

The Impact of Covid-19 on Employees' Motivation: A Saudi Arabian Case Study

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This research is of great significance as it highlights the effect of COVID-19 on employees' motivation with particular interest in a Saudi Arabian population. In addition, it will support the organisational structures by showing negative influences of this economy-deteriorating event on the Arabian workforce. The study is designed with a quantitative research design with a sample population of N=100 employees. Descriptive statistics including the standard deviation as well variance analysis in addition to Pearson correlation statistics have been applied for the interpretation of the collected data. Two variables have been studied in the research: effect of COVID-19 and employees' motivation. The results of the study concluded that COVID-19 impacted adversely the motivation of workers, therefore the adoption of a resilience strategy is suggested to deal with the present adverse situation.

Key words: *COVID-19, Motivation, Management, Saudi, Labor Relation, Behavior.*

INTRODUCTION

A global pandemic COVID-19 has emerged through a novel coronavirus and is responsible for many worldwide cases and fatalities. On March 12, 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak was announced as a global pandemic by the WHO. The pandemic situation is still not under control and is continuously aggravating. The worldwide efforts to combat the virus not only impact the health and economy of nations but also challenge the jobs and careers of millions of people globally. Outbreaks like COVID-19 widely disrupt necessary activities and economic growth as well as impart acute and long-term effects on individual's lives. The overall impact prevails on physical, economical as well as the emotional wellbeing of individuals. There is a consistent relationship between infectious outbreaks and psychological and behavioural significance. Adverse psychological penalties comprised frequent incidences of depression, distress, anxiety, and consequently reduced life quality. On the other hand, pandemic outbreaks also

resulted in positive behavioural consequences such as better hygienic practices, routine medical assistance and social distancing.

There are not many studies reported in Saudi Arabia regarding the harmful impacts of COVID-19 on the workforce of the Kingdom as well as possible strategies to out compete the prevailing condition by keeping the morale of employees up. One study was reported on this topic in Saudi Arabia. In that study insights of chief executive officers (CEOs) of several enterprises were collected regarding impacts of a health crisis due to COVID-19 on their businesses and their recovery plans for the sustainability of their work. The remarks and sentiments of CEOs were mixed. Some were planning to change their work strategy while others were thinking of minimising the number of their workers or delaying their salaries (Nurunnabi, Alhawal, & Hoque, 2020). This approach may panic the employees and enhance their uncertainty in the peak. In this situation, companies strongly need to devise a framework for the wellbeing of their employees to keep them healthy, safe and in good mental condition. This will, in turn, enhance their productivity and economic outcomes.

Although almost the whole of the workforce is affected by the psychological and behavioral consequences, essential health care workers are acutely victimised by this prevailing condition. Their primary concerns are limited availability of vaccines and personal protective equipment (PPE) with consequent endangered personal safety.

Besides these, in health care facilities individuals have also encountered harsh workplace demands such as increased and irregular working hours leading to fatigue, sleep disorders and headaches etc. According to another study conducted in Saudi Arabia an assessment of distress level due to COVID-19 among the population, it was revealed that around 40% of the people in Saudi Arabia are distressed due to this pandemic. These levels of distress were significant in young people, females, health workers and employees in the private sector (Al-Hanawi et al., 2020). In another study targeting physicians of different regions in Saudi Arabia, it was found out that the most common feelings among the physicians was isolation, fear and worry. These feelings were more significant in females than males and participants of the age range above 60 (Al Sulais, Mosli, & AlAmeel, 2020).

The workforce in hospitality and trade industries worldwide is also badly impacted due to global restrictions in order to prevent the spread of the virus. Although the world is gradually emerging from the lockdown, hospitality and trade sectors are still the high-risk industries due to the evolving "Second Wave" (Hu, Yan, Casey, & Wu, 2021). In general, the whole community is disturbed by the restrictions, isolation, and confinement to home. Further, the closure of educational and religious institutes further aggravates psychological difficulties (Restubog, Ocampo, & Wang, 2020).

The major responsible factor for the above-mentioned psychological consequences is lack of awareness about the emerging challenges and requirements during this time of the pandemic.

Epidemic preparedness and proper guidance are the key requirements to avoid chaos and panic. A detailed study was conducted in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. In order to assess the awareness level and attitude of people, a survey was conducted with 1767 participants. 58% of the participants manifested a moderate level of awareness, a high attitude was presented by 95% of participants and an adequate practice was found out in 81% participants. This study revealed that in males, a slight increase (60%) was shown in the level of awareness in comparison to the female members (57%). On the other hand, with regard to the practice towards COVID-19, females displayed improved efficiency (82%) more than males (80%) (Alahdal, Basingab, & Alotaibi, 2020).

Small businesses particularly need motivation as COVID-19 has almost completely closed down many small businesses as a consequence of requirements for physical distancing and extra hygienic measurements. It is an important point to be kept in mind that business is not just about numbers and tasks rather it is more reliant on relationships, workforce and the impact on the community (Ertel, 2020). Human resource (HR) managers should play their role in maximising the satisfaction level of their workers, proper guidelines and easy access to information resources. These are some of the key elements responsible for maximising their income and living styles accordingly. Moreover, effective communication between management and workers can also boost the motivation level of workers (Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020).

Among various strategies, working from home and working in different shifts are also playing an advantageous role in keeping the morale of employees high (Wolor, Solikhah, Susita, & Martono, 2020). Moreover, for employees' working in virtual environments during this time of COVID-19, a huge source of motivation is leadership effectiveness. Appropriate leadership is decisive for the maintenance of employees' performance through uncertain situations (Bartsch, Weber, Büttgen, & Huber, 2020). Furthermore, supervisor support at organisational and institutional setups plays an important role to mitigate the uncertainties of employees. A study conducted at two private sector universities of high COVID-19 impacted areas revealed that there is an inverse relationship between supervisor support and the emotional exhaustion of their employees (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020).

