The impact of mental health on employees' job performance in the hospitality sector

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Abstract

A lot of attention has been directed at employee mental health lately and this has largely coincided with the increased in prevalence of mental health problems. Mental health has also been highly relevant in the workplace with the hotel sector in South Africa not being spared the challenge. The effects of the pandemic aggravated the matter as it affects the job performance of the employees. Consequently, this study examined the impact of mental health on employee job performance with focus on the hospitality industry in South Africa. Quantitative research approach and a questionnaire was used to collect data. Simple random sampling technique was utilized to collect data from 44 employees of a Hotel in Gauteng province and the data collected was analysed using SPSS. Result from the descriptive statistics revealed that anxiety has an impact on the employees' as they find themselves in situations where they were anxious only to be relieved when everything is over. Additionally, stress was identified as the factor that influence the mental health of the employees' job performance, as a result, counselling services are provided by the Hotel. Based on the result of this study, changes can be made regarding promoting awareness and destigmatizing of mental health in workplace. The study recommended that mental health should be promoted in the workplace, flexible schedules should be offered at workplace, workplace stress should be addressed frequently, voluntary benefits should be offered at workplace and lastly, that managers should be trained on mental health management.

Keywords: Destigmatization, Employee, Hospitality, Job performance, Mental health.

1. Introduction

A lot of attention has been directed at the mental health and has to a greater extent coincided with the increased prevalence in the overall mental health problems. The Word Health Organisation [1] estimates that between 10% to 15% of individuals in developing and developed countries have mental health problems. The workplace has not been spared with many, particularly in the hotel industry having to contend with mental health conditions. This has been a challenge globally. For instance, the American economy was reported to be losing US$400 billion to loss of productivity due to mental illness annually [2]. In the United Kingdom, one- quarter of employees experience mental health problems [3]. More specifically, the Royal Society for Public Health [4] reported that 84% of individuals in the hotel sector reported that they suffered stress most of the time. In Africa, the rate of mental health prevalence has been increasing and has risen to 14 in every 100 000 employees. In the same vein, the Hotel sector in South Africa has not been spared the challenges with 69% of workers having to deal with such conditions [5].

The effects of the last COVID-19 pandemic have not helped matters with the hotel sector being one of the hardest hit industries globally [6]. The pandemic has added to workplace stressors by impacting on job security and general fear for the employees' well-being [7]. Working in the industry has mental health implications as employees must put in a lot of emotional labour and cope with high expectations and irregular working hours [8]. Research has shown that employees in the industry turn to drug use, self-medication as a coping strategy [9]. While there has been a noted increase in the number of individuals dealing with mental health issues in the workplace [10] mental health effects on employee job performance in the industry remain understudied [11].

Extant literature shows the mental health in the workplace may negatively impact employee job performance and overall organisational performance [12]. Lapses in energy and concentration, discomfort with waiting on or catering for large groups, memory issues and mistakes has been shown to results from such conditions [13-15]. Given the importance of mental health, it is important that the implications for employee job performance are understood. However, there seems to be a paucity of contextual empirical evidence in the South Africa hotel industry [11, 16]. It is against this background that the study seeks to investigate the impact of mental health on employee job performance at a Hotel in Johannesburg, South Africa.

2. Literature Review

Collaboration between an individual and the environment which are two critical elements is needed in pursuit of set objectives. Taking out the individual in the mix leaves a vacuum in pursuant of the set objectives. Nonetheless, an individual has various environments including society, school, and the workplace [17]. Factors that constitute the environment may be subdivided into two main categories and these are physical and human factors. Physical factors relate to machines, tools, security devices, workplace fuss, pollution, work-related risks, and vehicles amongst others [18]. Meanwhile, human factors include perception, attitudes, personality and conflict between groups and individuals. Both factors undoubtedly may impact on the mental health of individuals. The current study however is concerned with the human and mental aspect of the workplace as well as how these interact with the job performance of employees in the hotel sector in South Africa.

