



CMHA HK MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING BULLETIN Q&A

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Welcome Sakshi. Firstly, can we explore the connection between mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and the area of diversity & inclusion?

Thank you! Mental health, wellbeing in the workplace and diversity and inclusion are closely connected. For example, let's explore the intersection of mental health and inclusion. Individuals belonging to underrepresented groups in our communities or employees who are diverse in terms of gender, racial or ethnic background, sexuality, health status and abilities etc. may lack representation and opportunities. This can lead to them experiencing 'othering', microaggressions, be subjected to unconscious biases impacting their progress and how psychologically safe they feel in their workplaces and teams. Additionally, you have workplace stressors related to job design, role fulfilment, interpersonal relationships that impact an employee's mental health status as well.

If we were to visualise this intersectional relationship, It would look like a venn diagram

with multiple contributing conditions related to individual identity, socio-economic background, job and workplace culture, to name a few. While all of these are distinct elements, they overlap and greatly influence our mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Looking at mental health through the lens of diversity and inclusion enables us to shine a light on some of the unspoken experiences and address them to create inclusive environments and improve employees' sense of wellbeing.

How can workplaces become more inclusive when it comes to mental health and wellbeing?

When it comes to mental health in workplaces across Asia, the conversation is just getting started. There is a fundamental need for our view of mental health and wellbeing to shift. In the workplace, the responsibility to facilitate this understanding sits with the employers and more specifically, leadership and people managers. I want to highlight that it is both about creating a workplace culture that is inclusive to mental health and prioritising the

wellbeing of employees. Both of these need to happen in tandem, where employers are better equipped and responsive in supporting employees with diverse mental health needs as well as positively contribute to the wellbeing ecosystem of which workplaces are an integral part.

There are steps organisations can take, and it often starts with:

- **Raising Awareness** - building knowledge to smash the stigma around mental health topics in the workplace. Mental health disorders and conditions, also known as the 'Invisible Disabilities' remain unspoken in workplaces with high-performance cultures and go unaddressed in a psychologically unsafe environment. Here, awareness-building activities such as facilitated empathy circles, informational workshops normalise talking about mental health issues at work.
- **Provide Assistance** - through confidential employee assistance programmes as well as assistance in the form of training and skill development, focussing on workplace-

related contributing factors such as stress management, coping skills, burnout etc.

- **Reasonable Accommodations** - through creating flexible workspaces, providing support with collaboration with differences in work styles, breaks and leave policies. This is a critical step, and often what well-intentioned strategies stop short of addressing.
- **Provide Access** - to treatments and resources and ensure they are covered under employee insurance plans. Proactively communicate and signpost information on what support is available and help employees understand the benefits and claims procedures. This needs to extend beyond therapy and medication and should include comprehensive wellness and health programmes as well.

Employers and those within organisations driving programmes for diversity & inclusion must understand that inclusion is not a destination but a journey of continuous learning, unlearning, and demonstrating commitment and flexibility as an organisation.

In your work as a counsellor, what have been your observations on the topic of workplace mental health?

While there is a growing interest in prioritising wellbeing and mental health at work, there can be a lack of structures and clear policies when it comes to providing support. I have seen this make individuals feel that employers are tip-toeing around acknowledging the impact of a work environment that may lack the inclusion of employees experiencing mental health issues. The stigma towards mental illness still exists, and a culture of saving face can be detrimental to performance and wellbeing. I have seen several clients choose to not disclose their challenges with employers or line managers, worrying that this would negatively impact their perception and appraisals.

Furthermore, at times interpersonal dynamics in the workplace, specifically those with direct team members and line managers, can also be a source of distress. If clients also happen to experience workplace isolation due to language or cultural barriers, it can exacerbate their mental health challenges. These issues highlight the need for mental health initiatives to be culturally sensitive, company-wide, to address and upskill employees and managers to be supportive, a critical step in creating an inclusive workplace.

World Mental Health Day is this month. Can you tell us about Community Business' initiative Asia Employee Wellbeing Week?

Since 2008, Community Business has been promoting Asia Employee Wellbeing Week - providing a platform to raise awareness, educate and motivate action around employee wellbeing. This year Asia Employee Wellbeing Week takes place from Monday 5 October to Friday 9 October 2020. In the past, participating companies have organised independent events and leverage the content support from Community Business. To find out more, please visit the below websites:

[Asia Employee Wellbeing Week](#)

Community Business are also the exclusive Asia partner of the This Can Happen conference taking place 23-25 November 2020:

[This Can Happen Conference](#)

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The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong is a collaborative venture founded by city businesses. Championed by senior leaders, the Alliance is business led and expert guided and aims to create a culture of good mental health for workers in the city of Hong Kong, share best practice and increase mental health understanding.