

CHAPTER: 13

EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN THE WORKPLACE: AN HR PERSPECTIVE

Dr. ARADHANA CHADHA

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Commerce
Swami Shraddhanand College, University of Delhi

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ABSTRACT

Employee mental health and well-being have become central to human resource (HR) strategies due to rising workplace stress, rapid digitalization, and post-pandemic challenges. This paper synthesizes global frameworks, systematic reviews, and organizational case studies to highlight how HR policies and workplace culture can support mental health, reduce stigma, and foster sustainable productivity.

The findings emphasize the role of multi-level HR interventions, leadership engagement, and sector-specific strategies in shaping healthier workplaces.

Keywords: HR, Employee Mental Health, Workplace.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is now considered a crucial determinant of organizational performance. The World Health Organization estimates that depression and anxiety alone cost the global economy nearly US\$1 trillion annually in lost productivity. In India, studies reveal that chronic illnesses and burnout occur nearly a decade earlier than in developed countries, with 20% of employees considering leaving jobs due to mental health concerns. For HR professionals, the challenge is to address both the human and economic burden by embedding mental health strategies into policy, leadership, and everyday practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing body of research emphasizes the need for workplace-based interventions. Coppens et al. (2023) highlight that SMEs often lack resources, awareness, and leadership knowledge to implement structured programs. Wu et al. (2021) identified eight best practice categories, from

organizational culture to leadership support, as essential for mental health. Bhoir & Sinha (2024) consolidate employee well-being HR practices into bundles, positioning HR as a core driver of employee psychological well-being. Together, these works underline the convergence of organizational culture, HR bundles, and policy frameworks as critical determinants of success.

3. GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS FOR WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

The U.S. Surgeon General’s Framework for Mental Health and Well-Being (2022) introduces five essentials: Protection from Harm, Connection and Community, Work-Life Harmony, Mattering at Work, and Opportunity for Growth. Similarly, WHO’s Healthy Workplace Model advocates for a multi-dimensional approach, focusing on psychosocial, physical, and organizational interventions. These frameworks provide guiding principles but require contextual adaptation across industries and geographies.

4. HR BEST PRACTICES

Wu et al. (2021) identify categories such as comprehensive health benefits, supportive workplace policies, healthy environments, leadership commitment, and outcomes measurement.

Case examples include British Airways’ reverse mentoring program, improving cultural awareness and inclusion. Companies recognized under Mental Health America’s “Bell Seal” integrate mental health into core business strategy. These demonstrate the tangible outcomes of structured HR engagement.

5. HR BUNDLES FOR WELL-BEING

Bhoir & Sinha’s (2024) systematic review suggests that HR bundles combining autonomy, flexible work, supervisor support, employment security, and anti-harassment policies are more effective than isolated initiatives. Such bundles also align with the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model, balancing workload with resources and support.

Table 1: Comparison of Workplace Mental Health Frameworks

Framework	Key Elements	Relevance to HR
U.S. Surgeon General (2022)	Protection, Community, Work-Life Harmony, Purpose, Growth	Provides guiding principlesfor HR policy and culture
WHO Healthy Workplace	Physical, Psychosocial, Organizational, Community Involvement	Global standards adaptableby HR managers

Mattingly Award Criteria	Culture, Benefits, Leadership, Innovation, Outcomes Measurement	Benchmarks for best practicerecognition
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6. SECTOR-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

6.1 Healthcare

High emotional strain, long hours, and exposure to suffering patients result in burnout. COVID-19 amplified these pressures. HR can respond with resilience training, counseling, and staffing reforms.

6.2 Construction

Frequent job insecurity and short-term contracts increase stress. Suicide rates in construction workers are significantly higher than the general population. HR strategies should prioritize safety culture, job security, and anti-bullying policies.

6.3 Information Technology (ICT)

Digital overload, constant connectivity, and work-life imbalance are major issues. Policies around digital detox, remote work balance, and flexible scheduling are critical.

7. EMERGING ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital platforms are reshaping workplace mental health. Predictive analytics can flag burnout risks, while chatbots provide confidential first-line support. VR/AR tools are being used for stress management. However, issues of privacy and depersonalization remain.

8. BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Despite progress, barriers persist. Managers often lack training, and employees fear stigma or discrimination. SMEs cite resource constraints and time pressures. Evidence suggests that ROI-focused messaging (e.g., showing reduced absenteeism) and peer testimonials are persuasive.

9. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RESEARCH GAPS

Future research must evaluate the ROI of integrated HR bundles, explore AI-driven personalized interventions, and investigate links between employee well-being and ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) reporting. Longitudinal studies can shed light on long-term effects of HR-led interventions, especially in non-Western contexts.

10. CONCLUSION

Employee mental health and well-being are inseparable from organizational performance. For HR, the challenge is not only policy design but also culture change. By adopting multi-level frameworks, implementing bundled HR practices, leveraging technology responsibly, and tailoring interventions sector-wise, organizations can create environments where employees thrive.

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