

Effect of Psychological Support from Employers to Employees during COVID-19 Pandemic in Bahrain

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the effect of the psychological support rendered by the organizations to the employees during the COVID-19 pandemic phase in Bahrain. The term 'Corona Virus' came into the picture on December 31, 2019, in Wuhan, China, and then on, it has started spreading rapidly. Bahrain could no more be leading a normal life with its first case witnessed on February 21, 2020, and had to opt for 'work from home.' With the economic recession, the business sector was forced to cut costs, which has made them reduce the number of employees. Nevertheless, there has been psychological support rendered to the employees by the organization, which makes the crux of this study. The research objective was to study the impact of demographics on selected factors: work culture, job security, and psychological support. Further, the study also adds new observation to knowledge by identifying psychological factors considered by respondents as most needed during this covid-19 pandemic. The study was conducted using a self-designed questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. The data were collected using a convenient sampling method for selected corporate companies in Bahrain. Further, semi-structured interviews were conducted one-to-one to understand the respondents' experiences. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. Variables were tested for the significance of the relationship using the Pearson Chi-Square test. Further, factor analysis was also used to understand which factor is considered the most important in contributing to the psychological support provided by employers to employees. The results encapsulate that the psychological support from employers to employees plays a role in inculcating a sense of belonging to the organization and self-esteem development, contributing to the well-being of the self and the family, a harmonious society.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Bahrain, psychological support.

巴林新冠肺炎大流行期间雇主对员工的心理支持的影响

摘要: 本研究旨在检查组织在巴林新冠肺炎大流行期间向员工提供的心理支持的效果。“冠状病毒”一词于 2019 年 12 月 31 日在中国武汉出现, 然后开始迅速传播。巴林在 2020 年 2 月 21 日出现首例病例, 无法再过上正常的生活, 不得不选择“在家工作”。随着经济衰退, 商业部门被迫削减成本, 这使得他们减少了员工数量。尽管如此, 组织还是为员工提供了心理支持, 这是本研究的重点。研究目标是研究人口统计对选定因素的影响: 工作文化、工作保障和心理支持。此外, 该研究还通过确定受访者认为在新冠肺炎大流行期间最需要的心理因素, 为知识增加了新的观察结果。该研究使用基于李克特 5 点量表的自行设计问卷进行。这些数据是使用方便的抽样方法为巴林选定的公司收集的。此外, 还进行了一对一的半结构化访谈, 以了解受访者的经历。社会科学统计软件包 (SPSS) 用于数据分析。使用皮尔逊卡方检验对变量的关系的显著性进行了检验。此外, 因素分析还用于了解哪个因素被认为对雇主向雇员提供的心理支持最重要。研究结果表明, 雇主对员工的心理支持有助于培养对组织的归属感和自尊心的发展, 有助于个人和家庭的幸福, 和谐社会。

关键词: 新冠肺炎大流行，巴林，心理支持。

1. Introduction

With the outbreak of COVID-19, the conventional lifestyle has been in a state of flux. With multiple and intermittent lockdowns in the affected countries, the global economy has faced challenges like never. With children at home doing online classes and the parents working from home, undoubtedly, it has brought in closeness amongst the family members. However, the enforced cost-cutting in most organizations has led to sacking employees. This has played havoc in the working class's mental fabric, especially the breadwinners of the families. However, most organizations have sensed the importance of psychological support to employees, and this paper intends to examine its effect on the psychics of the employees.

2. Literature Review

On December 31, 2019, a pneumonia patient was identified in Wuhan, China [1], for a strange etiology, which was later identified as coronavirus, as there were over 40 cases with similar concerns [2]. Apparently, on January 7, 2020, China identified it as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) [3]. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it to be the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on February 11, 2020, which has been the largest outbreak of atypical pneumonia [4] as each case of it can infect four more cases [5]. Said to be transferred from an animal to a human [6], this virus has taken its name from the Latin word "*corona*," synonymous with "crown." Though COVID-19 started hitting the headlines globally from the beginning of January 2020, Bahrain felt the chill of the pandemic when its index patient was found on February 21, 2020. With no moment of delay, the governing authorities of Bahrain started with an action plan to combat the pandemic. Though the series of decisions such as travel ban on Iran [7], suspension of educational institutes for two weeks [8], and postponement of CBSE examinations were established [9], Bahrain witnessed its first COVID-19 death on March 16, 2020. Since then, Bahrain intensified the testing of the citizens and residents entering it and arranged medical camps to provide care and treatment to people from COVID-19-affected countries.

