RUDN Journal of Public Administration ISSN 2312-8313 (Print), ISSN 2411-1228 (Online) Вестник РУДН. Серия:

2025 Tom 12 No 2 296-304

http://journals.rudn.ru/ publicadministrationy

ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЕ И МУНИЦИПАЛЬНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ

DOI: 10.22363/2312-8313-2025-12-2-296-304

EDN: PRNOXC

Reveiw article / Обзорная статья

The role of human resource practitioners in dealing with mental health issues in the workplace Post-COVID-19

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Abstract. The existence of a worldwide mental health pandemic can no longer be overlooked according to the World Health Organization. Because of the tremendous stigma associated with mental illness, most research done to date has focused on the detrimental consequences it has on employees' productivity. The goal of this study is to get a comprehensive knowledge of the role played by human resource practitioners in managing mental health issues after COVID-19. This is accomplished by looking at mental health issues, coping mechanisms, and programmes implemented by human resources post-COVID-19 in the workplace. The research is desktop-based and gathers knowledge utilizing secondary data. To research data, a variety of databases including Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, AOSIS, ProQuest, and institutional repositories, have been utilized. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) analyzed secondary data on mental health concerns. The findings of the study show that the COVID-19 pandemic brought operational changes in the workplace, which led to mental health issues such as stress and depression. The study acknowledges the important role that human resources play in providing support services such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) to promote the well-being of employees in the workplace environment. However, some employees continue to experience mental health challenges at the workplace due to alleged limited support from employers. To provide knowledge regarding the pervasiveness of mental health issues in the workplace, especially in the wake of COVID-19, the study suggests launching mental health awareness initiatives, workshops, and seminars to address mental health challenges faced by employees in the workplace.

Keywords: psychological well-being, personnel management, staff support programs, occupational health, work environment

Contribution. All the authors participated in the development of the concept of this review, data collection, processing and analysis, drafted the manuscript, and formulated the conclusions.

Conflicts of interest. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Article history:

The article was submitted on 26.02.2025. The article was accepted on 28.03.2025.

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For citation:

Mashilo MT, Kgarose MF, Ramoshaba DJ. The role of human resource practitioners in dealing with mental health issues in the workplace Post-COVID-19. *RUDN Journal of Public Administration*. 2025;12(2):296–304. https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2025-12-2-296-304

Роль специалистов по управлению персоналом в решении проблем психического здоровья на рабочем месте в постпандемийный период

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Аннотация. Согласно данным Всемирной организации здравоохранения, наличие глобальной пандемии психического здоровья более нельзя игнорировать. Из-за стигматизации психических расстройств большинство существующих исследований сосредоточено на негативных последствиях, которые они оказывают на продуктивность сотрудников. Цель данного исследования — получить всестороннее понимание роли специалистов по управлению персоналом в решении проблем психического здоровья на рабочем месте в постпандемийный период COVID-19. Это достигается путем анализа проблем психического здоровья, стратегий преодоления и программ, реализуемых отделами по работе с персоналом в условиях постковидной рабочей среды. Исследование носит кабинетный характер и основывается на анализе вторичных данных. Источники информации — различные базы данных, включая Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, AOSIS, ProQuest, а также институциональные репозитории. Для анализа вторичных данных по проблемам психического здоровья применялся метод критического дискурсивного анализа (КДА). Результаты исследования показывают, что пандемия COVID-19 вызвала организационные изменения на рабочих местах, что привело к росту психоэмоциональных проблем, таких как стресс и депрессия. Подчеркнута важная роль, которую играет отдел по управлению персоналом в предоставлении поддерживающих услуг (программы помощи сотрудникам Employee Assistance Programmes — EAPs), способствующих улучшению психоэмоционального состояния работников. Однако некоторые сотрудники продолжают сталкиваться с трудностями в области психического здоровья на рабочем месте, что, как предполагается, связано с недостаточной поддержкой со стороны работодателей. С целью повышения осведомленности о масштабах проблем психического здоровья в условиях труда, особенно в постковидный период, предложено инициировать информационные кампании, тренинги и семинары, направленные на преодоление данных вызовов.

Ключевые слова: психологическое благополучие, управление персоналом, программы поддержки сотрудников, охрана труда и здоровья, рабочая среда

Вклад авторов. Все авторы участвовали в разработке концепции исследования, сборе, обработке и анализе данных, написании текста рукописи, формулировке выводов.

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

История статьи:

Поступила в редакцию 26.02.2025; принята к публикации 28.03.2025.

