

HR PRACTICES ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG GEN Z

Sugiharti¹, Kiswoyo², Abdullah³, Tri Sumiati⁴, Herman Wahyu Dwi⁵

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Totalwin

*Corresponding Author : kiswoyo@stietotalwin.ac.id

The study aims to explore Human Resources (HR) practices that cater to the mental health issues among Generation Z employees in the workplace. Given the fact that Gen Z is increasingly dominating the present workforce, companies would be forced to adapt their HR strategies to fit the special needs and sensitivities of this age group. This article explores various HR practices that include flexible work arrangements, training employees with regard to mental health, employee assistance programs, peer support networks, wellness initiatives, managerial support, digital mental health platforms, and workload management to ensure mental well-being, curbing of the stigma associated with mental disorders, and creating a supportive work environment for the employees. By focusing on a literature review methodology, the paper synthesizes current research findings to provide insights for HR professionals, researchers, and organizational leaders.

Keywords: Generation Z, HR practices, mental health, well-being.

1. Introduction

Over the years, more and more discussions in the workplace have grown, which are closely connected to increased evidence that explains it has a significant effect on how people can be in their work and on their corporate productivity. What is more, is that it comes with the generation that is now entering the workforce—Generation Z (Gen Z)—bringing with them particular perspectives and demands regarding mental health support at work. This review will introduce the evolving HR practices related to mental health, especially where this generation (Gen Z) is concerned, and this workplace well-being intersection. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is a state in which individuals realize their own potential, cope with everyday stresses, work productively, and contribute to society. However, despite increased awareness and advocacy efforts, mental health disorders still represent a considerable worldwide burden for people of all ages and demographics. Depression alone constitutes the main cause of disability in the world according to the WHO, accounting for an estimated 264 million people affected (World Health Organization, 2017; Patel et al., 2016). In the context of the workplace, mental health issues manifest in various forms, ranging from stress and burnout to anxiety disorders and depression. Such challenges not only jeopardize health and the joy of employees but also entail a significant toll on organizational performance and culture. Research shows that untreated mental health conditions reduce productivity, increase absenteeism, and increase the turnover rate, to limit achieving business objectives (Oliveira et al., 2023; Goetzel et al., 2018).

Moreover, the presence of Gen Z in the workforce has also brought about a paradigm shift in attitudes to mental health, compelling organizations to adapt their HR policies in line with the preferences and expectations of this generation. Born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, members of Gen Z are defined by their digital nativism, social consciousness, and work-life balance (Benitez-Marquez et al., 2021; Vieira et al., 2024; Chang et al., 2023). Unlike their preceding generations, they have grown up in a world characterized by unfathomable access to information and connectivity, shaping their perceptions of mental health and well-being (Stewart et al., 2016).

Evidently, Gen Z adds a premium emphasis on mental health support in the workplace, viewing it as something non-negotiable. A survey showed that 80% of Gen Z respondents said that their employer's approach to mental health and well-being was very important to them. Indeed, studies further suggest that Gen Z has experienced at least one mental health issue, and this was for good reason since it underscored the necessity to address such concerns in the workplace. Thus, in line with these trends, organizations need to re-examine their HR practices in order to cater to the evolving needs of Gen Z employees, along with fostering an environment that builds inclusivity and support (Jurewicz, 2015; Grelle et al., 2023).

2. Method

In this paper, the methodology is a literature review. The prime objective of the literature review is to focus on analyzing scholarly literature on HR practices toward mental health among Generation Z employees. The review aims at identifying current trends, challenges, and best practices that shall inform HR professionals, researchers, and organizational leaders (Bakker et al., 2014). A systematic and comprehensive search strategy will be implemented by using keywords such as "HR practices," "mental health," "Generation Z," and "workplace." Peer-reviewed journals, academic databases, and reputable sources will be searched to find articles published from 2015.

Inclusion Criteria:

- 1) Peer-reviewed articles considering HR practices and mental health initiatives at the workplace.
- 2) English-language publications from 2015 to the present.
- 3) Studies using different methodologies.
- 4) Exclusion Criteria:
- 5) Literature not directly relating to HR practices or mental health in the workplace.
- 6) Publications focusing purely on other generational cohorts or demographic groups.

