

**THE STIGMATIZATION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS
PROGRAMS IN THE CORPORATE WORLD**

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By

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee,
and approved by all its members, this project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of Arts in Corporate Communication.

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Research Justification

This research will help the corporation with more resources dealing with mental illness at the workplace. When people talk openly about their mental illness, it limits their opportunities. People don't want to be stigmatized as mentally ill, so they avoid and hence don't want to be labeled. This study can benefit society by providing more information on the framework of stigmatization with mental illness. This will also help organizations to know their employees better and earn that trustworthiness through this process.

Abstract: This research paper will discuss the importance of mental health and work-related stress, increasing in today's adult population. Employees are more vocal about their challenges with depression, PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), and anxiety. Many big corporations like Google and LinkedIn have supported mental health causes in their organizations and discussed coping methods on different platforms. Even though this kind of help breaks down the stigma around this issue, unfortunately, it is not enough to make employees in the corporate world feel safe to talk about mental health at work. Also, mental health stigma makes the environment hostile for those who speak out. One of the common problems many employees cope with is an anxiety-centered disorder that has become more widespread during the pandemic. The requirement of social distancing has been implemented worldwide and has increased the prominence of these kinds of mental health conditions. Even though social distancing saves lives, it also increases social anxiety because of people not being able to socialize. Thus, this research aims to discuss and analyze the stigmatization framework around mental illness in the corporate world. This study has two objectives: focus on the context of stigmatization of mental health, where this study will explain the underlying perceptions and second, the implications of mental health conditions in the workplace and the HR's role in portraying the wellness program practices in the company. I have conducted single-method quantitative analysis for the empirical research and collected my data with a survey questionnaire. This research project analyzes various themes and adds more knowledge to the existing literature. Some of the findings emphasize the significance of organizational culture and management support to better approach mental health issues and wellness programs in the workplace. Moreover, the research shed light on entry-level employees in the concealing of mental health issues due to a lack of open-door opportunities. Upper management needs more training to understand and recognize the early stages of mental health issues in the workplace. My research findings also provide implications for corporations to create and manage employees' mental health issues and different wellness programs.

Key words: Mental Health, Wellness Program, Stigmatization, and HR Policies

1. Introduction

Mental health issues and wellness programs have received attention in the corporate world in the past few years. Employees have decided to be more outspoken about their problems, and slowly corporations are trying to help. "According to data supplied by the American Psychiatric Association, employees with unresolved depression experience a 35% reduction in productivity, contributing to a loss to the U.S. economy of \$210.5 billion a year in absenteeism, reduced productivity, and medical costs" (McLean Hospital , 2020, p. 12). So, what does Absenteeism actually mean? "Absenteeism is an employee's intentional or habitual absence from work. While employers expect workers to miss a certain number of workdays each year, excessive absences can equate to decreased productivity and can have a major effect on company strategies, finances, morale and other factors" (Cucchiella et al., 2014 p. 1). Despite the awareness of mental health issues and creating more wellness programs, talking about mental health issues in the corporate world is still heavily stigmatized. Even in the most advanced work environments, employees are afraid to be outspoken because they don't want to jeopardize their job (Mordecai, MD, 2019). Along with the stigmatization, the pandemic has also impacted employees' mental health issues. "About 46% of the more than 1,400 workers surveyed at the end of last year reported struggling with mental health issues, compared to 39% a year earlier. And more than half of workers — 55% — said a mental health issue has affected them more since the pandemic began" (Epperson, 2021, p. 8).

Understanding and recognizing mental health issues is one of the most critical issues in today's corporate world. In addition to speaking up about mental health issues, we also need to know about the physical and psychological effects of mental health in the workplace. So, wellness policies should be there and situations like hostile environments, employee retention

etc. can be analyzed when these kinds of problems arise. Mental health is a complex topic, and a lot has changed over time regarding this issue. That is why it is important to know the basics and understand the effects and symptoms. When mental health issues arise, people instantly think about stress, but stress itself is not the sole reason of mental health conditions. Various reasons can cause one's mental health condition to deteriorate in the workplace. Some of them are toxic work environments, balancing personal and professional life, and one of the most important is overwork. During the pandemic, employees worked over time with fewer resources, and it was an all hands-on deck situation. (Higgins, 2020, Line 1). Although this thesis focuses on the stigmatization of mental health issues and the wellness programs in the corporate world, everyone needs to know and get trained on the basics of mental health issues in the corporate world.

Mental health issues affect not only the employees but also the employers. Every corporation's response to mental health issues and wellness programs is essential because the issue impacts the culture, recruitment, and retention. Investors think about these perspectives, too, because it improves a team's productivity and efficiency. "The World Health Organization found that every dollar put into treatment produces a four-dollar improvement in health and productivity for employees and businesses" (Sustainable Investing team, 2021). According to Forbes, a recent study done by American Heart Association, companies lose approximately \$17,241 per year in incremental healthcare and productivity costs for employee illness issues. Based on a report on Unum (a Tennessee-based fortune 500 company) mental health issues can impact job performance by leading to lack of focus, less productivity, and a hostile environment. Most employees do not talk about it because they are concerned about discrimination and not receiving the desired promotion or incentive (Vasilev, 2020).