2.1. Mental Health

World Health Organization [19] defines mental health as a state of wellbeing under which one realises their ability, their work productivity, cope with stresses of life, and effectively contribute to the community. Mental health is an integral part of the health system and overall health cannot be addressed without paying attention to the mental health. Mental health is fundamental to individuals and the collective ability of humans to enjoy life, earn a living, and think. Weaver, et al. [20] as well as Beeble and Salem [21] posit that mental health relates to cognitive, emotional, and behavioural wellbeing. It portends how individuals feel, think, and behave. However, various actions are used to measure mental health amongst employees, and one of them is the use of surveys which questions employees' feelings in the workplace and their opinions on their respective roles Zolezzi, et al. [22]. Sharma and Sharma [18] suggests the use of exit interviews especially where there is high rate of employee turnover as such turnover may be as a result of issues associated with mental health. Measurement of mental health is vital as suggested by Wang, et al. [23] who indicated that without measurement, management is almost impossible. Additionally, Brown, et al. [24] indicates that there are over 157 mental health conditions which an individual may suffer from and may struggle with one or more of those conditions. Mental health is a complex phenomenon that interacts with human activities, especially within the workplace towards job performance for productivity. In this context, mental health incorporates aspects like self-esteem, job satisfaction, locus of control and depression/anxiety.

2.2. Employee Job Performance

As describe by Scullen [25] job performance comprises four main aspects which are human performance, administrative performance, general performance and technical performance. These are different job performance dimensions that are likely to interact with employee mental health in the workplace [26]. Further, performance refers to the amount of useful work that is accomplished and as such may be likened to an achievement within a given period. At the employee level, job performance is perceived as how effectively and efficiently an individual fulfils his/her responsibilities and achieves the set objectives even more than expected [11]. Again, at the organisational level, the attainment of set organisational objectives determines the level of job performance achieved [10]. In most cases, organisations make use of key performance indicators in defining and measuring progress towards their goals [27]. Key performance indicators may be financial or non-financial in term of the metric used. The success of any organisation is marked by the extent to which set

goals have been achieved.

2.3. The Impact of Mental Health on Employee Job Performance

Mental health conditions have been found to have negative implications for positive functioning at the workplace. Some forms of job performance like structured tasks may under the pressure of time be impaired because of employees suffering any of the mental health conditions. Reskins [28] indicates that mental health is an important aspect that should be considered in the context of employee job performance. Further, Dua [29] asserts that occupational stress affects productivity of the employees and transposes to poor organisation performance. Moreover, workplace adaptation which can be understood to be adapting changes in ideas, responsibilities, expectations, trends, strategies and other processes, and workplace-friendly environment which allow all individual employees (including ones with disabilities) to work productively and safely [30] should always be upheld to alleviate employee mental stress. Some countries like the United Kingdom have embraced workplace adaptation and now a compulsory requirement for all the organisations [31].

Similarly, Wang, et al. [23] note that failure to seek or access adaptations within the workplace may see employees struggle to perform due to mental health conditions suggesting that where employees struggle to cope with stressors, they may perform poorly. Individuals with mental health conditions may bear negative self-image and dysfunctional career expectancies that may exhibit negative performance in their respective roles. The stigma that is attached to mental health conditions has an influence on employees' job performance at the workplace Soeker, et al. [32]. Carolan, et al. [33] concur that conditions like depression and stress have negative effect on employees' job performance at the workplace. Severely depressed and anxious employees may lose their concentration thereby making it difficult for them to perform at the workplace. According to Jackson and Frame [34] severe mental health conditions may result in loss of stamina thereby contributing to the failure to achieve or meet set goals/objectives.

2.4. Promotion of Employee Mental Health for Job Performance

Mental health refers to an individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing how they think, feel, and act. However, good mental health allows individuals to cope with life's stresses, realize their potential, and work productively. World Health Organization [35] describes mental health as a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. Consequently, an employee might be experiencing mental ill-health or have a poor mental health but may not have a clear, diagnosable mental illness [29]. A study by Soeker, et al. [32] reveal that an employee's mental health can change over time, depending on factors such as their workload, stress and work-life balance. Ahmed and Ramza [36] also argue that an employee's mental health comprises of how he/she thinks, feels and act, as well as their emotional and social well-being. Given its prevalence, there should be mechanisms through which the organization's Human Resource check if the employees at their organizations are experiencing mental health challenges or mental illness. It is very crucial to create an organizational culture that support employee's mental health [36]. Employees' mental health may be improved towards job performance by;

2.4.1. Promoting Mental Health in a Workplace

The first step towards the creation of a workplace that is supportive of employees' mental health is by sensitizing the employees and destigmatizing mental health or illness [36]. This can be achieved by providing the resources that will assist employees in learning more about mental health or mental illnesses and provide information on how employees who may be struggling can get help [29]. It is very important that managers should talk about mental health openly so that employees that are struggling will feel comfortable with the phenomenon and be able to reach out to the managers or co-workers. According to Hennekam [37] managers can also establish a workplace environment that supports mental health by promoting social support activities among employees, such as an organized support group that meets regularly, setting up an anonymous portal through which employees can reach out to let HR or managers know that they're struggling with high stress for help, providing training on problem solving, effective communication, conflict resolution and promoting employee assistance programs (EAPs). Further, promotion of mental health can be executed by "identifying the individual, social and structural determinants of mental health, and then intervening to reduce risks, build resilience and establish supportive environments for mental health. Interventions can be designed for individuals, specific groups or whole employees" [35].

