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Are Counsellors the Antidote to Toxic Workplaces?

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Overview Today

- What is a Toxic Workplace?
- Why are employers now focussed on employee mental health?
- Employer's Response
- Where do counsellors fit into this issue?
- Case Studies, Dilemmas & Questions
- Resources
- Summary

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WHAT IS A TOXIC WORKPLACE?

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Definition - Toxic

*'Extremely Harsh,
Malicious, or Harmful'*

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

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Toxic Workplace

A workplace environment, (culture, work practices and workload), that is toxic to its employees, suppliers and / or stakeholders, mental health and wellbeing.

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HSE Definition – Workplace Stress

HSE (Health & Safety Executive) defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to ***excessive pressures*** or other types of demand placed on them'.
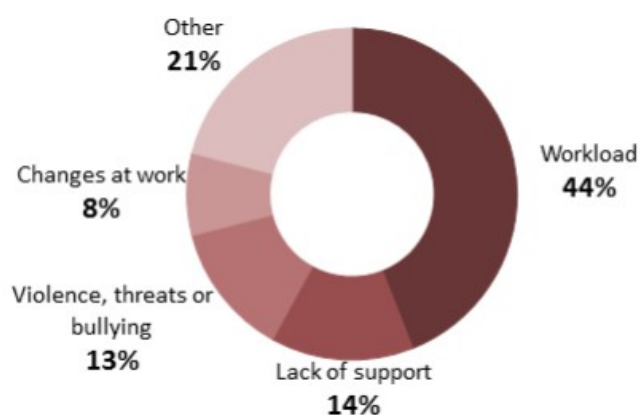
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HSE identify six main causes of workplace stress

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Demands	• Employees may say that are not able to cope with the demands of their jobs
Control	• Employees may say that they are unable to control the way they do their work
Support	• Employees may say that they don't receive enough information and support
Relationships	• Employees may say that they are having trouble with relationships at work, or are being bullied
Role	• Employees may say that they don't fully understand their role and responsibilities
Change	• Employees may say that they are not engaged when a business is undergoing change

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## Workplace Stress, Depression or Anxiety by Cause – Labour Force Survey

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Other
21%

Changes at work
8%

Violence, threats or
bullying
13%

Workload
44%

Lack of support
14%

Source: Labour Force Survey
www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/lfs/index.htm

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Workplace Stress, Depression or Anxiety by Cause – THOR-GP Data

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Figure 9. Analysis of mental ill-health cases reported to THOR-GP according to precipitating event, three-year aggregate total, 2013 to 2015

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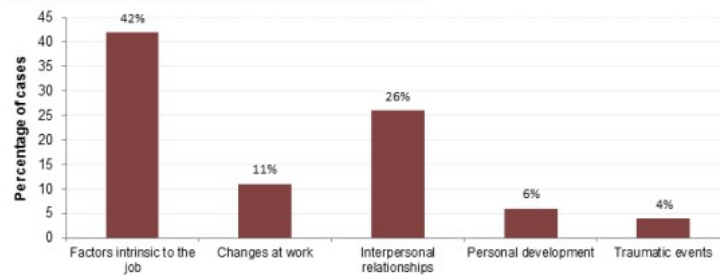
WHY ARE EMPLOYERS NOW FOCUSSED ON EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH?

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Stress, Anxiety and Depression Statistics 2017/18

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44%
- Of all work-related ill-health cases – Stress, Anxiety or Depression

57%
- Of all working days lost due to ill health are due to Stress, Anxiety or Depression

0.5+ million
- Workers suffering from work-related anxiety & depression

15.4 million
- Working days lost due to Stress, Anxiety or Depression

5.2 billion
- Annual Cost of work-related Stress, Anxiety and Depression in GB 2014/15

25.8
- Working days lost per case on average

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Employer Motivation

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£33 to £42 Billion

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Employer Motivation

Disability Discrimination claims at
Employment Tribunals have risen by
37%, from 4770 in 2017 to 6,550 in 2018
(Ministry of Justice Figures – 2019)

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EMPLOYER RESPONSE

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Employers Response

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In England 400,000 people have been
trained in Mental Health First Aid.

(Mental Health First Aid England 2019)

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Employers Response

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42% - Reorganised Work

33% - Conflict Resolution

29% - Confidential Counselling

27% - Intervention if Excessive Hours Worked

(HSE 2018)

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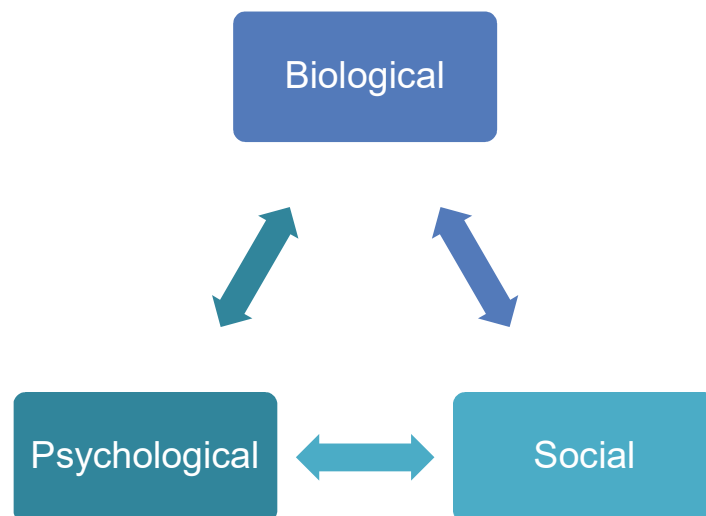
WHERE DO COUNSELLORS FIT INTO THIS ISSUE?
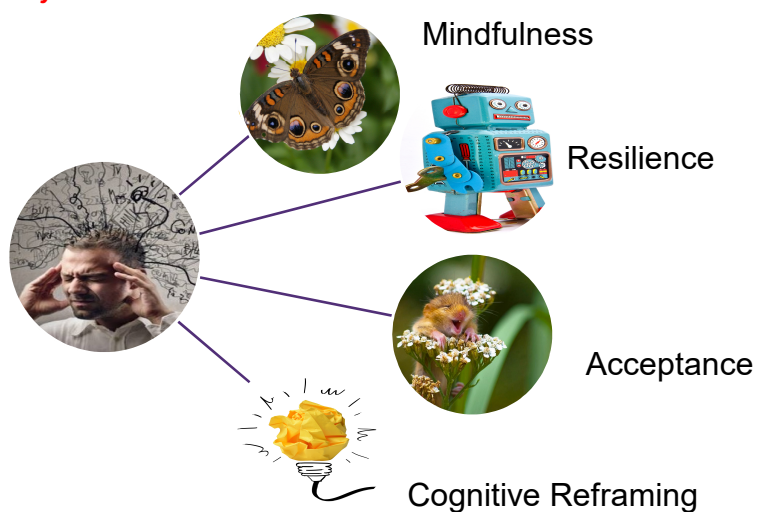
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Mental Health – Bio-Psycho-Social Model

