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TITLE

Impact of Covid-19 on psychological well-being of employees in the Zimbabwean travel industry

ABSTRACT

Covid -19 has undoubtedly shaped culture and human behaviour. This study was devoted at understanding the nexus between Covid -19 and the psychological well-being of employees in the Zimbabwean travel sector industry. Psychological well-being of employees is fundamental as it determines employee and organizational purpose. The study used the Psychological General Well Being Index's six sub-domains of depression, anxiety, vitality, positive well-being, general health and self-control. Hypotheses were developed that were centred on correlating these six variables to existence of Covid -19. The investigation utilized quantitative methodologies and was inferential in nature. Kobo collect application was used to collect data from 278 respondents from the Zimbabwean Travel Industry. The study found that Covid -19 increased depression, anxiety, and reduced vitality, general health, positive well-being and self-control. The investigation recommends organizations to offer counselling services to all employees before they return to work. This will prepare them mentally, and become productive.

Key words: *Covid -19, psychological well-being, employees, travel industry*

INTRODUCTION

Employee well-being has been largely being viewed as an important ingredient in the achievement of organisational's goals. Pesce & Sanna (2020) understands employee well-being as the state of emotional, mental and physical well-being of employees. Employee motivation, productivity and efficiency are largely depended on employee well-being (Chen *et al.*, 2022). In broader sense, organisational survival and success, and achievement of a sustained competitive advantage is possible if employee well-being is good. According to Conor (2022) employee well-being is a product of occurrences in and outside the organisation. External factors are considered to be the biggest contributors to employee well-being (Pesce & Sanna, 2020). The effects of Covid-19 pandemic have been devastating as people lost relatives and friends from the pandemic (Chen *et al.*, 2022). Covid -19 is a highly infectious disease caused by the recently discovered coronavirus (Brooks *et al.*, 2020). Literature has been limited on the effects of Covid-19 on employee well-being in Zimbabwe (Pesce & Sanna, 2020). Given the importance of employee well-being in the success of the organisation, it was essential that a study on the nexus between Covid-19 pandemic and employee well-being be carried out.

In the US, Davidson & Peterson (2020) established that Covid-19 restrictions have resulted in depression amongst employees. Brooks *et al.* (2020) report that Covid-19 induced social distancing led to loneliness and loss of social connections, and this resulted in decline of mental and physical health. Conor (2022) states that in extreme situations employees were susceptible to addiction to alcohol and drugs, as a way to deal with trauma that was induced by Covid-19. Bakker & Demeroul (2020) notes that many employees in the US have suffered from stress and burnout post Covid-19 pandemic. Pesce & Sanna, 2020 believes that the negative impact of Covid-19 pandemic on employee well-being is problematic, as it can result in decline of organisational performance. OECD (2021) recommends similar studies to be carried out in developing nations, as effects of Covid-19 on employee well-being may differ from one country to another.

In Ireland, Chen *et al.* (2022) reports that Covid-19 has resulted in constant fear, fatigue, stress, grief, internal conflict, worry, isolation, loneliness, paric behaviours and frustration, among employees. Bailey *et al.* (2020) found that 31% of people in Europe gained weight, 22% consumed alcohol and 3% started smoking during Covid pandemic. This is also a breeding room for future physical health related problems. OECD (2021) reports that 1 in 5 people in Europe felt lonely, 1 in 4 were at risk for depression or anxiety and 1 in 3 felt cut off from the

society during Covid-19 pandemic. Pesce & Sanna, 2020 asserts that employee well-being has been on a downward trajectory, and this has hindered productivity at the workplace. Conor (2022) argues that there is need for more and more studies if the world is serious about solving these issues. It is against this background that this investigation was carried out.

In Asia, 1.9 billion people are employed and occupational psychological well-being is a critical issue (Young & Johnson, 2022). Covid -19 pandemic was first reported in Asia, China to be specific. According to Lee & Dewhurst (2022) workers in Asia were hit hard by stress and burnout during Covid -19 pandemic as compared to other nations. 28% suffered from burnout, 41% have depression symptoms, 40% have anxiety symptoms and 38% suffer from distress (Lee & Dewhurst, 2022). In Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular there has been limited studies on employee well-being in the aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, this study serves as one of the limited studies in this area.

HYPOTHESES

H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between Covid-19 pandemic and employee well-being;

H2: There is a positive and significant relationship between Covid-19 pandemic and depression;

H3: There is a positive and significant relationship between Covid-19 pandemic and vitality;

H4: There is a positive and significant relationship between Covid-19 pandemic and anxiety;

H5: There is a positive and significant relationship between Covid-19 pandemic and general health; and

H6: There is a positive and significant relationship between Covid-19 pandemic and self-control.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly impacted every country and everyone. Organisational performance is largely dependent on employee performance, and the latter is possible if employees are in a right state of mind. Given that these employees went through traumatic experiences as they lost relatives and friends, it is significant to carry out an investigation on

their well-being. If their well-being is not checked, organisations in the Zimbabwean travel industry will be ineffective as their labour will not be in the right state of mind.

