

EMPLOYEE WELLBEING IN ORGANIZATIONS IN POST COVID -19 ERA

Dr. Catherine Laura Mamuli¹
Lecturer, Kibabii University
lmamuli@kibu.ac.ke
0724681652

Dr. Gladys Bunyasi²
Lecturer, KCA University
bunyasi@kcau.ac.ke
0726586111

ABSTRACT

Employee well-being is a multidimensional concept encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and economic aspects. It is crucial for organizational success, as employees are an organization's most valuable resource. Effective leadership plays a pivotal role in creating a positive work environment. Female employees often face unique challenges that affect their well-being, with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating these disparities. Workplace interventions traditionally focused on stress reduction but have shown limited effectiveness. This systematic review aims to explore the factors influencing female employee engagement and well-being, particularly during the pandemic. It identifies gender-specific challenges and recommends gender-inclusive well-being programs, promoting gender diversity in leadership, flexible work arrangements, leadership training, regular well-being assessments, inclusivity, and continuous learning. Implementing these recommendations can create an equitable, supportive work environment benefiting both individuals and organizations.

Keywords: Employee well-being, female employees, leadership, gender diversity, workplace interventions, COVID-19, systematic review.

1.1 Introduction

Employee well-being is a comprehensive concept that encompasses the overall health and welfare of an organization's workforce, spanning physical, mental, emotional, and economic dimensions. Within the context of organizational structures, an organization can be defined as a social entity where individuals collaborate to pursue common objectives, often involving the provision of goods and services to the community. Central to this framework is the recognition that employees are the most valuable resource for an organization, serving as the catalysts that transform various resources into the products and services demanded by customers. This process is guided by structured procedures that regulate the flow of work within the organization.

Effective leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping organizations that foster a positive work environment characterized by trust, exceptional customer service, collaborative teamwork, operational excellence, and innovative problem-solving (Pandya, 2014). In this context, a leader is an individual in a position of authority who leads and influences their followers—employees under their supervision. Effective leaders inspire passion and motivation among their followers, possess a clear vision, and chart a path toward its realization.

According to Martic (2020), employee well-being is a multifaceted concept that takes into account various factors, including employees' roles, expectations, stress levels, and work environments, and how these elements impact their overall health and happiness. It is essential to emphasize that employees are the most valuable asset of an organization. Consequently, the manner in which organizations treat their employees significantly affects their overall performance. Forward-thinking organizations recognize the challenge of replacing specialized skills, especially in the knowledge economy, and hence prioritize investing in their employees (Hellgren et al., 2008). Consequently, supporting and retaining employees becomes pivotal for organizational success.

Employees spend a substantial portion of their adult lives at work, whether they are employed by an organization or self-employed. Consequently, finding fulfillment and functioning effectively in their professional roles are fundamental components of an employee's overall well-being. Research has linked enhanced employee well-being to various positive organizational outcomes, such as improved work performance (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), reduced turnover intentions and actual turnover (Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008), increased effort and commitment to work, decreased absenteeism, and fewer work-related injuries (Keyes and Grzywacz, 2005). Given the substantial impact of well-being on both individual employees and organizational success, organizations are well-advised to actively support and promote well-being in the workplace (Dewe and Cooper, 2012; Hone et al., 2015).

Despite the manifold benefits associated with employee well-being, organizations have historically tended to focus on mitigating employee stress rather than enhancing overall well-being (Hone et al., 2015). Stress naturally arises when individuals perceive a misalignment between their personal resources and the demands of their environment. Research has consistently demonstrated that stress can lead to decreased productivity, ultimately affecting an organization's profitability (Ford et al., 2011). Consequently, organizations have often prioritized the implementation of stress reduction interventions (Kelloway and Day, 2005). Traditional well-being interventions, typically centered on individual stress management, have shown limited long-term effectiveness and have failed to yield improved organizational outcomes (LaMontagne et al., 2007; Baumeister and Alghamdi, 2015; Vanhove et al., 2016).

