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Updated FRIDAY September 10, 1999



# Depression costs billions

**Untreated depression takes its toll on business through increased absenteeism and decreased productivity.**

**By Usha Lee McFarling**  
*Eagle Washington Bureau*

WASHINGTON -- Depression is sapping productivity -- and costing billions of dollars -- at eight of every 10 American workplaces, according to a survey of human resource managers released Thursday.

One-third of those surveyed said depression was a moderate, if not large, problem in their workplaces. Overall, depression is a \$44 billion drag on the economy, according to national estimates. Most of that is not from medical bills but rather from such indirect costs as absenteeism and decreased productivity.

It's a disease that often robs workers of the very things they need to succeed -- energy, initiative and creativity.

"Depression can be so debilitating that you cannot work. I've gone the gamut from being able to fly around, give talks and run an organization to not being able to get out of bed," said Lydia Lewis, executive director of the Chicago-based National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association.

Mental illness also remains a taboo topic in many workplaces: Employees are afraid to seek help because they fear being stigmatized, while bosses are afraid to discuss a problem because they fear offending or being sued.

**More information**

These organizations offer resources on depression:

**Employee Assistance Professionals Association**  
[www.eap-association.com](http://www.eap-association.com)

**National Alliance for the Mentally Ill**  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

**National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association**  
[www.ndmda.org](http://www.ndmda.org)

**National Foundation for Brain Research**  
[www.treatdepression.com](http://www.treatdepression.com)

**National Mental Illness Screening Project**  
[www.nmisp.org](http://www.nmisp.org)

– Eagle Washington Bureau

Money	And many people don't recognize depression as an illness. Symptoms of fatigue and indecisiveness are often seen as personality problems, laziness or weakness.
Movies	
Music	
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NBA	"It's just not on the radar screen," said Ronald Kessler, a professor of sociology at Harvard Medical School and expert on the links between productivity and depression.
NBC	
NIE	
Neighbors	
NFL	Health-care cost-cutting has led many businesses to curb expensive mental health benefits. But that strategy can be short-sighted.
Obituaries	Absenteeism, hospitalizations and low productivity problems often follow within a year of such cuts.
Outdoors	
Outdoors calendar	
Pets	
Politics	"I tell CEOs, 'You either pay now or pay later -- with interest and penalties,' " said Thomas O'Connor, who practices the budding field of behavioral disability management from offices in Falls Church, Va.
Prep sports	
Regional news	
Religion	"People don't think about the cost of not treating illness," Kessler said "It takes an enlightened CEO."
Religion calendar	
Rent Guide	
Royals	
Scrapbooking	Financially savvy executives -- seeing their bottom line at stake -- are starting to find progressive ways to deal with depression.
Search	
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Sports	"Corporate America is just starting to wake up to the fact that this is an issue that they have to deal with," said Gregg Lehman, president of the National Business Coalition on Health, a Washington, D.C.-based national group seeking better health care for employees.
Sports headlines	
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Wildcats	When Banc One, a Columbus, Ohio, banking company, enhanced its employee mental health benefits and employee assistance program a few years ago, spending on mental health care plummeted, said Daniel Conti, a psychologist who heads the bank's employee assistance program.
Wings	But Conti said his company has not been able to curb disability costs, in part because both patients and insurers refuse to treat depression with urgency.
Wranglers	
Yellow Pages	"We still live in a society that requires you to be very, very sick before you get treatment," he said.

Studies show only one in 12 of the 17.7 Americans with depression will receive adequate treatment -- antidepressant medication, psychotherapy or both. Since depression often recurs, long-term treatment may be necessary.

Experts at a daylong workplace depression seminar Thursday said many could benefit if businesses provided adequate health benefits, offered free screenings for depression and taught managers how to recognize and confidentially discuss symptoms of depression.

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Employees "need to feel safe," Lehman said.

The economic toll of depression isn't just corporate. The careers -- and lifetime earnings -- of depressed employees can plummet as well. Trouble can start early; depression is linked to teen pregnancy and dropping out of school, said Kessler.

