

Study on Psychological Stress due to COVID-19 in India

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Abstract:- One of the worst global disasters in recent history, the COVID-19 outbreak has had a profound and long-lasting impact on health systems, economies, and nations. Many of us experienced increased anxiety, but for some COVID-19 has precipitated or exacerbated much severer mental health problems. Many people have shown evidence of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, or despair in addition to psychological anguish. In this study, we explore various mental health disorders, stress points and their effect on employees and their workplace environment. We also study the prospects of employer branding and its relationship with mental health.

Keywords:- Mental Health, COVID-19, Employer Branding.

I. INTRODUCTION

The infectious agent causing coronavirus disease is the SARS-CoV-2 virus. (COVID-19). It is an ongoing pandemic and was first identified from an outbreaking Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The COVID-19 disease has significant effects on world health. (Holmes EA, et al, *The Lancet Psychiatry* 2020). Social segregation was advocated and put into effect to lessen the chance of COVID-19 exposure. People from all walks of life must remain inside their homes and keep their distance from one another at all times while they are outside for a necessary purpose. (Rundle AG, et al, *Obesity (Silver Spring)* 2020). This intervention has had an enormously bad influence on people's mental health in addition to having an impact on all current activities. The fear of contracting the disease, lack of treatment, higher mortality associated with the virus, and ambiguity about when the virus would be overseen and when a vaccine would be available were discovered to be the main causes of rising mental trauma, adjusting, and even more extreme mental health issues..(Ram Lakhan, et al, *J Neurosci Rural Pract* 2020).

Recent research suggests that the present COVID-19 issue is not an outlier, with its economic effects having a negative influence on mental health around the world. High levels of anxiety and depression in China were linked to concerns about finances, employment, education, or the inability to repay loans. (Li J, et al, *World Psychiatry* 2020). Additionally, those who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic reported higher levels of distress than those who were jobless before to COVID-19. This finding may reflect the link between the sudden and unexpected decline in economic freedom and the degeneration in mental health experienced by many workers, even though this study did not specifically address the connection between economic concerns and emotional health beyond other concerns like COVID-19 health-related worries. (Pierce M, et al, *The Lancet Psychiatry* 2020).

Lockdown in India is far different from the western countries due to high population density, cultural diversity and poverty. Indians are perceived as being more sociable than people in western nations, having greater social networks, participating in numerous religious festivals, and hosting gatherings all year long. (Chadda RK, et al, 2013). This is due to the varied culture and traditions of India. (Gopalkrishnan N, 2018). In this aspect, a total lockdown may degrade the collective mentality of the populace. Additionally, it might have a long-term impact on the nation's farmers, daily wage labourers, and economy. While a lockdown is currently an absolute necessity to battle the COVID-19 infestation, precautions should be taken to lessen any potential psychological effects on the general people. (Grover, et al, 2020).

Furthermore, according to recent reports, the government's abrupt implementation of lockdown has made life difficult for those who are economically disadvantaged, as evidenced by the exit of migrant workers in large numbers and worries about malnutrition among those living in slum regions. (The Lancet, 2020). During the lockdown, many respondents expressed regret and concern about the challenges facing workers earning minimum wage, according to a recently released sentiment analysis of lockdown on Twitter (analysis as evidenced from tweets retrieved from March 25 to March 28; n = 24,000 tweets). (Barkur G, et al, 2020). On the psychological effects of COVID-19 in India, there aren't any national statistics available. The current study was created with the aim of assessing the fear, presumed stress, cross-sectional associations between economic difficulties and associated mental health, and mental issues related to lockdown because of COVID-19 infection in India over the last two years. This was done to assess the potential impact of COVID-19 on the public.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Conceptual Background of Employer Brand

In the practise of "employer branding," HR decisions regarding prospective and current employees are made using marketing principles, particularly the "science of branding." Corporate branding assesses how a company is seen by diverse external audiences, whereas employer branding considers both existing and potential employees as branding objectives. (Edwards R, 2009).

