



The workplace: Fertile ground for promoting men's mental health

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Introduction

The key is leveraging masculine ideals of problem-solving and the often-prized role of protector.

Work is often considered an integral part of the male identity. From the traditional perception of the male breadwinner, whose success was measured by career status and economic success (Buchbinder, 2002), the workplace is now also considered conducive to the expression of various male behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). For example, the need to outperform oneself and competition with colleagues are two manifestations of the masculine ideal (Collinson and Hearn, 2005). In order to address these observations and view the relationship between men and their work in a different light, we will focus on the protective factors of the workplace on men's mental health. We will also explore highlights from scientific literature to provide stakeholders interested in implementing a prevention or promotion program for men's mental health with possible solutions.

Protective factors in the workplace

A healthy relationship with work has a protective effect on men's mental health. For example, a study conducted by Oliffe, Han, Ogradniczuk, Phillips, and Roy (2011) among men with suicidal ideations found that many focused on the importance of their work-related roles, especially on their ability to positively contribute to the needs of their loved ones, in order to counter their suicidal impulses. Results suggest that these men drew from positive resources associated with work as a way to somehow protect themselves from mental illness, especially depression and suicidal thoughts. Therefore, the workplace can play an important part in disorder prevention and health promotion among men.

Men's work-related mental health promotion

Oliffe and Han (2014) present findings that can likely facilitate efforts to engage men into taking care of their physical and mental health. To do so, the key is leveraging masculine ideals of problem-solving and the often-prized role of protector so they can become the guardians of their own health.



The workplace is a promising environment to implement mental health prevention and promotion programs for men.

The authors believe that for a men’s health promotion program to be successful it must include the following strategies:

1. **Using positive messages to promote change without magnifying stigma and blame.** This means not appealing to men through their deficiencies (like the inability to express their emotions), but by highlighting their strengths and qualities (such as the importance of their role within their family).
2. **Fostering connections between masculine ideals and health.** These ideals include autonomy, determination, and rationality, which can be traded on to motivate men into taking charge of themselves and acknowledging their health needs to determine their best course of action. An example would be to show the direct connection between good health and improved work performance.
3. **Promoting testimonials of men who have made changes to take care of their health.** According to Oliffe and Han (2014), this is essential to a successful male-centred health promotion program. The principle consists in delivering the message through “role models” so as to encourage men to open up and share their experiences with peers.

Moreover, the workplace itself facilitates specific promotional activities such as lunchtime talks on stress and anger management, depression screening, the development of relationship skills, or the adoption of healthy lifestyle. These activities are considered effective when raising awareness among men and encouraging them to care about their health and seek help when needed. Similarly, successful suicide prevention initiatives such as “Mates in Construction” or “Working Minds” (Oliffe and Han, 2014), have already proven the relevance of establishing prevention and promotion programs in the workplace to reach men. In fact, these programs are reaching and educating a greater number of the male population, demonstrating that the workplace seems to be an ideal setting to engage men and inform them of the importance of taking care of their mental health.

Conclusion

The workplace is a promising environment to implement mental health prevention and promotion programs for men. Although this setting sometimes fosters attitudes of hegemonic masculinity, it is important to view such attitudes in another light and focus on their positive aspects. A vision that centres on men’s strengths and qualities is the cornerstone of effective men’s mental health promotion programs. A promising way to encourage men to take better care of their health is the involvement of an individual they consider to be significant. The employer or union members can play this role in their own way. Ultimately, the key is to change men’s view of mental health; to move beyond the taboo of mental illness, which is seen as shameful, to valuing the fact that men are concerned about their mental health and take time to maintain it.

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