

LATEST NEWS

Performance-based pay linked to anxiety, depression

Publish date: March 29, 2019

By [Brian Hoyle](#)

A study from researchers at Washington University in St. Louis and Aarhus University in Denmark charts the relationship of payment based on work done and employee mental health. According to phys.org, an aggregator of science, research, and technology news, performance-based pay is in place in 70% of U.S. companies. This means that employee income is based on a combination of bonuses, commission, profit sharing, and individual/team incentives, rather than guaranteed salaries. For some employees, performance-based pay can prove lucrative. But for others, such systems can lead to poor mental health.

The study, published in the Academy of Management Discoveries, charted the use of prescription medications for anxiety and depression by nearly 319,000 employees at about 1,300 companies in Denmark (2019 Feb 26. doi: [10.5465/amd.2018.0007](https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2018.0007) <<https://journals.aom.org/doi/10.5465/amd.2018.0007>>). Those in lower-paid positions and older employees were most vulnerable.

“Basically, older workers seem to be driving all of this effect,” said coauthor [Lamar Pierce, PhD](https://www.lamarpierce.net/) <<https://www.lamarpierce.net/>> , professor of organization and strategy, and associate dean at Washington University. “One, it’s harder for them to move, so they have less labor mobility. And, two, they have less flexibility: Learning new roles, adapting to change, they have more fully formed preferences at this point.”

A gender link also was evident; women were more likely to leave companies that adopted a pay-for-performance system. “Our study expands existing work by showing that the mental health costs of performance-based pay can be severe enough to necessitate pharmaceutical treatment,” the authors wrote.

Once a firm switched to the pay-for-performance system, the number of employees using anxiety and depression medications, which included Xanax and Zoloft, increased by 5.7%. The actual number of affected employees is almost certainly much higher, according to Dr. Pierce. Projecting the data to the United States, Dr. Pierce and his coauthor, [Michael S. Dahl, PhD](http://pure.au.dk/portal/en/persons/id(deaddc1a-1456-4723-9f6e-1c5d2ff43116).html) <[http://pure.au.dk/portal/en/persons/id\(deaddc1a-1456-4723-9f6e-1c5d2ff43116\).html](http://pure.au.dk/portal/en/persons/id(deaddc1a-1456-4723-9f6e-1c5d2ff43116).html)> , estimated that 100,000 Americans could be affected.

“These types of mental health problems are incredibly costly to both the individual and firm. If this is reflective of a broader increase in stress and depression in employees, the costs are very high,” added Dr. Pierce. The study highlights the broader health and wellness implications of the companies’ compensation policies, he said. [phys.org](https://phys.org/news/2019-03-performance-based-linked-employee-mental-health.html) <<https://phys.org/news/2019-03-performance-based-linked-employee-mental-health.html>> .

More and more people in the United States with severe mental illness and addictions reportedly are homeless, particularly in the Pacific Northwest and on the West Coast. Legislation aimed at addressing that problem is under discussion by Washington state lawmakers and appears to have broad support. The bill, which would authorize creation of a teaching hospital with 150 beds for people with mental illness, garnered unanimous support in the state’s House of Representatives and now has passed a Senate committee.

“The need for mental health care across our state has outgrown our facilities and our supply of trained health care professionals,” said [State Sen. Annette Cleveland](http://sdc.wastateleg.org/cleveland/) <<http://sdc.wastateleg.org/cleveland/>> , chair of the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee.

“This important facility will address those needs head-on by expanding our physical capacity, enlarging our skilled workforce and increasing access through the use of telehealth services. The establishment of this dedicated



behavioral health facility at the University of Washington would be the first of its kind in the nation.”

Jürgen Unützer, MD, MPH <<https://aims.uw.edu/j%C3%BCrgen-un%C3%BCtzer-md-mph-ma>> told KOMO News that the facility would be accredited and modern. “We would have a facility that’s from 2021 that’s state of the art, that’s approved, that’s a safe, welcoming environment where people would take their family members and say ‘this is a place that can give me some hope,’” said Dr. Unützer, who chairs the department of psychiatry and behavioral services at the University of Washington, Seattle.

The legislation <<https://app.leg.wa.gov/billssummary?BillNumber=1593&Initiative=false&Year=2019>> , H.B. 1593, is part of efforts by Gov. Jay Inslee <<https://www.governor.wa.gov/>> to tackle mental health issues in the state. The state’s aging mental health infrastructure has been losing federal funding, and patient safety issues have been identified at state-run mental health hospitals. KOMO News <<https://komonews.com/news/local/mental-health-crisis-teaching-hospital-could-be-created-in-seattle>> .

