CareWorks' Employee Wellness Programme

Let's Talk About Depression: A Hidden Struggle in the Workplace

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In South Africa, many people are silently struggling with something that can't be seen—but deeply affects how they live and work: **depression**.

It's more than just a bad day or feeling down after a setback. Depression is a common, serious medical condition that affects how you think, feel, and function—and it's especially important to address it in the workplace, where stress and pressure are often part of daily life.

The good news? **Depression is treatable.** And the earlier we talk about it, the better we can support ourselves and one another.

What Is Depression?

Depression is a mental health condition that affects your mood, thoughts, and energy levels. It's not a weakness, laziness, or something you can just "snap out of." It's a real illness that can impact every area of your life—including your job.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

Depression can look different for different people, but common signs include:

- Persistent sadness, emptiness, or hopelessness
- Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy
- Constant fatigue or lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Changes in sleep—sleeping too much or struggling with insomnia
- Appetite or weight changes
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or self-blame
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

If these symptoms last longer than two weeks and affect your daily life, it may be depression.

Depression in the South African Workplace

In South Africa:

- **1 in 4 employees** has been diagnosed with depression, according to the **South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG)**.
- Many workers don't disclose their struggles out of fear of being judged or losing their job.
- Depression is a leading cause of **absenteeism**, **presenteeism** (being at work but not functioning), and **reduced productivity**.

Ignoring it doesn't make it go away. In fact, untreated depression can lead to burnout, strained relationships, and long-term health issues.

What Causes Depression?

There is no single cause, but several risk factors may contribute:

- **Genetics** or family history of mental illness
- **Trauma or abuse**
- **Prolonged stress** (workplace stress, financial strain, grief)
- **Chronic illness or medication**
- **Substance abuse**

It's important to remember: anyone can experience depression, regardless of background, income, or position.

How to Get Help

If you think you or a colleague may be struggling with depression:

✅ **Speak to a professional**

- Visit your GP or clinic
- Contact a psychologist or counsellor
- Use your **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** if available

✅ **Contact SADAG**

- Call **0800 567 567** (24-hour helpline)
- SMS 31393 and they'll call you back
- Visit www.sadag.org for resources and support

✅ **Talk to someone you trust**

You don't have to go through it alone. A friend, family member, or manager can support you in getting help.

How Employers Can Support Mental Wellness

- Encourage a workplace culture that promotes **mental health conversations** without judgement
- Offer **mental health days**, flexible hours, or hybrid work options
- Train managers to recognise signs of depression and offer support
- Promote and remind staff about counselling and EAP services
- Host regular wellness talks and check-ins

Simple Daily Tips for Managing Depression

- **Stay connected**: Isolation can worsen depression. Make time for safe, supportive interactions.
- **Move your body**: Light physical activity like walking can help improve mood.
- **Eat well**: A balanced diet supports both physical and mental health.
- **Set small goals**: Even small accomplishments—getting out of bed, taking a walk—matter.
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs**: These may numb pain temporarily but worsen symptoms over time.
- **Be kind to yourself**: Healing is a journey. You don't have to be okay all the time.

In Closing

Depression is not a personal failure. It's a common and treatable condition. By creating safe spaces in our workplaces to talk about mental health, we can save lives, improve productivity, and build more caring teams.

Let's normalise the conversation. Let's check in on each other. And if you're struggling—know that help is available. You are not alone.

For 24/7 mental health support in South Africa, call SADAG on 0800 567 567 or visit www.sadag.org.