A strong employer brand leads to 50% more qualified applicants (Ansari K, 2022). Employer branding is even more crucial in industries with intense competition and significant demand for specialised skill sets.

The creation and execution of a workplace mental health initiative will improve employee health, boost business productivity, and improve the general well-being of the community. (WHO, 2017).

B. Mental Health

Our mental health includes all aspects of our physical, psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing. It has an impact on our attitudes, feelings, and actions. It also affects how we deal with stress, communicate with each other, and make wise decisions. (WHO, 2022).

Neuropsychiatric disorders are responsible for around 14% of the world's illness burden, mostly because they are chronically incapacitating conditions that include schizophrenia, alcoholism, and other substance use disorders. (The Lancet, 2007). Mortality is also influenced by mental health issues. According to WHO estimates from 2005, neuropsychiatric illnesses cause half a million fatalities annually and 14% of all years lost to premature death; the majority of these are brought on by dementia, Parkinson's disease, and epilepsy. (Mathers CD, et al, 2005). The importance of mental health needs to be acknowledged in both primary as well as secondary care. Beyond this, primary healthcare providers must receive adequate supervision and support as well as training in the recognition and treatment of mental diseases using evidence-based treatments. (The Lancet, 2007).

A vital component of overall health is mental and physical well-being. For example, depression increases the risk of a wide range of physical health conditions, particularly chronic conditions like hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and brain haemorrhage. In a similar vein, having chronic illnesses raises your likelihood of developing mental disease. (Bethesda MD, et al, 2015).

C. Stress

Any kind of change that puts physical, mental, or psychological strain on a person is stressful. Stress is the body's response to anything that requires concentration or activity. Everyone experiences stressful times. However, your general wellbeing is significantly impacted by how you handle stress. (World Health Organization, 2021)

The COVID19 epidemic has resulted in widespread emotional suffering. For instance, data from China indicates that 25% of the public at large has had mild to severe stress- or anxiety-related symptoms because of COVID-19 (Qiu, et al, 2020). Stress at work is becoming a more serious issue for employees, societies and employers. The direct and indirect consequences of stress have been shown by American researchers who study it (Matteson, et al, 1987). According to research conducted by Academia on "Causes of Stress in Organization" in Sukkur, 33% of all stress is brought on by external factors, whereas 67% of stress is brought on by internal sources. Workload (25%) was also identified as a significant contributor to stress since employees are working above their capacity. (Faiz Shaikh, et al, 2010).

Time-related stress is particularly detrimental to demanding mental labour, particularly while engaging in creative endeavours. Because we are unable to do our work

on time and without worry, the time-related stress impairs our perception and focus, which lowers performance. (Nekoranec J, et al, 2015). Additionally, there is still a stigma attached to mental illness, which may discourage employees from asking for help from managers and co-workers. Because they are unable to manage the tensions that come with their professions, employees may even worry about losing their positions. When workers are scared to seek treatment or approach supervisors and co-workers for assistance, disastrous results may result. (The Edmonton Sun, 2005)

D. Depression

According to the Mayo Clinic, depression is a mental illness that results in a protracted feeling of melancholy and loss of interest (Mayo Clinic, 2022). One of the most frequent mental illnesses and a leading contributor to disability and decreased life satisfaction in old age is depression (Skoog, 2011).

The study by Marta Elliott on "Gender Differences in Causes of Depression" implies that distinct treatment approaches are required for treating depressed men and women since the processes that cause depression and that reduce the impact of stresses on depression are different for men and women. (Marta E, 2014)

It has been noted that the physical and psychological signs of anxiety and depression reduce productivity at work and raise the possibility of accidents. As a result, there needs to be better communication between businesses and health care providers, and employees need to play an active role in their individual care and recovery.

III. THEORETICAL MODEL AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The workplace and their values form the basis of a solid employer brand. In the end, neglecting to care for employee mental and physical health will prevent organization from creating a desirable firm to work for. Employer branding is even more crucial in industries with intense competition and significant demand for specialised skill sets.

