

I feel very strongly about how mental health is abused by employers, leaving employees with lasting damage in their lives.

I suffer from a chronic illness, most of the time I am fine but in times of high stress my symptoms can flare up, and as will illness, being unwell affects your work performance.

I was working a full time job, with a high performance culture. I had at times worked 16 days straight.

This culture and the people driving it did not help me when I became unwell, and my physical and mental health suffered. Before joining this company I was seeing a psychologist regularly and was on medication for long term depression, which had started in my teenage years 10 years prior.

I was encouraged to work myself to exhaustion, with management fully aware of my illness, and after being found by the office manager crying in the stairwell, they were aware of my depression as well.

With them fully knowing what was going on, there was a meeting, where my performance was discussed. I told them what was the exact status of my illnesses and depression, which they claimed not to know as "it wasn't in writing". I was given a warning letter, with 4 points to be addressed within a fortnight, and another two optional. I had realized then that my manager was talking to me less and less at work, isolating me. They were so desperate to fire me that they did not even check that the first point, a measure of how much of what I had been working on was tested, was required to be above 75%. It was at 82%.

I knew what was going to happen regardless, so after making sure I fulfilled these points to the best I could, I brought the matter up with Fair Work Australia, in regards to my illness and depression being used to try and fire me.

In my employers submission to Fair Work, their first point was that I had refused to work overtime. Another point was that I had submitted a graph for evaluation that was in black and white.

At the Fair Work meeting, the conciliator did not address any of my points, and talked to me alone, as I had gone there alone. He said to me that it was pretty clear that they were going to fire me, and that I should ask for a deed of release. He noted that their lawyer was quite expensive in regards to any future action taken by me. After breaking down in his office, and breaking down on the phone to my sick Father, I asked if I could go home and think about it. The offer was declined by their lawyer, who made it clear it was for that day only. Without any legal advice I agreed.

It was probably one of the worst decisions of my life. At every stage, the people in authority who I trusted let me down. Luckily I had an appointment with my Psychologist the following day, who organized the local mental health team to come visit me, otherwise, I would probably have killed myself.

I developed alcoholism and a drug addiction in the following months, and it took me 4 months to get back working, and I am still working on my fear of sharing anything to do with my health with my employers and I have lasting health issues to this day from my addictions.

I feel very strongly that in a fair workplace, people with mental health issues should have the right at work to be able to work without having their mental health used as a weapon against them.