The survey on depression's corporate impact was conducted earlier this year for the National Foundation of Brain Research and the Society for Human Resource Management and was completed by 406 human resource managers.

In the study, the most notable symptoms of depression were lethargy, poor concentration and lowered productivity. Less than 40 percent of those surveyed said they could adequately measure productivity loss due to depression, and only 5 percent said their companies offered employees mental health screening.

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## Companies wake up to workplace violence

By Maggie Jackson, Associated Press, 08/01/99

Just a day after the Atlanta office shootings, the workplace violence prevention team at American Express convened by telephone to discuss coping with employees upset by the rampage.

At the clothing retailer The Limited, supervisors are trained to look for bruised employees, knowing that abusive lovers often pursue women at work.

Companies are waking up to the scope of violence at work. Murders, although declining in recent years, remain the second-leading cause of death on the job.

Companies are shaken by the rare but horrific cases in which a worker or customer runs amok, as chemist-turned-stock trader Mark O. Barton did Thursday in Atlanta, killing nine workers and customers and, separately, his wife and two children.

And increasingly, companies are being held liable for hiring violent employees or letting warning signs go unheeded.

"Companies are really under the gun -- literally -- to prevent violence and other hostile acts at work from happening," said Lynne McClure, author of "Risky Business," a book on workplace violence.

This spring, a North Carolina jury awarded \$7.9 million to the families of two men killed at a tool distribution center in 1995 by a violence-prone worker who had been fired. The jury found the center's two operators, Union Butterfield Corp. and Dormer Tools Inc., negligent in failing to protect them.

The fired worker had threatened to return and "take management with me." Lawyers for the Asheville, N.C., companies are trying to get the verdict set aside.

"This man was a ticking time bomb and the management knew it, yet they did nothing to protect

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their employees," lawyer David Kirby, who represented the family of one killed worker, said in May.

Other companies have been held liable for "negligent hiring," or failing to check if a new hire has a propensity to violence.

Just Friday, a worker killed his boss and himself at a Charlotte, N.C., trucking terminal. Police said there had been a quarrel.

Yet despite the headlines, homicides at work are declining. There were 856 work-related murders in 1997, a 7 percent drop from 1996 that mirrors the fall in violent crime nationwide during this economic boom, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Most work-related homicides happen during robberies and other crimes, often at restaurants or convenience stores.

But 81 people were killed in 1997 by workers, former co-workers or customers. And 44 people, or 5 percent of the total, were killed at work by spouses, lovers or ex-lovers -- up from 2 percent in 1996.

Many companies don't want to even begin facing up to the problem. "Too many things go unnoticed. We are in a constant state of denial," says Bruce Cedar, a psychologist and partner at CMG Associates in Newton, Mass., a consulting firm that specializes in workplace violence issues.

Researchers say companies need to intervene promptly when a problem arises -- as American Express does via its 4-year-old "Threat Assessment Team."

For instance, if a manager is afraid to fire a problem employee, the high-level team might help the manager plan the safest way to accomplish the task.

"We don't take anything lightly," says team member Joanne Colucci, director of security services for the company. Other team members come from human resources, legal affairs and the employee assistance program.

As part of a recent campaign to combat domestic violence, American Express has given cell phones to victims of abuse, along with parking spaces close to front doors so they can avoid isolated parking areas.

At The Limited, supervisors are trained to look for telltale signs of domestic abuse, and hotline numbers are posted in rest rooms, where they can be discreetly jotted down.

"Domestic violence doesn't end at the home," said the campaign's leader, human resources chief Arnold Kanarick. "The abuser will pursue the woman into the workplace."

Since the campaign began last fall, dozens of The Limited's employees have come forward asking for help, compared with just one or two previously, said spokesman Al Dietzel.

Still, many companies wait before acting. Recently, author Lynne McClure helped a company craft a progressive violence-prevention program that included monitoring problem employees.

What prompted the company's call to her? An attempted murder at work.



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# Tick, tick, tick

## Workplaces have a clear and present danger

By Michael Kinsman  
Copley News Service

Whether it's a day trader going berserk in Atlanta or alienated teens shooting up their high school in a Denver suburb, violence in public captures attention instantly.

