

# AS@W...FOR YOUNG WORKERS

## Why be concerned about depression in youth?

- ❑ For many individuals, first episodes of depression occur in adolescence or early adulthood.
  - It has been found that between 4 to 8% of teens meet criteria for a major depressive disorder; by the time they have reached 18, it is estimated that about 20% of teens may have had at least one depressive episode.
  - Young women have twice the rates of clinical depression than young men.
- ❑ Thus, many youth are at risk for, or are experiencing, depression at the time when they are preparing for or entering the workforce. Given that depression is a recurrent condition for many people, this represents a tremendous burden on the individual, the workplace and society.
- ❑ It has been estimated that fewer than 50% of individuals who meet criteria for a depressive disorder receive a proper diagnosis and, of those that do, fewer than 50% receive evidence-based treatment. Until recently, most of the recommended treatments for teen mood problems were based on research with adults.
- ❑ A recent British study found that individuals who experienced mental health problems in childhood or adolescence had more difficulties completing their education and training; achieving satisfactory housing and relationships, and finding and sustaining suitable employment. Furthermore, the likelihood that they experienced episodes of anxiety or depression in adulthood was greatly increased by workplace pressures.
- ❑ Although the duration and type of symptoms needed to diagnose clinical depression in adolescents is the same as it is for adults, depression can show up differently in youth. For example, there is often greater mood lability, irritability, physical complaints and/or social withdrawal, with less frequent verbalization of sadness, melancholy or self-harm.



## **AS@W** Antidepressant Skills at Work Dealing with Mood Problems in the Workplace

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## What are some of the factors that impact the occurrence and severity of depression among young people as they prepare for the workforce?

### Risk Factors

- Shifting from school to the workplace or to advanced education** can be very stressful for young people, especially given the competition that exists for desirable schools or positions.
- Navigating the transition to independent living** can be challenging for many, particularly when this involves living in a new and unfamiliar environment without continuity and support from friends and family.
- Lack of work 'readiness' skills** including the capacity to effectively handle personal, interpersonal and vocational demands, maintain work-life balance, and maintain good stress management and self-care.
- A personal or family history** of depression or other mental health problems, particularly if these have not been adequately identified and addressed.
- Lack of appropriate workplace/advanced educational supports** including proper orientation to expectations and resources, access to comprehensive health and mental health benefits and programs, and organizational policies that specifically attend to the psychological health and safety of students and employees.

### Protective Factors

- Resiliency** including good personal and interpersonal problem-solving, organizational and time-management skills.
- Support** from friends, family, employers, fellow students or employees.
- Realistic optimism** including a healthy sense of self, sustained values and clear and practical goals.
- Balanced involvement** across personal, interpersonal, community and educational/vocational domains.



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## What can be done to support young workers?

- When recruiting and orienting new employees, employers should ensure that they are familiar with company programs, policies, benefits and procedures that support workplace mental health.
- Young adults who are pursuing further education or entering the workforce should take the responsibility to inform themselves about the available resources and programs that are designed to support and sustain their physical and mental health.
- Employers (and unions) should be mindful that young workers have different expectations of work and the workplace than older employees. They tend to be less concerned with job security and long-term benefits and more concerned with flexible work arrangements, diverse work experiences and opportunities for learning and advancement.
- In addition to providing training in specific job skills, employers are encouraged to provide opportunities to help young workers develop the general skills necessary to successfully manage work life. These include stress management, and self-care, organizational and communication skills. For their part, young employees should avail themselves of these opportunities and, if they are not available, seek external education and training.
- Managers or supervisors of young workers should be particularly sensitive to signs of psychological strain or distress. This is particularly true when an employee is also handling the challenges of establishing a new life away from the familiarity of family and friends. It can be a good idea to see if a more seasoned employee is able to act as a mentor to help guide and support the new worker as they enter the workforce.

## References

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## ABOUT AS@W

### How was *Antidepressant Skills at Work* developed?

The guide was developed by British Columbia Mental Health and Addiction Services (BCMHAS), an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. The guide and accompanying materials have been authored by **Dr. Dan Bilsker**, **Dr. Merv Gilbert**, and **Dr. Joti Samra** – registered psychologists and scientist-practitioners with expertise in issues relating to workplace mental health. These psychologists are with the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University. The guide was written on the basis of a review of the scientific literature; consultation with employers, unions, mental health providers and employee groups; and adaptation of existing self-care depression programs.

### How can the manual be accessed?

The manual is available for viewing and free download at [www.carmha.ca/antidepressant-skills/work/](http://www.carmha.ca/antidepressant-skills/work/) or from [www.bcmhas.ca/research](http://www.bcmhas.ca/research). Individuals or organizations are free to print and make multiple copies of the guide, with permission from CARMHA ([publications@carmha.ca](mailto:publications@carmha.ca)). Print copies and audio CDs are available at a low cost from our ordering page at [www.carmha.ca/ordering](http://www.carmha.ca/ordering).

For further information about AS@W and associated resources and materials, please visit [www.carmha.ca/selfcare](http://www.carmha.ca/selfcare). This information will be updated on a regular basis.



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