Biological

Psychological

Social

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Are we helping employers to wring the maximum productivity from their human resources?

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Mental Health Personal Protective Strategies

Health and Safety Executive state that - 'PPE should be used as a last resort.'

Mindfulness

Resilience
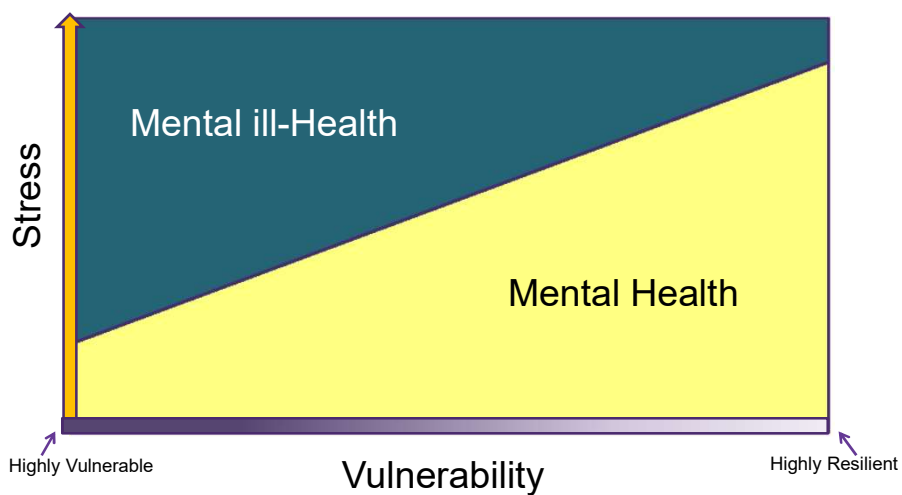
Acceptance

Cognitive Reframing

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Is it the responsibility of the individual to increase their level of resilience or the employer to reduce the level of stress?

Vulnerability – Stress Model of Resilience

Mental ill-Health

Mental Health

Stress

Highly Vulnerable

Vulnerability

Highly Resilient

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CASE STUDIES, DILEMMAS & QUESTIONS

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Case Study / Dilemma

You are providing counselling through an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).
Three members of staff from the same organisation have sought support due to workplace stress.
There is a striking similarity between each employees workplace experience, which is the primary cause of their need to seek counselling support.
Each employee is unaware of the other's situation.

What would you do?

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Case Study / Dilemma

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You have been asked by a workplace to deliver a mental health awareness training course for their managers.

You agree but during the course it becomes clear that managers intend to use the information to be able to 'spot' if someone is 'faking' a mental health issue in order to get time off.

What would you do?

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Case Study / Dilemma

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A client referred by an EAP has not been able to take annual leave for 3 years due to his workload. He is working evenings and weekends but despite raising concerns to his employer that his workload was 'massive' and 'unmanageable' his employer has taken no action other than to refer him for counselling.

What would you do?

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Question

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- Is it important for a counsellor working with workplace stress to know some aspects of employment law?

  - If **Yes**

- Would you share this information with clients?

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Employer Legal Responsibility

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- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 - assess the nature and scale of health risks at work (including stress)

- Working Time Regulations – hours worked and paid holidays

- Equality Act 2010 - requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to their work or workplace.

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Employment Law - Equality Act 2010

Employers liability for psychiatric illness caused by workplace stress

- Hatton v Sutherland – 2002

- Easton v B&Q – 2015

Essentially if an employer can argue that the employee's stress is not foreseeable i.e. the employee is in work or has returned to work and the employee has not explicitly stated to the employer that they are suffering stress then the employer will not be found liable.

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RESOURCES

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Resources

- HSE – Line managers resource
- ACAS – Health, Work & Wellbeing
- Mind – Workplace Wellbeing in Wales
- Mates in Mind – Tools for Organisations
- Samaritans - In the workplace
- Time to Change Wales – Resources
- Healthy Working Wales (NHS) - Mental Health
- Mental Health at Work – Building Mental Health in Construction
- British Heart Foundation – Health at work

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SUMMARY

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Summary

Mental Health and Wellbeing in the workplace is increasingly in the spotlight.

For counsellors this represents a lucrative emerging marketplace for our skills and knowledge.

We must ensure that we recognise and actively resist becoming complicit in shifting the responsibility for mental health and wellbeing from the employer to the employee.

It is essential that we speak up outside of the counselling room to prevent becoming the mental health field hospitals for workplace casualties.

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Thank You

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