



## A Comprehensive Introduction to Workplace Mental Health

A Review of

*Mental Illness in the Workplace: Psychological Disability Management*

by Henry G. Harder, Shannon L. Wagner, and Joshua A. Rash  
Burlington, VT: Gower, 2014. 389 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-4549-4.  
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Intended for an audience of employers and of other individuals interested in workplace mental health, Harder, Wagner, and Rash's book introduces non-psychologists to a wide range of mental health concerns encountered in the workplace. It describes a few common psychological disorders, considers some of the literature on occupational stress and toxic work environments, offers suggestions for creating healthier work environments, and reviews some legislation regarding mental health accommodations in the workplace. In general, the book offers a systems-sensitive approach, noting both the effects of the ill individual on the organization and also the degree to which organizational norms, job demands, and the behaviors of supervisors and coworkers may either help to alleviate or actively exacerbate adverse stressors that can erode the well-being of all employees.

In a thoughtfully organized overview of the scope of mental health concerns in the workplace, the book begins its second chapter by introducing the non-psychologist employer to some of the concepts and terminology related to mental health. In addressing the multiplicity of ways in which mental health and illness have been conceptualized and diagnosed, the authors effectively emphasize the fact that no one definition, concept, or system may fit all situations. Here readers also learn the prevalence of common mental disorders and the extent of their under-diagnosis and under-treatment in the general population. The workplace costs of untreated psychological illness in terms of organizational productivity, morale, and healthcare, are also highlighted with some comparisons and connections to the costs of chronic physical illness. Written just prior to the publication of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; APA, 2013)*, this second chapter notes how *The International Classification of Diseases (ICD)* and *DSM-IV* diagnoses were constructed. It describes the degree of information, detail, and professional expertise required for the appropriate diagnosis of a psychological disorder, serving to orient the employer to the inappropriateness of uninformed, non-professional attempts at diagnosis, while the book's tenth chapter offers practical information for employers regarding appropriate referrals for psychological and psychiatric assessment.

The need for more widespread mental health literacy becomes clear in the book's third chapter as it introduces research on stereotypes and stigmatization, on which it elaborates in later chapters. Here the authors also introduce findings about workplace characteristics that may promote or detract from the mental health of employees, including the balance between workplace demands and the employee's degree of control in meeting them, between effort expended and reward received, and between employees' personal skills and aspirations and the organization's demands and resources. Thoughtfully, the authors note here (and develop in Chapters 6 and 7) the degree to which the workplace itself can become a source of chronic stress for employees, especially as some occupations, including those of first responders and hospital workers, may expose them to traumatic situations on a regular basis.

Following its introductory chapters, the book focuses on specific psychological conditions typically considered as part of the internalizing spectrum, conditions typically marked by emotionality and subjective distress on the part of their sufferers (Krueger, McGue, & Iacono, 2001). Written with sensitivity to the sufferers of these conditions and drawing widely from empirical research, the chapters on depression, anxiety, general stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder introduce the reader to their prevalence, typical symptoms, and associated physiological responses. The authors also explore the effects of workplace structures and practices on individuals affected by these conditions. Interventions, pharmacological and non-pharmacological, as well as workplace accommodations are presented with sufficient detail for non-psychologist employers to gain a better sense of where to begin addressing the needs of employees who suffer from these conditions. Later chapters elaborate on employer responses. They address typical workplace referrals for psychological or psychiatric evaluation with information about the types of evaluations to be requested and the kinds of information provided by various assessment reports (Chapter 10). These chapters also address appropriate workplace accommodations specific to various clinical populations (Chapter 11). These accommodations, considered from the perspective of Canadian legislation, are sufficiently similar to those legislated in other Western countries for this chapter to inform even non-Canadian readers.

The "toxic" workplace occupies the book's sixth chapter, which details some of the losses to individuals and organizations attributable to bullying, mobbing, and other counterproductive workplace behaviors. Importantly, it begins by describing the kind of organization where such behaviors are most likely to occur, one which is profit-driven rather than people-oriented, which views workers "as a cost of production or an expense rather than their most valuable assets. . . , [which] sends the message that employees are expendable and not valued " (p. 211). An organization's preoccupation with the current "bottom line" may eclipse its consideration of the long-term costs of placing profit before people; the authors cite evidence that psychologically toxic work environments can lead to losses of up to 18 percent in productivity and profit. Events that may precipitate bullying behavior (occurring typically during organizational transitions involving cost-cutting, demotions, or downsizing) as well as the organizational structures that motivate bullying, including heightened intra-organization competition and potential institutional rewards for bullying behavior, also receive attention. The authors emphasize the need for organizations to maintain clear rules and policies that support the implicit psychological contracts of morality and fair exchange, with clarity from the date of hire about organizational practices and role expectations.