The psychological effects of COVID-19 will likely outweigh the medicinal effects. This indicates that, at the point this study was conducted, many more persons than infections were emotionally touched by COVID-19. Anxiety over an infection and its effects can lead to actions like panic buying, which can worsen emotional suffering and social unrest (Taylor, 2019).

Some people groups have been impacted significantly more than others. Young people have been left vulnerable to social isolation and disconnection as a result of prolonged school and university closures. These conditions can exacerbate emotions of worry, uncertainty, and loneliness and result in emotional and behavioural disorders. Mental health services have been severely disrupted while mental health needs have increased. Early in the epidemic, when personnel and infrastructure were frequently redeployed to COVID-19 relief, this was particularly true. Social

restrictions at the time also made it difficult for people to receive care. In many instances, inadequate information and misinformation about the virus also increased people's anxieties and worries, preventing them from getting medical attention.

Workplace stress is the alteration in one's physical or mental state as a result of situations at work that the employee perceives to be challenging or dangerous. According to research, a variety of factors play a role in working stress. A toxic work environment, a bad workload, isolation, the types of average hours, role conflict, role ambiguity, a lack of autonomy, barriers to career advancement, problematic interactions with supervisors and/or co-workers, organisational bullying, harassment, and organisational climate are some of these factors. (Thomas

W, et al, 2008). Workload and other workplace demand also have an impact on stress and exhaustion, which can cause health issues and lower work efficiency (MacDonald, 2003).The aetiology of physical illnesses like heart disease, electrolyte imbalance, immunosuppression, and persistent pain has been linked to workplace stress. Depression, ongoing worry, pessimism, and resentment are additional psychological effects of working stress. (Colligan T, et al, 2006).

When we consider of someone who is experiencing workplace depression, there may be a number of work- and non-work-related elements at play. Depression is a complicated disorder with a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviour that can affect everyone and everyone.

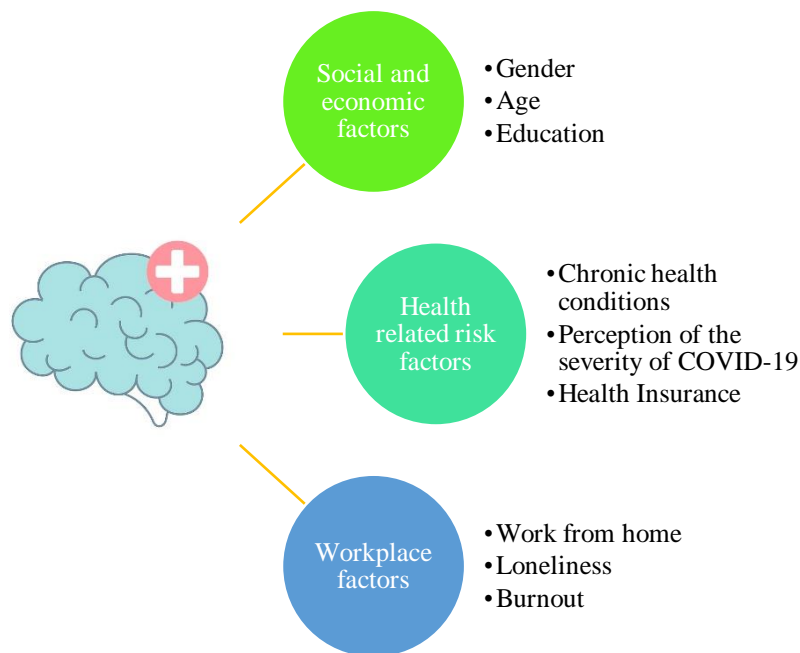


Fig. 1: Psychological Stress due to COVID-19

A. Employer branding by managing employee stress

A company's operational and organisational structure plays a key role in the level of burnout found within a business. Levels of stress are perpetuated by lack of planning, management, staff, and organisation (Ansari K, 2022). Employee behaviour can be influenced by organisational identity, and by upholding the organization's values, they contribute to forming and securing the organization's identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1996).

