



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on October 1, 2012

Survey Shows Depression Plagues Much of Europe, but Misses Why

A Mori survey taken for the European Depression Association has found that [10 percent of European workers](#) say that they have missed work because of depression. When the survey dug deeper, the results were grimmer: A whopping 20 percent of those surveyed had been diagnosed with depression at some time in their lives.



The “IDEA” survey (Impact of Depression in the workplace in Europe Audit) polled 7,000 workers in seven different nations: Germany, Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and Denmark. Interestingly, those who reported diagnosis for depression the most often were workers in nations that have largely avoided the recent economic problems of the eurozone — Germany (61 percent), Denmark (60 percent), Britain (58 percent) — while Italy, which is facing major economic problems, had the lowest rate of depression at 12 percent.

The survey estimated that the economic cost of depression is €73 billion a year. In Britain alone, the average number of work days lost is 41. Throughout the nations surveyed, the number of lost work days “per episode” was an average of 36 days. The association also cited findings of general medical research which show that indecisiveness, forgetfulness, and inability to concentrate were consequences of depression. This impact upon cognitive functions is said to occur in 94 percent of depression episodes.

The Mori study also found that 25 percent of workers are reluctant to tell employers that they suffer from depression, for fear of losing their jobs.

Dr. Vincenzo Constiglioni, president of European Depression Association, commented on these findings:

The results of the survey show that much needs to be done in raising awareness and supporting employees and employers in recognizing and managing depression in the workplace. We ask policymakers to consider the impact of depression on the workforce and charge them with addressing depression and workers and workplace safety.

European Parliament member Stephen Hughes, who belongs to the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats and holds a cabinet-level position for Employment and Social Affairs, observed, “Depression in the workplace is an employment and societal challenge that is causing serious damage and which requires attention and action from the European Union.”

Ms. Emer O’Neill, chief executive of the UK’s Depression Alliance, noted that things were improving in Britain:

We have moved forward significantly. Depression and anxiety is being talked about more and is more widely recognized ... employers are increasingly coming to groups like us to help them provide support and put procedures in place to allow people to go through this illness like they would any other.

Critics say there may be an agenda behind this research. Stephen Hughes belongs to a political



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movement which strongly favors a paternalistic state. The survey findings themselves show that “43% of managers call for better policies and legislation to protect employees.”

The findings in America also suggest that depression costs a lot of money. Mental Health America estimates that worker absenteeism from depression costs the economy \$51 billion annually in lost productivity. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) also reports that in a three-month period, depressed employees miss an average of 4.8 days and have an average reduced capacity for 11.5 days.

These surveys and organizations focus on government action (e.g., European managers who want more regulation) and medical research, but ignore what some analysts say may be the salient factor in depression: absence of faith.

In 2010, Baylor University conducted its Religious Survey, an exhaustive study of the relationship between faith and mental health. The results were clear: Religious people tend to be happier and feel less stress. Depressed people are less likely than the non-depressed to belong to a church, attend religious services, read the Bible, or pray.

Moreover, people who believed in an “engaged” God were found to have significantly fewer problems with anxiety, obsessions, and compulsions than those who did not. Those with the fewest mental health problems attended church “several times a week.” The group with the second-lowest instance of mental problems was those who attended church “about weekly.” The data did not produce an unbroken line, however. Those who attended church “about once a month,” for example, had the highest reported incidence of mental health problems. But on balance, the more one attended church, the fewer the mental health problems.

In the specific area of depression, the Baylor University survey found that the highest level of depression was among those who never attended church — at 39 percent — compared to a depression rate for those who did attend church of 22 percent. The same pattern appeared when people were asked if God had a plan for their lives, if they had a personal relationship with God, and if God loved them.

Analysts see parallels between these findings and the depression rates in European nations. For instance, in Italy — suffering dire economic problems but with a church attendance rate of about 30 percent — only 12 percent of workers report depression; meanwhile, in Denmark — which is in much better economic shape than Italy, but has a church attendance rate of only about one percent — 60 percent of workers report depression. Church attendance rates in Great Britain are also much lower than Italy, and among the young the rate is only 7.4 percent and dropping with each survey. The study showed that church attendance is only about 10 percent in West Germany and five percent in East Germany. The same patterns appeared when questions were asked about praying daily (Danes, Germans, and Britons overwhelmingly do not; Americans generally do; and Italians, less frequently than Americans, but much more often than other Europeans, tend to pray daily).

In 2009, a survey from the University of Toronto showed that “believing in God can help block anxiety and minimize stress.” A February 2010 study from the Rush University Medical Center in Chicago revealed that “belief in a concerned God can improve responses to medical treatment” for clinical depression.

Meanwhile, in answer to the recent Mori survey in Europe, officials of the European Depression Association and the European Union are calling for more regulations and laws.



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