



FUNDING TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK IS FAILING TO DELIVER RESULTS

Tuesday 8th April 2025 – 10:30 CEST - New research presented at the 2025 European Congress of Psychiatry reveals that in the last 25 years, although there has never been this level of funding, guidelines and regulation aimed towards mental health at work, employees are now reporting greater workplace demands and increasingly less control over work deadlines. Many also report that they fear their job will make them ill. These stressors have a stronger negative impact on the mental health of millennials compared to earlier generations when they were at a similar age.

Data from over 19,000 people from the years 2000 – 2020 were used, from a population-based cohort study. Investigators looked to evaluate whether work is becoming more stressful, and whether employees are less resilient.

Key findings from the study include:

- Over 20 years, employees report an increasing trend in work being more stressful than they imagined, complex and difficult and fearing it will make them ill.
- Although employees felt they had more freedom to decide when they do their work, they report less control over how work is carried out.
- Encouragingly more people report using skills in their job and learning new skills.
- Disconcertingly millennials seem less resilient to work stresses than previous cohorts (i.e. Generation X) at any given age.
- The negative impact of higher levels of job demands on mental health has increased in younger cohorts, while at the same time they receive fewer psychological benefits from autonomy and control over work, compared with older cohorts.

Nick Glozier, Professor of Psychological Medicine, University of Sydney and Lead Investigator, said: “Globally, an estimated 12 billion working days are lost every year to depression and anxiety at a cost of US \$1 trillion per year in lost productivity.¹ There are many risks to mental health at work including demands, which can peak in middle age due to employees reaching the pinnacle of their careers. However, our study shows that all ages questioned in the later years of our analysis report high levels of job demands and less control at work. It is very positive that there has been much more of a spotlight and funding towards mental health at work, but we have seen that the prevalence of mental ill health and subsequent disability benefits are on the rise. This has major implications for employers, insurers, regulators and benefit systems.”

Dr. Julian Beezhold, Secretary General, European Psychiatric Association, said: “Interestingly, this study reveals a paradox in that while more funding is being set aside to support workplace employees’ mental health, the prevalence of employee mental ill health rates is seemingly on the increase. This may be explained by accepting that younger employees have an increased sensitivity to work stress effects and view work as becoming more stressful. It is something that must be considered by all groups if we are to mitigate the impact of work stresses on the mental health of all ages, otherwise we risk the inevitability of the more serious consequences it may lead to.”



The European Congress of Psychiatry takes place from 5-8 April 2025 in Madrid, Spain, and represents Europe's largest congress dedicated to psychiatry, with over 5,200 attendees from over 120 countries: epa-congress.org.

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Notes to editors

Abstract:

The Workplace Mental Health Paradox - Why is mental ill health at work rising yet we have never spent more to prevent it? [EPA2025-ABS-2341]

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Introduction: There is a prevailing paradox in workplace mental health. Never has so much been spent on prevention, intervention, and regulatory programs yet the prevalence of employee mental ill-health has not only not improved, but rates are seemingly on the increase

Objectives: Two evaluate 2 explanations (a) has the reported prevalence of specific psychosocial workplace risk and protective factors changed over the last two decades (e.g., is work getting more stressful), and (b) are there trends, and generational differences, in the impact of these factors on worsening or buffering mental health (e.g., are employees becoming less resilient).

Methods: We use a 20 year population based cohort study (n=19,744) (a) We estimated the linear trend over time (2001 to 2020), to determine the population-trends of reporting higher levels of job demands, control and complexity (b) To assess cohort differences in resilience to job stressors we estimated regression models predicting mental health (MHI-5 scores) by each psychosocial risk and birth cohort. Each model included the interaction between the self-reported psychosocial risk factor (independent variable) and birth-cohort (moderator variable) to estimate the dependency for each cohort. The marginal slope between the level of the risk factor and mental health for each cohort was estimated by the delta method (see below). Differences between the marginal slopes of adjacent cohorts were tested with adjustment for pairwise comparisons.

Results: From 2000 to 2020 employees report trends of increased perceived job demands and decreasing autonomy in deciding how work was completed, but increasing control over when work is carried out and greater skill use. High levels of demands have a stronger negative impact on the mental health of Millennials than older cohorts at a similar age, and this younger cohort benefits less from the buffering effect of autonomy at work improving mental health

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interests of psychiatrists in academia, research and practice throughout all stages of career development. The EPA deals with psychiatry and its related disciplines and focuses on the improvement of care for the mentally ill as well as on the development of professional excellence. More information: <https://www.europsy.net/>

References

1. *Mental health at work*. World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work#:~:text=Globally%2C%20an%20estimated%2012%20billion,workers%20with%20mental%20health%20conditions>. Last accessed March 2025.