

Productivity and Mental Health: A Perfect Storm?

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This paper outlines challenges facing researchers in accurately accounting for the impact of mental illnesses on productivity, principally in Canada and the US. Despite the difficulties, a consensus has emerged that the productivity loss caused by poor mental health is substantial, with studies pointing to \$50 billion per year for Canada. And, there is also support for the view that that productivity loss has been growing in recent years and will continue increasing into the future.

This paper provides a comprehensive listing of the mental conditions that need to be considered as a first step towards calculating productivity loss. It will identify the segments of the population that must be taken into consideration before establishing a fulsome picture of the lost productivity, including offsetting factors not usually factored into research. Then, there will be a review of the evidence usually brought forth to validate the contention that mental illness has been increasing and with it lost productivity. In this regard, particular attention will be paid to the lynchpin issue of presenteeism. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the various forces that have been advocating in favor of devoting enhanced resources to reducing the impact of mental health on productivity and what a different perspective might suggest for public policy.