Для цитирования:

Mashilo M.T., Kgarose M.F., Ramoshaba D.J. The role of human resource practitioners in dealing with mental health issues in the workplace Post-COVID-19 // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Государственное и муниципальное управление. 2025. Т. 12. № 2. С. 296—304. https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2025-12-2-296-304

Introduction

The fundamental right to mental health is universal, including protection against risks, access to appropriate treatment, liberty, independence, and participation in society [1]. Work-related stress has been recognized as a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation, with October 10 as World Mental Health Day. The research investigates the role of human resources practitioners in addressing mental health concerns post-COVID-19, focusing on the workplace. According to Son, Hegde, Smith, Wang and Sasangohar [2], high workloads, unclear job objectives, and long hours can lead to employees identifying their jobs as their main source of stress. An average corporation uses 20% of its payroll to address stress-related issues [3].

Many studies have explored stressors, coping mechanisms, and methods for managing stress, highlighting the mental health issues faced by individuals in their personal and work lives. However, the role of human resource practitioners in handling mental health remains less researched [4]. This study investigates the role of human resources in dealing with the mental health illness of employees post-COVID-19, focusing on the challenges brought by COVID-19 and coping strategies employed. The prevalence of mental illness is rising, particularly among working-age individuals, with estimates of 15% of individuals worldwide suffering from a mental disorder, many of whom are working class [5].

Purpose of the study sought to examine the role of human resource practitioners in dealing with mental health issues in the workplace post-COVID-19.

Methods and materials

According to Guerin, Janta, and van Gorp's [6] classification, the methodology used in this paper is a desktop study based on a wide-ranging literature review, which offers scrutiny of the recent and current literature and covers various topics at various levels of comprehensiveness and generality. The topic of this article is mental health at work, which was identified as a global health priority by WHO [5]. It is fascinating to investigate how human resources may help with mental health difficulties. By offering wellness Programmes, flexible work schedules, and other efforts that enhance employee well-being, human resources' main responsibility is to encourage employee engagement. The narrative form that emanates from critical discourse analysis is the central trait of this type of evaluation Han [7] that we have employed in this paper.

The study adopted the Coping Theory, which enabled the researchers to understand the challenges that employees face in their respective workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers were also able to illuminate the role of Human resource departments in the fight against mental health issues that were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was imperative to employ this theory as it is about the coping process and how people cope with stressful situations in their lives, as alluded to by Coyne and Racioppo [8].

The study aimed to examine the role of human resources in managing mental health issues in the workplace, particularly post-COVID-19, using various platforms like Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, Scopus, AOSIS, ProQuest, and university repositories. The research was conducted on the prevalence of mental health issues in the workplace and the importance of understanding the role of human resources in addressing these issues. The study screened articles based on their applicability to the study, and the essay lists all the evaluated papers.

Critical review of literature

Mental health challenges caused by COVID-19 in the workplace

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted South Africa and the global community, leading to increased mental health problems and increased workloads for some employees [9]. According to Greenberg, Weston, Hall, Caulfield, Williamson and Fong [10], Front-line workers, particularly those in the workplace, face emotional pressures and suicidal thoughts due to the pressure to save lives. The pandemic also increased the number of individuals needing social services, such as counseling, in the workplace [11]. The pandemic has raised concerns about the mental health difficulties faced by workers during the pandemic and the potential for these impacts to persist after the epidemic [12]. Some researchers have identified concerns over the impact of workloads on mental health, as well as the lack of support from employers.

Some employees rely on coworkers or teammates for assistance, as their bosses may not provide it. Communication issues between employees and employers have also been a concern, as communication challenges can cause stress and negatively impact mental health [13]. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of workers, with concerns about workloads, workloads, and lack of support from employers [14]. Addressing these issues is crucial to ensuring a healthy and productive work environment for all employees.

Human resource practitioners' role during and Post COVID-19

Through the Occupational Health and Safety division, human resources oversee ensuring employees' safety while they are at work. They must make sure that there are no risks at work that might endanger their lives or cause them bodily or psychological harm. Hecker [15] asserts that COVID-19 has brought about a new workplace danger that poses a serious mental health risk to employees [16] and a significant problem for enterprises, particularly for human resource professionals [17]. The impact on employees' health varies depending on their employment position and working environment [20]. The two primary issues that need to be addressed in this case are how to stop the virus from spreading and protect workers from infection, as well as how to raise employee knowledge of the requirement of adhering to workplace safety procedures. The WHO has

given companies guidelines on how to safeguard the safety of their workers, even if it may be difficult to monitor employees' actions as some may choose to disregard self-isolation regulations [5].

