job profile.

Special programmes aiming at healthy behaviour beyond the workplace

Mars, Poland, offers a multi-component programme that includes a comprehensive assessment of the state of health and lifestyle of each employee; offers several steps for learning how to live more healthily and monitor success; and, finally, encourages employees to spread the lessons learnt and to inform people within their community.

Professional advice and support for handling factors outside work

ATM's DRU-S Unit, Italy, strives to promote wellbeing by offering a family-friendly network that provides employees with advice, suggestions and services related to parental and family needs. Some other examples of practical approaches, as observed in other case studies in the collection, are mother-to-be and father-to-be programmes and workshops concerning how to handle divorce, death in the family and marriage.

Social events for promoting healthy lifestyles

Magyar Telekom, Hungary, holds film evenings where documentaries are shown as a method of informing employees about health-related topics such as stressful life situations, disabilities, family violence, etc. After the films, an interactive dialogue with experts takes place to actively discuss the issues and topics raised in the film.

Health-related individual interviews

'R', Spain, holds one-on-one interviews with employees in an effort to understand and analyse the professional situation of all employees. The aim is to make self-knowledge the starting point in personal development and to give people a sense of meaning in their work.

Financial support for employees facing a crisis

IFA, Switzerland, has established a social account that supports employees who are facing financial emergencies (like health costs, dental expenses, funeral costs of a family member, etc.). Staff members of IFA with financial emergencies can also be supported with a special loan. Some examples include: company-funded childbirth in a private clinic; offering loans to employees; and offering provision of company housing for migrant workers or workers facing housing problems.

Take a look at our case studies and the analysis report to get inspiration and knowledge on how to promote mental health at work!

More information on **workplace health promotion** is available at <http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/whp> and on **stress** at <http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/stress>

Mental Health promotion in the workplace — A good practice report available at: http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/mental-health-promotion-workplace_TWE11004ENN/view

This factsheet is available in 24 languages at: <http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/factsheets>

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