# chazai wamba
## BUSINESS LAW FIRM FOR AFRICA

# MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK: A MYTH?

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Mental health at work has become an increasingly important topic as the effects of workplace stress and mental health disorders on employees have become more evident. It could be helpful to get a better understanding of what mental health at work actually is, the impact of workplace stress on our mental health, and how to promote mental health at work.

The significance of mental health in the workplace is often overlooked, but it has a significant impact on employees' productivity, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression are among the leading causes of disability worldwide and can lead to reduced productivity and absenteeism in the workplace (WHO, 2017)[1]. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of mental health in the workplace, as many employees have been forced to work from home and face increased isolation and stress (Wang et al., 2020)[2].

According to the WHO, the prevalence of mental disorders in Cameroon is estimated to be around 10%, with depression being the most common disorder (WHO, 2020)[3]. The burden of mental illness is especially high in vulnerable populations such as women, children, and refugees (*Id.*).

The mental health system in Cameroon faces significant challenges, including inadequate resources, limited access to care, and stigma surrounding mental illness. In terms of resources, the country has a severe shortage of mental health professionals, with only one psychiatrist per 1.5 million people (*Id.*). Additionally, mental health services are concentrated in urban areas, making it difficult for people in rural areas to access care. The stigma surrounding mental illness is also a significant barrier to care, with many people being reluctant to seek help due to fear of discrimination and social exclusion (*Id.*). As we do sadly notice mostly in Africa and specifically here in Cameroon, immediately an individual starts having a weird behavior, local beliefs directly point to mystical origins.

According to a recent study, the prevalence of mental disorders in Cameroon is highest among women and young adults. The study found that the prevalence of depression was highest among women aged 18-24, with a prevalence rate of 32.6%. Additionally, the study found that the prevalence of anxiety disorders was highest among women aged 25-34, with a prevalence rate of 31.3%.

Despite the challenges facing the mental health system, there are efforts being made to improve mental health in Cameroon. The government has developed a national mental health policy and strategic plan to guide the development of mental health services in the country (Ministry of Public Health, 2014).

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[1] World Health Organization. (2017). Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates.

[2] Wang, C., Pan, R., Wan, X., Tan, Y., Xu, L., Ho, C. S., & Ho, R. C. (2020). Immediate psychological responses and associated factors during the initial stage of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic among the general population in China. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17(5), 1729.

[3] World Health Organization. (2020). Mental Health Atlas 2020 Country Profile: Cameroon

Additionally, there are several organizations working to improve mental health in Cameroon, including the Cameroon Association for the Protection and Education of the Child (CAPEC) and the Cameroon National Association for Family Welfare (CAMNAFAW), both of which provide mental health services to vulnerable populations.

Mental health is an essential aspect of overall health and wellbeing, yet it is often overlooked in the legal profession.
According to a study by the American Bar Association (ABA), 28% of lawyers experience depression, 19% experience anxiety, and 23% experience chronic stress (ABA, 2020). The study also found that lawyers are more likely to experience mental health issues than the general population, with substance abuse being a significant problem (ABA, 2020)[4].

It thus becomes crucial to take several steps to promote mental health in the workplace. One of the most effective ways to promote mental health is to create a positive work environment that is supportive and inclusive. This can include providing employees with access to mental health resources such as counseling services (WHO, 2020). Additionally, organizations can promote mental health by offering flexible work arrangements and promoting work-life balance, which can help employees manage workplace stress and improve their overall well-being (WHO, 2020).

Effective strategies for managing mental health include creating a culture of support and understanding (by encouraging the culture of team building activities, for example, which we more and more see in our local companies), promoting work-life balance, and providing resources for mental health support, and creating safe places where employees feel comfortable seeking help for mental health issues without fear of stigma or negative career consequences. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, training programs, and support groups.
There is this popular perfectionism trap, that most of us seem to by all means *want* to fall into, in order to be considered as a high achiever or ambitious (comparison due in particular to wrongly absorbing information on social media has a lot to do with that), at the cost of losing our minds and focus of what should actually count.

In conclusion, mental health in the workplace is an important issue that can have a significant impact on employee productivity, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. Workplace stress is a significant contributor to mental health issues among employees, but organizations can take several steps to promote mental health, including creating a supportive work environment and offering access to mental health resources and flexible work arrangements. By promoting mental health in the workplace, organizations can improve employee well-being and productivity, which can have a positive impact on organizational success.

It thus becomes important to reassess what is really important to us, and how we do achieve a personal sense of well-being while achieving our goals. We should give ourselves grace!

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[4]American Bar Association. (2020). The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/law

References:

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