

An Empirical Study On COVID-19 And Workplace Stressors Of Human Resources

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Abstract

Since the inception of the corporate world, employees have never been asked to work from home, therefore this situation has created an unprecedented situation for organisations. The distressful situation caused by Covid-19 has posed a peculiar kind of challenge for human resources such as insufficient IT infra, no physical interaction with superiors, colleagues and subordinates, lack of infrastructure, etc. The research study consisted of a sample of 116 individuals employed in various industries in Uttarakhand. Data analysis was done with the help of the Correlation and Regression method by using the Statistical Packages SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Using correlation and regression, the study found a significant positive relationship between five stressors of human resources (Job insecurity, remote working, unemployment, psychological distress and organisation performance) and covid-19 at the level of $p < 0.001$.

Keywords: Covid-19, human resources, stressors, psychological distress, Organizational performance.

1. Introduction

On December 2019, Covid-19 disease was detected in Wuhan, China and infected most of the countries across the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) announced Covid-19 as a widespread Global pandemic on March 11, 2020. The pandemic has greatly hampered business, travel, employment and many private and public sectors worldwide and government across the world had taken stringent measures to prevent the damage caused by the disease (Mahmood S, Hasan K, Colder Carras M, Labrique A, 2020). The covid-19 pandemic greatly impacted the daily earners and employees working in the private sector. In most countries, employees had been instructed to carry out their work responsibilities from home so that the spread of the coronavirus can be prevented. The policy of working from home has proved itself to be an effective tool in controlling the spread of micro-organisms causing Covid-19. Since the inception of the corporate world, employees have never been asked to work from home; therefore, this situation has created an unprecedented situation for organisations. The distressful situation caused by Covid-19 has posed a peculiar kind of challenge for human resources such as insufficient IT infra, no physical interaction with superiors, colleagues and subordinates, Lack of infrastructure, etc. Most of the Indian employees don't have enough places to work at home. Due to the work from home, coordination of activities among departments and people has become difficult. Most countries are undergoing economic downturns because of the restriction imposed to restrain the spread of covid19 virus. This economic downturn has caused the trimming of job opportunities, the axing of salary paid and the demeaning of skills and knowledge of HR.

Working from home has caused a sense of job insecurity. Most organizations irrespective of their size are compelled to adopt suitable IT platforms. Therefore, it has created pressing demand on the part of employees to learn and improve their IT skills. In addition to learning new IT skills, employees are also expected to adhere to new SOPs formulated by the organisations and regulations evolved due to covid-19.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, the majority of business sectors are facing an immense economic crisis. Many organizations especially small organizations where a large number of workers are working at risk of suffering from loss of jobs, reduction in salary

and getting laid-off because of the Covid-19 pandemic such organisations are forced to take measures like laying off their workforce, reduction in the Salary, increased workload, etc. (Mediaindonesia, 2020)

With this Covid19 disease outbreak, some companies inevitably reduce the number of workers or employees so that layoffs occur to employees as an effort to prevent the spread of the disease. Many companies also take steps and extreme to maintain their business and of course to reduce losses due to covid-19 (PIKIRAN). The unceasing effect of the Covid-19 pandemic has weakened many business houses to the extent that their earnings are insufficient to meet the salary component of their monthly expenditure. Because of this insufficient fund flow, companies are terminating the jobs of their employees. As a result, the unemployment rate is increasing day by day across the world (Mediaindonesia, 2020).

2. Review of Literature

All round versatile multi-skilled employees are the need of the present Covid situation. Employees who are malleable and are able to perform various functions can be kept motivated and engaged in these precarious and uncertain situations. Entrusting employees with new assignments and feeding them with new skill sets will keep the employees inspired and motivated (Kaushal V., Srivastava S., 2021). Clear and positive communication between employee and employer provides benefits to both business and its employees. Stress management training and assuring employees that their job will not be terminated even if outside forces cause an economic downturn, resulted in talent retention and higher commitment by employees (Ngoc Su D., Luc Tra D., Thi Huynh H.M., Nguyen H.H.T., O'Mahony B., 2021). Anxiety caused by covid 19 has a positive association with job insecurity and inner psychic weariness. Organisational support has an augmenting impact on the relationship between employee job insecurity and emotional weariness (Chen H., Eyoun K., 2021). Social distancing and home isolation of the employees will help the organisation to prevent the spread of the pandemic (D'angelo D., Sinopoli A., Napoletano A., Gianola S., Castellini G., del Monaco A., Fauci A.J., Latina R., Iacorossi L., Salomone K., Coclite D., Iannone P., 2021). Activities involved in the construction industry require the actual assembling of employees and therefore can't be carried out virtually. Fear of