"We see incidents of workplace violence, and our fear factor immediately goes up," said Steve Albrecht, a security consultant with The TAP Group in San Diego and author of "Ticking Bombs," a book about workplace violence. "We all ask ourselves: Could it happen here?"

The shooting rampage in Atlanta, which left nine people dead in two securities offices, reopened water-cooler conversations in workplaces about the safety inside company walls.

John Case, a security consultant, said the more highly publicized the incident, the more talk it generates.

Case said it is important for companies to train managers and employees alike about behaviors that could result in workplace incidents. And while no company can be expected to protect its employees from violence at every turn, there should be a plan in place to recognize and deal with threats, he added.

"In most incidents, the warning signs are there," Case said. "Every instance is unique, but the red flags are usually there."

At the office of All-Tech Investment Group in San Diego, a spokesman referred all calls to the company's headquarters in New York. The All-Tech office in Atlanta was one of the two securities firms that investor Mark Orrin Barton shot up.

"I'm sure that at brokerage offices, the topic is a hot conversation," said Ellen Reardon, a counselor for Kaiser Permanente, a managed-care provider. "When violence happens in schools, people at other schools talk about it, just as people in hospitals do when it happens in a hospital."

Reardon said she saw a surge of referrals of troubled teen-agers after the shootings at Columbine High School near Denver in April. School administrators and counselors began to identify troubled students, fearing that copycat incidents were possible.

"When we have incidents such as the Atlanta and Columbine shootings, it heightens our awareness of our surroundings," Reardon said. "We have an expectation that our workplaces are safe environments, and when we see that violated, we get concerned."

Albrecht thinks incidents such as the one in Atlanta galvanize workers when they realize it can happen anywhere.

"We're not used to seeing it happen to white-collar workers," he said. "It happens in a factory, and people don't seem as surprised. But I have calculated that there are 1,000 to 1,100 people killed each year in workplace incidents. The publicity of some of these events makes them loom larger."

He estimated that only one in four companies has taken adequate measures to prepare the workplace for violence, should it erupt.

"You should be prepared to handle violence, should it happen in your workplace," Albrecht said. "You should control access to your workplace and have a plan, like a fire drill, for people to escape if trouble occurs."

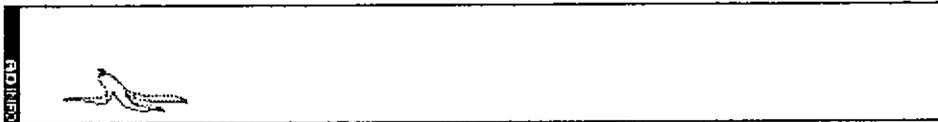
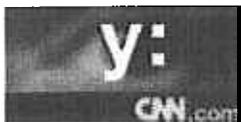
"You never know where or why it happens. I always look for the back story. We can see things that happen in front of this, but it's those hidden things we don't know. There are people carrying tons of emotional baggage out there that can cause problems."

Albrecht offers a checklist for workplace behavior that is potentially dangerous and requires immediate attention:

- Employee states a clear intent to harm.
- Employee has intense anger.
- Employee commits a physical assault.
- Employee makes an overt threat to fatally injure someone.
- Employee possesses a weapon.
- Employee sabotages or damages company equipment.

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# Warning signs given for potential workplace violence

November 3, 1999  
 Web posted at: 10:36 a.m. EDT (1436 GMT)

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Workplace violence has increased steadily since the corporate downsizing of the 1980s

**HONOLULU (CNN)** -- Was there anything in Byran Uyesugi's history that hinted at the bloodshed that erupted in Honolulu, where police say the Xerox copier repairman shot seven co-workers to death?

Police would not comment on a motive in Tuesday's massacre. But Mayor Jeremy Harris said it appeared "as though it was a disgruntled employee who snapped."

## What to look for

Anger can explode when "people who are disgruntled, who have a grudge, are looking for some kind of mediation and nothing happens," said Robert Butterworth of the American Psychological Association.