Stress and well-being are interconnected yet distinct concepts; positive stress can contribute to employee well-being, while the absence of stress does not necessarily equate to well-being (Keyes, 2005). Evidence suggests that flourishing, which entails thriving in various aspects of life, may serve as a buffer against the negative effects of stress, underscoring the importance of investing in well-being to reduce stress while fostering additional benefits associated with flourishing in the workplace (Keyes and Grzywacz, 2005; Hone et al., 2015).

Female employees often contend with unique challenges that lead to higher stress levels compared to their male counterparts. A recent survey conducted in the United Kingdom found that 79% of women, compared to 66% of men, reported experiencing work-related stress. Furthermore, Gallup's 2021 State of the Global Workplace report revealed that female workers globally experience higher stress levels than their male counterparts, with 46% of working women and 42% of working men reporting stress in 2020. In the United States and Canada, these figures rose to 62% and 52%, respectively. This data highlights a concerning decline in well-being among employed women, irrespective of whether they have children, compared to men. The significant stress experienced by female workers affects their overall well-being across five dimensions: career, social, financial, physical, and community well-being. Gallup's research further underscores that a fulfilling life involves thriving in all these dimensions, with career well-being often being the first aspect to suffer. Additionally, gender diversity in the workplace not only enriches the leadership pipeline but also leads to more effective management by women and increased engagement among female employees. Gender-diverse companies are also shown to be more profitable. A pre-

COVID-19 Gallup study demonstrated that gender-diverse business units in retail had 14% higher comparable revenue, while gender-diverse business units in the hospitality industry exhibited 19% higher average quarterly net profit compared to less diverse units.

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced significant challenges for organizations, particularly in the realm of human resource management (Carnavale and Hatak, 2020). The pandemic has prompted radical changes in work environments, including the widespread adoption of remote work and the implementation of new workplace policies and procedures to align with COVID-19 protocols recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). These changes have had consequential effects on employees, including difficulties in disengaging from work demands, separating work from personal life, and experiencing psychosocial risks such as isolation (Chawla, MacGowan, Gabriel, and Podsakoff, 2020). Despite Kumar's (2021) general overview of what constitutes an engaging work environment, little is known about how to foster employee engagement and well-being in the current pandemic context. This study, therefore, aims to explore the primary drivers of female employee engagement and well-being in the current health crisis and delve deeper into their empowerment within the workplace.

The existing body of knowledge emphasizes the importance of employee well-being and its connection to organizational success. However, there is a conspicuous gap in understanding the specific challenges faced by female employees regarding their well-being, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While studies have highlighted gender disparities in stress levels and well-being, there is a need for more comprehensive research that not only identifies these challenges but also explores effective strategies and interventions to support female employees in the current health crisis. Additionally, the link between gender diversity in the workplace, female leadership, and organizational performance underscores the significance of addressing the unique well-being needs of female employees.

This study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by conducting a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing female employee engagement and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to identify the specific stressors and challenges faced by female employees, assess the impact of these challenges on their overall well-being, and propose evidence-based strategies for organizations to empower and support their female workforce. By doing so, this research aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform organizational policies and practices, ultimately promoting gender equality and enhancing both individual and organizational well-being.

2.0 Empirical Literature Review

2.1 Female Employees' Wellbeing at Work

Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept often viewed from two main perspectives: hedonic and eudemonic. The hedonic perspective defines well being as happiness, emphasizing life satisfaction, positive mood, and the absence of negative mood (Diener et al., 1998). On the other hand, the eudemonic perspective focuses on self-actualization and the expression of virtue, emphasizing personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Combining both perspectives, well being can be seen as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes feeling good (hedonism) and functioning well (eudemonia) (Aked et al., 2009).

