Development, implementation and evaluation of a media-based intervention to promote mental health awareness at work

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BACKGROUND

Increasingly, the workplace is viewed as a domain in which mental health problems occur and in which they must be addressed. Costs related to poor mental health in the workplace are rising due to increased rates of sickness absenteeism, presenteeism (lost productivity while at work), and staff turnover (Birnbaum et al., 2006). In addition to the significant economic costs associated with mental health problems in the workplace, there are considerable social costs such as increased rates of unemployment, reduced career goals and quality of life among those affected (Stuart, 2004). However, several barriers exist which prevent those suffering from mental health issues to speak openly about their symptoms and seek help early. One major barrier identified is the stigma associated with mental illness, a multi-component concept involving misinformation or ignorance, prejudicial attitudes, and acts of discrimination (Thornicroft et al., 2008).

Therefore, increased efforts have been invested into the development and implementation of anti-stigma programs that aim to reduce stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination against those with mental disorders in the general public. Two examples of such anti-stigma campaigns include the ‘Time to Change’ initiative in the UK (Henderson & Thornicroft, 2009) or the ‘Open the Doors!’ initiative in Germany (Baumann & Gaebel, 2008). These general public efforts, however, have returned mixed results. Research has shown low rates of audience awareness in public campaigns which suggests that more targeted interventions (such as workplace interventions) might reach more people, albeit within a smaller subset of the population (Szevo & Dobson, 2010). It has also been found that the knowledge and information learned as a part of public anti-stigma campaigns are likely to be tied to the context they were learned in (Barden et al., 2004). This implies that a) only a workplace anti-stigma intervention will be effective at reducing stigma in the workplace and b) that workplace anti-stigma interventions are needed to complement existing public campaigns and add to the overall effectiveness of the anti-stigma message.

Unfortunately, however, so far existing research on anti-stigma and/or mental health awareness interventions in the workplace is scarce, not well synthesized, lacks long-term follow-up evaluation and was conducted in English-speaking countries only. Therefore, few conclusions can be drawn about their effectiveness. This implies a need to establish stronger evidence for effective practices through the use of standardized workplace-specific interventions, reliable and valid evaluation tools, and overall enhanced scientific rigor (Malachowski & Kirsh, 2013). The purpose of the current study is to contribute in filling this gap by developing and evaluating a mental health awareness intervention at work in Germany.

RESEARCH PLAN

Overall objective
To promote Siemens employees’ knowledge, their attitude and behaviour regarding mental health at work via a media-based awareness intervention

Specific aims
1. To create an overview of the effectiveness of existing media-based awareness interventions aiming to increase mental health awareness at work
2. Evaluate the current knowledge of mental health of Siemens employees as well as their attitude and behaviour towards mental health
3. Develop a concept for a media-based intervention aiming to promote mental health awareness at work
4. Pilot implementation and evaluation of the impact of a media-based intervention on employees’ knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards mental health, in a defined unit of Siemens
5. Determine the cost-effectiveness of an awareness intervention

Methods

RELEVANCE FOR THE PROJECT

In general:
The current study will complement existing public campaigns and add to the overall effectiveness of the anti-stigma message. A targeted workplace mental health awareness intervention could help reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues and improve Siemens employees’ knowledge and awareness. This should increase help-seeking by employees who experience mental health issues and have large positive financial repercussions for the organisation (reduce sickness absenteeism, disability claims, increase productivity).

For Siemens:
So far, mental health at work has remained somewhat a taboo topic within the company. However, in October 2013 a law has been released that requires all organisations in Germany to assess psychosocial risks at work and derive measures from it. However, those measures can only prove fruitful if Siemens employees become aware of the importance of mental health at work and a culture is promoted where employees can speak openly about this topic.

Within the scope of MARATONE:
This project contributes to the development of strategies for the social and private sector responses to mental ill health in the form of health promotion and prevention programs specifically tailored to the workplace – and thus - helps to meet the challenge of the 2009 EU Resolution on Mental Health.

EXPECTED RESULTS

Hypotheses:
• The media-based awareness intervention will lead to increased knowledge about mental health, reduced prejudice and increased utilization of existing Siemens health measures among employees
• The benefits of a media-based awareness intervention will outweigh its costs

Expected results:
• Development of an effective industry tailored mental health awareness promotion programme
• Climate change towards greater openness and tolerance regarding mental health at work
• Increased mental health and well-being among Siemens employees

REFERENCES