Selected articles will be screened with title and abstract screening followed by a full-text review. Data will be extracted and classified under pre-determined themes such as HR interventions, mental health outcomes, challenges, and recommendations. Thematic and content analysis will be undertaken for data synthesis.

The quality and rigor of the selected studies will be assessed based on established criteria like the CASP for qualitative studies and the Joanna Briggs Institute checklist for quantitative studies. Studies that meet high-quality standards will have priority during the synthesis.

Synthesized findings will be organized thematically and then presented in a narrative format, highlighting the important parts, which include the identified trends, implications for HR practitioners, gaps in the literature, and future research directions.

Ethical considerations will be taken into account throughout the review process, which will include confidentiality, data integrity, and proper attribution.

Limitations, which may include publication bias and limitations on language, will be acknowledged. Efforts will be made to minimize biases and ensure the validity of findings.

The literature review will be conducted over a specified time frame with milestones for each stage. Realistic timelines will be set up for the completion of each milestone.

Findings will be disseminated through academic publications, conference presentations, and other relevant channels to reach diverse stakeholders who are interested in HR practices and mental health in the workplace.

This review aims to make a meaningful contribution to the discourse on HR practices and mental health support for Gen Z employees working in contemporary workplaces.

3. Result and Discussion

Generation Z (Gen Z) is the newest intake into the workforce, born approximately from the mid-1990s to early 2010s. It is a distinct cohort with unique characteristics and expectations, including an emerging awareness of mental health problems. The challenges of mental health facing Gen Z employees necessitate the adoption of flexible practices by organizations in their approach towards promoting mental well-being. This paper explores various HR practices aimed at supporting mental well-being among Gen Z at workplaces, examining each practice in detail and supported by relevant scholarly literature.

1) Flexible Work Arrangements

The proliferation of flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options and flexible hours, received prominence in recent years as well-established strategies for supporting employee well-being, especially in the Gen Z demographic. Studies by Allen et al. (2019) have underscored how flexible work arrangements are positively related to reduced stress levels and augmented work-life balance. Offering flexibility acknowledges the diversified requirements and preferences of Gen Z, with high autonomist and work-life balance aspirations (Twenge, 2019). By adopting flexible working hours, organizations offer flexibility that Gen Z employees can use to balance their workload in a way that would not adversely affect their mental health and productivity (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021; Chomatowska & Janiak-Rejno, 2022).

2) Mental Health Training and Education

In providing mental health training and education programs for employees and managers, organizations can improve awareness, reduce stigma, and prepare individuals with the skills required to support their own mental well-being and that of their peers. Research by Cullen et al. (2020) highlights the need for mental health destigmatization in the workplace through education initiatives. Providing an environment where employees can openly communicate their problems and be able to access required resources would address mental health issues experienced by Gen Z employees.

3) Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are programs that offer counseling services, therapy, or support for employees experiencing personal or work-related issues, including those related to mental health. Greenberg et al. (2015) have established that EAPs are effective in enhancing employee well-being and the reduction of absenteeism and turnover. By enabling access to professional support, organizations are able to promote active self-

care and seek help at any point in time, which creates a work culture that is more caring and supportive.

4) Peer Support Networks

Peer support networks constitute the creation of an informal system of support within the workforce where employees could relate to another who is struggling with similar problems and share experiences, coping strategies, and resources. Studies in Mikolajczak-Degrauwe et al. (2023) have been beneficial in the research conducted to indicate how peer support networks help reduce feelings of isolation and enhance the emotional well-being of employees. The provision of resources for peer support group formations can enable Gen Z employees to gain a sense of community and belonging; the same would enhance their resilience and coping capacity in response to workplace stressors.

5) Wellness Programs and Initiatives

Wellness programs and initiatives comprise a range of activities and resources promoting physical, mental, and emotional well-being among employees. These include mindfulness sessions, fitness classes, nutrition workshops, and stress management seminars. Studies reveal that wellness programs have been linked to improved employee health outcomes, increased job satisfaction, and increased levels of engagement (Marshall, 2020; Richford and Needham, 2020; Sypniewska et al., 2020). Wellness support would enable such organizations to invest in widespread wellness programs that enhance the overall well-being of the Gen Z employee base and foster a work environment that is health-focused and vital.

