



## **Mental Health and Its Impact on Productivity**

Everyone has the right to employment in conditions of security, equity, freedom and human dignity. For persons with mental health problems, achieving this right is a challenge.

According to the World Health Organization (2001), mental health is defined as ‘a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community’. However, in today’s workforce many people seem to be plagued by this disease and it is often overlooked as they are usually hidden by individuals in the workplace. For people suffering from mental illness, social exclusion is often the hardest barrier to overcome and is usually associated with feelings of shame, fear and rejection. Therefore, the stigma that is attached to having a psychiatric disorder dissuades most from admitting to its existence. There is also a reluctance to seek treatment out of fear that it could result in job loss.

As a result, mental health disorders often go unrecognised and untreated. This is not only detrimental to an individual’s health and career but it also influences productivity in the workplace. Mental illnesses have a huge effect on interpersonal relationships at work. People who suffer from mental illness may withdraw from others, act in unexpected ways or take a lot of time off. This can therefore strain relationships with supervisors and co-workers.

Employee performance, rates of illness, absenteeism, accidents and staff turnover are all affected by employees’ mental health status.

Treatment, if applied could ultimately alleviate symptoms for the employee and improve job performance. However, accomplishing these aims, especially in St. Lucia, will require a shift in attitudes as they relate to the nature of mental health disorder. Common mental health problems that can be found in the workplace include depression, bipolar disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and anxiety. The symptoms of which are all highly documented, but they tend to manifest differently at work. Although, effective mental health services are multidimensional, the workplace is an appropriate environment in which to educate individuals and raise their awareness on mental health. It is highly suggested that companies acknowledge and invest in the mental health of their employees. Not only for the sake of their employed workforce but also for the company. When organisations focus on the practical things that can be done to alleviate mental illness in the workplace the numbers of hours worked and productivity improves. Therefore, in the long term, costs spent on mental health care may represent an investment that will pay off- not only in healthier employees, but also for the company's financial health.

### **About the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC)**

Established in October 2013, The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) is responsible for the identification of key issues related to competitiveness and productivity in Saint Lucia.

The NCPC and its Technical Secretariat is committed to providing the necessary advocacy and research to produce timely and effective recommendations to policymakers on issues that affect both competitiveness and productivity on island. For more information about productivity or on the NCPC, visit [www.stluciancpc.org](http://www.stluciancpc.org); [www.facebook.com/stluciancpc](https://www.facebook.com/stluciancpc), call 468-5571/5576 or send an e-mail to [stluciancpc@gmail.com](mailto:stluciancpc@gmail.com)