

Employee well-being and mental health initiatives: Literature review

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Abstract

Employee well-being encompasses not only physical health but also mental health. Staff working at higher education (HE) institutions are exposed to various forms of work-related stress on account of tight delivery, transition from face-to-face to online classes with limited support, social isolation and others. The main objective of this literature review is to explore the factors impacting the well-being and mental health issues of the employees working in HE institutions. The review recognized that HE institutes in India encounter unique challenges which includes administrative workloads, research pressures and student engagement on account of scarcity of resources. The consistent training programs and leadership support model is needed to address the mental health challenges of HE institutes.

Keywords: Employee well-being, Mental health, HR practices, HE institutes

1. Introduction

In the modern competitive era, many employees are facing mental health issues such as stress, burnout and anxiety. These mental health issues are not only impacting the individual but also overall success of the institutions, leading to lower job satisfaction, productivity and increased rate of turnover. Employee well-being encompasses not only physical health but also mental health. Mental health issues is a pervasive issue for all the workers in any industry. It is no longer limited to high-stress jobs (Rai, Sharma, & Pastor, 2025). Staff working at higher education (HE) institutions are exposed to various forms of work-related stress on account of tight delivery, transition from face-to-face to online classes with limited support, social isolation and others. It has forced several HE institutions to emphasize on the importance of better support system to support the mental health of the employees (Rahman,et.al, 2024).

Recognizing the significance of mental health on well-being of employees, it is essential to emphasize on the human resource (HR) initiatives to advocate the issues of the employees in the HE institutes (Duraku, Holly, Arënliu, Uka, & Behluli, 2024). In this context, the study emphasizes on cost-effective recent solutions such as digital intervention and peer support models to improve the well-being and mental health of the employees working in HE institutions.

1.1 Objective

The study reviews the unique well-being and mental health challenges faced by the employees working in HE institutes and what initiatives are required by HR to overcome the problem. The review suggests HR initiatives needed to improve the mental health problems of employees in HE institution, covering both researched as well as underexplored contexts.

2. Methods

The main objective of this literature review is to explore the factors impacting the well-being and mental health issues of the employees working in HE institutions. The primary rationale behind selecting this method is it facilitates in integration of current state of the knowledge while culminating new perspectives and offer an interpretation of the factors that could enhance the mental health in HE institutions by consolidating different findings into a unified review. Therefore, the narrative analysis is used to provide an insight to identify key themes recognized through systematic literature review.

2.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria have been followed to maintain the focus of narrative view. The review includes English peer reviewed studies and research reports to address the factors impacting mental health and well-being of employees in HE institutes. The study covers the perspective of developing and developed regions of India over the period of 5 years (2021-2025) during which significant developments has occurred in the domain of mental health in HE institutes specifically due to COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Search strategy

The search was conducted across different database such as Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus and Psyc Info was selected on account of its wide range of peer-reviewed studies of employee well-being and mental health initiatives. The search incorporated terms such as “mental health issues in higher education institutions,” “mental health initiatives in higher education institutions” and employee

well-being issues in HE institutes” were used. The search strategy helped in conducting well-defined research in the context of mental health in HE institutions.

3. Literature Review

The review delves into critical aspects of employee well-being and mental health initiatives by HR in HE institutions.

Employee well-being and mental health issues in HE institutes

(Banerjee, 2024) cites that the well-being for university employees is multi-faceted. It reflects that mental health cannot be reduced to individual traits. They are the results of structural conditions such as job security, workload, recognition, organizational climate and cultural expectations. Furthermore, HE institutes encounter unique challenges which includes administrative workloads, research pressures and student engagement. However, Universities in India operate under administrative pressures and research issues on account of which the issues of mental health might erode in real time. For example, an employee might feel undervalued and stressed yet happy because they are working in regions where unemployment level is high.

