

**October 10 2017: World Mental Health Day: 'Focus more on designing work processes and environments to improve mental health in the workplace!**

**Psychologists state that determinants of mental health include not only individual attributes, but also social and environmental factors such as working conditions.**

**'Mental health in the workplace' is the theme of World Mental Health Day 2017.**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) more than a quarter of the European adult population has experienced at least one mental disorder in the past year, e.g. depression or anxiety. While these rates are relatively stable, the absences from the workplace because of mental illness have been increasing steadily over the past decades. WHO forecasts that the prevalence of depression, as one of the more prominent mental illnesses, will increase. Mental disorders have a significant impact not only on the individuals but the burden continues to grow with significant economic consequences.

"A large part of our time is spent at work. The experiences in the workplace are one of the most important factors which determine our general well-being. While efforts to minimize stress-levels at work show positive effects on the health of the employees and their productivity, a negative working environment may lead to mental as well as physical health problems. These in turn may cause absenteeism, lost productivity and substance abuse," explains Julia Scharnhorst, clinical psychologist, Standing Committee on Psychology and Health, European Federation of Psychologists' Associations EFPA.

#### **Stress at work one of the major concerns of occupational health and safety**

Mental illness is the result of a complex interaction of social, psychological and biological factors. One of the causes are the continuously rising levels of stress at the workplace. This is a new challenge for employers. Some European countries have already made stress at work one of the major concerns of occupational health and safety.

"As psychologists, we know that reducing the adverse effects of stress on mental health by campaigns which focus mainly on the individual behavior of employees is not very successful," according to Scharnhorst: "We need to focus more on efforts to design work processes and environments which prevent stress, because this is more efficient. Mental health-friendly workplaces can not only reduce staff turnover and the cost of recruitment and training, but can raise morale, strengthen teamwork and communication, as well as boosting productivity and performance."

Occupational and health psychologists are experts in the field of mental health in the workplace. They are able to assist employers in identifying detrimental work processes and environments and to give advice how to improve working conditions. Mental illness has to be addressed on the individual level as well as by measures of structural prevention.

<http://efpa.eu/news/october-10world-mental-health-dayfocus-on-designing-work-processes-and-environments>

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