

Tuesday » June
6 » 2006**Working when sick is bad for both employees, colleagues****'Presenteeism' main stress factor; Income worries send workers back too soon****ERIC BEAUCHESNE**

CanWest News Service

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Employers, who have long worried about absenteeism among their employees, should also be concerned about "presenteeism," suggests a report published today by a Canadian financial institution.

"In Canada, employees put work first - before family and friends," says the report by Desjardins Financial Security, which argues that in doing so everyone loses, including the employer.

"Presenteeism, the feeling that you must show up for work even if you are too sick to be there, is a main factor in employee stress and distraction," said Alain Thauvette, a senior vice-president with Desjardins.

"The costs and effects on people and companies are tremendous."

And it's the worry about the loss of income that's driving employees back to work before they're ready, says the report based on a national survey of the financial, physical and mental health of Canadian adults.

The survey of 1,501 Canadians, conducted this spring by SOM Surveys, Opinion Polls and Marketing for Desjardins Financial Security, has a margin of error of 2.6 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

For companies, the results are productivity losses.

For employees, the cost is to their personal relationships, as well as increased stress.

Over the past two years, one in five Canadian workers reported suffering physical health problems resulting from mental health issues, yet roughly 60 per cent of those maintained regular work schedules, while a similar proportion cut back on personal commitments at the expense of relationships with family and friends.

Financial concerns are the root of the work-life imbalance, which in turn is a source of stress at both home and on the job, it said.

Adding to the stress of employees, and further undermining the balance between their work and personal lives are the advances in technology.

"Wireless technology and laptops, which were designed to help simplify life, have in fact opened the door to work in the home or cottage," it said.

Of the nearly two-thirds of Canadian workers who carry wireless devices and laptops, 83 per cent said this technology has either increased or maintained their level of stress.

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