Specific institutional responses to general workplace mental health issues are the focus of the seventh, eleventh, and thirteenth chapters, with the first of these elaborating on stigma

and issues of disclosure and hiring practices. With a focus on more common psychological conditions, this chapter gives less attention to rarer, more severe, disorders, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, and yet, the positive impact of employment programs on individuals with severe mental illness should not be overlooked (Bond & Drake, 2014; Campbell, Bond, & Drake, 2011; McGurk & Mueser, 2004). Workplace issues regarding severe mental illness merit more attention, perhaps in a future volume.

With regard to the institutional environment, chapter eleven offers a ten-step, audit-based plan for creating a healthy workplace, which can be implemented fairly directly with a needs assessment, identification of key indicators of health, and feedback mechanisms leading to continuous improvement in workplace practices. Throughout the book, the authors take a constructive view, offering practical ways in which to think about psychological disabilities in the workplace, with a focus on clarity of policies and procedures, fairness, optimal match of training and responsibilities, and the like. In this spirit, the book's thirteenth chapter attempts to integrate findings from positive psychology into its conceptualization of a healthy work environment, presenting some of the benefits to organizations of maintaining a positive workplace environment for all employees. Psychological capital, it seems, may translate directly and indirectly into better bottom-line results.

Ambitious in its coverage, this book necessarily reflects a selective view of the literature related to workplace mental health. This selectivity lends coherence to the narrative, which highlights the often unseen costs of depression and anxiety in the workplace. Through careful selection, the book also manages to cover many important workplace mental health issues in only 368 pages. However, the book's selective focus on internalizing psychopathology tends to understate the significant adverse effects of externalizing psychopathology in the workplace.

Externalizing disorders, typically marked by a lack of behavioral constraint (Krueger, McGue, & Iacono, 2001; Krueger et al., 2002), include substance use disorders and some personality disorders, particularly those with antisocial and narcissistic features. The authors allude to externalizing behaviors in the context of toxic work environments, noting that bullies often show the following characteristics: "insincerity, arrogance, insensitivity, remorselessness, impatience, erratic behavior, unreliability, and a general lack of personal and professional ethics" (p. 217), many of which are echoed in the Hare's *Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (Hare et al., 1990) and in the *DSM-5's* descriptions of personality disorders, especially antisocial and narcissistic types, the symptoms of which have been associated with counterproductive work behaviors (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). Some aspects of psychopathy remain ambiguous, however, associated with both positive and negative leadership outcomes. Future research may help to clarify the range of effects of psychopathy in the workplace and also may identify more effective methods to address the adverse consequences of psychopathic behaviors (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013).

The prevalence of alcohol and other substance use disorders and the degree to which they contribute to years lost to premature mortality or lived with a disability varies across the global population, but the United States and other Western nations typically have higher-than-average rates of these disorders (Whiteford et al., 2013). Worldwide estimates show that illicit drug use disorders account for 10.9% and alcohol use disorders, for 9.6%, of disability-adjusted life years, second only to depressive and anxiety disorders, which account for 40.5% and 14.6% of disability-adjusted life years, respectively (Whiteford et al., 2013). For alcohol and other substance use disorders, a direct and detailed examination of

their effects on the workplace seems essential, given further evidence that, beyond the obvious safety concerns, workplace permissiveness toward substance use is associated with increased work strain and diminished workplace morale, affecting non-users as well as users (Frone, 2009). Certainly an examination of legislation regarding workplace policies of testing for substances would be of interest to employers, although the complexities of workplace issues around substance use disorders would necessarily lengthen the book. Finally, although alcohol and substance use disorders tend to correlate with externalizing traits (Krueger et al., 2002), they frequently co-occur with depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder in ways that affect the detection, diagnosis, and treatment of these disorders. The book alludes to comorbidity as an indicator of potentially greater functional impairment. More attention specifically to the dual diagnosis literature regarding assessment, intervention, and treatment for these comorbid presentations of alcohol or substance use disorder with depression or anxiety would increase the work's utility.

Overall, Harder, Wagner, and Rash offer an excellent introduction to workplace mental health issues at the individual and organizational levels, covering a range of specialty fields with remarkable clarity and thoughtful organization. Ambitious in its scope, their book offers employers a useful introductory handbook for learning about psychological disorders, their symptoms, prevalence, and treatment, and appropriate accommodations. It also offers organizations very practical information and guidance for handling difficult times of transition while fostering optimal mental health and for creating a workplace where employees can thrive and contribute creatively to its goals.

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