

Depression and Anxiety Among Canadian Women in the Workplace

Executive Summary

Introduction:

This study was conducted by Leger Marketing on behalf of Wyeth Canada to understand the incidence and effect of depression and anxiety on women in the workplace. Its objectives were to measure the prevalence of these conditions among working women and to understand a) how these illnesses affect women's day-to-day experience at work, b) what impact, if any, they have on women's career paths, and c) how getting well (achieving remission), may benefit the work life and careers of the women studied.

Methodology:

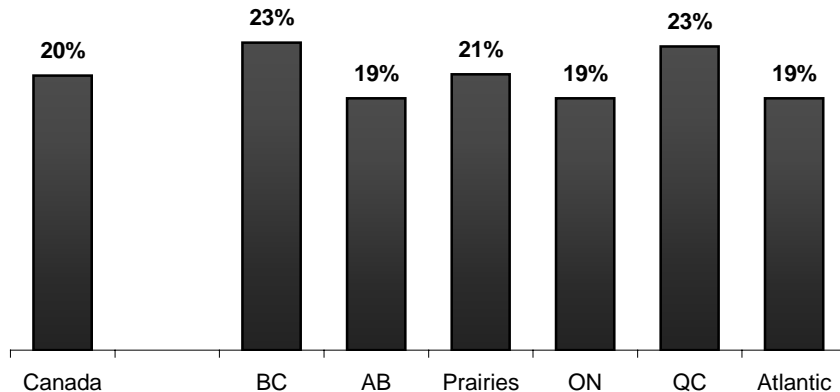
In total, 1,508 working women over the age of 18 with depression and/or anxiety were interviewed across Canada. The participants were either already diagnosed or met the diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder or generalized anxiety disorder according to the MINI International Neuropsychiatric Inventory (MINI). These interviews were conducted between August 12 and September 21, 2004. With a sample size of 1,508, results are considered accurate to within plus or minus 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Findings and Statistics:

One in Five Working Women in Canada Have Depression or Anxiety

One in five (20%) working women in Canada has been diagnosed or shows symptoms of depression or anxiety. Most working women who experience depression and generalized anxiety disorder are between the ages of 35 and 55, live in a city or a suburban community, and have children. These women cross most occupation types, education levels and income segments.

Women are most likely to discuss their symptoms/feelings with friends (87%), family (85%) or even colleagues (55%) but are less likely to talk with their boss/employers (35%). Most women speak with a healthcare professional within the first year of experiencing symptoms of depression/anxiety – 53% within the first six months. If they have not yet seen someone about their depression or anxiety, they are not likely to do so in the next six months (79%). If they have not seen a doctor, it is mostly because they think they can deal with the condition themselves (83%), they wait for it to go away (74%) or simply do not have time to deal with it. (58%).



Incidence of anxiety/depression among working women in Canada

Depression and Anxiety in the Workplace Seen as Greatest Barrier to Success

The symptoms of depression and anxiety are seen by respondents as greater barriers to their success in the workplace than some of the traditional barriers such as pregnancy (71% for depression and anxiety vs. 23% for pregnancy), raising children (49% vs. 44%), sexism (54% vs. 37%) and caring for the elderly (51% vs. 39%).

Due to symptoms related to their depression and anxiety, many working women reported negative experiences at work, such as three out of four (74%) who felt overwhelmed at work, 59% did not feel motivated to get things done, while 55% found it hard to get to work and even stayed home from work (44%). One in four women (25%), had symptoms so severe that they hid in their workspace or bathrooms to avoid their colleagues.