When mental health issues come up, we all know stress is one of the biggest causes that impact personal and professional life. But along with stress, depression and anxiety are some of the most common causes (Schott, 1999). All these causes of mental health create a financial burden on employers. When employees suffer from mental health issues, they tend to hide them, creating absenteeism. Organizations tend to see more absenteeism than presenteeism. “Presenteeism is a concept used to designate the phenomenon of people, despite complaints and ill health that should prompt rest and absence from work, still turning up at their jobs” (Dew et al, 2005, p. 2273). This kind of situation describes that employees still come to work despite having mental health issues. Presenteeism makes the environment hostile for both the employer and employees, hindering work performance. These are some issues that organizations can no longer ignore because it affects them financially too.

Therefore, it is safe to say that employees will continue to conceal their mental health issues without proper guidance and better awareness. The stigma prevents employees from sharing their mental issues in the workplace. This labels people differently, which hinders their progress in the workplace and their personal lives. Like all other problems in the workplace, like interpersonal conflict, communication, and leadership, the stigmatization and the concealment of mental health issues is a massive barrier in the corporate world.

1.1 Research Objective

This thesis project focuses on employees' mental health issues in their daily lives in the corporate world and how they cope with their stress and depression. Employees tend to conceal their mental health issues in fear of losing job security. And that's why wellness policies are required in every organization. Furthermore, a lack of awareness of mental health stigma affects the organizational culture and creates a toxic workplace. This research aims to understand and

recognize the employees' experience and their thought processes toward mental health and wellness programs. As a result, there will be important lessons about creating awareness that could be helpful for everyone.

The stigmatization framework around mental illness in the corporate world is ignored by society and organizations. However, mental health and well-being have become an interesting topic in the corporate world since the issue has been affecting employees for a long time. Since the pandemic started, mental health and wellness programs have become recognized, but it still is not enough to allow some employees to openly talk about their conditions. Two national surveys were conducted by McKinsey's Center for Societal Benefit through Healthcare at the end of year 2020. The results "indicate there is continued opportunity for employers to support workforce mental health by taking five actions: make mental wellness a priority, enhance available mental health support, communicate available mental health support, create an inclusive work culture, and measure and meet the need" (McKinsey , 2022 p. 10). Stress and anxiety are among the fundamental causes of mental health in the workplace, and employees face more challenges such as mental health stigma, not having proper resources, and losing job security. In this research, I would like to focus on employers' and employees' understanding of mental health and how a wellness program can be fostered and endorsed. I have spoken about the role of HR in my paper to show the good side of an organization when good initiatives are taken for employees. I will end my paper by offering in-depth information about the struggles of employees and employers, through answering my research questions, and fostering new initiatives on these issues in order to help corporations.

2. A Review of The Literature

The following literature review will overview mental health and the wellness programs and discuss the importance of having mental health support in the workplace. Mental health will be described in the context of stigmatization, and the underlying perception and implications towards mental health conditions will be explained. Along with that, the impact of the pandemic and mental health problems of the employees as well as the effect of labor and job stress will be discussed. The last section will discuss practices that focus on the well-being of the employees and the HR's role in portraying the wellness program practices in the company.

2.1 Mental Health in the Workplace

Employees who suffer from various mental health conditions face significant challenges in the workplace. Boardman (2011) describes that people that have mental illness are overlooked by mainstream society. And when society talks about mental health, all challenges are described the same way. In reality, every person has their own challenges to overcome in terms of mental health conditions in the workplace pre and during the pandemic (Boardman, 2011). In 2020, 5.6% (14.2 million) of U.S. adults experienced serious mental illness in the workplace. About 1 in 20 adults experience mental illness (Health, 2021). A lot of employees have chronic mental health conditions that bring a significant financial burden on them. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than one-third of the population are affected by the pay difference in their annual salary because of their mental health conditions (Sickel et al., 2014). Society always puts an underlying stigma on people that have mental health conditions. Hence, people with mental health issues suffer from lower employment and lower income compared to other medical conditions (Baldwin & Marcus, 2006).

Along with all these issues, higher unemployment rates in turn create depression and low productivity in those people. They are also at an increased risk of presenteeism; “the problem of workers’ being on the job but, because of illness or other medical conditions, not fully functioning—can cut individual productivity by one-third or more. In fact, presenteeism appears to be a much costlier problem than its productivity-reducing counterpart, absenteeism” (Hemp, 2014, p.17), which can negatively impact the organization in many aspects. Mental health in the workplace has been a topic that organizations didn’t put much thought into but the pandemic has brought to light the fragile mental health of the employees. During the pandemic, people have suffered from various mental health problems that have affected their professional and personal life, and that’s why people have been quitting their job during this time. Overall, it appears that the pandemic has brought attention to this issue of organizations losing their talent because they are unable to help their employees with proper resources. When spoken about, organizations mainly think about treating their employees with pre-existing mental health conditions, but they also need to pay attention to the workload, workplace environment, and interaction between employees.

2.2 Organizational Culture of Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

The pandemic has brought to light the fragile mental health of people, and one of the main reasons is that the majority of our adult population spends at least one-third of their time working. During the pandemic, organizations realized how important it is to take a humanistic approach to address that issue. If this issue is ignored for longer, well-being in the company will suffer. Employers play an essential role in shaping a significant stake for the employee's physical and mental health. Work culture and work environment is an effective tool to encourage healthy habits. Creating better wellness offerings like exercise classes, walking clubs, and step

competition creates more positive experience and also more participation. One participant stated, “Knowing other people are doing it too and seeing familiar faces and seeing other people participate is just even a little bit more motivating. And it almost helps you make an excuse to do it. The existence of a program was felt to provide some permission to participate” (Seward et al., 2019, Line 150). Economical and straightforward initiatives such as creating peer support networks with co-workers and starting the topic of a healthy work environment can improve mental health awareness in the workplace. “Pandemic has deeply altered social and working environments in several ways. Social distancing policies, mandatory lockdowns, isolation periods, and anxiety of getting sick, along with the suspension of productive activity, loss of income, and fear of the future, jointly influence the mental health of citizens and workers” (Giorgi et al., 2020, Line 1). An organization needs to build a workplace culture that supports and values mental health, and it doesn’t even need to be expensive. For example: creating a positive affirmation workplace that supports mental health can significantly improve the organizational culture and employees' health.