(Elufioye, et.al, 2024) indicates that the employee well-being is a key element for the success of the institution. Emphasizing on the well-being of the employees is not only of moral importance but also of strategic significance. Well-supported employees are more likely to contribute more towards the goals of the organization, resulting to overall performance of the organization. Employees also seek the workplace that lay emphasizes on the holistic well-being, leading to positive employee brand. Therefore, the workplace that instils a well-being culture are able to navigate the challenges and thrive in dynamic environment. Mental health is a critical element of well-being.

(Rautela, Sharma, & Panackal, 2024) points that mental health refers to the well-being state where an employee identifies the ability to address the normal stresses of work and contribute to the organization. The mental health issues in the workplace have increased in recent years. In the aftermath of pandemic, the mental health problems have compounded because of increases demands of work, job burden and digital interventions in the working environment.

(King, et.al, 2021) insights that the humanistic approach on mental disease evolved in 18th and 19th centuries when people started complaining against living situations of the mentally ill. People in the state of good mental health are able to work to their complete potential. It plays a key role in emotional, social and psychological well-being. The employee well-being, interactions and self-

esteem are adversely impacted by poor mental health. The person can sustain their capacity to enjoy life by looking after their mental health.

Mental health initiatives in HE institutes

(Ohadomere & Ogamba, 2021), points that academic staff in HE institutions undergo increasing levels of workload, lack of management support, poor work life balance and other factors which impact mental well-being. The management led interventions for coping with elevated levels of anxiety and stress for academic staff are important to enhance the quality-of-service delivery. Therefore, stimulating collaborative work, support from top management and reduce workplace stress can help in reducing mental health issues. However, the mental health cannot be tackled in isolation without recognizing its effect on organization structure.

(Elufioye, et.al, 2024) insights that mental health is a key element of employee well-being. In that context, leadership culture sets the entire direction for the entire organization. The well-being should be integrated in the key values. Leaders at top level should be accessible and approachable by provide necessary educational resources, training and workshops. However, one of the critical challenge in implementing mental health initiatives is cultural barriers that restrict the organization from discussing the mental health issues openly. It is essential that well-being initiatives should be inclusive and accommodate the diverse workforce in the institution. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed to promote a healthy living style.

(Mahbob, Bawazir, & Hasim, 2024) asserts that digital technology and workload are critical factors that impact the mental health of the employees in HE institutions. The rapid advancement of digital technologies imposes a significant pressure on employees who lack digital skills. With the increase in workload, employees find it difficult to cope with address job pressures and changes, making it more susceptible of mental health problems such as stress, anxiety and burnout. The institutes should introduce training programs to overcome the resistance to change. Stimulating learning opportunities while helping employees managing workloads will stimulate mental health benefits.

4. Discussion and findings

The mental health refers to the state of mind that are able to work to their complete potential. Well-supported employees are more likely to contribute more towards the goals of the organization, resulting to overall performance of the organization (Elufioye, et.al, 2024). The mental health issues in the workplace have increased in recent years on account of increases in demands of work, job

burden and digital interventions in the working environment (Rautela, Sharma, & Panackal, 2024). HE institutes in India encounter unique challenges which includes administrative workloads, research pressures and student engagement on account of scarcity of resources (Banerjee, 2024). The management led interventions for coping with elevated levels of anxiety and stress for academic staff are important to enhance the quality-of-service delivery. The institutes should introduce training programs to overcome the resistance to change (Ohadomere & Ogamba, 2021). Leaders at top level should be accessible and approachable by provide necessary educational resources, training and workshops. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed to promote a healthy living style (Elufioye, et.al, 2024).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the contemporary HR practices are needed with employee well-being and mental health at the forefront for addressing the mental health employees working in HE institutions. The institutes should integrate mental health initiatives into HR practices where employees should feel valued that the organization mental health is on top priority. The institutes should cultivate a supportive culture it will help in retaining top talent and promote the overall health of the employees. The study emphasized on literature review to identify issues and initiatives needed to address the mental health problems of employees. However, the future research should emphasize on how workload in HE institutes should investigate how employee well-being and mental health can be moderating by HR initiatives using mixed methods approach and more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the research findings.

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