the spread of covid-19 has caused a 30-90% reduction in the Construction industry. If construction project managers maximize construction activities which are low-risk activities then only this industry can reduce the spread of covid 19 among its workers and thus can cope with absenteeism caused by covid 19 (Araya F., 2021). To protect the employees from the Covid-19 pandemic, they should be given Masks, Gloves, and Sprays, and educated with new health and safety measures. The company retained 20% of the total workforce as it is a hotel industry; the decision to terminate employees was difficult because they were dedicated and committed employees (Smart K., Ma E., Qu H., Ding L., 2021). Study shows organisational strategies and Human Resource Management policies have a direct impact on Governance which in turn helps the organisation to achieve social missions (Oliveira M., Sousa M., Silva R., Santos T., 2021). The emotional distress among employees depends upon the perceived disparity between the self and the referent group which is usually a higher-level group upwards. Social comparison and socio-emotional resources are critical factors during a health crisis (Lee H., 2021). For many companies, the Universal spread of covid-19 resulted in a massive experimental situation for practising remote working. In this study, it was found that Organisational norms were critical. The higher the flexibility and adaptability of an organization, the higher it was able to perform in this new remote working scenario (Tanpipat W., Lim H.W., Deng X., 2021). Research indicates that due to the lockdown, many employees' services were terminated by the textile industry and they were asked to go to their native places (Paulet R., Holland P., Morgan D., 2021). Research indicates that managerial employees were not getting impacted due to the pay cut. However, the pay cut was greatly impacting the non-managerial people and emerging a feeling of job insecurity and stress. Research shows that there is a positive relationship between stress and employees' performance (Agarwal P., 2021).

3. Need of the study

The human resources of an organisation are the most critical resource. It is the topmost responsibility of the management to train and equip their employees with the necessary skills, knowledge and training so that they can cope with this pandemic era. Academicians and corporate think tanks have realized the increasing stress level developed among workforces. Now the onus

is on the HR managers to develop the means and methods to train the employees to tackle this pandemic. The solution to the present problem lies in developing new HR policies.

The aim of this study is to focus on finding the solution for handling problems caused by Covid-19 Pandemic. Ad-hoc steps to combat crises, caused by Covid-19 can adversely affect the sustainability of organisations and the economy as a whole. Any remedy which doesn't keep the sustainability of the organisation as its priority will have an immensely harmful impact in the long run. Therefore, it is required to find out a solution which is fundamentally sustainable. This present study aims to focus on the human resources policy framework for the present time. The prevailing HR policy which was successful till the spread of the pandemic has become ineffective in today work from home era. So it is the responsibility of HR management to redraft the HR policy framework. If the organisation wants to sustain itself in this pandemic era, they need to immediately address the need of employees undergoing immense mental stress. In the present situation, employees are working under continuous threat of economic instability, health risks to them and their families, a sense of future uncertainty, etc. Therefore, there is a need to study the method which can help to reduce the psychological distress and economic problems of the employees. Business activities and job profiles which require working in groups or going out in the market and dealing with people have great exposure to Covid-19 disease. All such business activities and job profiles also need some special attention from the HR managers. Therefore, this is the need for time to draft specific SOPs and policy documents. In the present day of covid-19 pandemic era, a most important function of an HR manager is to formulate strategies and operational tactics to strengthen and stabilize human resources so that they can become at ease in working in the present situation. During the pandemic era, Human resources have to be preserved, retrained with the new working method and managed with the new HR policy framework as they are the important assets of the organizations.

4. Conceptual Model:

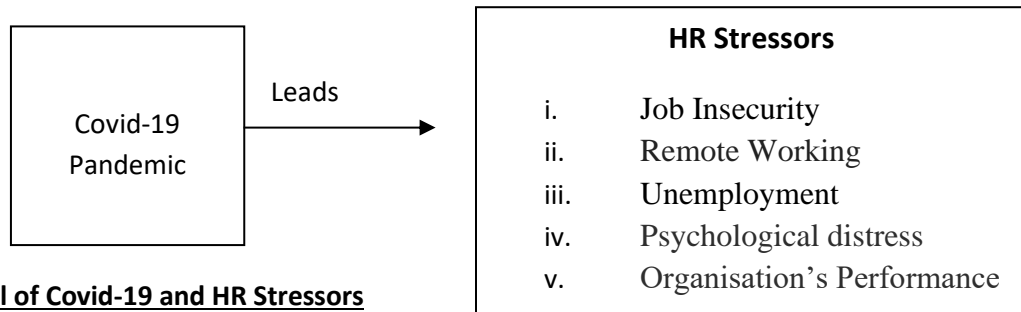
The conceptual model based on HR inimitable issues (Job insecurity, Remote Working, unemployment, Reduction in Salary and Psychological Distress) and Covid-19 shows the relationship between HR issues and Covid-19. The model explains how strongly

the inimitable issues are correlated with Covid-19. The issues are discussed below:

- i. Job Insecurity: Job insecurity is one of the greatest workplace stressors which impacts a worker to a great extent that may result in poor health. Exposure to job insecurity has been associated with poor health, especially the mental health of an individual (Burgard). Covid 19 has created a sense of job insecurity and frustration, psychological distress, etc. which in turn, has resulted in increased consumption of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. If this situation continues, it may cause deterioration of the mental health of the employees (Bufquin).
- ii. Remote Working: Self-isolation is the best solution for combating covid-19. Therefore, employees have to learn and evolve mechanisms for carrying out job responsibilities with the help of adopting remote working methods. No employee has ever experienced such a situation in his career to work from home in self-isolation. Due to this new mode of working, employees are experiencing frustration, psychological distress, and increased workload, which in turn generates a feeling of dissatisfaction (Dubey). Research shows that remote working, teleworking and WFH are the only options to work during lockdown. Research reveals that workers are facing many problems while working from home as they are going through family and work stress and inefficient remote working (Kumar P., 2021).
- iii. Unemployment: Covid -19 pandemic is not only affecting the physical and mental health of the employees but also increasing unemployment for workers. Covid-19 has caused a feeling of job insecurity through increased downsizing and layoff of employees by employers which may turn in increased unemployment. As employees were working in the retail industry, they had a feeling of job insecurity. As a result of this, their performances were getting affected. During the lockdown period, they experienced the biggest challenge to retain themselves in this industry (Salamzadeh A., Dana L.P., 2020).
- iv. Psychological distress: Human resources are experiencing psychological distress due to the Covid-19 pandemic which may result in anxiety, fear, sadness, etc. Study shows that healthcare workers need psychological support as they are

working at the highest risk of getting infected with the disease (Felice C., Di Tanna G.L., Zanus G., Grossi U., 2020). Research says that fear of getting infected with the disease increases general anxiety among healthcare workers (Ammar A., Stock A.D., Holland R., Gelfand Y., Altschul D., 2020).

- v. Organisation's Performance: Due to the pandemic, organizations are not earning much profit. As a result of this, employees' salaries and benefits are getting deducted which in turn reduces the organisation's performance. There is a significant positive relationship between employees' development and organizational performance which in turn helps the organisation to motivate the employees for a longer time (Jayathilake H.D., Daud D., Eaw H.C., Annuar N., 2021).



Conceptual Model of Covid-19 and HR Stressors

5. Methodology

Qualitative methods are used to test the hypothesis of the research study. The study is descriptive in nature and based on primary data. Secondary data was also used to collect the information related to the research study. Data collection was done with the help of a random sampling technique. Human resources at managerial levels of different companies were used for conducting the research. Google Forms and e-mail were used to collect the data. Most of the respondents were from Tourism, hospitality and health industries based in Uttarakhand. 210 respondents were taken to collect the responses. However, only 116 respondents filled out the questionnaire completely. Respondents' average age was 45. Out of 116 managers, 34% were female managers and 66% were male managers. The questionnaire is prepared on the basis of Covid-19 and workplace stressors of HR working at managerial levels in different organisations. Data analysis was done with the help of the

Correlation and Regression method by using the Statistical Packages SPSS and Microsoft Excel. The Secondary Data is gathered from various sources like newspapers, magazines, and internet websites were used to collect the secondary data related to Covid-19 and workplace stressors of HR.

6. Analysis

Five variables were determined after studying the review of literature based on research papers related to the Covid-19 pandemic and Human Resources. These variables (Job insecurity, remote working, unemployment, psychological distress and organisation performance) were used to prepare the questionnaire. Likert’s 5-point scale was used to measure the items that vary from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The analysis of the research was done in three stages. Respondents’ demographic profile was shown in the first stage. The second stage of research was the measurement of reliability estimation for ensuring consistency. SPSS software was used to determine the value of Cronbach’s coefficient alpha and statistical relations between workplace stressors of HR and the Covid-19 Pandemic was determined with the help of correlation and regression techniques using SPSS software.

7. RESULT

Table 1

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=350)

Gender	Percentage %	Frequency
Male	65.52%	76
Female	34.48%	40
Age		
25-30	20.68%	24
31-35	40.51%	47
36-40	14.65%	17
Above 40	24.13%	28

Table 1 indicates the percentage (%) and frequency of respondents’ age and gender. Out of 116 respondents, 65.51% were male and 34.48% were female. In our research study, the respondents’ percentage belonging to the age 25-30 was 20.68, 40.51% belong to the age 31-35, 14.65 % were from the age 36-40

and 24.13% to the age which was above 41. Table 2 shows the Means and standard deviations of the determined variables. The Mean scores for five variables of HR Stressor and Covid-19 were higher than 3, indicating a high value of agreement from the respondents. Results mentioned in Table 2 indicate that job insecurity (Mean±SD=3.63±.44) and organisation’s performance (Mean±SD=3.43±.43) consist of the greatest and lowest mean.