Emotional burnout is one of the most critical aspects that people had to go through during this pandemic. “Burnout is characterized by high levels of emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and reduced personal accomplishment (PA). In nursing research, EE is often used as the most important indicator of burnout” (Havaei et al., 2021, Line 16). During this pandemic, people suffer from mental and economic problems that are hard to address sometimes. The voice of senior management is powerful and influential, and it can make an impact on entry-level employees. Senior management should look for ways to make it safe to discuss any sort of mental health issue rather than destigmatizing it, creating a healthy atmosphere where CEOs and managers talk about mental health and spread awareness. For

example a simple question like “Are you done with your project report?” can be phrased differently and kindly, “How are you doing? If you are having trouble completing your tasks, is there any way we can support you? These small gestures can create better relationships between an employer and an employee. A leader should have an open-door policy because it creates good relationships between them. When a leader shares their thoughts or even simple confirmations like “I had a hard day” it can go a long way in normalizing conversations about being emotionally drained.

2.3 The Stigma around mental health conditions

As I researched more and read more peer-reviewed articles on mental health in the corporate world, one thing that stood out to me was the importance of revolving stigmatization around this topic. According to Percesepe and Cabassa (2013), public stigma is a barrier limiting an individual from engaging in proper health care and wellness programs. The negative attitude initiates individuals to fear, reject, and avoid help with mental health conditions (Parcesepe & Cabassa, 2013). In the corporate world, there is stigma around mental illness because people are ignorant and misinformed about this issue, which creates discrimination against those individuals with mental health issues.

Stigma refers to when we or the society labels an individual, and that’s something that creates more challenges for an individual. People with mental health conditions face twice as many challenges as people with other physical illnesses. First of all, they struggle with the symptoms and disabilities and are also challenged by stereotypes and misconceptions about their mental health conditions (Corrigan & Watson, 2002).

Another perspective of the stigmatization framework on mental illness is depression and job security in the corporate world. When people talk openly about their mental illness, it limits

their opportunities. People don't want to be stigmatized as mentally ill, which is why they avoid speaking about hence do not want to be labeled. And their act prevents them from seeking help which is one of the vital roles of mental health problems. To be mentally ill makes an individual a target for discrimination at work and in their personal life. The stigmatization also leads oneself to self-doubt. People with mental health conditions take the negative assumptions and take it to another level which creates depression and anxiety for them (Corrigan, 2007). A study was carried out during COVID-19 to understand how one can cope with stress and personal traits, including emotional intelligence. (Prentice et al., 2020). Coping strategies in this study were categorized into task, emotion and avoidance-oriented coping. The results showed that emotional intelligence significantly related to all coping strategies, whereas only certain personality factors make unique variances. When both emotional intelligence and personality were in the same equation, with the latter being controlled, the former showed incremental variance and the influence of personality factors was reduced. The mental health stigma creates a barrier which is one of the reasons people seek personal help in the corporate world.

2.4 Disclosing mental health conditions

The stigma around mental illness stops people from discussing their problems, especially regarding job security. In terms of employment, people usually avoid talking about their mental health conditions openly to their employer. They know it would create more obstacles for them to actually have a job. "Decisions to disclose mental health conditions, even by those who had done so, appear driven entirely by consideration of negative aspects. This suggests that anti-discrimination policy, legislation, awareness campaigns, and manager training have yet to change negative perceptions, and that any decision aid tool needs to incorporate counterfactual positive aspects that appear not to be an important consideration" (Stratton et al., 2018, Line 18).

When employees disclose their mental health issues, they barely get any support from their employers. Not only that, “According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2018, 19.1 percent of disabled people were employed. The type of jobs people with disabilities hold will vary depending on their capabilities. Many disabled people work part-time or seasonal work with no benefits. But others work full-time and continue to do so until retirement. Unfortunately, disability discrimination in the workplace is a valid concern” (Foundation, 2021, Line 1). Issues like this are something we should look at since this number should rise to give more opportunities to disabled people.

One of the most critical aspects of disclosing mental illness is that employees need reasonable adjustments to their work schedule so their mental health condition doesn't worsen. People also hide their symptoms upon discussing their problems because they don't want to be judged. When it comes to the topic of concealment of mental illness in the corporate world, Employees benefit from the concealment of their mental illness because it is less hassle for them. Over 35% of employees admit to lying about their mental illness and they make up excuses “for taking a sick day. While some of this is due to “conspiratorial” reasons (interviewing for a job at a different company) or because the employee has run out of vacation time, responses suggest that in some instances, this is done to conceal a mental health problem” (Holistic Workplace wellness, 2020, Line 6). Along with that, employees suffer from less judgment. Therefore, more opportunities for an open-door policy would lower their fear of discrimination and the organization's stigma.