2.4.2. Offering of Flexible Scheduling

Offering of work schedules that is flexible and friendly is one of the ways through which employee mental health can be promoted in a workplace. Consequently, Wästberg, et al. [38] assert that work-life balance or a lack thereof, can affect the mental health of an employee. Therefore, to balance the personal and work lives of employees in the hotel industry, employers should embrace flexible workable work scheduling, although it may be difficult in the industry but manageable. Workplace flexibility may include flexible time, telecommuting and unlimited paid-time-off (PTO) policies. Dua [29] alluded to this fact that flexible work schedules promote employees' job satisfaction, increased work-life balance, less stress, and better mental health.

2.4.3. Addressing Workplace Stress

One of the major areas towards the promotion of workplace mental health is in that workplace. Any concerned organization must always address any issue(s) potent enough to cause stress or tension in a work environment thence, it

may lead to employees' mental ill health or stress. Wästberg, et al. [38] acknowledge that chronic stress at workplace contributes to the increase in employee fatigue, irritability, and various health problems. Although workplace stress may not be eliminated completely, it can be managed effectively with the assistance of managers [34]. However, common job stressors include a heavy workload, intense pressure to perform at high levels, job insecurity, long working hours, excessive travel, office politics and conflicts with co-workers. The organization's management should always try to reduce the resultant stress to the barest minimum. According to a study by Jackson and Frame [34] there are various activities that can assist employees in reducing workplace stress while improving on the mental health stress. These activities are "making sure that workloads are appropriate, having managers meet regularly with employees to facilitate communication, immediate address of any negative issue(s) and illegal actions in the workplace. Bullying should not be tolerated, discrimination of any kind must not be accepted and any other ill behaviour that is likely to tension or stress in a workplace and environment. There must be recognition and celebration of employees' successes no matter how little it may be. These aforementioned activities contribute immensely towards boosting of employees' morale, serve as motivators and ultimately decreases the stress levels significantly.

2.4.4. Evaluating Organisations Benefits Offerings

In promoting and fostering mental health in a work environment, an organization is expected to review from time to time the standing organization's benefits offer to the employees. Ensuring that the benefits offer applies to all the employees who are qualified for them, according to the categories, is the ultimate. As Carolan, et al. [33] posit that organizations should in-time review the benefits they offer to the employees with the aim of motivating and ensuring support for their mental well-being. The authors [33] further assert that evaluating standing health care plan/designs is essential towards creating an enabling culture that supports the mental health of the employees. The authors equally enumerated some voluntary benefits which an organization may offer to support the mental well-being of their employees as, "offering simple perks like financial planning assistance (as financial stress is one of the stressors to poor mental health), employee discount programs (where employees can receive gym memberships, stress-reducing massages or acupuncture at a lower cost)" [33] and other EAPs (Employee Assistance Programs) to support the organization's employees. Moreover, according to World Health Organization [35] "Promoting and protecting mental health at a work environment should be supported by legislation and properly regulated, while organizational strategies and interventions must be encouraged for the betterment of employees mental health at workplace".

2.4.5. Provision of Mental Health Training for Managers

World Health Organization recommended that managers' training should be included in organization's strategies and interventions to enhance the management of mental ill health [35]. According to Sharma and Sharma [18] one of the most significant problems hindering mental health support at workplace is the stigmatization associated with the mental ill health. Notwithstanding the current and consistent talks in societies towards destigmatizing of mental health, the issue still prevails. Accordingly, to ensure that there is an absolute control and management of the stigma associated with mental health in the workplace, it becomes extremely crucial that organizations must train their management staff efficiently. This will lead to or ensure effective management of excessive stress, fatigue, workplace bullying and mental illness when the signs are recognised. Additionally, Hennekam [37] alludes that managers should equally be trained on how to manage difficult conversations and speak openly to employees about the state of their mental health. Nonetheless, World Health Organization [35] suggests that "promotion and prevention programmes should involve all the sectors of the economy including the hospitality sector, and that the health sector should contribute significantly by embedding promotion and prevention efforts within health services by advocating, initiating, and where appropriate, facilitate collaboration and coordination for effective mental ill health amelioration. Suicide prevention is a global priority which is included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Much progress can be made if we coordinate adequately and collaborate".

