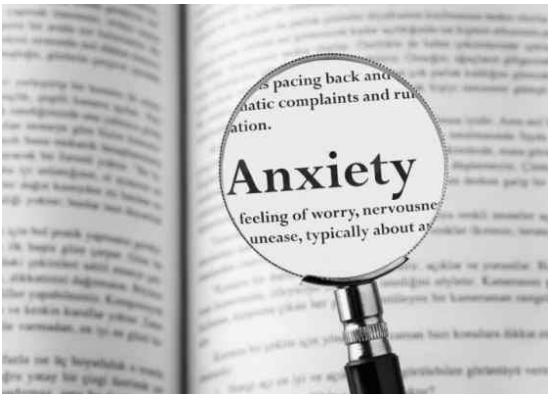


There is no shortage of anxiety during this pandemic

By Shazreen Hussain

Looking back on the past year, it is very hard to believe what Kiwis have been through. COVID-19 came out of nowhere to devastate everyone's lives – compelling employers to reassess their strategies to support employees to work remotely. Now, that it is more common for us to work from home, most are worried about job security. New studies now reveal the impact of the virus on employee anxiety levels.



AUT Business School Professor Jarrod Haar, in an ongoing Wellbeing@Work study, has found levels of job anxiety has steadily increased from May 2020 to December 2020 and to April 2021. The study involved just over 1000 participants in each of the three periods studied. The three groups all comprised participants of a similar age range (roughly 39 years on average), gender (roughly 50/50 male/female split), and employment sector (roughly 70% private sector). In each distinct cohort, Professor Haar analysed levels of job depression and job anxiety.

The results are noteworthy. Job anxiety levels rose significantly. So, what do those numbers mean? Professor Haar suggests that the increasing numbers indicate Kiwis are getting less enjoyment from their work, but they also describe the “spinning” and “racing” of our minds since the first lockdown in 2020. The biggest driver of this mental health concern is a persistent worry about job insecurity. This has remained relatively high and unchanged across the three-time periods. “Kiwis are worried about their job and future,” says Professor Haar. Further, he notes, the study data shows that organisations generally have struggled to aid worker wellbeing since the first COVID-19 lockdown.

Cruise Ship: Working for Wellness

With the prospect of a mental health crisis on the horizon, what can employers do to aid worker wellbeing? Well, the Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has launched a mental health initiative for its travel agents. The ship's "Walk for Wellness" event inspires travel agents in Australia and New Zealand to track their steps towards a combined goal of 100,000km via a mobile app. Ben Angell, the Vice-President and Managing Director of NCL in Asia-Pacific, told the NZ Herald on 30 September 2021, that 'Walk for Wellness' is simple – it's the acknowledgement that the simple act of walking can work miracles for one's mental and physical wellbeing.

The Chief Operating Officer at House of Travel commented in relation to his employees by saying, "they're more than work colleagues, they're family in a way". He welcomed NCL's initiative stating that there is nothing like going for a walk for an hour to get out there. It cleanses one's mind.



Where to get support:

- Kidsline: 0800 543 754 (available 24/7)
- Anxiety helpline: 0800 269 4389 (0800 ANXIETY) (available 24/7)
- Rainbow Youth: (09) 376 4155