

Canada's youth feeling weight of the working world

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Canada's youngest employees are suffering from high levels of depression and anxiety and, unlike their parents, they are demanding help, according to statistics released yesterday.

"Younger employees -- the Generation Xers and the Millennials -- are the ones reporting the highest levels of depression and anxiety symptoms, and it looks like it is going from bad to worse," said Rod Phillips, president and chief executive officer of employee assistance firm WarrenShepell.

"Over the last three years, we have seen a tremendous jump in anxiety rates among 20-to-29-year-old employees, and depression rates among employees under 20 years old are higher than in any other age group," Mr. Phillips said.

The survey involved 2,500 companies representing 123,000 employees.

(Generation X is a term often applied to those born between 1965 and 1980, while the Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are those born between 1981 and 2000.)

The reasons are many: Younger people are less shy about seeking help, their work world is far more competitive than that of their parents, they face constant uncertainty about their futures and work does not live up to their expectations, said Karen Seward, vice-president of WarrenShepell Research Group, which conducted the survey.

"The workplace has changed so much for them versus what it was 10 or 20 years ago. It's more competitive; they are entering a world where there is no security; people change jobs all the time," Ms. Seward said.

"Younger people are idealistic, they want to change the world and they've entered a working world that kind of stops them cold. It's 'hold on, there are rules here, you have to put in time and effort and, by the way, didn't we tell you you had to put in 50 hours a week?' "

Younger employees are not only challenging those rules, but they are demanding help for the emotional fallout, she said.

Among employees who use employee assistance programs, the youngest employees reported the highest rates of depression, with 10.6 per cent of employee assistance plan

(EAP) users 20-and-under seeking help for depression and almost 8 per cent of those 29 and under reporting that they were depressed, WarrenShepell found.

"Anxiety symptoms were more prevalent among 20-to-29-year-olds (three-year average of 3.94 per cent versus the EAP national norm of 2.63 per cent)," according to the report, *Workplace Mental Health Indicators: An EAP Perspective*.

The report suggests that people become more stable as they age, but also, said Ms. Seward, the younger generation is a generation in a hurry -- "they want it all and they want it now."

But another possible explanation for rising anxiety and depression rates among younger employees is that they have been misled about the nature of their jobs, their professional development opportunities and their prospects for advancement, said consultant Adwoa Buahene, who advises corporations on how to meet the aspirations of the different generations in the work force.

Younger employees do not expect a job for life, said Ms. Buahene, a co-founder of Toronto-based n-gen People Performance Inc., but they do expect their jobs to live up to the employment promise.

Recruiters "tell you there's room for growth, all those great things . . . but the caveat they forget to add is that it will take you 10 years to get anywhere," Ms. Buahene said. Younger employees get incredibly anxious if they feel their jobs are not leading anywhere and their skills are not being developed, she said.