COVID -19 PANDEMIC

Covid -19 pandemic has redefined interactions between people, in the social spheres and undoubtedly in the business circles. World Health Organization (2020) defines Covid -19 as a highly infectious disease caused by the recently discovered coronavirus and can be spread through coming into contact, with a cough or sneeze of a person infected. This definition implies that the disease is extreme and spread quickly from one person to another, and implicitly views organizational physical locations as breeding grounds. Moreover, Jha & Kumar (2021) postulate that Covid -19 pandemic is a mild to severe illness that is caused by the coronavirus from one person to another. This definition if taken can cause employers to be reluctant in putting up measures to halt the spread of Covid -19, as it includes the aspect of „mildness“ which can make people to take the infection for granted or be in denial. Therefore, Covid -19 is described as an extremely contagious disease caused by the novel coronavirus, and it is spread by coming into contact with a person or his or her sneeze or cough. The first Covid - 19 case was reported on the 17th of November 2019 in Wuhan China. In Zimbabwe, the first case of the disease was reported on 20 March 2020. Since the virus is contagious there was a need to institute social decongestion in eliminating the spread of the novel coronavirus. Vaccination has been one way for preventing more deaths that have been caused by Covid -19 pandemic.

PSYCHOLOGICAL GENERAL WELL-BEING INDEX

Employee well-being is the state of mental, physical and emotional health of an employee that can influence the productivity of employees (OECD, 2021). Employee well-being can be measured by the Psychological General Well-being Index. This has six indicators and these are depression, anxiety, positive well-being, vitality, general health and self-control. Depression refers to a mental health illness that is characterised by a low mood, sadness and lack of interest in activities (Chen *et al*, 2022). Anxiety is a feeling of unease characterised by fear and too much worry (Pesce & Sanna, 2020). Positive well-being is a state of feeling good and functioning very well (Pesce & Sanna, 2020). Vitality is the state of being lively, strong, energetic and vibrant (Chen *et al*, 2022). General health is the extent to which one's body is free from illness, and the extent it is able to resist diseases (Pesce & Sanna, 2020). Self-control is the ability to control one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour (Chen *et al*, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was purely quantitative in nature as it seeks to understand the relationship between Covid-19 pandemic and employee psychological well-being. Positivism research philosophy was adopted as this study was scientific. The research was deductive in nature as the Psychological General Well-being Index from literature was used to test the relationship between Covid-19 pandemic and employee psychological well-being. A multiple case study was employed by using three companies in the Zimbabwean Travel industry. The investigation was quantitative in nature as it covered a wide range of respondents. A sample size of 278 was established as calculator.net. The study used simple random sampling on selecting the study respondents. Ethics were not an issue as respondents were alerted that they were autonomous agents who could withdraw from the study anytime. Kobo collect was used to collect data from respondents, and SPSS version 24.0 was used to analyse and present data. Correlation was not an issue as all indicators scored above 0.7 the standard score for internal validity using Cronbach test. The study was found valid as the investigator performed discriminatory validity as shown in Table 1. All variables scored below 0.8 showing that there was no overlap amongst the variables.

Table 1: Correlational Matrix

| Construct | Covid-19 | PWB | A | D | NV | GH | SC |
|------------------|-----------------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Covid-19 | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| PWB | .625 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| A | .075 | .235 | 1.00 | | | | |
| D | .238 | .396 | .661 | 1.00 | | | |
| NV | .553 | .236 | .631 | .084 | 1.00 | | |
| GH | .431 | .355 | .227 | .163 | .247 | 1.00 | |
| SC | .539 | .243 | .334 | .751 | .342 | .652 | 1.00 |

PWB: positive well-being, A: anxiety, D: depression, NV: negative vitality, GH: general health, SC: self-control.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

56% of respondents were men and 44% of respondents were women, hence this study was inclusive of both genders, and this is important as employee well-being may be different from one gender to another. 32% of the study respondents indicated that they have negative employee well-being due to Covid -19 pandemic, this finding concurs to Chen *et al.* (2022) in Asia, and Davidsen & Petersen (2021) in Europe meaning that effects of Covid -19 in terms of employee well-being are uniform worldwide. Table 2 shows a multi-linear regression between Covid-19 and indicators of employee well-being.

Table 2: Multiple linear regression on the relationship between Covid-19 pandemic and Psychological General Well-Being Index

| Variable | B | T | p-Value |
|---------------------|------|--------|---------|
| Positive Well-Being | .332 | 6.185 | .071 |
| Anxiety | .180 | 4.958 | .030 |
| Depression | .580 | 6.866 | .022 |
| Negative Vitality | .596 | 16.928 | .010 |
| Self-control | .942 | 28.608 | .088 |
| General Health | .345 | 30.435 | .063 |

$R^2 = 0.682$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.678$, F-value = 161.886(0.000)

R square of the study was 0.678 indicated that Covid-19 pandemic explains 67.8% of employee well-being. H1, H5 and H6 were not supported by the findings. Therefore there is no positive relationship between Covid-19 and employee well-being. The study showed that Covid -19 pandemic resulted in negative well-being, and this corroborates to Brooks *et al* (2020) findings. The investigation also found that Covid -19 pandemic leads to decline in general health, as people are stressed by Covid-19 they lose or gain weight and are susceptible to illness. In addition, Covid-19 was found to decrease self-control amongst employees. Due to traumatic experiences employees are no longer able to control their emotions and behaviour.

H2, H3 and H4 was supported by the results from the survey. Covid-19 was found to have a positive relationship with anxiety, depression and negative vitality. In other words, Covid-19 pandemic led to increase in anxiety, depression and negative vitality amongst employees. These findings concur with existing literature and there is need for global interventions.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore this study found that 30% of employees in the Zimbabwean Travel Industry. Covid-19 was found to have increased anxiety, depression and negative vitality, and have reduced general health, self-control and positive well-being amongst employees. Therefore, the study gives the following recommendations:

1. Organisations to formulate and implement health policies at work;
2. Organisations, NGOs and Government to spearhead health awareness campaigns;
3. Government to rollout policies and resources to improve well-being of citizens;
4. Capacitation of hospitals with human resources and medication to deal with depression and anxiety sicknesses; and
5. Medical Aids to cover mental illnesses.

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