On March 17, 2020, the governing authorities of Bahrain released \$11.39 billion to equip the economy to face the pandemic. "*Feena Khair*" was initiated to acquire contributions from individuals and corporates towards the COVID-19 national campaign [10]. On

March 22, 2020, Bahrain started penalizing the public for indulging in gatherings in public places with a fine of 5000 Bahraini dinars or three years of imprisonment. Then, Bahrain extended its support by bearing the cost of three months' salaries of all the working Bahrainis [11] and waiving off the electricity and water expenses for the residents of Bahrain from April 2020 to June 2020 [12]. Further, the BeAware Bahrain app [13] was introduced on March 31, 2020, by the Information and eGovernment Authority (iGA) to track the spread intensity and alert the users by SMS when they are present in the areas with more positive cases of Bahrain in addition to monitoring quarantined people. In addition to providing the statistical update of the COVID-19 cases, it gives appointments for the corona test and the vaccination. Bahrain, being the third-highest in the world for population density, has effectively tried to record the pandemic effects with this app.

With the inputs given by [14] and learning experience by the affected countries, Bahrain furthered the suspension of educational institutes [15], reinforced a set of social distancing protocols [16, 17], and encouraged the working class to work from home [18]. [19] suggests that the knowledge and execution of the preventive measures of COVID-19 can only help control the pandemic spread globally. As cherished by [20] for a vaccine to nullify the infection of COVID-19, in the late 2020 National Health Regulatory Authority of Bahrain approved EUAs for the Sinopharm vaccine, BBIBP-CorV, and the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine, respectively [21]. Thankfully, the number of people taking the vaccination is growing high day by day, which holds hope for a corona-free Bahrain and a stable economy.

In due course, the closure of shopping malls, cinema theatres, salons came into the picture, which incurred the fear of economic recession [22]. In the next quarter, with border closure and with only 55% of export, Bahrain contained thousands of jobless expatriates forced to stay in Bahrain with agony [23]. The unpredictable future, drastic lifestyle changes, being indoors with family have affected the mental makeup of the people [24]. This rings the bell on the importance of socialization [25] and job security in organizations. The research studies of [26-30] encapsulate that the people had suffered psychological turmoil owing to the unstable pandemic situation. This has made employees feel insecure about their jobs [31, 32] which is the primary stress factor during the COVID-19 phase [33-35] as it affects not only the individual's welfare but also the societal well-being

[36]. The sense of job insecurity has adverse effects on employees as they fear financial crises, loss of other social benefits they enjoy owing to their jobs [37], and the loaded work pressure due to remote working [38]. The talented employees must contribute to the companies and drive them by their competency and ability to achieve the organization's goals [39]. So, it becomes significant to examine the effect of the psychological support rendered by the organizations to the employees.

3. Research Methodology

The study was conducted using a self-designed questionnaire divided into four sections: Section A: Demographic Profile; Section B: Organization Work Culture; Section C: Job Security; Section D: Psychological Support. The questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale, where respondents ranked their level of agreement with five representing parameters: 5 - strongly agree, 4 - agree, 3 - neutral, 2 - disagree and 1 - strongly disagree. The data were collected from selected corporate companies in Bahrain. For collecting data, a convenience sampling technique was used. There were 50 respondents, and all responses were considered for the study. The reliability statistics of 20 items shows the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.955, which is highly significant, acknowledging all the items to be reliable. The final sample, comprising 50 executives, is described as follows:

Table 1 Summary of the sample structure

N = 50	No of Respondent	Percentage
Gender		
Male	27	54%
Female	23	46%
Marital Status		
Single	15	30%
Married	35	70%
Age Group		
Less than 30	12	24%
30-45	30	60%
45 and Above	8	16%
Income Role		
Sole Breadwinner	24	48%
Primary	15	30%
Secondary	6	12%
Income for self	5	10%

4. Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. Variables were tested for the significance of the relationship using the Pearson Chi-Square test. Further, factor analysis was also used to identify the prominent factor that is the most important factor of psychological support for employees during this COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Discussion and Findings

Pearson's Chi-Square test was applied to determine employees' perceptions towards support provided by the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic. The summary is provided below for understanding the impact or relationship of employees' demographic profiles with work culture, job security, and psychological support. Further, factor analysis was conducted to identify the core factors of psychological support that impact the employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Factor analysis is defined as a procedure mainly used for data reduction and summarization. It is an interdependence technique used to examine an entire set of interdependent relationships. The following tables present the SPSS results and their interpretation:

Table 2 Summary of Pearson's chi-square test: relationship of demographic profiles with the identified variables

S. No	Variable	P-Value	Significant level
	Gender*Work Culture	.130	Not Significant
	Gender*Job Security	.360	Not Significant
	Gender*Psychological Support	.443	Not Significant
	Marital*Work Culture	.500	Not Significant
	Marital*Job Security	.143	Not Significant
	Marital*Psychological Support	.155	Not Significant

A chi-squared test was conducted, which showed that the gender and marital status of respondents had no impact or direct relation with work culture, job security, and psychological support. Thus, as a significant relationship among the variables was found, it can be inferred that the mere possession of a professional education helps maintain a balance between personal and professional lives, thus affirming a harmonious existence.