2.5 The Role of HR on the era of COVID

During COVID, the role of HR has become more prominent and it started to redefine every organization. It's an HR responsibility to ensure that their organization can fulfill the needs

of their employees. This initiative includes training and support in their managerial responsibility. But during COVID, managers had to think and proceed differently about their responsibility because of social distancing practices and CDC regulatory policies. Well-being and work-life balance are essential features that HR managers have been working on since the pandemic started. When speaking about well-being, it is not always about physical wellness, it is about cognitive and emotional health too. Employers make a great impact on their employees' well-being, and employers have a crucial role during this pandemic. Since the pandemic started, a lot of companies have struggled to stay in business.

On the other hand, some companies took advantage of their employees to gain more. One of the essential topics that got everybody's attention was mental health and well-being. Since the pandemic started two years ago, people have been working from home. We might think that is so pleasing, but it gets very hard on people too. Being isolated and working in front of the computer for more than eight hours with no physical human contact can affect anybody's mental health. A multi-millionaire company like Google chose to offer extra days off from the week to its employees, whereas other companies like Amazon did not do much for its employees. Google mentions that working from home has its advantages, but it also causes burnout, loneliness, and struggle to have a strict balanced routine.

Along with all these, the pandemic stress, some people losing their loved ones, and not seeing them because of the restriction can also contribute to overall mental health struggle. "Google is giving employees another day off to avoid burnout as the Covid-19 Pandemic enters its seventh month" (Elias, 2020). The company advised its employees to take time off and spend time away from work. Employees are one of the most critical stakeholders in the company and taking care of their well-being is something worth investing in. Overall, as a company, Google

focused on its employees, giving them a good reputation for its loyal customers and its specific industry profit. Many companies responded in favor of its employees. For example: Airbnb with their Host relief fund, Shopify with their home office allowances for its employees, and Google with their extra days off.

Work is one of the most important parts of our lives because it allows us to succeed. Since the pandemic started it has opened the door for more empathy and flexible working and other work life options. “It is clear that organizations need to adopt a more tailored approach to work–life balance programs and initiatives and have the courage to move away from a one size fits all approach” (Darcy et al., 1970, Line 7). Every organization should have some sort of hybrid working policies because that will help employees with their mental health. Not everyone's life is the same, that’s why HR should support their employees' preference of working even with their home office supplies too. It is time for every organization to understand working from home and work at home during crises.

3. Research Questions

The above discussion has outlined topics related to mental health and the management of employee wellbeing. It also outlines the topic of mental health conditions in the workplace along with its challenges. I would like to explore my research more in this topic with the following questions:

- **How do employees depict their understanding about the management of the mental health and wellness programs?**
- **How do employers address mental health in order to help their employees?**

4. Research Methods/Data Collection

This research project has been based on an empirical study using a survey questionnaire method. The survey was designed and conducted through Qualtrics. With the help of this methodology, I maintained the participants' privacy by not documenting their personal information and trying to understand and recognize their perceptions regarding this issue.

I conducted the survey through Qualtrics from February 14th, 2022, to March 15th, 2022. The participants were between 18-65 years old and worked either full-time or part-time. I have recruited eligible candidates for the survey through the snowball recruitment procedure for the recruitment process. First, I sent one person the survey and its instructions for the emails. Then, the participants could click on the link and be directed to the survey. They were also encouraged to forward the email. Once they are on the link with the survey, they can confirm their age and consent to take the survey. I have also used different platforms of social media (Instagram, LinkedIn) to gather more relevant data who are on my "Friends" list. Even though my goal was 120 participants, I gathered enough information through 60 participants. The survey initially had informed consent, which allowed the participants to opt out.

The survey consisted of mostly multiple-choice questions and two open ended questions. The questions mostly focused on demographics, their job criteria, their perspective about job security, stigmatization about mental health issues, disclosure and concealment of mental health issues in all levels of employees, and different wellness programs. One of the most important topics the survey focused on was the pandemic and its effect on mental health in the corporate world. The survey ended with two optional open-ended questions which focused on the participants' opinions regarding wellness programs in their organizations.

Qualified participants in this survey were individuals from 18-65 years old, mostly those who worked in the corporate world. This specific age group of people helped me analyze the views of mental health in the corporate world, with observations and insights away from the conventional way we see it.

For analyzing the data, I used Univariate Analysis. With the help of the Univariate Analysis, I was able to describe the survey answers through graphs. Univariate analysis helped me analyze my research data with graphical illustration. The elements of this research is set to understand the stigmatization of mental health issues and wellness programs in the corporate world.

5. Results/Findings:

This research was conducted with a single method approach (survey analysis). The survey was based on demographics, then it focused on the questions regarding mental health, wellness programs, and the perspective of the employees. Below I have attached the graphical distribution and analysis of the survey questionnaire.

5.1 Demographics Distribution

The survey has generated 61 responses. And since the survey was not mandatory, forty-one people agreed to participate in this survey, and eight people didn't. Out Of that sample size, 76.74% were female, whereas 20.93% were male. The remaining 2.33% choose the option "*prefer not to answer.*" Furthermore, most participants were between the ages of 25-34, and 30% were between the ages of 18-24. Below I have attached the graphically demographic distribution of the survey.

