

MEDIA RELEASE

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Job insecurity and heavy workloads can cost business.

High work loads and job insecurity have been linked to long-term absences from work. The findings of a study published in the June issue of Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health could have serious implications for Australian employers and the economy.

Workers reporting very heavy workloads or feeling insecure about their jobs were more likely to have long-term sickness absences from work. They were also likely to be irritable and listless, have difficulty concentrating, and exhibiting symptoms of depression, anxiety and diminished physical health.

The lead researcher for the study is Dr Rennie D'Souza of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, Canberra. She said that adding to the problem of workplace stress is the growing perception of job insecurity.

Dr D'Souza warned that any policies that increase workloads or the perception of insecurity are going to be problematic. "It doesn't matter whether job insecurity is actual or perceived, because both have been shown in the literature to have a serious effect on mental health," she said.

Mental health problems are the leading cause of non-fatal disease burden in Australia, which accounts for nearly one-third of years lost to disability, according to other published studies.

Work conditions that erode employee health are also likely to erode productivity, diminishing the effectiveness of policies that seek to reform the economy, the study found.

"More and more policies get put in place for the short term, with short-term financial goals," Dr D'Souza said. "Instead, policies must look at the long-term consequences for employees' health, because that's what's going to determine productivity in the long term."

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