

# Depression harms productivity, economy

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Donna Hardaker had just accepted a full-time position that she loved when a whiplash injury from a car accident thrust her into a deep depression.

That's when everything changed for the worse.

"I was having insomnia and terribly low self-esteem. What people saw at work was I was irritable, angry, blaming people all the time. I was struggling with being able to remember things. I couldn't remember verbal information, so it was really nerve-racking," she said.

"People didn't know what was going on, and instead, they got angry back at me."

Her manager dealt with it by not speaking with her.

"Literally, the last year I worked there, she didn't speak to me, so it was a very toxic work environment for me."

She had a "really, really hard time" and eventually left her job.

Ms. Hardaker is not alone in having her career disrupted by depression.

## WORRY ADDS TO THE DEPRESSION

In a recent national survey that studied 802 Canadian adults diagnosed with depression, about 70 percent said their symptoms at some point significantly disrupted their career. Thirty-five percent quit their job, 33 and 29 percent respectively took short- or long-term disability leave, and 25 percent lost their job.

The survey, conducted by Leger Marketing and sponsored by the Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC), Wyeth Canada, and Shepell.fgi, also found that depression can greatly impede workplace productivity.

Working respondents said they spend an average of two hours daily on non-work-related activities when



IMPAIRED ABILITY TO WORK: A national survey on depression highlights the significant impact the illness can have on productivity in the workplace. PHOTOS.COM

experiencing depression symptoms, while 42 percent said they left work early.

"There is a significant amount of information and understanding of the emotional damage and issues that depression entails. The fact is that there are [also] functional issues involved and people are unable to function at work and at home," said MDSC's national executive director Phil Upshall.

However, "with appropriate medical assistance, people can return not only to good emotional states but also good functional states," he said.

Eighty-five percent of the patients surveyed said they were satisfied with their relationship with their physician.

But less than 40 percent said they thought their doctor really understood their underlying issues and criteria for diagnosis, including their ability to handle family responsibilities, function at work, and deal with personal relationships.

For those going to work with depression, 55 percent worried that their illness would be misconstrued as laziness or lack of interest and make them vulnerable to layoffs in the current economic environment.

"Of course the worries add significantly to the depression itself," said Mr. Upshall, adding that the MDSC has recently published a very helpful brochure on depression that's available on its website.

## MANAGER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP IS KEY

Ms. Hardaker's experience led her to a new career "to help prevent anybody else from going through what I did, and what my coworkers and manager went through."

Now a workplace mental health specialist for the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) York Region, she does presentations in workplaces as part of CMHA's Mental Health Works program.

While her workshops are geared toward different groups, including employees, union representatives, and human resources staff, the primary focus is managers.

According to research, "the relationship an employee has with their

manager is the key to a successful outcome," said Ms. Hardaker.

Her former situation in which her manager did not speak to her is what's called "mobbing," she said.

It's a "group-think bullying" where "people in a position of influence model for everyone else what you do with a marginalized person. You indicate to the group that the person is not part of the group, which in itself is a huge risk factor for developing mental health problems because it causes such fear, confusion, sadness, and loss of connection to the group."

Ms. Hardaker still sees her former group as "really, really good people. They just didn't know what to do."

"The nature of mental illness is not very well understood," she said.

Meanwhile, the "huge stigma and discrimination" makes it almost impossible for people to seek help.

## LOOK BEYOND THE BEHAVIOUR

Ms. Hardaker calls on workplaces to learn about the signs and symptoms of depression and to stay flexible to meet their employees' needs and help them succeed.

If an employee does not seem to be behaving in their usual way, managers and co-workers must look beyond the surface to try to understand what is going on, she said.

What's commonly seen is someone who was previously competent in their job suddenly seems unable to concentrate very well.

They may be irritable, experience fatigue, show a lack of interest, need more time to read, or have trouble remembering verbal instructions or meeting deadlines. They may also be agitated during meetings and may not be able to sit for long periods.

Instead of putting on labels such as "slacking off," "weak," dismissing the person, or taking a disciplin-

ary approach, kindness and accommodation will go a long way toward helping the employee and benefiting the team and organization, said Ms. Hardaker.

It can begin with caring inquiries such as "you don't seem like yourself," "I miss your contribution at team meetings," and "How can I help you?"

A manager can talk to the employee about what they need to be successful at their job. It might include providing support so they can meet deadlines, offering a flexible schedule, adjusting the way they do their work, or helping the employee find ways of expressing their need without becoming angry or irritable.