Wellbeing at work reflects an individual's overall satisfaction with and positive feelings toward their work. It's increasingly recognized that conceptualizations of well being, both at work and in general, should include a social relationships component, as it's crucial for positive work experiences (Fisher,

2014). Research shows that employees with high well being invest more thought and effort into their work, leading to greater productivity (Canaff and Wright, 2004; Keyes and Grzywacz, 2005; Day and Randell, 2014). Conversely, poor psychological health, including depressed mood and anxiety, can diminish cognitive resources, leading to decreased performance (Ford et al., 2011; Taris, 2006). It can also result in reduced energy and motivation for positive work behaviors, impacting outcomes like organizational citizenship behaviors (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Ford et al., 2011). Employee well being has been linked to positive organizational attitudes such as team cohesion, job satisfaction, and engagement (Bakker, 2015).

However, female employees often face unique challenges that impact their well being. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, with women experiencing greater economic and social disparities. Economic slowdowns during crises tend to disproportionately affect women, pushing gender equality concerns down the agenda (UN Policy Brief, 2020). For example, the representation of women in leadership positions in Corporate America was slowly increasing before the pandemic, but women have faced increased burnout and pressure during the crisis (McKinsey Report, 2021). Female employees in emerging economies have reported even more acute challenges compared to those in developed economies (McKinsey Report, 2020).

In addition to economic disparities, women are disproportionately engaged in informal and vulnerable forms of employment, often excluded from formal social protection measures (UN Policy Brief, 2020). Female healthcare workers, who make up a significant part of the workforce, may have less decision-making capacity and less access to protective equipment during crises (UN Policy Brief, 2020). Women working in informal health sectors, such as home healthcare, can be particularly vulnerable.

These gender disparities and the increased stress experienced by female employees have led to high turnover rates and burnout among women, negatively impacting organizational performance. The cultural expectation that women are caregivers adds to their stress levels, contributing to poor workplace performance.

2.2 Workplace Well being Interventions

Workplace well being interventions have traditionally focused on reducing stress among employees. These interventions can be categorized into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Tetrick and Quick, 2011). Primary interventions target the organization to reduce or eliminate stressors, secondary interventions focus on changing individual perceptions or reactions to stressors, and tertiary interventions aim at rehabilitating individuals already suffering from strain. While tertiary interventions can provide short-term stress reduction for those already suffering, they often lack long-term effects on stress coping or organizational attitudes (Noblet and Lamontagne, 2006).

Effective workplace interventions often combine both primary and secondary levels by encouraging employees to engage in positive activities that promote well being. However, evidence on the effectiveness of workplace interventions, especially for female workers, is limited. Women's unique challenges, including gender roles, stereotypes, and intersectional factors, can make them more vulnerable to workplace stressors and impact their mental health.

To address these challenges, organizations should embrace work-life balance practices that meet the needs of female employees and enhance their commitment levels. Leaders, managers, and HR professionals must drive cultural change within organizations by providing well being training programs, fostering open communication, and integrating well being into policies, practices, and measurements.

Inclusive flexibility and sustainable ways of working should also be promoted to support women's well-being. By taking proactive steps to address these issues, organizations can create a more equitable and supportive work environment for all employees, ultimately benefiting both individuals and the organization itself.

3.0 Methodology

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the literature related to female employee engagement and well-being, a systematic review approach was meticulously employed. A systematic review is a rigorous and structured research method aimed at evaluating, synthesizing, and integrating key insights from primary research studies on a specific topic or subject matter. This systematic review followed well-established procedures to ensure the reliability and validity of its findings, with a strong emphasis on objectivity and precision (Manterola, 2009).

The first step in this systematic review involved the development of a systematic search strategy. This strategy was designed to identify pertinent literature effectively. It entailed an exhaustive and methodical search of bibliographic databases, ensuring comprehensive coverage of relevant studies. The search query was thoughtfully crafted to encompass various dimensions of female employee engagement and well-being, including but not limited to topics such as stress, work-life balance, career progression, and organizational policies. To minimize selection bias, the search extended to encompass peer-reviewed journals, academic publications, conference proceedings, and other reputable sources in the field. This inclusive approach to sourcing literature was essential to ensure that the review encompassed a wide range of perspectives and insights.