People all over the world now feel less anxious, thanks to the recent development of COVID-19 vaccines, but it has also presented two new challenges for organizations: managing the vaccination campaign at work and their ability to sponsor and pay for it given the financial difficulties they have faced because of the pandemic [18]. Numerous studies, such as those by [19–21] have shown the dangers of COVID-19 for both physical and mental health. Because they might feel alone and divided between their personal and work life, home-based workers could have emotional difficulties [22]. Employees who are required to physically be present at work might return worried about contracting the virus or passing it on to their family [23], which could raise their stress levels and risk of mental health issues, especially for workers who were already under a lot of psychological stress at work before the pandemic [24], or those who have a high-risk job position, like human resource professionals.

Employee Assistant Programmes (EAPs)

Employee assistance Programmes (EAPs) are benefits provided by businesses to employees going through difficult times at home or at work. These Programmes include mental health and behavioural support. EAPs have often been offered as a stand-alone benefit that can be obtained internally or outside and offers a certain number of workers-free services. Even though most businesses provide the service, employees seldom utilize EAPs [25]. The COVID-19 outbreak and its consequences on employees have increased awareness of the importance of workplace mental health. This highlights the need to investigate EAPs, which were used in the research as a key programme to help workers.

EAPs today deal with a lot of issues that modern workers deal with and that negatively affect their productivity and well-being. Even though EAPs are primarily designed to help with work-related issues, they now provide a broad range of programmes that may help with issues not linked to the job. Many workers struggle with personal and family concerns that may result in problems with drug misuse, stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as with money problems, marital problems, and other problems [6]. EAPs have expanded the scope of their counselling services to help staff members combat the negative effects of these many problems. EAPs are also equipped to provide preventative treatments, such as programmes to encourage healthy behaviours, including stopping smoking, exercising, and reducing weight. The efficacy of an EAP may be favourably impacted by EAP training that is primarily intended for managers, and managers are in a good position to play a key role in promoting employee involvement and buy-in, which might ensure the success of an EAP [7].

Coping strategies and programmes in enhancing mental well-being

The frequency of mental health difficulties among employees is growing, posing a significant challenge to public health [26]. It has been often documented in the literature that a wide variety of psychosocial variables, including a lack of company and family support, influenced employee mental health and coping techniques. Cahill, Cullen, Anwer, Wilson, and Gaynor [27] state that inappropriate coping techniques may be major contributors in the continually high incidence of stress and mental illnesses at workplaces. According to Sediri, Zgueb, Ouanes, Ouali, Bourgou, Jomli, and Nacef [28], poor techniques could also cause domestic violence to increase significantly in women. Enhancing mental well-being involves adopting various coping strategies and participating in Programmes that promote mental health.

Self-care practices

Self-care practices is regarded as one of the coping strategies and Programmes in enhancing mental health. According to Butler, Mercer, McClain-Meeder, Horne, and Dudley [29], Self-care practices refer to the actions and practices that we choose to engage in on a regular basis to maintain and improve our health and well-being. It is essential for maintaining good mental and emotional well-being [30]. Butler et al. [29] further stated that self-care practices have six (6) domains. Maintaining healthy mental health requires routines. This includes getting adequate sleep, eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and using relaxation techniques such as meditation or deep breathing exercises. Self-care can also be regarded as a personal journey, and it is important for employees to find the practices that resonate with them and fit into their lifestyle [31]. Employees should employ different strategies to prioritize self-care in their daily routine to ensure that their mental and emotional well-being is supported.

Recommendations and way forward

Considering the findings of the study, it is evident that post-pandemic comfort measures must be taken to mitigate the potential negative effects of the pandemic on an individual's mental health. Thus, the researchers recommend the following short and long-term organizational strategies.

- Training to educate staff members and managers on how to effectively handle COVID-19 and related pandemics in the workplace environment.
- Human resources should provide a supportive atmosphere in the workplace to lessen the possible negative effects of mental health concerns, contagion anxiety, and uncertainty on workers
- Organizations should create or strengthen workplace rules and policies that deal with stigma prevention.
- Organizations must conduct public awareness campaigns on mental health issues to support those who are struggling with mental health disorders and/or problems.

Conclusion

There is growing recognition of the importance of mental health issues in the workplace. Employee well-being, productivity, and performance are all strongly impacted by the widespread problem of mental health. The significance of human resources in managing mental health and further examining issues and coping mechanisms has received less attention despite the enormous amount of research on the subject. In this research, we highlighted the financial burden that mental health problems place on businesses and argued in need for comprehensive employee assistance Programmes and coping methods that aim to improve and support workers' mental health. We also acknowledge the necessity for organizational researchers to take on the task of comprehending mental health concerns in the context of the workplace and to incorporate information about mental health issues from other fields.

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