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THE REAL COST OF SICKNESS-ABSENCE IN MENTAL HEALTH: A COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL PERSPECTIVE

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The number of employees experiencing psychological problems related to occupational stress has increased rapidly in Western countries and mental illness is now cited as one of the top three causes of certified sickness absence.

Worldwide economic issues are now synthesising various cultural beliefs and behaviours and should Western factors have an influence then one could presume workplace mental health problems will increase worldwide. The presentation will focus on the literature pertaining to the potential function of sickness absence for the individual as well as the known maintenance factors for anxiety and depression from a CB perspective. The presentation will highlight that the basic CB premise of emotional disorder implicates the potential for an individual's response to symptoms to have a maintenance role in the course of both anxiety and depression. The potential impact of sickness absence for anxiety and depression via the loss of the benefits of employment (e.g. structure, activity and social contact) the potential for the development of sick role behaviour (e.g. reduced activity, social isolation) as well as the reinforcement of avoidant coping are considered significant. In conclusion the presenters propose that sickness absence for individuals with anxiety and/or depression can function as a maintenance factor for both disorders. The implications for the future use of sickness absence as a standalone intervention within this group will be discussed. The audience will have an opportunity to reflect on the potential effectiveness of cognitive behavioural therapy within the workplace