



MENTAL DISORDERS AS THE REASON FOR DISABILITY

Mental and behavioral disorders are one major reason for sick leaves and disability. Mental disorders were the most common reason for new disability pensions granted by Varma in 2023. Women and young employees are more likely to have mental disorders as the reason for disability.

There are many ways to strengthen and support the mental health of employees in the workplace

There may be many reasons for mental ill-health. The employer has a statutory obligation to ensure that employees are not exposed to unreasonable strain at work. At best, work strengthens mental health. A well-balanced workload and work that is rewarding and meaningful can support mental health when life outside work is stressful. A workplace that strengthens mental health is created through co-operation between the various parties in the workplace.

SOLUTIONS



Create good interaction and an open work atmosphere.

Build a work culture where people can openly discuss mental well-being and the challenges related to it in the course of everyday work. In a good and psychologically safe work community, work-related problems are discussed openly and as early as possible, and people are allowed to make mistakes.

Invest in good and fair leadership.

Managers play a key role in supporting their employees' mental well-being. A good manager cares and is genuinely present, and they encourage, trust, and listen to their employees. Well-defined objectives for work, well-organised work and sufficient recovery from work are important factors. The possibility to influence one's own work and control over work also support work ability.

Strengthen sense of community.

Ensure that everyone receives the support they need for their work, employees know each other, and the work involves sufficient encounters with others. Transferring competence in an open manner, enabling learning, and developing work together are all valuable activities.

Ensure that work is not too stressful.

Identify the workload factors and reduce excessive workload. At the same time, it is important that the job resources are strengthened. You can utilise, for example, surveys, team discussions, occupational health care data and reports, as well as industry-specific data to identify the workload factors and resources.

Provide sufficient support for work ability.

Take sufficient measures to support early intervention, work ability-related challenges and return to work and make sure that employees are familiar with all these methods. Work should be adjusted so that it supports work ability. Work can be rehabilitative when it is well-balanced with the individual's resources. The expertise of occupational health care is a good resource for fostering mental health and work ability. The pension insurance company can also provide support for the development of work ability management in the workplace, which contributes to the strengthening of mental health.

Mental and behavioral disorders are a major reason for disability

815

Number of new disability pensions granted by Varma based on mental disorders in 2023

43% 30%

for women for men

Share of disability pensions granted in 2023 based on mental disorders

Source: Varma, 2024

What do we know?

Challenges related to mental health are common. Many studies show that psychological stress has increased. In 2023, over 100,000 Finns received sickness allowance due to mental and behavioral disorders (Kela, 2024). Disability pension due to mental disorders is increasingly common. In 2022, disability pension was granted to over 5,600 persons due to mental and behavioral disorders (Finnish Centre for Pensions, 2023). Disability related to mental disorders is more common among women and young employees. Because the mental health challenges are complex, there is a need for multilevel actions, including the workplaces.

Why is this important?

Mental health is a major resource that should be cherished. Healthy employees are a key success factor for workplaces, and it is therefore important that workplaces invest in mental well-being. Pursuant to the Occupational Safety and Health Act, employers are obligated to ensure that employees' physical and psychosocial workloads are not excessive. Identifying workload factors is the starting point for effective fostering of work ability. Psychosocial workload factors may be related, for example, to the content of work, the way in which work is organised or the social functioning of the work community.

What should be done?

It is important to create in the workplace an atmosphere where people feel that they can openly discuss issues related to mental health. Being heard, having the opportunity to influence and joint understanding of work-related objectives and the future outlook support mental well-being. Solutions can also be related to good and fair leadership, the strengthening of sense of community, identifying and reducing workload factors, methods used to support work ability – from early intervention to supporting return to work – and good co-operation with occupational health care.

Proactive measures that involve the entire work community and tackle individual situations are necessary in the workplace. Persevering and systematic work aimed at fostering work ability is essential.

Promoting mental health in the workplace is part of the joint everyday activities.



TIPS FOR PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH IN WORKPLACES

- Ensure good interaction and open communication.
- Discuss mental health openly, how to maintain it and the related challenges.
- Trust the employees and listen to the staff and their wishes.
- Invest in good managerial work, sufficient time allocated for managerial duties and strengthening of the managers' competence related to mental health.
- Use surveys to obtain information on working conditions and the situation regarding mental well-being and work ability.
- Co-operate – use, for example, the competence and services of occupational health care to foster employees' mental health and work ability.

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HOW THE BUSINESS BRIEF WAS MADE:

The solutions are based on the project “Mielenterveyttä vahvistavat keinot – työpaikkojen hyvät käytännöt” (Measures strengthening mental health – best practices of workplaces), which reviewed the concrete measures that Varma's customer companies use to strengthen mental health. The research was conducted in cooperation with Aula Research Oy.

You can view the results report (in Finnish) [on our website](#).

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