To maintain the relevance and quality of the studies included in the review, stringent inclusion criteria were established. These criteria considered factors such as the publication date, study design, and the central focus on female employee engagement and well-being. Only studies meeting these predefined inclusion criteria were deemed eligible for inclusion in the review. This selective process aimed to ensure that the research selected for analysis was of high quality and directly contributed to the review's objectives.

Subsequently, data from the selected studies were extracted with precision and methodical rigor. This involved a systematic collection of key information, including study objectives, methodologies, participant demographics, and primary findings. To enhance accuracy and reliability, multiple reviewers independently performed the data extraction process. Furthermore, an evaluation of the methodological quality of the included studies was conducted to assess the robustness of their research designs and data collection procedures. Established criteria for quality assessment were consistently applied to each study, with any discrepancies being resolved through thorough discussion and consensus among the reviewing team.

By employing this enhanced methodology, the systematic review aimed to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding female employee engagement and well-being within the workplace. The systematic approach ensured that the review process was rigorous, objective, and reliable, thus yielding valuable insights to inform practice and further research in this critical area.

4.0 Discussion of Findings

The empirical literature review in this paper discusses two key areas: the well-being of female employees at work and workplace well-being interventions. The following is a breakdown of the findings in each of these areas:

4.1 Female Employees' Wellbeing at Work:

Wellbeing Conceptualization: The review begins by discussing the multifaceted nature of well-being, encompassing both hedonic (happiness) and eudemonic (self-actualization) perspectives. This dual perspective suggests that well-being is not just about feeling good but also about functioning well. **Importance of Wellbeing at Work** The review highlights that well-being at work is crucial for overall job satisfaction and positive work experiences. Employees with high well-being tend to invest more effort and thought into their work, resulting in greater productivity. Conversely, poor psychological health can lead to decreased performance, reduced motivation, and even affect organizational citizenship behaviors. Well-being is also linked to positive organizational attitudes like team cohesion, job satisfaction, and engagement.

Challenges for Female Employees:Female employees often face unique challenges that affect their well-being, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has exacerbated gender disparities, leading to increased burnout and pressure among women. Economic slowdowns during crises disproportionately affect women, and female employees in emerging economies face even more acute challenges. Women are also more likely to be engaged in informal and vulnerable forms of employment, lacking access to social protection measures. Female healthcare workers, a significant portion of the workforce, may have less decision-making capacity and access to protective equipment during crises. Additionally, cultural expectations that women are caregivers add to their stress levels.

Impact on Organizational Performance:The gender disparities and increased stress experienced by female employees can lead to high turnover rates and burnout, negatively impacting organizational performance.

4.2 Workplace Wellbeing Interventions:

Types of Interventions:The review categorizes workplace well being interventions into primary (organization-focused), secondary (individual-focused), and tertiary (rehabilitation-focused) levels. Primary interventions aim to reduce or eliminate stressors within the organization, while secondary interventions focus on changing individual perceptions or reactions to stressors. Tertiary interventions target individuals already suffering from strain.

Limited Evidence for Female Workers:The review points out that evidence on the effectiveness of workplace interventions, especially for female workers, is limited. Women's unique challenges, including gender roles, stereotypes, and intersectional factors, can make them more vulnerable to workplace stressors and affect their mental health.

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges:To address these challenges, the review suggests that organizations should promote work-life balance practices that meet the needs of female employees and enhance their commitment levels. Cultural change within organizations is essential, involving well being training programs, open communication, and integration of well being into policies, practices, and measurements. Inclusive flexibility and sustainable working practices should also be promoted to support women's well being.

In conclusion, the literature review provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of female employee well-being at work and the interventions needed to address these challenges. It underscores the importance of considering the unique challenges faced by female employees and highlights the need for

evidence-based strategies to support their well being in the workplace. The review also emphasizes the potential benefits of such interventions for both individuals and organizations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic review has shed light on the critical relationship between employee well being, particularly among female employees, and organizational success. Employee well being is a multifaceted concept encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and economic dimensions. Recognizing that employees are an organization's most valuable resource, fostering their well being is pivotal for overall performance. Effective leadership is essential in creating a positive work environment that promotes trust, collaboration, operational excellence, and innovation.

