Mentally healthy workplaces: a multicomponent approach

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Introduction: Mental illness can impact the workplace through absenteeism, presenteeism and workplace injuries. Workplaces provide opportunities to promote better mental health and address mental health problems.

Objectives: To examine the acceptability and feasibility of using evidence-based initiatives to address mental health problems in industry.

Methods: In a case controlled study, employees from four workplaces participated in the Working Well Mental Health Program consisting of general awareness education; a peer-based support framework; supervisor training; and a workplace policy review. Survey data was collected before and after at control and intervention sites.

Results: The program identified positive changes in knowledge, attitudes and help-seeking behaviours in workers. Workers who completed training showed significant improvements in confidence in identifying workmates with mental health problems and support available, and willingness to start a conversation with a workmate. Supervisors (n=117) were more confident to: identify someone experiencing mental health problems; have an effective conversation about performance issues that may be due to mental health problems; and recommend support services. The policy review identified commitment from management to the promotion of mental health and safety initiatives, however not all levels of the organisation were equally involved.

Conclusions: Evidence-based initiatives embedded within workplace policy and undertaken with an organisation-wide strategic approach can achieve positive health and safety outcomes for workers. The findings from this study support the importance of both a focus on mental health and the role peers can play in addressing mental health problems in the workplace. Occupational therapists can assist workplaces in implementing such approaches.