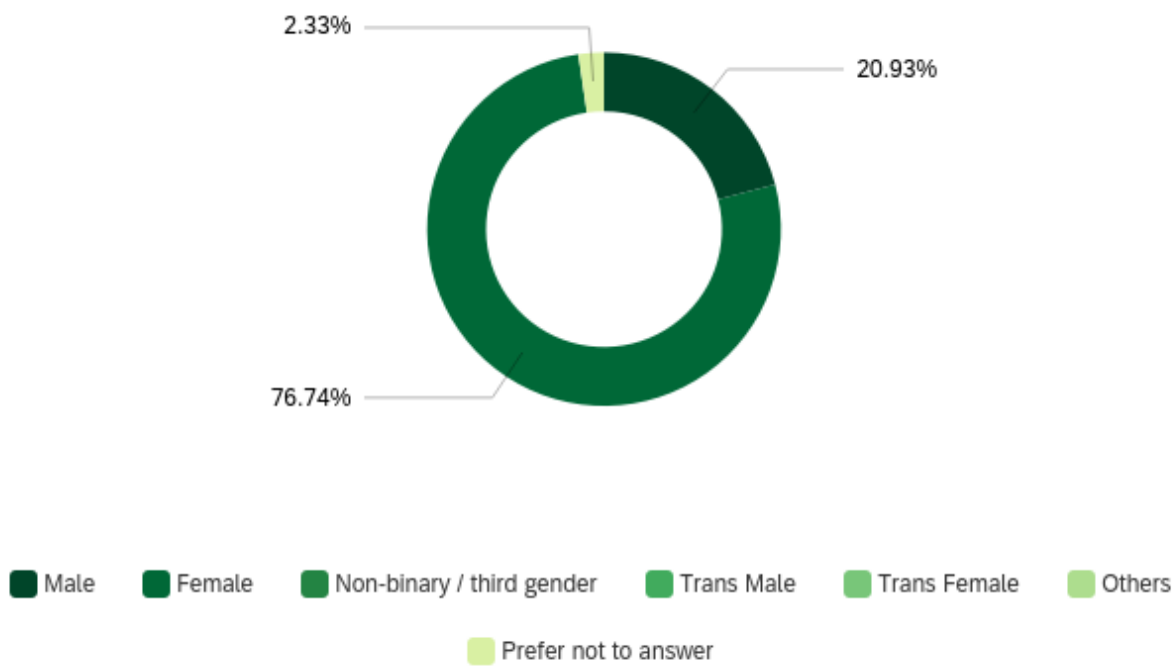


Figure 1.1 Gender Distribution

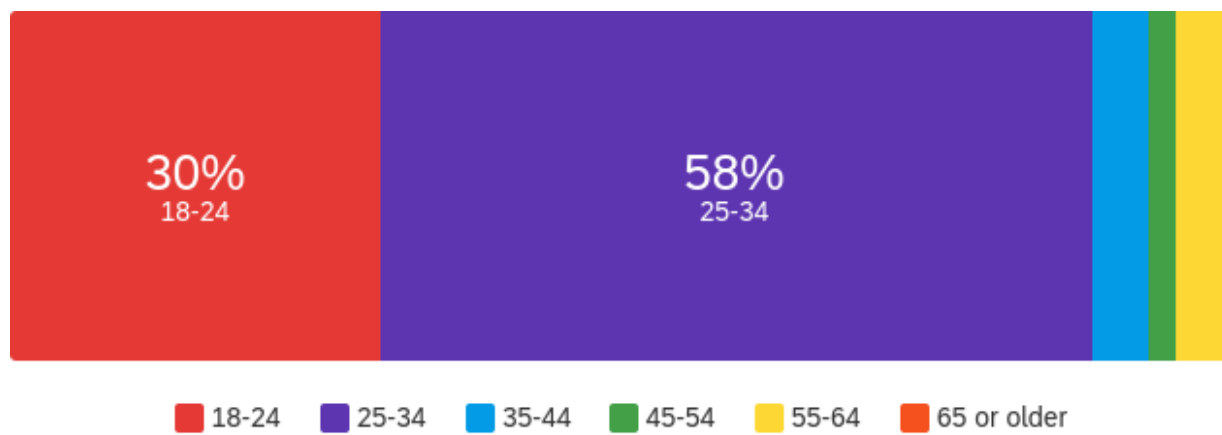
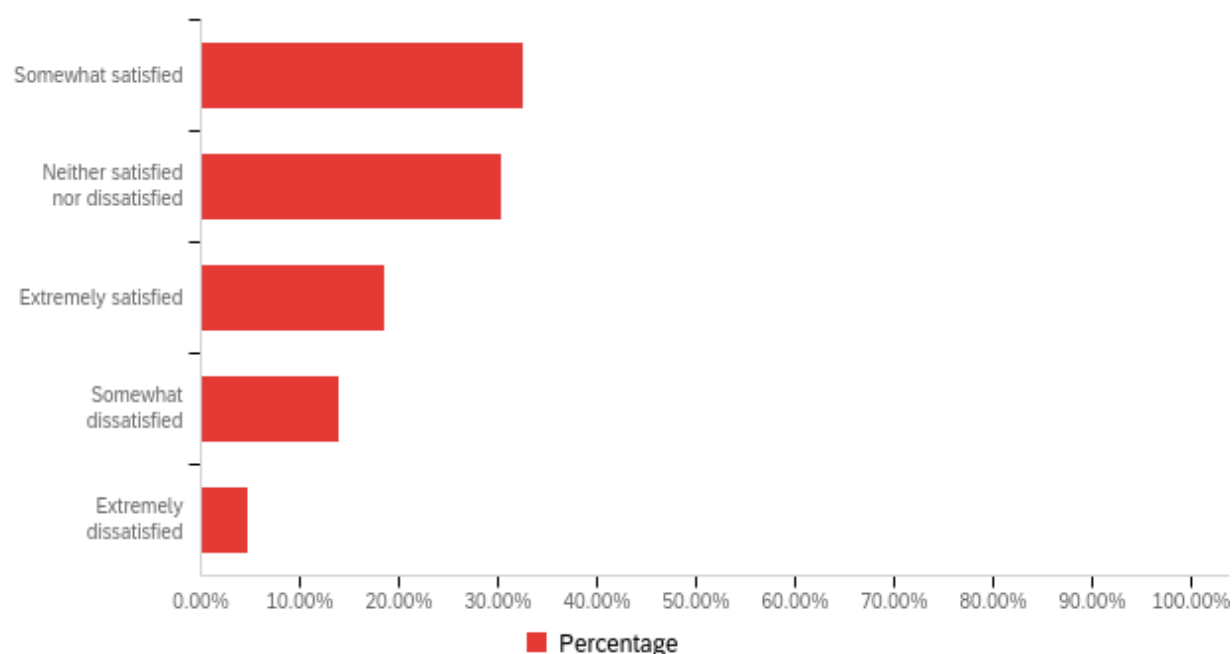