Organizations with distinctive employment brands will offer compelling affective commitment content (transactional, relational, or ideological)(Edwards R, 2009). Because the employer brand contributes to the construction of an affective commitment, the veracity of the knowledge it conveys will have an impact on how people view the fulfilment of that contract(or breach) (Backhaus, et al, 2004).

• Hypothesis 1: Low stress level in employees has a positive impact on employer branding

Many employees see the coronavirus pandemic's substantial changes, such as company closures and a move to remote work, as key sources of stress. Long recognised as the "standard," working weeks that include 40 or more hours are no longer considered necessary to make a living.

Even though not everyone is able to give less hours, giving employees more freedom over when and where they work could significantly enhance their quality of life. Numerous factors, including mental and physical health, can be impacted by financial stress. Fair compensation and raises based on performance will keep staff members motivated and feeling valued.

The way employees connect with one another can have a significant impact on the workplace culture, everyone's happiness, and the overall ambiance. Although it is unlikely that the concept of "profit over people" will entirely disappear in our lifetimes, powerful employer brands are starting to emerge. Within their organisations,

these employer brands are aiming to realign expectations, spur change, and offer greater chances for work-life balance.

B. Employer branding by mitigating organisational factors leading to depression

According to Watson Wyatt experts, both internal and exterior branding should be included in the concept of employer brand. For the outside of the business, the employer develops its reputation and brand among potential employees so that they are eager to apply for jobs there; for the inside, the employer develops its brand among current employees while simultaneously making a commitment to those employees and realising it with them. (Xia H, et al, 2010)

"A powerful tie that binds an individual to his or her organization even when it might not be financially sound for them to stay there," is what employee loyalty is defined as (Logan, 1984). Because of their positive views and opinions about their business, people stay. (Mitchell & Lee, 2001).

There are six essential traits of organisations having an employer brand. (Kucherov, 2012):

- A good reputation on the job market
- standard fulfilment of promises made to employees and adherence to the terms of the mental health contract
- uniqueness of a mix of the physical and intangible qualities that are beneficial to the intended audience
- high level of target groups' recognition of the firm as an employer
- correct key demographic separation of the employer from rivals in a particular job segment of the market

• Testing

- stable procedures and initiatives to position the business in the employment market. We refer to potential and current workers as "target audiences."

• Hypothesis 2: Employees low depression level has a positive impact on employer branding

A stressed employee may have negative repercussions on the division or business, such as lower morale and productivity as well as more employee burnout and attrition. Employees don't expect managers to be able to repair everything in these difficult circumstances. However, they do want to know that managers are trying to help and making a difference. They also want to feel seen and heard.

Giving lip service is no longer an option in employee relations, as it is in so many other areas. Employees anticipate that businesses will move to improve things in a targeted, noticeable, and ongoing manner. These kinds of evidence points make it abundantly evident to staff members that firm executives care about their welfare. This is crucial for supervisors and managers, who are frequently responsible with carrying out the last phase of employer branding.

Management and team leaders can support a better work-life balance by:

- Encouragement of weekend work off
- Promoting lengthy lunch breaks
- Ensuring complete use of yearly leave
- Setting an example by establishing wholesome work habits