While research has established the benefits of employee well being for organizations, gender disparities persist, with female employees facing unique challenges that impact their well being. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these disparities, emphasizing the need for organizations to address the distinct stressors and pressures experienced by women. Female employees are more likely to report work-related stress, with significant implications for their overall well being. This underscores the importance of gender-specific interventions and support strategies.

Workplace interventions aimed at enhancing employee well being have traditionally focused on stress reduction. However, these interventions have shown limited long-term effectiveness, necessitating a shift toward holistic approaches that consider both stress reduction and the promotion of positive well being. Organizations should prioritize work-life balance, offer well being training programs, and foster inclusive flexibility to support female employees. By addressing these challenges and embracing gender diversity in leadership, organizations can create an equitable and supportive work environment that benefits both individual employees and the organization as a whole. This systematic review serves as a foundation for understanding the complex dynamics of female employee well being and provides valuable insights for organizations seeking to enhance the well being of their workforce in a rapidly changing world.

4.0 Recommendations

1. **Implement Gender-Inclusive Well-Being Programs:** Organizations should develop and implement gender-inclusive well-being programs that address the unique challenges faced by female employees. These programs should encompass physical, mental, emotional, and economic dimensions of well-being. To ensure effectiveness, organizations should actively involve female employees in the design and evaluation of these programs. Tailored initiatives can include stress management workshops, mental health support, financial literacy programs, and career development opportunities that specifically consider the needs and aspirations of female employees.
2. **Promote Gender Diversity in Leadership:** Organizations should prioritize gender diversity in leadership roles. This involves not only hiring more women but also creating an inclusive and supportive leadership culture. Gender-diverse leadership teams can serve as role models and advocates for female employees, helping to reduce gender disparities in the workplace. Mentorship and sponsorship programs can be established to facilitate the career advancement of women, providing them with guidance, opportunities, and exposure to leadership positions.
3. **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Given the increased stress and challenges faced by female employees, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations should offer flexible work arrangements. This flexibility could include options such as remote work, flexible hours, and job-sharing arrangements. By providing these choices, organizations can help female

employees better balance their work and personal responsibilities, reducing stress and promoting overall well-being.

4. **Leadership Training:** Equip leaders and managers with the skills and knowledge needed to foster a positive work environment that supports employee well-being, including that of female employees. Leadership training programs should emphasize empathy, communication, and the recognition of diverse needs within the workforce. Leaders should be encouraged to actively listen to the concerns of female employees, provide constructive feedback, and create opportunities for growth and advancement.
5. **Regular Well-Being Assessments:** Implement regular well-being assessments and surveys within the organization to monitor the well-being of all employees, with a specific focus on female employees. These assessments can help organizations identify emerging challenges and areas where interventions are needed. Data-driven decision-making can guide the development and adjustment of well-being initiatives to ensure they remain effective and relevant.
6. **Promote Inclusivity and Diversity:** Organizations should foster a culture of inclusivity and diversity where all employees, regardless of gender or background, feel valued and respected. Training programs and awareness campaigns can help combat gender bias and stereotypes in the workplace. Encouraging open dialogue and creating safe spaces for discussions on gender-related issues can further contribute to a more inclusive and supportive work environment.
7. **Continuous Learning and Adaptation:** Recognize that the landscape of employee well-being is constantly evolving, especially in the face of external challenges such as pandemics. Organizations should remain adaptable and open to ongoing learning. Regularly review and update well-being initiatives to ensure they meet the changing needs of female employees and the workforce as a whole.

Incorporating these recommendations into organizational policies and practices can lead to a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive workplace where female employees can thrive, ultimately benefiting both the individuals and the organization's overall success. By prioritizing the well-being of female employees, organizations can contribute to a more diverse, engaged, and resilient workforce.

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