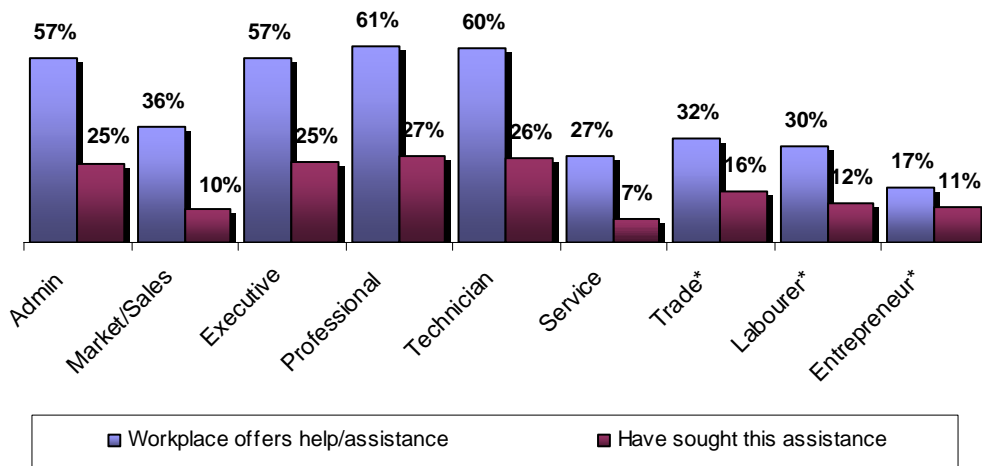
About seven out of ten (73%) women felt that their depression and anxiety limited them at work. On average, these women felt they worked at around 75% of their ability.

About one in ten (7%) women has lost her job because of depression or anxiety. Women are more likely to quit (23%) or take long-term disability leave (21%).

While leaving/being away from work may seem like a solution, it has resulted in financial difficulties for many (25%), made their symptoms even worse (12%) and lowered self-esteem (8%). However, 13% do say taking time off was a relief for them, making dealing with their symptoms of depression and anxiety easier.

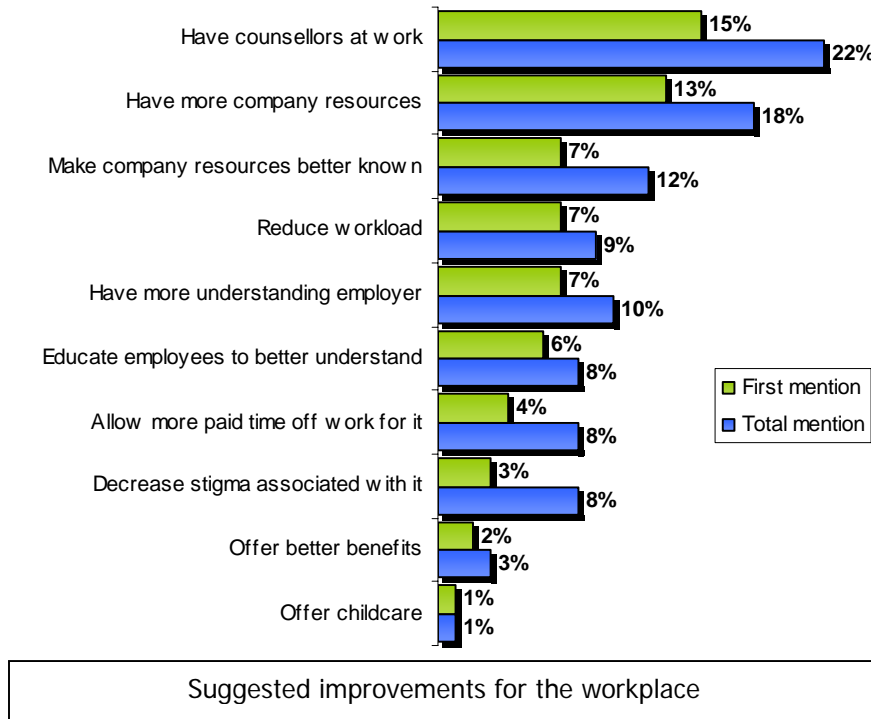
Only half of the women interviewed say or know that their workplace offers an employee assistance program (47%). One in five (20%) women have taken advantage of these programs, with most being satisfied with the help they received (82% of those who sought help through a program).

More women in professional (61%), executive/management (57%), technical/technician (60%) and administrative (57%) roles are aware of their workplace offering employee assistance programs for depression and anxiety as compared to those in marketing/sales (36%) and service roles (27%). As a result, those from marketing/sales (10%) and service (7%) roles are much less likely to take advantage of the employee assistance program than women in other occupations.



For those women who did not seek help through work, 25% indicated that they are already getting help from elsewhere, 14% believe they can handle it themselves, 12% did not know whether it was available while 12% were concerned about the confidentiality issues and another 5% did not want anyone else to know.

Almost all women (91%) wish for better and more accessible help from their work/employer for treatment of their depression/anxiety through increased availability of resources. These include having a healthcare professional or a counselor on site (22%), having more company resources available (18%), making these resources better known to the employees (12%) and being a more understanding employer/educated employer (10%).

