



Support the mental health of millennials in the workplace

Millennials, Generation Y, Echo Babies, Boomerang Generation, Generation We, Generation Me, Generation Next, the list goes on. Call them what you want, this generation born between the early 80s and the year 2000 is starting to make a big impact in the workplace.

Born in an era immersed in technology, globalization, and instant communication, the expectations of millennials and their outlook on the workplace can differ from preceding generations. Research suggests that this is a generation effect, not just an age effect, and that it transcends cultures.¹ The better we can understand this generation, the better we can inspire, challenge, and retain these future leaders.

Millennials in the workplace

In the next 5 years, as most Boomers retire and leave the workforce, we expect to see a shift as millennials assert their place in the workforce. By 2020, 50% of the global workforce will be millennials.²

Understanding the work characteristics of millennials and how they link to mental health could be critical to building a stronger work culture.

Emerging adulthood

Emerging adulthood is the life stage between 18-29 years. It is the transition to adulthood that is now understood to be longer and quite complex with its own features and implications on the mental health of a developing adult.

This stage is often characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feelings of being “in-between” and at the same time possibilities and optimism.³ These factors can weigh heavily on younger employees and lead to feelings of anxiety and depression.⁴

Understanding the challenges of this demographic is crucial to being able to provide the right kind of support for the generation now entering the workforce and better preparing them for success in their careers.

Stress and mental health of millennials

According to the 2015 Sun Life Canadian Health Index, 31% of millennials report having either experienced, or currently experiencing, a mental health issue such as depression, anxiety and substance misuse.⁵ This is compared to the national average of 20% (1 in 5) from all survey respondents.⁶

This aligns with a recent study which noted the high incidence of mental health issues among young workers. The study noted that “Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 were the most likely to have experienced mood disorders (8%) or major depressive episodes (7%) within the past year”.⁷

Taking action

While research shows that younger Canadian workers are particularly vulnerable,⁸ it is important to note that workplace mental health is a multi-generational issue. It is in the best interest of employers and employees to support workplace mental health.



Emerging adulthood

- Identity exploration
- Instability
- Self-focus
- Feeling in-between
- Possibilities and optimism
- Anxiety and depression
- Social media for support
- Low social support
- Believe should be more adult
- Difficult times are harder

Source: Arnett, J.J., Zuckauskiene, R., & Sugimura, K. (2014). The new life stage of emerging adulthood at ages 18 – 29 years; implications for mental health. *Lancet Psychiatry* 1:569-576.

What **employers** can do:

- Changes in management styles (e.g., work-life balance and flexible work environment)
- Offer training based on interests and values (e.g., organizational awareness, career counselling, and financial literacy)
- Consider wellness programs (including physical, psychological and financial health)

What **individuals** can do:

- Collaborate effectively—build a positive work environment
- Share experiences and perspectives
- Embrace diversity and differences in work habits
- Make time for fun
- Encourage new ideas and innovation
- Contribute to an environment of open communication

A healthy workplace is one that understands, appreciates, and leverages the characteristics and strengths of every generation. Consider your role at work and how you can support a workplace that collaborates and makes multi-generational connections.

References

- ¹ J. J. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development From the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, May 2000.
- ² PWC, *Millennials at work, Reshaping the workplace*, November 2011
- ³ J. J. Arnett, “*Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development From the Late Teens Through the Twenties*,” May 2000.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Sun Life Financial, *Sun Life Canadian Health Index*, 2015.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ The Conference Board of Canada, *Healthy Brains at Work: The Situation for Younger Workers*, 24 April 2015.
- ⁸ Ibid.

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