

Look into mental health at work

ANY proposed amendments to the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) 1994 should include a provision to provide a supportive environment to foster mental well-being at all workplaces.

The government and employers must be aware that the neglect of mental health and psychosocial factors in the workplace is not only detrimental to the individual worker but also directly affects productivity, efficiency and output of any organisation. Accidents at workplaces can be caused not only by poor work safety practices but also by mental health issues.

Under OSHA 1994, the focus is very much on safety and physical health, although section 4 (C) of the Act does state that it aims to promote an occupational environment that meets the physiological and psychological needs of workers. But more specific provisions must be included through amendments to the Act to address mental health issues, including providing support for employees with such problems.

All safety and health committees under OSHA should include activities related to mental health; at present, safety and health committee functions have nothing to do with mental health.

Mental health issues at the workplace are caused by a combination of factors, such as personal work, the work environment and organisational factors.



I have consistently raised concerns about mental and psychosocial issues affecting those in homes as well as at schools and workplaces. In general, the problems are also affecting the well-being of the community at large.

It has been reported that mental health disorders are on the rise in every country in the world, and could cost the global economy up to US\$16 trillion (RM65.3 trillion) between 2010 and 2030 if a collective failure to respond is not addressed.

Medical journal *The Lancet* commissioned a report by 28 global specialists in psychiatry, public health and neuroscience, as well as

mental health patients and advocacy groups; the report says the growing mental health crisis could cause lasting harm to people, communities and economies worldwide.

No workplace is immune to mental disorders, and their impact in psychological, social and economic terms is high.

Mental health at workplaces should no longer be ignored, as it could cost employers and the country billions of ringgit if not properly addressed.

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