Table 3 Summary of Pearson's chi-square test

S. No	Variable	P-Value	Significant Level
	Age*Work Culture	.000	Significant
	Age*Job Security	.000	Significant
	Age*Psychological Support	.000	Significant

Further, the study highlights prominent results pointing to a significant relationship between the demographic profile of age and the role of income and work culture, job security, and psychological support, except for the relationship between income and work culture. This means that as the ages of the respondents increased, the work culture of an organization was found to play a more significant role. This could be due to various factors such as the connections/bonds developed over years of work, familiar work environment, shared understanding with colleagues, and so on. Furthermore, by analyzing respondents' age with job security, it was found that the fear of job security increased in parallel with an increase in the

ages of respondents. This implies that as the ages of employees increase, they do not prefer job hopping or relocation, and they end up with fewer opportunities.

Table 4 Summary of Pearson’s chi-square test

S. No	Variable	P-Value	Significant Level
	Income Role *Work Culture	.350	Not Significant
	Income Role *Job Security	.000	Significant
	Income Role* Psychological Support	.000	Significant

As stated above, the relationship between income and work culture was found to be non-significant. The reason stated by respondents was that if the respondent were the sole breadwinner, they would be more concerned about feeding the family than dealing with their organization’s work culture. If the respondent is a secondary earner, his or her role is only to contribute towards luxuries or savings, which can be compromised for an indefinite period until there is hope for a new opportunity. Those respondents who earn only for their own needs found the scenario to be more flexible. They tend to adjust to the existing work culture and are open to new opportunities and relocating'. The role of income’s relationship with job security and psychological support is significant. With the changing role of income, job security and psychological support change. If the respondent is the sole breadwinner of the family, more job security and psychological support is expected from the organization than is the case with primary earners, secondary earners, or earners for self only. Therefore, the expectations when it comes to job security and psychological support are distinct for different respondents.

The second part of the research is dedicated to identifying the most important factors that respondents considered it essential to overcome or deal with in the COVID-19 pandemic. After reviewing the available literature and conferring with various employees in the selected region, the researchers have identified ten factors for psychological support that can be considered important. They are:

PS1: The organization allows working from home.

PS2: The organization enhances communication while working remotely.

PS3: The organization conducts webinars to train employees for online working.

PS4: The organization promises to provide safety to staff and their families.

PS5: The organization regularly sanitizes seating areas and keeps track of body temperature.

PS6: The organization’s support and care make me feel happy.

PS7: The organization provides us with a webinar for health and safety.

PS8: The organization credits the full salary on time.

PS9: The organization provides salary in advance or other financial assistance for emergencies.

PS10: The organization provides job security and assures current year promotion or appraisal.

From the factors mentioned above, four are identified as most crucial; the employees expect these from the organization/employer during the pandemic.

Table 5 Component matrix^{a1}

	Component
PS2	.953
PS1	.948
PS8	.957
PS10	.956

From the analysis, it was observed that PS8 and PS10 are considered as the primary psychological factors, with PS8 (employers must pay on time) the more important of the two, motivating employees to work with complete dedication. If this is fulfilled, the organization earns employee loyalty and future commitment, which is hard to achieve in this competitive era. Further, PS8 is also considered necessary, as existing employees are sure of the expected quality of the work they need to deliver, so timely payment of full salary is regarded as more important than having job security. However, they also consider job security vital as it assures a chance for appraisal or promotion. The third psychological factor identified was PS2, which engages employees with communication during their working remotely. This assures connection between the employees and employers and helps the colleagues overcome the boredom of staying at home and working independently.

Last but not least, PS1 was the fourth psychological factor identified as employees can save themselves, their families, and colleagues from the virus. However, while interacting with employees, they said they were working from home as it provides more flexible scheduling of working time than working in the office. This reinforces the idea that the employees can work at their most productive working hours, even at night. However, when the time to work from home extends unconditionally, the monotonous attitude prevails, resulting in boredom and stress. However, this attitude of employees can be conditioned by employers by communicating formally and informally.

6. Conclusion

Working from workstations or home – the communication between employers and employees brings in the sense of belonging that is the root for cultivating commitment from both parties. The formal and informal sharing of caring enhances productivity for the employers and job security for the employees as

it results in team building. For building a dedicated and positive workforce, it becomes inevitable for employers to pay the employees on time, which keeps them motivated and protected. This study has given clear insights into rapport building between employers and employees which is the base for establishing a stronger corporate world. Further, the study has contributed to identifying the much-needed psychological factors and their impact on various demographics of respondents. Beyond the significance of the study, its scope is limited to psychological support to employees in Bahrain. In the future, the study can be conducted on employers and compare the psychological support of employers from different industries and at different levels of industries.

7. Future Research

This study is based on remote working; however, the same can be considered for a combination of work from the office and home. The study has its sampling from the same country, whereas its furthering to compare two countries or two regions will add more critical insights in this regard. A comparative study applying the same factors to different sectors will be more interesting. A study in detail could be initiated on whether the range of pay manages to bring in big changes in the employees' mindsets.

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