Covid-19 and the impact on Mental Health

02 Oct 2020

As the Branch Secretary of a GMB Police Staff Branch for over 10+ years, and a Mind trained Bluelight Mental Health Champion, I have a great deal experience of supporting members who are living with Anxiety and other Mental Health conditions.

I probably deal with on average 2 or 3 cases a week normally where Anxiety is either the direct cause or a contributory factor whether that it a case of capability – absence or performance – or a disciplinary case.

Since the start of this global pandemic I have seen the number of cases involving anxiety grow considerably and as lockdown eases there is no let-up, in fact I think it continues to grow and so what does that mean for people in the workplace.

When most people think of the Police Service they usually think about Police Officers and forget about my members, who have borne the brunt of austerity cuts within the service for the last ten years.

Roles of Police staff vary widely including operational staff such as those working in the Control Room taking your 999 calls and Custody Detention Officers as well as office based staff those in the back office functions such as ICT or as Domestic Abuse Risk Assessors and Management of Violent or Sex Offender Officers.

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My members, like all our key workers, have continued to be out there on the front line throughout lockdown. Many of them in roles which are normally incredibly stressful but during a global pandemic even more so. I have no idea of what it must be like attend the scene of a sudden death as a Crime Scene Investigator or be a PCSO on "scene guard" for several hours at a time but I can imagine the real sense of fear in the current times of then going home and taking the potentially fatal Covid-19 virus to my family or the impact on personal relationships of those who are living apart from their families to protect them.

The reasons for Covid anxiety are many and varied – and aren't reserved for front line workers.

People working at home who are experiencing social isolation or those shielding now have to ease themselves back to day to day "normal" life which will come with a real sense of fear because the reason they were shielding in the first place remains just the same and the virus just as deadly.

For some people also, working from home brings other challenges as normally being *at work* is an escape from a difficult home life.

Not being able to socialise with your friends or see your family will also have an impact, along with additional workloads with increased demand and/or reduced staff available because some colleagues have had to shield for months now. I could keep listing the ways in which it will manifest itself, but you get the picture.

Covid-19 has been the biggest civil emergency we've seen in this country since the Second World War and we had to adapt the way we live and work. Employers do need to respond to the mental health crisis that is surely coming, the way in which we adapted during the lockdown itself.

Here in South Wales we have well established processes for identifying staff who are involved in traumatic working situations (being contacted by the Occupational Health Team), we have invested in Mind Bluelight Mental Health Training and implemented Health & Wellbeing schemes but there is more to be done.

There needs to be recognition of the impact of Covid-19 on people's mental health, continuing to check in with people regularly so we normalise the discussion of mental health issues.

There needs to be a real investment in supporting people with mental health issues which includes,

- Employers ensuring that supervisors and managers are trained to support their staff who experience mental health issues and that there are supportive processes and policies in place to allow this to happen in a timely manner
- Individuals need to break the associated stigma by making talking of Mental Health as normal as talking about our physical health issues

- And the union will need to follow up on the results of the Covid-19 Mental Health survey by engaging with employers to address issues on a local basis and campaigning on a national level of improve the provision of third sector services

GMB wants to hear what matters to you, about your concerns and your experiences, to help us build a campaign for real change in the workplace. Please complete our Covid-19 Mental Health survey to tell us how this has affected you so we can work with employers to ensure the right response to this long-term fallout from Covid-19.