Figure 1.2 Age Distribution

5.2 Employees perspective on the wellness initiatives:

RQ1: How do employees depict their understanding about the management of the mental health and wellness programs?

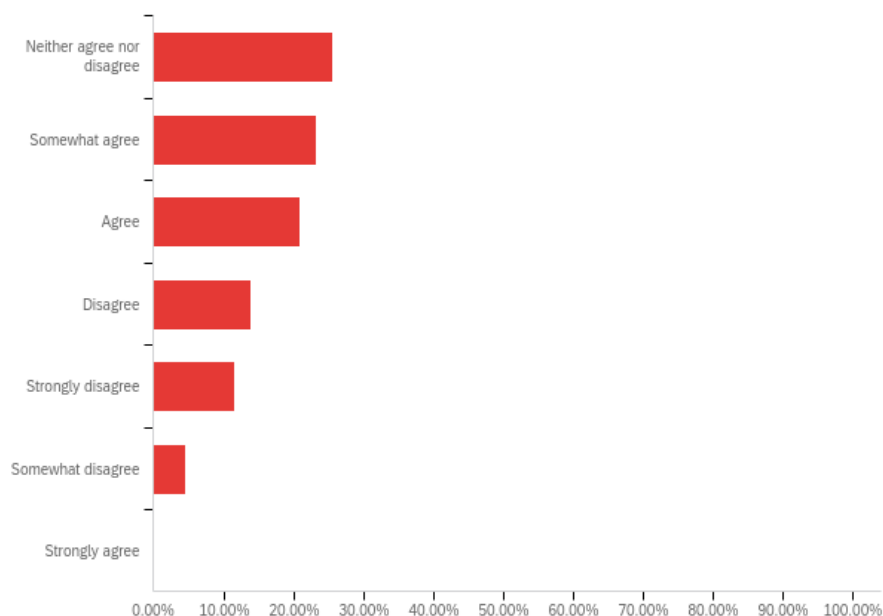
5.3 Job Satisfaction: “Are you satisfied with your current job?”



To further understand the importance of mental health in the corporate world, I asked participants to answer questions regarding the significance of this issue. Job satisfaction reflects the employees having a safe ground or a level of comfort to express themselves. 32.56% answered somewhat satisfied, which indicates that employees feel strongly about inputting more thoughts about wellness programs in the organization. A small portion of 18.60% are extremely satisfied with their job, and the rest answered 13.95% somewhat dissatisfied and 4.65% extremely dissatisfied. A total of 69.81% was the majority. The remaining 30.23% of the participants responded neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. This data indicates that organizations are initiating

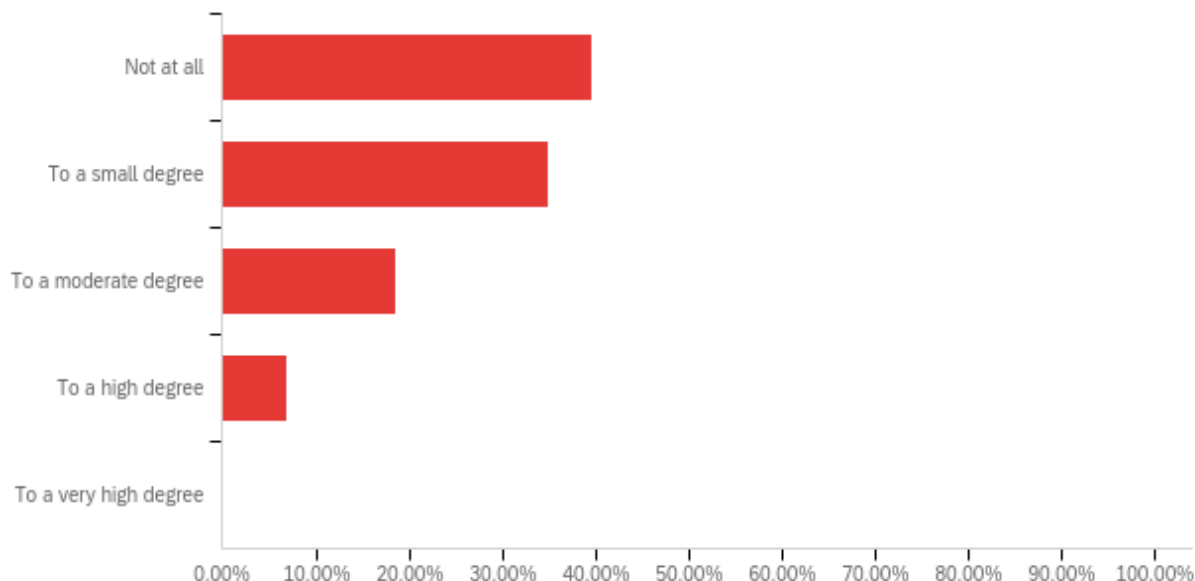
wellness programs and showing the understanding of the importance to mental health, but there still should be more changes that need to be incorporated for the employees to feel satisfied.

