



The effect of COVID-19 over Employees' Mental Health - A Review

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Review Article

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has been classified a WHO very hazardous pandemic, with millions of people being infected deceased in only a few months. Many pharmaceutical developers are researching a viral vaccine however there has been no reporting of progress. At the global level, the financial market is seriously affected by the virus and the government preventive actions. These preventative measures have resulted in numerous organizations throwing their staff away or imposing wage reductions. Dread of being infected with the virus, as well as fear that jobs will be lost and the future financial difficulties would degrade the mental health of the employees. This article also examines various settings in situations where different employees feel uneasy as a result of the COVID-19 outburst.

Keywords: COVID-19; coronavirus; mental health; employees; pandemic disease.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The disease of COVID-19, which started in the year 2019, has turned itself into a pandemic and is the reason for the downfall of the world market and the death of millions of people around the world. Basically, it occurs due to "the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2". The world is still in panic and scared to their hearts. Millions are dead, and several times more people are contaminated by the disease. Losing the loved ones and the fear of losing their lives and the source of earning has made them uncertain, and even their belief over government and doctors are losing their grip. World health organization has developed many strategies to control and cure the disease, but every strategy has failed on practical grounds. It was advised by the WHO to keep a 2 meters safe distance from any other human or anything which might be contaminated and even to isolate the one suspected of contamination for 14 days. People wore masks to prevent themselves from the disease as it spread through the microdroplets released from a contaminated person who might contaminate another person when it enters the body. Several researchers are conducting researches to develop a cure for COVID-19. Many drugs have been sent for clinical trials, but not a single success has been reported despite various claims that state success. From allopathic to Ayurveda to homeopathy, all drug development fields are giving their complete focus on developing the cure. The world was in a complete lockdown for several months, but it was not enough to control the pandemic. But the lockdown affected all types of markets in India as well as the overall world. Millions of employees across the world lost their jobs, and millions are in fear of losing their jobs. All the countries' governments are standing with their hands tied as their primary focus is to defeat the pandemic. Undoubtedly, governments are correct in preferring lives over the market. In order to gain control over the market again, it is important to defeat the disease first, for which the citizens need to follow the guidelines dictated by WHO and their respective governments [1].

The proposed system studies the impact and effect of COVID-19 on employees' stress and mental health from different sectors. It also shows the problems they have gone through and are expected to go through in the future if the pandemic remains uncontrollable. Many aspects are studied concerning employees, which are

willingly or unwillingly ignored by the corporate industry or even governments [2].

2. HISTORY OF COVID-19 AND HOW IT SPREADS

It has been found that the molecular structures of the previous pandemics are a lot similar to the ones we are suffering with at present. The virus of COVID-19 has originated from a place in China known as Guangdong. The virus spread through different China cities, and it speeded its effect by contaminating the whole world. At present, China has controlled the pandemic, but it is still a major problem for the world because of speedy contamination capability. Due to its mutation, it has always been hard to identify the patients as its post symptoms are often unidentifiable. Even these totally asymptomatic patients are completely contagious and can spread the disease to as many people they come in contact with without even knowing. Various reports suggest that the disease originally started from a bat, but in opposition, various researchers stated that it originated from a camel who came in contact with humans, but WHO is still unclear about the virus's origin [3].

In India, COVID-19's first case was reported in February of this year. Indian government implemented a lockdown on 22nd March 2020, which was the biggest lockdown in history, keeping more than 1.3 billion people in lockdown. This lockdown is still active in many areas of the country, but the country is taking the hit from new corona patients of approximately more than **75,000** people per day. Till now, more than **30,527,764** people are reported to be infected by the disease [4]. This lockdown has created a major downfall in the Indian financial market. Because of this financial downfall, many employees lost their jobs which further resulted in the occurrence of stress problems within them. Though the government is providing them all possible health as well as financial benefits but these benefits are only sufficient for their survival, and since these benefits are short term, therefore it is not relieving them of the stress they are going through. The environment of fear and disease under which the employees who still have to go to their workplace has put them in a traumatic situation. The guidelines established by the government are not followed with efficiency at the workplaces. Many social organizations have recommended proper law enforcement at such places to overview the situation of the employees [5].

2.1 How It Spreads

The virus of COVID-19 spreads from one person to another when they are at close range through droplets of body fluid that enters the respiratory aerosols. In general, it is confirmed and directed by the health authorities to isolate suspected patients for 14 days which is the maximum expected time within which the virus of COVID-19 will show its effect. This virus is suspected of mutation as it is a single-stranded RNA virus. This mutation has created a series of new problems for drug developers [6]. At present most of the drug-developing labs are working over the vaccine for coronavirus, but not a single one succeeded, and the doctors are still empty-handed. Many claims are made regarding the vaccine's successful development, but till now, all the claims have failed in the clinical trials [7].

