

Employees' knowledge, attitudes and intended behavior regarding coworkers with mental health problems

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Background

- In many countries, participation and reintegration of people with mental health problems (MHP) in the workforce is problematic.
- Employees with such problems have a higher risk for sick leave, early retirement, exiting the workforce via disability benefits, and unemployment than workers with physical conditions.
- The extent to which workplace stigma plays a role in this problem has been under researched.
- Research questions of this study are: (a) How do employees think about coworkers with MHP?; (b) What is their willingness to spend time and effort to support coworkers with such health problems?; (c) which variables explain the social distance to coworkers with mental health problems in the workplace?

Methods

- In February 2018, a cross-sectional survey was carried out among a nationally representative internet panel of Dutch employees.
- An online survey was promoted including questions about knowledge, attitude and (intended) behavior related to mental health problems.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

Gender, Male (% , N)	43% (529)
Age, mean(sd)	45.4 (12.0)
Number of household members, mean(sd)	2.6 (1.3)
Married, yes (% , N)	50% (617)
Living in urban zone, yes (% , N)	46% (535)
Highest level of education, higher vocational education (% , N)	33 % (406)

Table 2. Predictors of social distance in the mental health workplace

	<i>B</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	<i>B</i>
Problem in managing the situation	,274	,048	1,315	1,003	1,724
Workload	,772	,000	2,165	1,601	2,926
Problem in workplace	,966	,000	2,628	1,925	3,586
Talking about the situation	,727	,000	2,069	1,428	2,998
<i>Corrected by age, gender, income, familiarity and work culture oriented to mental health</i>					

Results

- A total of 1246 respondents filled out the questionnaire (response rate 74,6%). Main socio-demographic features are reported in Table 1.
- A total of 39,9% preferred not to have a close colleague with MHP, and 61,2% preferred not to work for a manager MHP.
- The extent to which they were willing to spend extra time on a coworker with MHP depended on whether they liked the coworker (78,3% agreed), or if the coworker could clearly indicate what s(he) needs (87,6%).
- Main concerns were that the coworker could not handle work (44,7%), that the employee would have to take over the coworkers' work (32,9%), or would not know how to help the coworker (37,6%).
- Predictors of social distance in the workplace are reported in Table 2.

Conclusions

- Negative attitudes towards coworkers with mental health problems are highly prevalent amongst Dutch employees.
- The findings of the present study regarding knowledge, attitudes, and behavior are important for future studies on sustainable employability of this group and the development of anti-stigma intervention studies.