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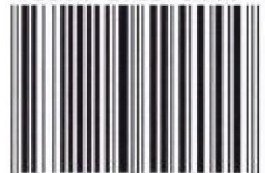
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COVID-19 AND JOB STRESS

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INTRODUCTION

Stress refers to an individual's reaction to different situations. This includes changes in their physiology or psychology in dealing with events in the external environment that are valued more than they can bear, thus affecting their physical and mental well-being. Stress in the workplace is considered a process of interaction between individuals and the work environment, which represents the accumulation of negative emotions produced by work (Kuo et al., 2020).

Job stress is not a new phenomenon in any industrial society and, historically, workload has been a key contributor to workplace stress and anxiety. What are the most common sources of stress and anxiety in the workplace? According to Shawn Singh (2020), employees report that the most common anxiety-provoking stressors are:

- Deadlines (55%)
- Interpersonal relationships (53%)
- Staff management (50%)
- Conflict resolution (49%)

COVID-19 AND WORKPLACE STRESS

Even though job stress is not a new phenomenon as we already acknowledged its common sources, the global COVID-19 pandemic has created a new cause of work-related stress that has replaced these main 'traditional' reasons for workplace stress and anxiety (University of Birmingham, 2020). Workloads seem to have been pushed aside, while other factors that were not prominent or may not have existed before the current pandemic made significant contributions to work stress. In short, COVID-19 has caused other factors to suddenly become the main focus in influencing a person's level of work stress.

A study by the University of Birmingham (2020) has identified five occupational stresses caused by COVID-19:

- Concerns about income since the inception of COVID-19
- Fear of being exposed to the virus when called to return to work
- Concerns about possible job loss
- Unable to separate personal life from work while working from home
- General stress caused by working from home

Conditions caused by the spread of COVID-19 and the response to this epidemic have affected the vast majority of employees around the world. Nearly 70% of American workers report that the COVID-19 pandemic is the most stressful time of their careers. Similarly, 88% of workers reported moderate to extreme stress in the early months of the outbreak (Shawn Singh, 2020). The impact of this situation is also significant on productivity. Among employees who reported an increase in stress levels during the pandemic, 62% said they lost productivity at least one hour a day, while 32% reported losing two hours a day. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, lost

productivity and costs for employee health and well-being continue to increase (Shawn Singh, 2020).

Studies conducted on hospital and university staff also show similar results. Hospital staff reported moderate levels of stress and nurses had the highest levels of stress (Kuo et al., 2020). In addition, university staff and students reported high psychological stress, presenteeism and absenteeism due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both for University staff and students, rapid job changes and study arrangements are thought to cause work or study stress, which may be caused by personal stress such as having to work remotely, having to change tasks, and having to combine all of this with home-schooling children and care for elderly family members or neighbours (Van Der Feltz-Cornelis et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic may put pressure on people. The fears and anxieties about a new disease and what may happen can be overwhelming and evoke strong emotions in everyone. It creates stress and anxiety as it increases the instability of income and job insecurity. Having to work from home can also create stress as they are unable to separate personal and work life. In addition, the exposure to the virus could also cause stress to employees.

Government actions, such as social distancing and MCO are taken to combat the spread of COVID-19 virus. However, these actions limit movement which in the end increases stress and anxiety as well. Despite that, this action is needed to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Overcoming stress in a healthy way will make us stronger.

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