But the standard deviations for the five variables of HR Stressors varied from .43 to .51, indicating homogeneity in the data. The result also indicated the Mean±SD=3.53±.45 for Covid-19. Table 2 indicates the value of Pearson correlation for all determined variables. The result indicated a significant positive correlation between five variables of HR Stressors and Covid-19.

The result analysis of the data indicated a strong significant positive correlation between the job insecurity variable of HR Stressors and Covid-19. Table 2 indicates that at the $p < .001$ level, the correlation value between job insecurity and Covid-19 is 0.327 which is statistically significant. The result indicated a strong significant positive correlation between the remote working variable of HR Stressors and Covid-19. Table 2 indicates that at the $p < .001$ level, the correlation value between remote working **variables** and Covid-19 is 0.647 which is statistically significant. The third variable unemployment had the lowest correlation value **indicating** a significant positive correlation with the Covid-19 pandemic working in various sectors. Table 2 indicates that at the $p < .001$ level, the correlation value between unemployment and Covid-19 is 0.374 which is statistically significant. The result indicated a strong significant positive correlation between the psychological distress variable of HR Stressors and Covid-19. Table 2 indicates that at the $p < .001$ level, the correlation value between the psychological distress variable and Covid-19 is 0.456 which is statistically significant. The result indicated a strong significant positive correlation between the remote working variable of HR Stressors and Covid-19. Table 2 indicates that at the $p < .001$ level, the correlation value between the organisation’s performance variable and Covid-19 is 0.632 which is statistically significant

Table:2

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Job Insec.	Rem. work	Unemploy	Psycho Distress	Organisation’s Performance	Co-19
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Job Insecurity		3.63	.448	.802					.527**
Remote Work.		3.54	.442		.714				.647
Unemployment		3.461	.463			.726			.374**
Psycho Distress		3.612	.517				.841		.456**
Organisation's Performance		3.437	.436					.716	.632**
Covid-19		3.534	.452						.846
Reliability	116								.837

Note 1: i. SD= Standard Deviation. iii. Co-19=Covid-19 ii. ** = $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed). iii. Bold values indicate Reliability **alphas**.

In the regression analysis, Tables 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 show the value of the Beta Coefficient of each variable of human resources; job security ($\beta = 0.326$), Remote work ($\beta = .269$), Unemployment ($\beta = .547$), Psychological Distress ($\beta = .325$), Organisation's performance ($\beta = .174$). The results showed that covid-19 had the highest and lowest impact on unemployment and Organisation's performance respectively. Table 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 shows the multiple regression analysis result, stating a significant positive relationship between five stressors of human resources and covid-19 at the level of $p < 0.001$.

Table 3: Result of Regression analysis for the impact of Covid-19 on Job Security (N=116)

Variables of Dependent	Variables of Independent	R Square	F	t	Beta
Job Security	Covid-19	.439	41.144	8.546	.326

Table 4: Result of Regression analysis for the impact of Covid-19 on Remote Working (N=116)

Variables of Dependent	Variables of Independent	R Square	F	t	Beta

Remote Working	Covid-19	.571	45.564	7.82 3	.269
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Table 5: Result of Regression analysis for the impact of Covid-19 on Unemployment (N=116)

Variables of Dependent	Variables of Independent	R Square	F	t	Beta
Unemployment	Covid-19	.338	42.454	16.23 6	.547

Table 6: Result of Regression analysis for the impact of Covid-19 on Psychological Distress (N=116)

Variables of Dependent	Variables of Independent	R Square	F	t	Beta
Psych Distress	Covid-19	.481	41.254	7.82 5	.325

Table 7: Result of Regression analysis for the impact of Covid-19 on the Organisation’s performance (N=116)

Variables of Dependent	Variables of Independent	R Square	F	t	Beta
Organisation’s performance	Covid-19	.565	45.329	4.56 8	.174

Conclusions:

The studies which were done earlier have continuously claimed that the multiple regression analysis result stated a significant positive relationship between five stressors of human resources and covid-19 at the significant level of $p < 0.001$.

Working from home has caused a sense of job insecurity. Most organizations irrespective of their size are compelled to adopt suitable IT platforms. Therefore, it has created pressing demand on the part of employees to learn and improve their IT skills. In addition to learning new IT skills, employees are also expected to adhere to new SOPs formulated by the organisations and regulations evolved due to covid-19. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, the majority of business sectors are facing an immense economic crisis. Many organizations especially small organizations where a large number of workers are working at risk of suffering from loss of jobs, reduction in salary and getting laid-off because of the Covid-19 pandemic such organisations are

forced to take measures like laying off their workforce, reduction in the Salary, increased workload, etc.

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