Millennials and mental health



We're all stressed and getting more stressed. A 2017 study found that 41 percent of us were at high risk for mental illness – up from 35 percent in 2016. And Millennials, those born between 1980 and 1999, are the hardest hit.

Unlike their optimistic Baby Boomer parents who think anything is possible if you just work hard enough, Millennials are anxious and depressed about their future. The 2017 Deloitte Millennial Study surveyed Millennials in 30 countries and found that only 36 percent of those living in mature economies feel they'll be financially better off than their parents and only 31 percent think they'll be happier.

Misunderstood Millennials

There's been a great deal written about the Millennial generation who, like their parents before them, are reshaping society due to their sheer numbers. Some say the highly educated, technically savvy Millennials are self-centred, unmotivated, have a sense of entitlement and are unequipped to deal with stress thanks to school systems in which no one failed, parents who supervised and structured every aspect of their childhoods and a digital revolution that has impaired any ability to develop interpersonal skills.

This is not entirely fair. Millennials entered adulthood just as the 2006 economic recession hit causing entry level opportunities to shrink. Career advancement also became difficult because many older workers were forced to delay retirement. Establishing a career, or even finding a decent job, paying down student debt, buying a first home and starting a family hasn't been easy for Millennials.

They've also faced another issue no previous generation has had to contend with: the online world. From a young age, Millennials have been bombarded by news, information, and alerts that further increase their anxieties and fears for the future. And the role of social media cannot be underestimated. Posts and tweets from friends, acquaintances and celebrities about fulfilling careers, exciting promotions, nights on the town, exotic vacations, beautiful homes, happy relationships and perfect children only add to many Millennials' feelings of inadequacy, anxiety and depression.

Millennials changing the mental health landscape

Millennials are a confident generation with high expectations, and not reaching their sometimes unrealistic goals can make them anxious, stressed and depressed. A 2015 study from the American Psychological Association found that 52 percent of Millennials say stress keeps them awake at night. Fortunately, this is a generation that actively seeks opportunities to learn and grow and has an openness and candor about mental health. They are not afraid to ask for help. However, they prefer to access information digitally when they want and where they want. Web portals, social media sites, online forums and communities, blogs, apps, interactive programs and e-counselling are now part of most mental health providers.

Millennials are responsible for a cultural shift regarding mental health awareness and people of all ages now feel more comfortable accessing services – especially through their Employee Assistance Program. And in today's diverse, multigenerational workforce, that means resources and services delivered in a wide variety of ways, both online and in person, but with Millennials leading the charge.