Butterworth says our society is vulnerable to violence because of the easy access to

Warning signs of building anger can include:

- Emotional difficulties
- Tardiness or absenteeism
- Contempt for fellow workers or superiors
- Paranoia



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• **Obsession with violence or firearms**

Uyesugi, who had worked at the Xerox facility in Honolulu for 15 years, was clearly fascinated with firearms. He had 17 registered in his name.

### How to prevent it

After the corporate downsizing of the 1980s, the number of assaults and threats of assault in the workplace grew to roughly 2 million a year in the United States, according to Justice Department statistics.

About 1,000 of the incidents are homicides, and most (75 percent) are related to robberies.

While violence by co-workers is still relatively rare, Butterworth says it can be explained by our culture where "people are trained ... not to sit back" when they feel they've been wronged.

That, plus easy access to weapons, makes for a "volatile combination," he told CNN.

DCC, a Connecticut-based consulting firm, designs programs for companies to help workers and managers identify the warning signs and prevent workplace violence.

"All employers ought to have an employee assistance program that specializes in dealing with helping employees reduce stress," said John Place, the company's president.

Still, there's no guarantee such training won't prevent tragedy.

"How could this have happened?" asked Xerox Hawaii General Manager Glenn Sexton. "Perhaps we'll never know."

*Correspondent Eileen O'Connor and The Associated Press contributed to this report.*



The shooting at the Honolulu Xerox facility left seven workers dead

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# Workplace Substance Abuse - Did You Know?

## *Incidence of Substance Abuse in the Workplace*

- ◆ Eight percent of full-time workers employed as adults are current users of illicit drugs. (1)
- ◆ The rate of illicit drug use among full-time workers is higher for:
  - Construction workers - 16%
  - Food preparation, waitstaff, and bartenders - 11%
  - Handlers, helpers, or laborers - 11%
  - Machine operators or inspectors - 11% (1)
- ◆ About 8% of the workforce are heavy drinkers, with significantly higher rates among:
  - Construction workers - 17.6%
  - Food preparation, waitstaff, and bartenders - 12%
  - Handlers, helpers, or laborers - 16%
  - Machine operators or inspectors - 14% (1)
- ◆ Seventeen percent of employees surveyed across five different work sites reported situations that imply prescription drug misuse. (2)
- ◆ Small businesses are more likely to have problems with illicit drugs. (3)
  - Employees in companies with fewer than 25 employees are twice as likely to use illicit drugs as employees in larger companies.
  - Illicit drug use among employees is linked to a lack of workplace drug policies; illicit drug users were less likely than employees from large establishments to report that their employer provided information, had written policies, or provided access to an employee assistance program (EAP).
- ◆ Fifteen percent of illicit drug users and 6% of heavy alcohol users report that they had gone to work high or a little drunk in the past year. (4)
- ◆ Seventy-five percent of people calling a cocaine hotline said they sometimes used cocaine on the job; 25% said they took cocaine on the job daily. (5)
- ◆ Drug-using employees at GM average 40 days of sick leave each year, compared with 4.5 days for nonusers.
- ◆ Employees testing positive on pre-employment drug tests at Utah Power & Light were five times more likely to be involved in a workplace accident than those who tested negative.
- ◆ The State of Wisconsin estimates that expenses and losses related to substance abuse average 25% of the salary of each worker affected.



## *Cost to Employers of Employees with a Diagnosed Chemical Dependency Problem*

- ◆ Alcoholism causes 500 million lost workdays each year (6)
- ◆ Alcoholics are expensive to businesses in several different ways:
  - Workplace accident rates are two or three times higher than normal;
  - Alcoholics are five times more likely to file a worker's compensation claim; and
  - Alcoholics are 2.5 times more likely to have absences of eight days or more. (5)
- ◆ Employees diagnosed with a chemical dependency problem in a large manufacturing plant were found to have:
  - Six times the number of absences;
  - Seven times the number of days missed from work; and
  - Higher incidence of injuries, hypertension, and mental disorders. (7)