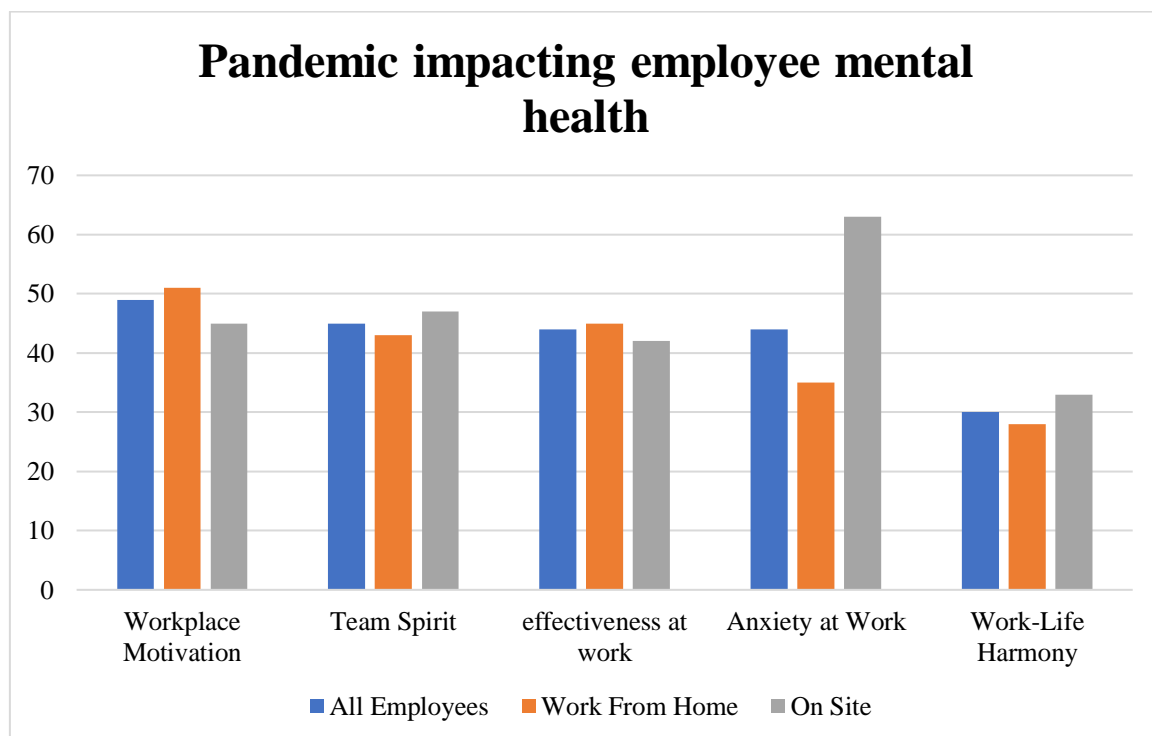


Fig. 2: Pandemic impacting employee mental health

According to the survey conducted by The National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM), during the epidemic, the number of people experiencing anxiety and depression symptoms has tripled and quadrupled, respectively. Additionally, according to data, 54% of Americans worry that the virus would cause them to lose their jobs, and 50% are afraid to resume in-person employment owing to health reasons.

This infographic emphasises how the COVID-19 outbreak has impacted workers' mental health. It demonstrates the significance of employee mental wellbeing and how it directly impacts the company's productivity

IV. CONCLUSION

The significance of workers' mental health cannot be understated in the quest of success because they are essential to achieving success metrics. Making sure employees are mentally well benefits a business as well as the employees themselves, both at work and in all other facets of their lives.

Untreated mental diseases can lead to higher rates of disability and unemployment, which results in workers who are recruited and trained but are no longer capable of doing their jobs. Finding, recruiting, and training a new employee need more time and resources.

According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), mental diseases have a variety of effects on workers. Of course, mental illnesses can impair an employee's ability to fulfil their job duties and be productive, but they can also hinder their ability to interact with co-workers and carry out everyday tasks physically.

According to the CDC's figures, melancholy makes it difficult for a worker to execute "physical work activities about 20% of the time." Additionally, it may result in a 35% decline in cognitive function.

To address the significance of mental health in the workplace, a change in attitudes towards mental diseases is required among both employees and employers. To feel comfortable taking the time necessary to address their mental illness, employees must also be aware that therapy does not always lead to a rapid fix.

Employee visibility is lower than it has ever been, and the epidemic has increased stress and anxiety levels, thus company priorities should be put first on implementing well-being solutions that benefit certain groups of individuals. Low productivity and efficiency are the results of not doing this, and there is also a chance of widespread retention when the economy improves, and the talent battle re-emerges. Because of this, the employer brand must include well-being as an essential and authentic component.

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