## 'A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD'

It's not about special treatment but adapting workplace processes to be accessible and inclusive of diversity, and to assist people by providing a level playing field, Ms. Hardaker said.

According to the CMHA, nearly three million Canadians will experience depression in their life, and one in 20 employees can experience depression at any one time.

Mr. Upshall noted that lost productivity from mental illness costs the Canadian economy an estimated \$33 billion annually.

The good news is that "employers are starting to recognize that not only do they have a responsibility in this area, it's good for their business to start to understand the consequences of mental illness, particularly depression," Mr. Upshall said.

"A mental illness like depression is really no different than someone who has a heart attack and needs to take time off and needs to be able to return to work and engage in productive work, because they are trained and capable employees when they're not ill," he said.

## Longest solar eclipse of the century shrouds Asia

CONTINUED FROM P1

"After we complete this ritual, we visit the temple. The house is kept very clean and fresh food is cooked after the eclipse, as it is inauspicious to prepare food during an eclipse. During the solar eclipse, no food is taken. We also take a bath immediately after the eclipse. Pregnant ladies are also forbidden from leaving the house during this time," added Shenoy.

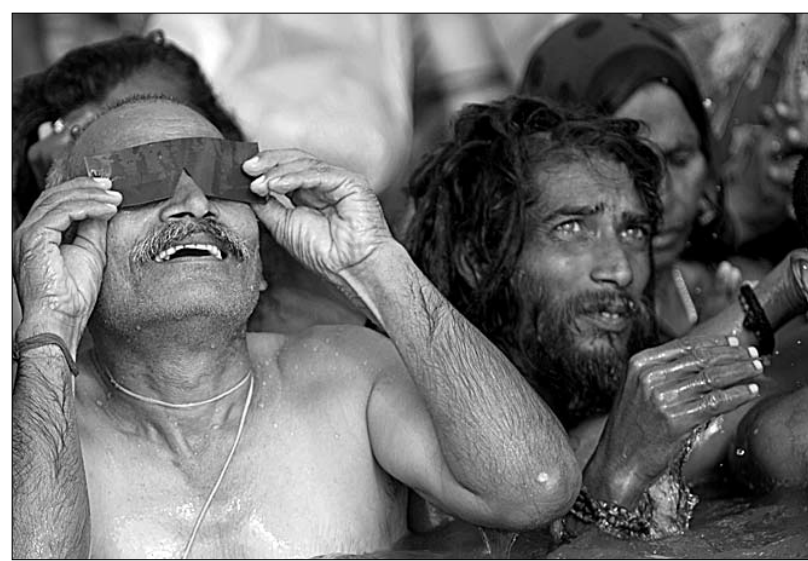
Another resident, Bhagwan Devnani, said "the city looked absolutely empty as there was no one on the roads and no traffic. The whole place looked deserted as I went to the park to do exercises."

According to NASA, the total solar eclipse lasted for about 6 minutes and 39 seconds. The incredible diamond ring effect was clearly visible during its peak. The phenomenon occurs just before the sun disappears or just after the sun emerges from behind the moon. The diamond

ring effect is seen when only one bead of sunlight is left and the sun is completely covered by the silhouette of the moon.

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A special chartered aircraft was sent to cover the solar eclipse from 35,000 feet above. The event lasted about 2 hours from 5:28 a.m. to about 7:28 a.m. It reached its peak of visibility at about 6:24 a.m. The total solar eclipse was



A Hindu man watches a solar eclipse as he takes a bath in the Ganges River in the Indian city of Varanasi on July 22, 2009. The longest solar eclipse of the 21st century cast a shadow over much of Asia, plunging hundreds of millions into darkness across the giant land masses of India and China. PEDRO UGARTE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

also clearly visible from other cities in North India like Surat, Vadodara, Indore, Bhopal and

Debrugah. A total solar eclipse such as this one will only be seen again after 123 years.

## Calgary mulls backyard chickens

CONTINUED FROM P1

"Three hundred cities in North America have a chicken by-law including New York," says Hughes. "I'm looking at Vancouver and what they did in a large urban centre about five times the size of Calgary maybe, and they have no problem with it."

Hughes has six chickens in his yard, and says he knows of about three dozen other people in Calgary who are already keeping chickens.

He says an area about the size of a sheet of plywood is sufficient for two chickens.

"That's a lot of room for two chickens. It gives them a chance to move around, stay healthy. If you had six chickens I'd say at least two sheets of plywood, but for two chickens, they'd keep each other company and you'd get a couple eggs a day, that's great."

