Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Millennials and mental health: Challenges and opportunities



Millennials, born between 1980 and 1999, have now surpassed their Baby Boomer parents as the largest generation in history. By 2020 they'll make up 75 percent of the workforce! But unlike their parents, Millennials in developed economies (including Western Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada, and the US) are stressed out and not optimistic about their future. According to the 2017 Deloitte Millennial Study that surveyed Millennials in 30 countries, only 36 percent of Millennials in mature economies feel they'll be financially better off than their parents and only 31 percent think they'll be happier. Japanese Millennials have the worst mental well-being in the world followed by their counterparts in the U.K. In fact, deaths resulting from mental health issues have jumped 50 percent in the U.K. in the last few years.

On the other hand, Millennials in emerging markets, including India, China, Brazil and the Philippines, are more optimistic. Seventy-one percent expect to be financially better off than their parents and 62 percent feel they'll be happier.

While optimism about the future varies among countries, Millennials globally are stressed. In established economies, they're worried about the economy, unemployment, the cost of education and housing, political tension and especially the rise of terrorism. In developing economies, crime and corruption, poverty and health care are high on the list of concerns.

When it comes to seeking help with stress, depression and anxiety however, it's not so much where people live, but culture.

The role of culture

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Our culture not only affects how we experience mental illnesses like depression – the symptoms – but also the meanings we attach to mental health. In some cultures depression has no meaning – it is not seen to exist. In others, mental illness is considered a weakness or shame. Culture also plays a part in diagnosis and whether people even seek help, even in countries with aggressive public health campaigns to eliminate the stigma.

Culture is complex and many factors are involved in how we each perceive mental health. For example, whether we are part of a collectivist or individualist society, gender and family roles, religious beliefs and customs all play a role. Immigrants face the added barriers of language and conflicts between the expectations of their culture and those of their new country.

One thing Millennials around the world have in common is the fact that they are stressed and that is taking a toll on global economic prosperity. A recent analysis by the World Economic Forum estimated that "the cumulative global impact of mental disorders in terms of lost economic output will amount to $16 trillion (US) over the next 20 years." In response, the World Health Organization has stated that more has to be done globally to increase mental health programs and support. Not only for economic efficiency but to enhance individual and population health and well-being, reduce social inequalities and protect human rights. There's also the need to address the impact depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses are already having on the next generation waiting in the wings -- Generation Z, born after 2000. As a demographic, they're even more pessimistic and concerned about their futures.

The role of business

Globally, Millennials tend to be highly educated, technologically adept, culturally diverse and superb multi-taskers and problem solvers. They possess the skills needed for all economies to remain competitive through innovation. To attract and retain skilled Millennials, more and more organizations are making mental health a business priority. This means helping them achieve success, have good work-life balance, and receive support from their managers. Seventy-six percent also regard business as a force for positive social change and actively seek out employers with good reputations for corporate social responsibility and community service.

Millennials just want the chance to make a difference.