3. Research Methodology

The research method adopted for this study was quantitative method which involves investigating the impact of mental health on employee performance at a Hotel in Johannesburg. The study employed a deductive approach and adopted a positivist research philosophy, allowing for objective and measurable analysis. A descriptive research design and survey strategy were used, because the study was quantitative in nature. Data was collected using random sampling which produced a sample of 50 employees used, online survey questionnaires were shared to the employees selected for the study.

The questionnaire included both demographic and attitudinal items which were measured using 5-point Likert scale, however, pilot study confirmed its clarity and effectiveness prior to main data collection. To ensure reliability and validity, various methods were employed including internal consistency, construct and content validity checks. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS Version 28, excluding inferential methods. Ethical considerations and steps to reduce bias were also considered.

4. Results and Discussion

Out of the 50 questionnaires distributed only 44 employees completed the survey, indicating a response rate of 88% which is considered suitable for data analysis. Findings from the demographic data revealed that majority of the participants were female (41% male and 59% female). With regards to the age of the participants, it was revealed that majority of the employees are above 30 years at 75%, while in terms of duration of service, majority of the employees have

worked at the hotel for over 1-3 years.

The first objective of the study sought to investigate the impact of mental health on employees' job performance, to achieve this objective, 6 questions were asked. The key findings revealed that majority (50%) of the participants were neutral that they experience difficulties relaxing as envisaged by Sato, et al. [39] that psychological detachment from work and relaxation during the weekend puts the employees in a better recovery state after the weekend. Many employees assert that they could not get themselves to be as active in the workplace as they usually do, and majority of the participants disagreed that they have the tendency of overreacting to situations. Mental health conditions have been found to have negative implications on the active functioning of employees. Aultman [40] notes that specifically depressed and anxious employees may lose their concentration thereby making it difficult for them to perform. Soeker, et al. [32] report that some mental health conditions make employees fearful and such fear makes them overreact and defensive which affects their communication in the workplace. Findings also revealed that most employees do take leave from work often as they are not satisfied with their job. This finding is consistent with Anya [41] and Ahmadi, et al. [15] who reported that employees who are depressed or dissatisfied with their jobs were more exposed to physical/mental or absenteeism syndromes.

The second objective of the study seeks to determine the influence of mental health on employees' job performance at the Hotel using 5 statements. The findings from the study revealed that participants are in agreement that stress affects their job performance at work. This is in line with [29] who highlighted that occupational stress has a significant influence on the mental health of employees' job performance and this transposes to poor organisation performance. Counselling was among the coping strategies that was highlighted by Hennekam, et al. [42] that tends to positively affects the performance of employees. Findings reveal that counselling services are provided by the organization which helps the employees to have high self-esteem and exhibit positive attitudes and behaviours towards their jobs.

The third objective of the study seek to make recommendations to the organization on ways through which mental health can be improved to enhance employees' job performance using 5 statements. The findings from the study revealed that majority of the participants are in agreement that mental health should be promoted in the workplace, majority of the participants are in agreement that flexible work schedules should be offered at workplace, majority of the participants are in agreement that workplace stress should be addressed frequently, majority of the participants are in agreement that voluntary benefits should be offered at workplace and lastly, majority of the participants agree that managers should be trained on mental health management.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the study is to investigate the impact of mental health on employees' job performance with specific reference to a Hotel in Johannesburg, South Africa. The findings from this study revealed that employees experience anxiety mood disorder which makes them find themselves in situations where they were anxious, only to be relieved when everything is over. Although counselling services are provided by the organization, employees believes that stress affects their job performance at work. Therefore, it is recommended that employers should consider employees' state of mental health because it affects not only employees' well-being but also organizational productivity by adhering to the recommendation highlighted above.

The study recommends that mental health should be promoted in the workplace. This can be achieved by mental health awareness campaign and mental health support services. It will help employees learn more about their mental health or mental illnesses, know when there is a problem, be aware on how to take care of their mental health and also when and where to seek help. Additionally, considering that there exists fatigue due to work overtime which affects the mental health of employees at the hotel, flexible time work schedules should be encouraged and adopted to provide employees with job satisfaction, better health, increased work-life balance, and less stress.

Furthermore, management should introduce various activities such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness and laughing to help reduce employee stress. Managers can also help to reduce employees' stress by reducing workloads, facilitating effective communication and addressing conflicts with co-workers. Managers should also be provided with training on mental health management. With the training, managers will be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress and depression in employees and encourage them to seek help from qualified mental health professionals, as well as ensuring that no stigma surrounding mental health exists in the organization.

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