5.4 Employee Wellness Programs: “To what extent do you agree with this statement: “Your organization provides good wellness programs”?”



Furthermore, participants were asked a statement-based question regarding wellness programs with the Likert scale. 43% of the participants agreed with the statement that their organizations do provide some kind of wellness programs. 28% of the participants disagreed with the statement, indicating that employees still don't have good resources for wellness programs. 25% of the participants neither agreed or disagreed with the statement. This data seems to make it safe to say that employees still don't have access to proper wellness programs.

5.5 Employee Wellness Programs Initiative: “To what degree would you say your organization helped your mental health issues (if you have any experience) with their wellness program initiatives?”

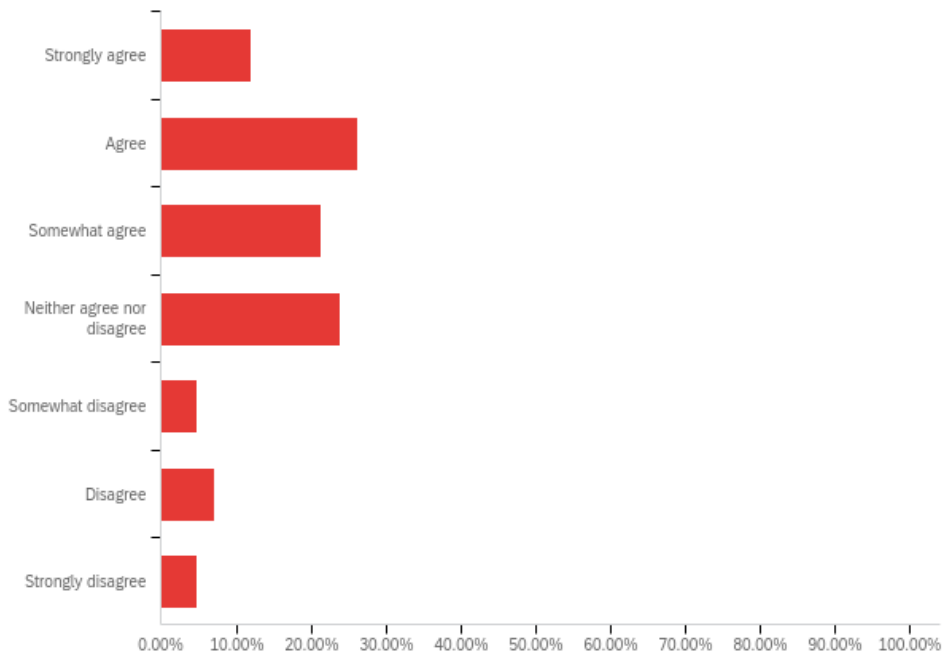


In addition to this, participants were asked if their respective organizations helped them with their mental health issues. Majority of the participants, 39.53%, answered not at all which indicates that employees either don't have resources or their organizations didn't provide enough accommodation for them to feel comfortable with speaking about their mental health issues. 52% of the participants answered to a moderate degree and the rest of the participants 6.98% answered to a high degree. According to this data, employees still need help expressing themselves. The stigma is there which stops most of the employees from speaking out.

6 . Wellness programs provided by the employer

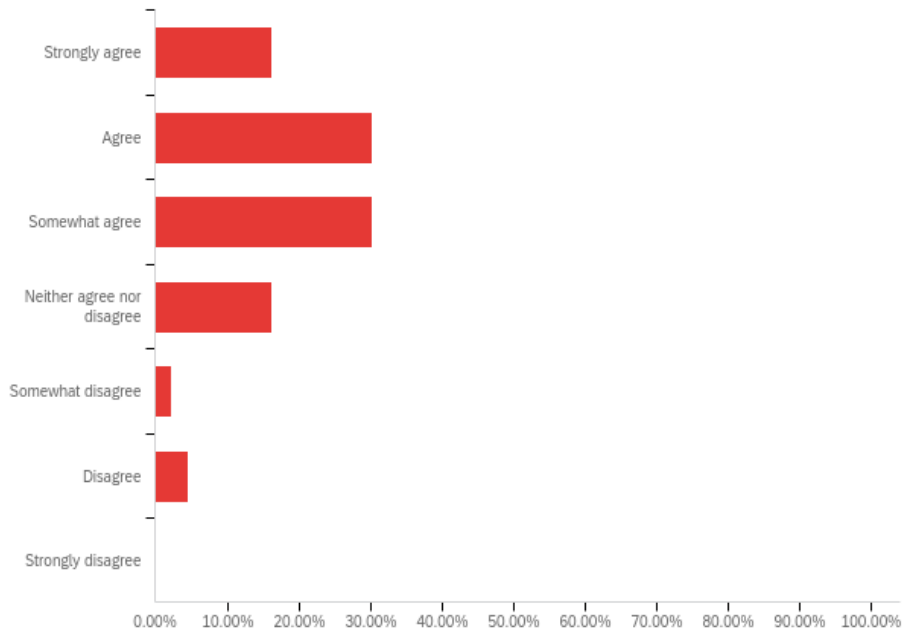
RQ2: How do employers address mental health in order to help their employees?