The absence of vaccines has created havoc in people's minds and the financial market of the world. People are getting insecure with respect to their jobs, and those who already have lost their jobs are on the verge of losing their ways of getting food [8].

Negligence of common people can also be counted as a major reason for the spread of the disease. The government and the health departments' guidelines are not taken seriously by many people because the spread has gone out of control. Even the organizations are following the guideline, which resulted in establishing fear within the employees. There are no proper guidelines available for supporting the mental health of the employees.

3. CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 OVER STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

The pandemic's impact is at a global level, but no government has not registered or reported the complete consequences. The main issue is the fear generated within common people, especially those living in rural areas who are unaware of the precautions that must be taken to avoid the illness. People are scared for their jobs and businesses and even for the options left in front of them to feed their families. Farmers are unable to reach their customers for selling their grains, vegetables, etc. Labors, auto-rickshaw drivers, cab drivers, hawkers, and all others who used to earn on a daily basis through hard work have completely lost their jobs. Many of these people have nothing left to feed their families. The

outbreak of coronavirus has caused a high level of stress among these people [9].

Coronavirus is spreading at such a high speed, and yet the medical team and which is unable to find a cure or vaccine for it. It is hard for the government to explain the situation, especially to the employees who lost their jobs or have to go to their respective workplaces where they don't feel secure because of the virus. These issues have badly impacted the mental health of the employees.

4. EMPLOYEES IMPACT ON COVID-19

Employees are the ones who are said to be affected at the highest level as they are totally dependent upon their respective organizations. As the organizations lost their way of income, the first thing they did to compensate their loss was cost deduction and initiated this process by throwing away their employees. Because of the pandemic, the employees who lost their jobs were unable to find a new one as there was no opening available across the world. Slowly they lost their savings and did not have anything left to survive the situation. Respective governments provided their people with basic needs, but it was not enough, and, in many cases, the provided facilities did not reach the people who were really in need. The fear affected the mental health of these people. The stress was easily reflected through their frustration and anger as they were unable to see any further scope to regain their financial condition. Even those who did not lose their jobs were scared of getting infected at their workplace, and spreading the infection to their families through them was another reason for their fear[10].

There are three factors available that might lessen or intensify the effect of COVID-19 on the employees' mental health and stress. These factors are:

Organizational factors: These factors are concerning the occupational role, occupational safety, and health management as well as teleworking.

Occupational role: On the basis of the occupational role of the employees and the working environment provided to them by the responsible authority, the exposure of COVID-19 varies. Its effects on the employees' mental health also vary as the environment they are working in is a reason for the degradation of their

mental health. In the same context, the employees working in the field of health care are overloaded with their work and are at the highest level of risk as they are working with contaminated patients. Many health workers have died because of the virus, which has badly affected their mental health. The police force employees are also in a similar situation as they were also working for the public in an unsafe environment, and many of the policemen have lost their lives serving their duties [11].

i) Occupational safety and health management: It's the responsibility of the organization to provide a safe environment for their employees to work in. Safety is important for both the physical and mental health of the employees. The outbreak of the coronavirus has become a challenge for all organizations at the global level. Especially for this situation, the managers should work in combination with the HRM and the health departments and follow the guidelines for creating a safe environment for their employees [12]. Safety measures and health plans with an after-contamination plan must be incorporated in their daily task to protect their employees' physical health and boost their morale to fight against their fear. The organizations' policies will play an important role in the mental stability of the employees and prevent them from any health hazards of COVID-19. Proper education must be provided to the employees concerning the preventive measures that should be taken for the prevention of coronavirus, and protection materials such as sanitizers, masks, etc., must be made available to them. It should be governed that every employee follows the social distancing and other protocols as a single mistake made by a single employee may risk the lives of all the employees and even their families. The provision of all the preventive measures will create trust within the employees, reduce the stress level, and create a better environment at the workplace. The employees will feel safer, and this will further improve their mental health [13].

ii) Teleworking: Working from home has become a key challenge for organizations. Various researches have exhibited the importance of working from home as the employees will feel safer at home and being with their friends and family will provide moral support, which is a much needed factor at this point in time. Work from home has kept the employees safe and the one they would have come in contact with. Various papers also exhibited the significance of being connected

with the groups a person is comfortable with. This type of environment enhances the mental health of an employee. Organizations can provide moral support to their employees for giving a boost to their confidence so that they can be motivated in doing their work from home, and managers can take daily reports, not only related to their work but about their daily activities so the employees feel more connected to their work family. Besides, managers should promote their employees to open up about their problems, making them feel comfortable in the workplace [14].

iii) Institutional factors: This factor is about the government's programs for supporting the employees both psychologically and financially during the virus outbreak and even after the control over the virus. Out of these two programs arranged by the governments, financial programs made for the employees' financial security will lower the effect of disease on the employee's health during the virus's outbreak. These two factors will play a very significant role in preventing physiological disorders among the employees. For example, those countries where the outbreak has greatly damaged the people like India have provided emergency packages which constitute delayed loan payments, extra business loans, free medical facilities, etc., to stand with the people of the country and provide them with the mental stability they require. These will help the employees with security and provide them with a psychological balance.