The New York Police Department recently reported a near-doubling of 911 calls by people the city refers to as “emotionally disturbed persons” over the past decade. Encounters between police and people in need reportedly have resulted in the deaths of 14 people over the last 3 years.

“There is a serious problem in New York City in the manner in which the NYPD interacts with mentally ill people,” said attorney Sanford Rubenstein <<https://www.rubensteinandrynecki.com/attorney-profiles/sanford-rubenstein/>> , who is representing seven families whose family members with mental illness have been shot by police since 2016. “The training of police officers with regard to that interaction is limited and the number of patrol officers who have been trained is small. That is unacceptable.”

The problem was recognized years ago, and a plan was put in place by the city to provide mental health training to every police officer. Flash ahead 4 years and less than one-third of the police force has received any mental health training – just 11,970 of the 36,753 uniformed police officers. What’s more, teams of mental health workers and police that were formed 3 years ago to help intervene in responses to emotionally disturbed people have not been brought into the loop of the 911 system. The result has been 911 responses by officers not trained to deal with such situations and without the support of those who could help. The number of 911 calls related to emotionally disturbed people rose from just over 91,000 in 2009 to nearly 180,000 in 2018, averaging almost 500 every day. The calls are disproportionately from predominantly black and Hispanic precincts.

A 2014 announcement of “diversion centers,” where people with emotional disturbances could be brought by police instead of ferrying them to hospitals or jail, has failed to materialize. “[The problem] is overwhelming in the neighborhoods that I represent,” said Bronx council member Ritchie J. Torres <<https://council.nyc.gov/district-15/>> . “Whether it be Tremont or Fordham – you can feel it and see it on the ground. ... You see chemically addicted, mentally ill people, who either are languishing on the street or being cycled in and out of the criminal justice system. And I’m wondering to myself, there has to be a better approach. This is insane.” *New York Magazine* <<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/03/special-report-nypds-mental-illness-response-breakdown.html>> .

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds <<https://governor.iowa.gov/>> **has signed a comprehensive bill** <<https://governor.iowa.gov/2018/03/gov-reynolds-signs-mental-health-teen-suicide-prevention-bills>> **that**, among other things, aims to make sweeping changes in the state’s mental health system. The new law also requires suicide prevention training for school personnel in the state. “This legislation was pushed over the finish line by individuals and families who knew firsthand the importance of having a robust mental health system,” Gov. Reynolds said. Critics contend that the legislation does not go far enough in several respects, including specifying where funding will come from and ensuring full access to care. Meanwhile, the governor announced plans to sign an executive order “establishing a platform to begin developing a children’s mental health system.” *Des Moines Register* <<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/2018/03/29/iowa-mental-health-bill-legislation-suicide-prevention-reynolds/467850002/>> .

Emergency room staff at AdventHealth <<https://www.adventhealth.com/>> **hospitals in Orlando** and neighboring Kissimmee, Fla., will begin assessing the mental health of patients as part of a pilot project with the University of Central Florida, according to reporting by 90.7 WMFE, a National Public Radio affiliate in central Florida. “How do we start providing that preventive care like we would with a typical chest pain patient? The same type of health care probably doesn’t apply to those patients with that mental health disorder,” said Robert Geissler <<https://today.ucf.edu/adventhealth-ucf-collaborate-suicide-prevention-initiative/>> , director of emergency services at AdventHealth Kissimmee. “And that’s why we’re trying to change the landscape with this particular project.” Similar programs in Michigan and Tennessee have helped curb suicides and lowered costs associated with mental health–related emergency care. As part of the AdventHealth program in Florida, emergency room staff will ask patients about feelings of

hopelessness or despair as part of routine assessments. Patients deemed at high risk of suicide will be paired with counselors for the next 3 months, with daily calls and possibly house visits. Other mental health care resources in the community will be enlisted. [90.7 WMFE <https://www.wmfe.org/local-emergency-room-staff-will-start-assessing-patients-mental-health-with-the-goal-of-suicide-prevention/99245>](https://www.wmfe.org/local-emergency-room-staff-will-start-assessing-patients-mental-health-with-the-goal-of-suicide-prevention/99245) .

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