6) Managerial Support and Leadership

Effective leadership and managerial support are critical to promote employee well-being and create a conducive working environment. Managers should become the role model of healthy work practices, provide feedback and recognition, and offer support and guidance to employees with regards to their mental health (Genrich et al., 2022). Echoing this in empathy and a proper understanding of their employees' situations, managers will build trust and goodwill toward Gen Z employees to establish a positive work environment in support of mental health.

7) Digital Mental Health Platforms

The utilization of digital mental health platforms may be the provision of easily accessible, time-friendly, and relevant interventions to enhance employees' mental health and well-being through technology (Paleta-Lázaro et al., 2022). Such platforms can be mobile applications, internet-based psychotherapy, and online communities. It is observed that digital mental health platforms facilitate easy access to the different forms of psychotherapy and really diminish the barriers to treatment, thus improving treatment engagement by Philippe et al. (2022). Organizations may easily adopt digital mental health services to suit the mental health needs of Gen Z workers who are used to using technology for self-care and support (Lattie et al., 2019; Lipschitz et al., 2022; Himle et al., 2022).

8) Workload Management and Job Design

Efficient workload management and job design are necessary for preventing burnout and promoting mental well-being in employees. Jong (2016) notes that the key to mitigating the negative effect of job demands on employee mental health is the facilitation of autonomy, control, and meaning in job content. In such a scenario, workload pacing,

delegation of tasks, and job crafting are tools that organizations could implement to improve the designs of jobs in order to create conditions that support the emotional well-being of Gen Z employees. At the same time, promoting a balance between challenges and resources boosts the psychological well-being of Gen Z employees and inculcates a culture of sustainability and resilience within the workplace.

4. Conclusions

This paper has addressed several HR practices related to promoting mental well-being among Gen Z in the workplace that are an instrumental component of organizational success. Firstly, flexible work arrangements take autonomy and work-life balance as pertinent issues with flexible work arrangements reducing stress while improving productivity (Allen et al., 2019). The other crucial concern involves mental health training and education programs that augment awareness, reduce stigma, and equip employees and managers with the necessary skills for supporting their own and colleagues' well-being (Cullen et al., 2020). Providing EAP services and establishing peer support networks are also other methods in promoting mental health support and resilience among the Gen Z employees (Greenberg et al., 2015; Mikolajczak-Degrauwe et al., 2023). Wellness programs and initiatives are a holistic approach to employee well-being, because they touch on physical, mental, and emotional health issues. From mindfulness sessions to stress management seminars, they have been linked with greater health outcomes and higher levels of engagement (Marshall, 2020; Richemond & Needham, 2020). Effective managerial support and leadership are indispensable to establish a supportive work environment by managers and leaders (Genrich et al., 2022). Thus, it calls for innovative digital platforms for mental health, being for example mobile apps, online therapy services. These are like self-care and support for Gen Z workers who have learned to make use of technology as a mechanism (Philippe et al., 2022; Lattie et al., 2019). The ability to effectively manage workload and job design is also vital to prevent burnout and enhance employee well-being. Job design can be improved by setting autonomy, control, and meaningful work experiences (Jong, 2016).

5. Acknowledgements

In summary, addressing mental health issues among Gen Z in the workplace entails a comprehensive approach inclusive of diverse HR practices and initiatives. By emphasizing flexible work arrangements, mental health training, employee assistance programs, peer support networks, wellness initiatives, managerial support, digital mental health platforms, and effective workload management, organizations can provide the environment required to ensure well-being, enabling the development of a culture that not only cares but supports and cares for employees. In order to develop evidence-based HR practices, continuous research, collaboration, and innovation are necessary, ensuring that these practices cater to the changing needs of Gen Z employees and support mental health and resilience in the workplace. If the right practices are embraced, organizations can cultivate healthier, more productive work environments that benefit not only the employees but the organization as a whole.

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