The health workers were the ones who were most involved in the COVID-19 situation, and still, their mental health was under-addressed. Since the beginning of the outbreak, the health care employees were at the maximum risk, and no proper financial and psychological support was provided to them. The hospitals still have not trained their health care employees with respect to the ways of dealing with mental fatigue. Various researchers have suggested that on the basis of terms related to the multidisciplinary mental health that the officials make of the health departments, urgent, timely health care should be developed. There should be clear communication with the employees, and psychological counseling must be provided to them via smartphones or video chats to keep a complete report of their day to keep a check on their mental health condition, especially in relation to suicidal tendencies, which have grown common within the employees in this pandemic situation [15].

In the related context, the health officials must take some initiatives to provide first aid concerning the psychological effect via telemedicine and get in contact with these employees and educate them on the possible personal level, which will develop an understanding and belief within the individuals.

Individual factors: The individual factor represents the socio-demographic factor such as age, education, gender, etc., with every individual employee's mental health history. The chances of vulnerability towards physical and mental health are also an important factor. Because of this coronavirus situation, many people who were in the past suffering from any type of mental or physical issues are more prone to the virus and its effects. The studies also suggest that these types of people need to take extra care of their health and keep a safe distance from any possible threat related to the coronavirus. These suggestions were educated to people worldwide through news channels, the internet, etc., which somehow has badly affected these people's mental health as they generated a new type of fear and stress within them, which further affected their mental health[16].

There is no available study that specifically exhibits the effect of COVID-19 on the mental health of the employees, but some predictions are suggested based on the conditions available at the workplace for the employees. The researchers exhibit that concerning mental health, women are more vulnerable to suffer from anxiety and stress. This suggests that the reaction of women employees to the situation will be more intense than the male employees. The study also suggested that people of old age are more vulnerable to psychological disorders as they are more prone to getting affected by the virus, and data which shows the mortality rate of people dying because of the virus is more in old age people. This makes them both physically and mentally weak to fight against the virus outbreak [17]. The higher-age employees get more insecure as they might feel that they won't have any option to restart their employment because of the organizations seeking younger employees as they will be less vulnerable to the virus and more adaptive to the new technologies being implemented at the workplaces. Education has played an important role in the virus outbreak as less educated employees have grown more mental health issues than the more educated employees. This is a reason for the insecurity of losing their job permanently, and

lack of technical knowledge might throw them out of the race. The employees with a history of chronic illness are also more vulnerable to the COVID-19 outbreak; this gives the employees mental health and stress.

5. QUARANTINE AND CONFINEMENT

Quarantine is a special implementation made by governments worldwide to control the outbreak of the coronavirus. Through quarantine, the individuals who are suspected and those diagnosed with the virus are isolated from other people to stop the spread of the virus. This restriction (quarantine) is implemented over an individual for a specific period till the disease is cured or till it is made sure that the individual is no longer a threat. The reason for implementing this restriction over those who are not diagnosed with the disease is the asymptomatic nature of the virus. This same implementation of restriction was followed at the time of the 1918 pandemic when Spanish influenza killed thousands of people and during the time of SARS and Ebola, which affected the year 2003 and 2014, respectively. The confinement (lockdown) was implemented to prevent those individuals who are not yet affected by the virus from keeping them safe from the COVID-19 outbreak. India implemented the biggest lockdown that lasted for months keeping 1.3 billion people at their respective homes. During the lockdown, strict laws were imposed so that no one gets infected by the disease.

This lockdown badly damaged the business, especially concerning SMEs, and several employees lost their jobs. Though the lockdown implementation was done for a greater cause, its effects on the employees' mental health were hazardous. Many suicidal cases were in the news because of the employees' financial degradation. Even the employees who did not suffer the loss of their job were affected by not getting their salaries on time. In many organizations, especially in the education sector, employees were offered to work with half of their existing salaries. This created financial havoc in the employees, and they started to suffer from mental health issues.

6. CONCLUSION

The study reveals the bad impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the mental health of the employees. It exhibits the financial and physical vulnerability with which the employees are

suffering, leading to the degradation of their mental health. The government has taken various steps to support them financially and medically by providing different packages. Even organizations are also trying to get in the business and continue providing jobs. But these initiatives are still lagging in providing efficient results. The situation's need is to provide the employees with a proper environment and educate them regarding the situation. The employees must be educated about COVID-19 and its preventive measures, which must be followed to fight against the disease. The organization must provide a safe environment for their employees, and if necessary, proper psychological consultancy should also be arranged for them.

CONSENT

It's not applicable.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Taken from Symbiosis Institute of Management Studies, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune, Maharashtra, India.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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