6.1 Low Cost Wellness Strategies: “To what extent do you agree with this statement: “Your organization provides low cost wellness strategies for entry-level employees”?”



Moreover, participants were asked questions regarding the employer's perspective regarding wellness programs for entry level employees. 58% of the participants agreed with the statement that employers do provide wellness programs for everyone in their organization. A small portion of the participants 11% agreed with the statement. 10% of the participants answered neither agree nor disagree with the statement. With the help of this data, it can safely be said that employers do provide wellness programs for all levels of employees but they need to improve on their existing initiative.

6.2 Employee Retention: “To what degree do you think wellness programs improve retention of employees in the organization?”



The last issue I want to focus on is employee retention. Participants were asked about the relationship between retention and wellness programs in an organization. 76% of the participants agreed with the statement that wellness programs help employee retention. Only 6% of the participants disagreed with the statement. This data indicates that employers are investing in employees as a whole person, so they could have a healthier life. Employees' healthy lives could lead to better productive teamwork.

Remarkably employees' perceptions of mental health and wellness are more towards improving the existing wellness program initiatives. Participants between the age of 25-34 years old emphasize creating better opportunities that connect with wellness programs. On the other hand, employers are taking initiatives toward the employees, but still some participants think employers need to work on their existing initiatives. For the scope of this thesis research project, I decided to focus and analyze specific questions that could help with the research question.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation for wellness practises:

In this research, I have highlighted the common obstacles employees face daily in the corporate world. The findings of this research project help understand the significance of mental health issues and having a better work culture related to enhancing employees' wellbeing in the corporate world. In addition, this research study has explored two research questions:

1. How do employees depict their understanding about the management of the mental health and wellness programs? (i.e the definition of a Mental Health and wellness programs and the stigma and whether the organization's mental health policies help enough from an employee's perspective)
2. How do employers address mental health in order to help their employees?

With the limited sample size from the survey data, it implies that the current workforce expects the upper-level management to work on implementing new initiatives that relate to wellbeing practices. The survey results indicate maybe better and more wellness programs would create a better work culture. The survey suggested various wellness programs, and more than 40% of the participants wanted more employee assistance programs. A better work environment for the employees comes from the management's commitment and transparency. The first step to having a better wellness program is implementing organizational commitment that allows employees to discuss mental health issues and well-being policies further. When top-level management implements more open-door policies like communication expectations, setting boundaries for both employees and employers, and listening to the employees, it will lower the disclosure rates expressing issues related to mental illness. Some examples include setting up one-on-one biweekly meetings in every department, asking for suggestions and the work procedures from other employees. Policies should be written down in the employee handbook to help employees know their rights and the steps they should take upon disclosing

mental health issues. A team should be formed to gather and evaluate the existing information from employee feedback. The evaluation would help the organization know if the program complies with the competency gap and the work is not compromised upon. From the financial perspective, checking the cost ensures the program is budget-friendly and at the same if it fulfills both the employers and employees goals. However, this research data only investigated the employee's perspective, and doesn't entail the employer's perspective.

Additionally, the survey results in this research correlates with the mental health and well-being process that has been mentioned in the literature review. Employees seek opportunities that provide an organizational culture for emotional well-being. More than 46% of the participants agreed that the stigmatization stops them from disclosing and speaking about mental health or even wellness programs. Therefore, organizational leaders must create opportunities to help employees interact with each other. When employees just sit in their cubicles, it creates an isolated work environment. Interaction and communication create a bridge between all employees in an organization.

The learning experience from this whole research study was stressful but rewarding. I had the opportunity to gather data regarding an issue often ignored by the corporate world. Upon doing some in-depth research, I learned the role of an organization and HR in the employee's mental health and wellness being policy. There are a few ideas that I want to provide that I have gathered with this research that would benefit leaders in creating a better work environment:

- Communication: both the employees and the employers need to have an open communication system to help them understand each other. Employees shouldn't wait until they are drained out to ask for mental health leave. Top Management should

encourage an hour's break away from their cubicle and avoid isolation. Both the employees and employers should practice this process.

- Digital space: since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen the transition to remote work. That's why leaders should look at wellness policy initiatives that can be done digitally. Reducing the screen time limit is one of the significant examples of digital wellness policy.
- Transparency & Management's engagement: Leaders need to be transparent with any policy because it helps employees understand related procedures and necessary steps. Transparency motivates employees to be truthful and boost their confidence to represent the organization.

While fulfilling this research project, I learned critical lessons about structured academic resources and gathering valuable survey data. While I had some limitations, exploring the topic of mental health in the corporate world, focusing on the stigma and understanding the perspective of both the employees and employers was worth the learning experience.

8. Suggestions for Future research:

Future research could expand their knowledge solely from the employer's perspective. The findings of my research project form a good foundation for additional research from the employer's side too. That could give this topic in-depth information from both sides. Both pieces of research could later help create a program that could create wellness policy programs.

One more approach for future research to consider is initiating programs digitally because of more increased remote work opportunities. In addition, organizations will improve their corporate reputation if they start a digital approach. My research project could help future

research on building more transparent and ethical organizations and creating a strong relationship with their prospective stakeholders.

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