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Covid-19's Impact On Women's Mental Health



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Organizational leadership behaviors pique my curiosity.



Dr. Anita Henderson, President-elect of the Mississippi Chapter of the American Academy of ... [+]
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The past six months have been chaotic, uncertain, and stressful. Our lives have changed in ways we never anticipated. Some of us have worried about getting sick or having a loved one get sick, losing a job, getting laid off, schooling kids online at home, loneliness, despair, and lack of control over when Covid-19 will end. All of these worries and concerns are legitimate feelings that can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression. A **Total Brain** survey announced today that 83% of women and 36% of men had experienced an

increase in depressed moods. 53% of working women and 29% of men have experienced an increase in anxiety since February. The toll of Covid-19 on mental health is concerning and needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

There are a variety of reasons why women may experience more depression and anxiety, than men over the past six months. One main reason may be that women tend to be the primary caretakers of the family. The challenges Covid-19 has brought upon caretakers can't be overlooked. Everything from moving the office to work at home arrangement, learning new technology, trying to maintain order with kids now at home doing online schoolwork while everyone stuck inside due to the stay at home orders. Just one of these challenges is enough to cause stress, but combining multiple stressors is overwhelming. A study conducted by [Dimensional Research](#) says Covid-19 has caused more stress than 9/11 and the Great Recession.

The results of stress are different for each individual. According to [WebMD](#), people that don't manage stress properly may experience physical, emotional, and mental issues. These issues may manifest itself as sleep problems, headaches, tiredness, loss of concentration, irritability, sadness, lower levels of motivation, and depression. This emotional toll can impact the workplace by leading to feelings of anger towards others, lack of motivation to stay on task, missing deadlines, meetings, and overall feelings of burnout. The Dimensional Research study found 2/3 thirds of respondents said they lost one or more hours of work a day since the Covid-19 began. This loss of productivity translates to a financial impact on the workplace.

Now more than ever, companies need to practice empathy towards employees and look at flexible work arrangements and mental health benefits. Sending out a quick survey to employees to get a check on stress levels will demonstrate a concern for employees. It may identify areas that can be addressed through benefits and small changes the company can make. A few questions leaders can ask themselves are:

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1. How is Covid-19 impacting employees at home?
2. Is leadership addressing and acknowledging the impact of stress on employees? If so, how?
3. Does the company have a benefit that employees can use easily to get support? If so, are employees aware of this benefit?
4. Is the workplace culture accepting of flexible work arrangements to help employees? If not, why?
5. How can leadership do a better job supporting employees in a manner that is a win-win?

Since Covid-19, more companies are improving their mental health benefit offerings for employees. A [recent survey](#) of 256 companies by the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions found that, since February, 53% of employers have begun providing specific emotional and mental health programs for their workforce. [Ginger](#), a company that uses messaging and video to connect people with a variety of behavioral health coaches, therapists, and psychiatrists, saw a 50% increase in users over the previous six months. Benefits such as gym memberships, health apps, and virtual counseling sessions are increasing in popularity.

[Companies](#) such as Starbucks allows employees 20 sessions of free virtual counseling. Target employees have free access to apps that help employees deal with health and stress. PwC recently began offering well-being coaching sessions. PwC allows employees to reach out to a professional coach to

discuss anything that may be causing them stress. Kickstand Communications provides employees with a monthly wellness allowance that can be used to pay for mental or physical health-related services. Kickstand also began providing employees with a more flexible work schedule and allows employees three hours per week to step away from the computer and recharge.

The well being of a workforce can directly impact the success of a company. Therefore it is critical during this time for leaders to check-in and keep an eye on the stress level of employees. Ignoring stress-related issues won't make it go away. Instead, it will allow it to grow and manifests itself in unproductive ways. Paying attention to the needs of employees and providing benefits that help support them demonstrates compassion and commitment from leadership.

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