But some are opposed to the idea, raising concerns that people might be tempted to get chickens for their children at Easter or Christmas, and

then neglect or abandon them when the novelty wears off.

Other concerns are that backyard hens might attract rats or cause a smell. But Hughes says "responsible" chicken owners will not have a rat problem, and there is no smell from a small flock of two to six hens.

He calls chickens "amazing" and says there are many benefits to owning them.

"They're quiet, they keep down the pests, they provide excellent fertilizer, and plus the eggs as well. There are so many positives."

Founder and chair of the Calgary Food Policy Council, Hughes is also involved in a growing movement in Calgary to put excess city land and unused spaces to use as vegetable plots and community gardens.

It's all about food security, he says, and eggs from backyard chickens are part of that.

"The wise and savvy distribution of chickens through a neighborhood—that's sustainable agriculture."

## Feeding the hungry: pepper farmer starts produce donation effort

CONTINUED FROM P1

Quiring hopes his efforts will lead to tax changes that would encourage other growers to participate, putting millions of dollars worth of fresh fruits and vegetables on food bank shelves across Ontario annually.

Nature Fresh Farms harvests peppers ten months of the year, ensuring a steady supply of fresh produce from March through December.

Quiring has teamed up with Hamilton Food Share, a charitable organization that procures more than two million pounds of food annually for distribution through a network of community-based organizations.

"Fresh produce is something that has been missing from the mix, but we are set up to handle it with cold storage," says Joanne Santucci, executive director of Hamilton Food Share.

"This donation is more than we could absorb in the local communities we serve, so we are working with the Ontario Association of

Food Banks to get product to people across the province."

Adam Spence, executive director of the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB), says Quiring's donation means a steady supply of fresh, nutritious product for food banks in tough economic times.

"In a period where we're seeing an increase in the number of people returning to food banks—we're up 20 percent this year alone compared to last year—this couldn't come at a better time."

Food banks are down about a million pounds of food this year due to closures in Ontario's food manufacturing sector, Spence says. With the increase in demand, "the gap grows even wider in terms of the amount of food that we need to move through the system."

OAFB has been lobbying the Ontario government to create a small tax credit to provide incentive and compensation for farmers and processors who donate products.

"We are facing tough times in Ontario, and we all need to do more to help each other."

"The return on it is really high," says Spence. "Every dollar the government would invest in this would create \$7 worth of local fresh food for families that need it the most."

When OAFB submitted its proposal in the spring the response was positive; however, there has been no commitment to follow through on the initiative.

In the hope that it will be implemented by the Fall Economic Statement, OAFB is circulating petitions, has launched a letter-writing campaign, and has been meeting with

provincial governments officials.

Quiring says he believes other Ontario growers would be willing to divert millions of pounds of produce to the province's food banks if tax credits were in place to help offset the costs of managing such programs.

Currently, Ontario's farmers and processors receive no benefit or compensation for food donations.

"There are tax credits in place for financial donations, for people who give money and also people who give time, but for food there's no tax benefit that you get for that donation. Many states in the U.S. already have this kind of tax credit, places like Oregon, Colorado, and North Carolina, and that has generated millions of pounds of fresh food for food banks in those states," says Spence.

Once the produce donation program is in place, there's a possibility it may be adopted by other provinces, Spence says. Currently, the only fresh produce going to food

banks across the country comes from local farmers making small-scale donations.

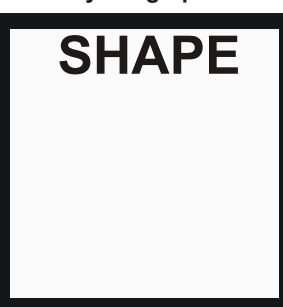
"If we can encourage this to happen in Ontario in one place it will happen in other places across the province and in other provinces across the country... The volumes are out there—there's up to 25 million pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables that are available in Ontario alone, and so across the country the volumes would be even greater than that."

Currently, the only fresh food program OAFB has is a milk program with the Ontario Dairy Council and the Dairy Farmers of Ontario which generates up to a million and a half litres of fresh milk every year.

"So accessing farm products, fruits and vegetables, and livestock, is extremely important for us given that persons living in poverty have particular challenges with health which are related to the food that they eat," Spence says.

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PUZZLES...PEACE

Guess the hidden saying, phrase or word(s) suggested by the graphic below



SHIP

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SOLUTION ON P7