

A call to action!

Revolutionising mental health in the workplace

ABOUT 60 per cent of the world population is currently in work, with 15 per cent of these working-age adults reported to suffer from workplace mental disorders (WHO, 2022). The number is certainly worrying, but many organisations are still not fully aware of the issue, let alone care to resolve or provide solutions to their employees.

Mental health problems may include conditions such as anxiety, depression, and burnout, which affect productivity, work satisfaction, and overall organisational health (WHO, 2022).

Among the main factors causing mental health issues in the workplace are excessive workload, long working hours, lack of control, conflict between individuals, and organisational problems (Fortunisa & Darmawan, 2022).

WHO (2022) has estimated that mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, will cost the global economy USD trillion every year due to loss of productivity.

Given its impact on both employee well-being and organisational performance, it is very timely to revolutionise the approach to mental health in the workplace to create a healthier and more productive environment.

BARRIERS TO DEMAND FOR CARE

Individuals with mental health issues are often stigmatised, discriminated against, and excluded, leading them to remain silent about their health conditions. Misconceptions and negative stereotypes about mental health issues contribute to this stigma.

Many cultures also regard mental health issues as personal failings or supernatural afflictions (WHO & ILO,



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2022). Hence, individuals may hesitate to disclose or seek help for fear of it negatively impacting their career prospects.

Affected employees are often wrongly portrayed as less competent or unreliable. This misrepresentation intensifies their isolation and prevents them from accessing necessary support.

A significant number of people also lack essential knowledge about mental health issues and the benefits of treatment. Some believe mental health issues cannot be managed. This causes them to be less likely to seek psychosocial support, often because they do not recognise the need for proper care.

Employees frequently do not realise they have a mental health issue until their condition worsens. Unclear workplace policies on mental health further contribute to this barrier, as employees may not know how to access help (WHO & ILO, 2022).

Mental health care and services are also insufficient, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Many organisations do not provide adequate mental health resources, such as stress management workshops or counselling services.

Even when services are available, issues such as low-quality care and confidentiality concerns further inhibit their use (WHO & ILO, 2022), leaving many without the assistance they need.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTIVE REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGIES?

Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive and revolutionary approach to mental health in the workplace. Abu Huraira narrated that Prophet Muhammad s.a.w said:

‘There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment’. Sahih al-Bukhari 5678 (Book 76, Hadith 1)

This hadith emphasises the Islamic

imperative to seek treatment, including those related to mental well-being. Ensuring mental health and well-being in the contemporary workplace is critical to organisational productivity and employee satisfaction.

According to the WHO (2022), practical strategies for revolutionising mental health in the workplace require a comprehensive approach that includes prevention, protection, promotion, and support.

These strategies are paramount for fostering a workplace culture that prioritises mental health, eliminates risks, and supports all employees in reaching their full potential.

REVOLUTIONISING MENTAL HEALTH

Revolutionising mental health in the workplace is about creating opportunities for employee development rather than simply addressing existing problems.

Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this effort not only enhances individual well-being but also has significant social and economic impacts. Improved mental health offers far-reaching benefits that transform the workplace environment.

Effective strategies can alleviate mental health symptoms, thereby enhancing employees’ quality of life and reducing overall suffering. Good mental health is crucial for maintaining physical health, as the two are closely interconnected.

Ensuring equitable access to mental health services for all employees, regardless of their socioeconomic background, promotes inclusivity and fosters a supportive work environment (WHO & ILO, 2022).

HUMAN RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Good mental health is a fundamental

STRATEGIES TO REVOLUTIONISE MENTAL HEALTH AT THE WORKPLACE

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driver of social equality and inclusion. Employees who prioritise their mental well-being are better equipped to engage in productive work, contribute positively to their communities, and lead fulfilling lives.

Safe and healthy working environments are a fundamental right and are essential for enhancing job performance, increasing employee retention, and reducing workplace conflict. This focus on mental health also supports economic development (WHO & ILO, 2022), as mentally healthy individuals are more productive and satisfied with their jobs.

By addressing mental health challenges, societies can alleviate the economic burden associated with these conditions and promote overall economic growth and stability.

TIME FOR TRANSFORMATION

Mental health refers to emotional, psychological and social well-being. It influences how we think, feel and behave. At the workplace, employee's mental health and well-being play a vital role in their overall job performance, productivity and satisfaction (Fortunisa & Darmawan, 2022).

A healthier mind leads to a more vibrant and productive workplace. Realising the impacts and benefits, the revolution of mental health in the workplace needs to be accelerated to ensure that all employees can thrive in a supportive and mentally healthy environment.

This urge to action is also profoundly embedded in the Quran and Hadith, which highlight the importance of good mental health, compassion, empathy, and caring for one another. It is time, indeed, to transform the way we think about mental health at work and put it into action! - The

HEALTH

Strategies

1 PREVENT WORK-RELATED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- **Legal and policy frameworks:** Governments should collaborate with organisations to include provisions on mental health at work. An organisation may develop new or review and revise existing employment and Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) policies (WHO, 2022). This initiative aims to ensure that the definition of occupational health always covers both physical and mental health.
- **Training and awareness:** Provide education training for managers and workers to enhance mental health literacy, identify early indicators, and take appropriate action (WHO, 2022). This encourages employees to identify psychosocial hazards and get advice on any action they take when they have mental health issues.
- **Psychosocial risk management:** Potential psychosocial risks at work include stress, violence, bullying, harassment, discrimination, and job insecurity. These can be managed by preventing psychosocial risk factors at work through organisational interventions (WHO, 2022). Examples include safe staffing levels, achievable deadlines and targets, and flexible working arrangements. This intervention may assist in reducing emotional distress while increasing employee productivity, performance, and job satisfaction.

2 PROTECT AND PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- **Manager training:** Provide training for managers to recognise and respond to emotional distress appropriately (WHO, 2022). Encourage them to foster a supportive work culture and advocate for mental health measures. This training should improve managers' interpersonal skills and their ability to prevent discrimination in the workplace.
- **Employee training:** Provide training for employees in mental health literacy and awareness to improve their perception of mental health. This can foster a culture of seeking help and giving help, especially among colleagues, and combat stigma (WHO, 2022). Employees should be exposed to their rights and the mental health policy provided at work. Individuals who have been through mental health issues might be very effective, as they can share their experiences and tips to overcome them.
- **Individual interventions:** Provide activities and resources that may assist employees in developing personal stress-management skills (WHO, 2022). It can be stress management workshops, mindfulness training, halalan toyyiban living workshops and access to counselling services. This helps them reduce the symptoms of mental health conditions as well as improve their mental health.

3 SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- **Reasonable accommodations:** Reshaping working environments that are tailored to employees' needs. In practice, these are parts of organisational intervention, but they are used to address the barriers that employees encounter rather than the entire organisation (WHO, 2022). Examples include private areas for relaxation or medication and job redesign to reduce interaction with clients when employees find it too stressful.
- **Return-to-work programmes:** Combining work-directed care with clinical care to assist employees in returning to and maintaining employment after a mental health-related absence (WHO, 2022). It aims to ensure their safety is maintained and help them overcome their disability and pain.
- **Supported employment initiatives:** Improving vocational and economic inclusion for affected individuals by implementing immediate paid work and ongoing assistance support from health, social, and employment services (WHO, 2022). It is an approach that 'places and trains' them straight into employment rather than 'train and place' (Medical Development Division, Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2022).