



# Registration Guidelines

E003 Job-related depression



Netherlands Center  
for **Occupational Diseases**

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## E003 Job-related depression



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# Registration Guidelines

## E003 Job-related depression

These guidelines are accompanied by a [background document](#).

### Description of the disorder

A depressive disorder that is predominantly caused or exacerbated by demanding psychological circumstances at work. The most characteristic symptom of depressive disorder is a low mood, which is experienced either as sadness or loss of enjoyment. In addition to depressive disorders, *minor* depressive disorders can also be reported as job-related depression.

### Main risk groups

Depression can occur in any occupation, but there are limited indications that the risk is higher among lawyers, teachers and secretarial staff. On the one hand, there are indications that being in paid employment can protect against depression but, on the other hand, there are strong indications that psychosocial risk factors in the work environment can contribute to depression.

### Risk factors at work

It has been shown that a number of psychosocial factors in the work environment can contribute to depression: job unsuitability, excessive workload, lack of control/influence over work, problematic work relationships, harassment, psychologically demanding work, lack of social support at work and stressful events experienced at work.

Only two of these factors – i.e. job unsuitability and lack of social support (harassment) – are likely to contribute individually to the extent that the disorder can be defined as a job-related depression.

In addition, it is known that a number of chemical factors in the work environment can play a role in the etiology of depression. There are limited indications that occupational exposure to lead and organic solvents is a risk factor. Since somatic presentation (as in exposure to lead or solvents) is an exclusion criterion for the diagnosis, a diagnosis of depressive order within the meaning of DSM-IV is not allowed.

## Diagnostic considerations

### Clinical diagnostics (DSM-IV):

Five or more of the symptoms listed below, and at least one of the core symptoms, must have persisted for two weeks. The symptoms must cause evident distress or impairment of social, occupational or other important areas of functioning.

#### *Core symptoms:*

- low mood
- clear loss of interest or enjoyment

#### *Associated symptoms:*

- change in weight or appetite
- changes in sleeping patterns
- agitation or irritability
- fatigue or loss of energy
- feelings of worthlessness or excessive/unjustified feelings of guilt
- indecisiveness or concentration problems
- attempted suicide, or recurring thoughts of death or suicide

#### *Conditions for diagnosis:*

- the subject does not have bipolar disorder (i.e. no manic episodes)
- the symptoms cannot be attributed to the physiological effects of (the abuse of) a substance or to somatic presentation<sup>1</sup>
- the symptoms cannot be attributed to a grief reaction

- The diagnosis is minor depressive disorder if a total of 2 to 4 symptoms are present, including at least 1 core symptom.

#### *Differential diagnostics:*

Sadness also occurs in burnout and nervous breakdown. Characteristic features of depression are a persistent low mood, lack of positive emotions, depressive thoughts about one's identity, achievements and often the past and immediate future. Strong feelings of guilt and worthlessness, and suicidal tendencies, are symptoms only of depression, and are not consistent with burnout or nervous breakdown.

Etiological diagnostics: psychosocial factors

a. Exposure

Confrontation with demanding psychosocial factors in the work environment.

Psychosocial factors that, individually, constitute a risk for depression:

1. Job unsuitability (unclear role, unsuited to work)
2. Lack of social support (harassment)

Psychosocial factors that can contribute to depression:

- a. excessive workload
- b. psychologically demanding work
- c. lack of control/influence at work
- d. stressful events experienced at work
- e. low procedural justice

**Decision rule:**

Exposure to factor 1 or 2 → depression = job-related

Exposure to at least two factors (a to e) → depression = job-related

Exposure to one factor (a to e) → decision as to whether depression is job-related depends on the exposure intensity and the weighting of the factor in relation to factors outside the work environment.

*Minimum exposure intensity: not quantifiable*

*Minimum exposure duration: not quantifiable<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Also consider occupational exposure to lead or solvents.

<sup>2</sup> In the studies (see background document), the length of time between exposure and assessment of the illness varied between one and five years.