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How to support staff with mental illnesses

By Violet Nabatanzi

A healthy workplace can be described as a place where workers and managers actively contribute to the working environment by promoting and protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees.

Health experts have said the workplaces that promote mental health and support people with mental disorders can reduce absenteeism and increase productivity.

Dr Sheila Ndyabangi, the principal medical officer for mental health and control of substance abuse at the health ministry recently said, a negative working environment may lead to physical and mental health problems, harmful use of substances, absenteeism and loss of productivity.

Ndyabangi said unemployment may be a risk factor for mental health problems and getting a job can be protective to mental disorder, but a toxic work environment can also be a source of the problem.

Ndyabangi said there are many risk factors for mental health in the working environment. These include

inadequate health and safety policies, poor management practices, low levels of support for employees, inflexible working hours, bullying and psychological harassment among others.

Supporting those with mental health problems

Ndyabangi said organisations have a responsibility to support individuals with mental disorders to continue to work.

Research shows that long-term unemployment, can have a negative impact on mental health.

Flexible hours, job-redesign, addressing negative workplace dynamics and supportive and confidential communication with management can help people with mental disorders continue to work.

Ndyabangi said Access to evidence-based treatments has also been shown to be beneficial for depression and other mental disorders.

Employers need to ensure that employees who may face stigma at workplace feel supported and are able to ask for support to continue with or returning to work and provided with the necessary resources to do their job.

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