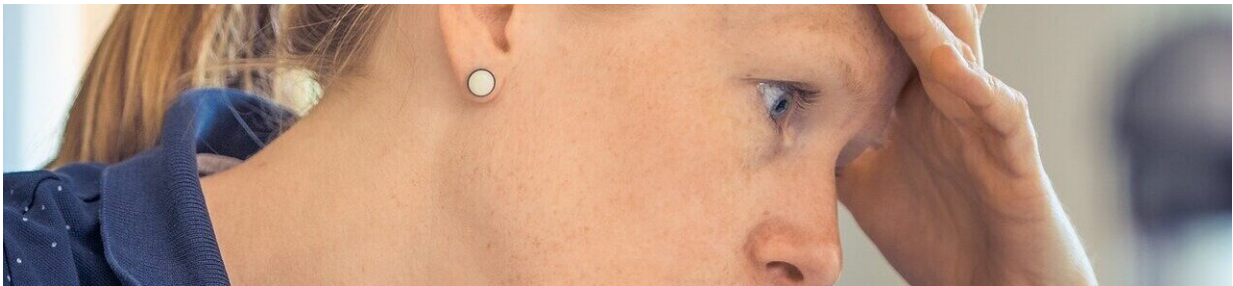


Toxic corporate workplace culture could be linked to Australia's spiral into depression

December 4 2019, by Candy Gibson



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Here's a sobering statistic for the 'lucky country': 36 million prescriptions for antidepressant medication were issued in Australia in 2018, the second highest in the developed world after Iceland.

Just why Australia is in the grip of a [mental health](#) crisis—with one in five struggling with depression, anxiety or [mood disorders](#)—is complex, and often attributed to traumatic childhood experiences, [family history](#), life stresses, and chronic [health](#) conditions.

But another factor, largely unexplored, is the impact of toxic workplaces on mental health.

University of South Australia Professor Maureen Dollard, a global

expert on work health, will spend the next three years leading an ARC-funded \$477,782 project investigating the possible link between work distress and Australia's high levels of antidepressant use.

Believed to be the first study of its kind in the world, Prof Dollard's team will explore how corporate workplaces contribute to mental illness and medication use, depending on a company's commitment to its employees' psychological health.

"Existing studies largely focus on the role that work pressure, bullying and lack of support play in health and wellbeing, but we believe it goes deeper than that. The root cause lies with the corporate culture of a workplace and its commitment to what we call 'psychosocial safety' of employees," Prof Dollard says.

Prior research has estimated the link between [work-related stress](#) and [antidepressant medication](#) use costs Australia \$212 million per year.

With 65 percent of Australians aged 15-64 years spending a large chunk of their time in their workplace, the issue requires national attention, Prof Dollard says.

"Work pressure and bullying are products of poor management and go right to the top of an organisation.

"If managers are concerned about work stress and their employees' psychological health, the [work environment](#) will reflect this. Job demands will be manageable, work conflicts such as bullying will be avoided or minimized, and resources will be adequate."

The researchers also hope to determine whether Australia's high level of medication use actually masks work-related stress, underestimating the true burden of unhealthy corporate cultures on employees' mental health.

Stress-related work compensation claims have doubled since 2006 and are now estimated at \$480 million annually.

Prof Dollard says her own research indicates that improving the psychosocial health of Australian workers could recoup lost productivity costs of \$6 billion per annum for employers.

"If we could prevent just 20 compensation claims across the country, it would justify the cost of our research project," she says.

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Toxic corporate workplace culture could be linked to Australia's spiral into depression (2019, December 4) retrieved 18 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-12-toxic-corporate-workplace-culture-linked.html>

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