

Mental Health in the Construction Industry

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, which makes it a good time to talk about mental health in the construction industry. The National Alliance on Mental Illness estimates one in five adults experiences a mental illness and, around the world, the construction industry has one of the worst records for employee mental health and suicides. During these difficult times with COVID-19, the mental health situation in the industry could become even worse.



Several risk factors combine to make construction such a damaging profession for workers' mental health.

Construction's workforce is predominantly male, and considering how many male construction workers pride themselves on their masculinity and endurance, falling to a vulnerable state can be a tough blow. Workers' toughness prevents many of them from admitting they have a mental health problem and stops them from seeking help.

Construction is a hard job that has the potential to trigger and exacerbate anxiety and depression. Construction workers contend with long hours and exhaustion on top of seasonal employment schedules. Workers' lengthy bouts of unemployment can damage self-esteem, cause discouragement and worry about their ability to support themselves and their families, and lead to both physical and mental health issues.

Workplace culture complicates an already precarious situation, when those struggling may receive condemnation and bullying from their peers, which can push them to self-medicate instead of seeking a medical professional. The lack of support networks is also an important element. Working in the construction industry can involve a lot of long-distance travel and extended time spent away from families, friends and other support networks.

Employers should encourage open communication about mental health concerns among workers. Talk about issues like stress management in your meetings. Be willing to mention the importance of self-care and living a healthy lifestyle.

Many mental health problems go undetected, which causes people to suffer in silence. Help employees detect problems by training your staff on how to recognize the verbal and physical signs of mental health and how to respond. Encourage employees to access free online screening tools and provide in-service trainings with mental health professionals. Statistics show most people will seek treatment once they recognize they may have a problem. With treatment, 65% to 80% of individuals with mental illness see improvements, so make sure you support people's efforts to get the help they need.

If there is a culture of suppressing mental health discussion, this needs to change. Promote a culture of respect and dignity. Employees need safe environments where they can share their struggles without facing criticism or discouragement. This will assist in reducing the stigma about mental health.

Sources: www.brinknews.com, www.thehrdirector.com, www.forbes.com, www.constructconnect.com

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