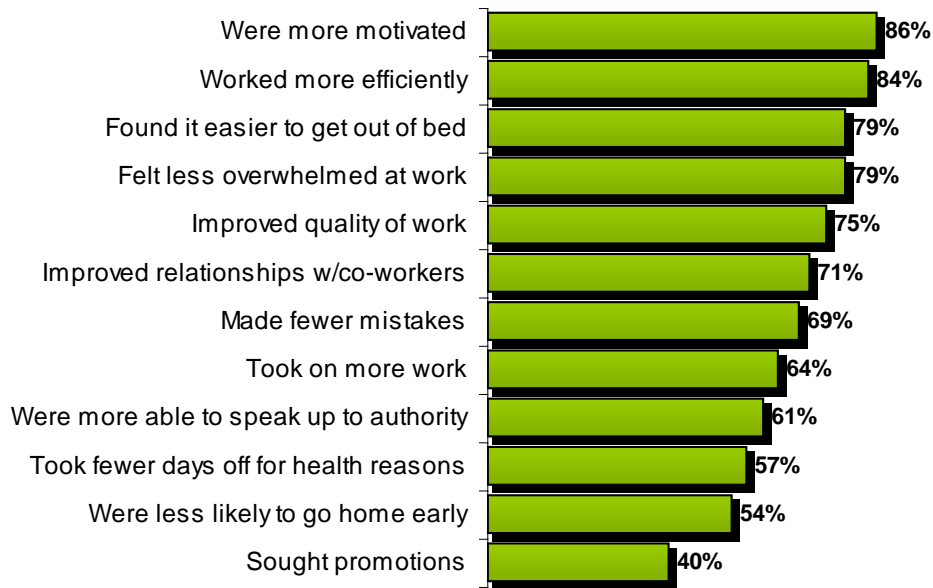


Remission and Feeling Better: Three in Four Believe Remission is Possible

Most of the women suffering have a positive outlook on treatment, as 75% indicated that they believe it is possible to be completely symptom free.

While almost all women say they have felt better at one point (87%), just over half have actually achieved remission at one point, with 58% saying they have felt 70-100% better. Those who have achieved remission (felt better at a level of 70-100%) are more likely to feel better at work. When asked how much more productive they were the last time they felt better, 87% of women who achieved remission said they were 90-100% more productive.

Once they achieved remission, most women found they were more motivated (86%), worked more efficiently (84%), found it easier to get out of bed and go to work and felt less overwhelmed at work (79% each). They also improved their quality of work in general (75%), improved their relationships with co-workers (71%) and made fewer mistakes (69%), among others.



Workplace changes experienced with remission

Regional Insight

Beyond some of the slight occasional differences in specific behaviours and attitudes, many of the results are consistent throughout Canada. This means the degree of impact that symptoms of depression and/or anxiety make on a woman's ability to be successful at her workplace as well as in her personal life is not so unique to individual regions and is common to all working women from all walks of life across the country. Regional highlights include:

- More women in BC (18%) are diagnosed with depression and anxiety than those from the eastern regions (12% in Ontario, 12% in Quebec and 13% in Atlantic), while more women in Quebec are diagnosed with general anxiety than any other region (12%). More than half of BC residents have taken advantage of the employee assistance program their workplace offers (57%).
- More women surveyed in the Prairies (87%) spoke with their family doctor than those from Ontario (81%) or Quebec (78%), while those in Quebec tend to discuss their problems more with psychologists than any other provinces (52%).
- Prairie women are also most likely to discuss their symptoms with a family member (92%), a friend (90%), or even a work colleague (63%) or their boss (43%).
- When asked why respondents decided to seek help for their depression, Quebec women were most likely to say this is because they found it hard to get to work each day (78%). BC residents said this was because their relationship with friends and family was suffering (78%), while those in the Maritimes said it was because they couldn't enjoy anything anymore (76%).
- Prairie women were most likely not to have sought help because they believe their feelings are just something they have to live with (91%).

- While most women find depression to be the biggest barrier in the workplace, Ontarians find child-raising responsibilities slightly more of a barrier than depression and anxiety in the workplace (47%).
- Women in the Prairies found that not working had an effect on their financial situation, with 42% saying they had difficulty making ends meet. This compares to 15% of Albertans who say the same. However, Albertans are more likely than any other women to say not working made their depression worse (28% vs. 12% of all respondents).