As the world is now opening up from lockdowns and entering into a "new normal" phase, there is the chance for the nations to act in solidarity. Saudi Arabia is one of the only countries worldwide to announce that everyone residing there, including people with visa violations can access free COVID-19 treatment irrespective of any legal or monetary considerations, has set a spectacular example to be followed. Despite its remarkable damages to human beings and their livelihoods, this pandemic provides an opportunity to turn this disaster into an incentive to achieve sustainability. The organisations and industries of every sector to conduct their work by prioritising their employees' motivation towards their work commitments and mitigate the safety concerns.

The literature review showed that there is a deficit about the detailed study of the impacts of COVID-19 on employees' motivation within the context of Saudi Arabia. The present research study is designed to identify the factors which contributed to the development of demonisation of the employees towards their work commitments, efficiency and job satisfaction.

1. NEED FOR THE STUDY

There are not many studies reported in Saudi Arabia regarding the harmful impacts of Covid-19 on the workforce of the Kingdom, as well as possible strategies to out compete this prevailing condition by boosting employee morale. In this situation, companies strongly need to devise a framework for the wellbeing of their employees to keep them healthy, safe and in good mental condition. This will, in turn, enhance their productivity and economic outcomes. Moreover, for the workers working in the virtual environment during this time of COVID-19, a massive source of motivation is leadership effectiveness. Appropriate leadership is decisive for the maintenance of employees' performance through uncertain situations (Bartsch, Weber, Büttgen, & Huber, 2020).

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are

1. To investigate the relationship between employees' motivation and Covid-19 effects.
2. To investigate the effect of Covid-19 on the employees' motivation.
3. To assess the gender difference in the employees' motivation during Covid-19 situation.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Quantitative method

This quantitative research is based on a population survey, a questionnaire development for the collection of required information and interviews of the targeted population. To explore the relationship between the different dependent and independent variables quantifiable data in the form of close-ended questions is collected for the interpretation of the recorded trends and correlations. This type of research design is implicated to understand the general information prevalent in the population. The discussion clarifies the points behind the selection of a quantitative research design.

In addition to a quantitative methodology, the exploratory approach is applied to resolve, identify and point out the factors involved in the escalation of employees' motivation and demonisation, and the potential role of COVID-19 in this context. Such types of approaches

try to analyse comprehensively any hidden aspects that occur in encountered problem. It adds essential information to the relevant literature. Further, the exploratory process is selected for the data exploration of the Saudi Arabian geographical region. Likewise, from the deductive and inductive approaches, the former one is chosen because the literature is enriched with the theoretical description of major frameworks of employees' motivation.

4.2 Research participants and sample size

The selection of participants which took part in the present research work is carried out by keeping in mind the research objectives, requirements, and other perspectives. Therefore, the working Saudi Arabian population is the target of the research work. On the other hand, the motivation level of the study participants is also considered. The workforce related to different public and private sectors and those impacted with COVID-19 is also an element of this research. Industry worker, small, medium, and large business people, bankers, teachers and others. The sample size is $N=100$, and comprised of the male and female population of Saudi Arabia (main workforce). The age of the participants is around 25-55 years. This age range is used for the deep analysis of the age factor on the level of motivation in coronavirus pandemic.

4.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria have been set for the research as it increases the chances of recording accurate information from the targeted population. That is why the participants are Saudi Arabian public or private employees in any of the mentioned fields. The participant's age should be in the range of 25-55 years and the impacts of COVID-19 are faced in their working scenario. By using this criteria relatively strong data can be provided in comparison to non-employed Saudi Arabian citizens.

4.3 Data collection

The data was collected from the website (Data.gov, 2019) where employees gave feedback about their personal views and experiences. Initially, the data was assessed for demographic information of the participants for example gender, age, employment status and qualification. Whereas later the information about motivation level, working hours per day, effects of COVID-19 on employees' mental health was collected.

4.5 The validity of the Data

A responses validity assessment has been made to eliminate any ambiguity from the results. From the total participants, ten were selected in the first stage to analyse the level of responses, nature, and accurateness of the data. The outcomes gave an idea about the validity of the answers in the first stage; it supported the accurate data collection in a later stage with full clarity and transparency.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, overall N=100 employees recorded their data from different workplaces. Moreover, n=50 females and n=50 males were included. In table 1 results show the descriptive statistics of the real data.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the variables.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Gender	100	1.00	2.00	1.5000	.50252	.253
Qualification	100	1.00	3.00	2.3100	.64659	.418
Are you employee in the company?	100	1.00	1.00	1.0000	.00000	.000
Time duration of the job per day	100	1.00	3.00	2.2400	.66848	.447
Age	100	18.00	43.00	30.0100	4.11328	16.919
Effect of Covid-19	100	1.00	3.00	2.5600	.53786	.289
Employees Motivation	100	1.00	3.00	2.4700	.54039	.292

According to Jackson (2020), the covid-19 pandemic is first and foremost a human tragedy that has played out across the globe. It's no surprise the Covid-19 pandemic is upending the lives of employees who are struggling to focus and stay engaged at work as fears of becoming unemployed or ill loom. Being buried in projects makes employees feel overwhelmed, stressed and anxious. This shows a negative correlation was found between the Covid-19 and employees' motivation.

Moreover, in this study, table 2 results illustrated that there is a significant negative correlation between the effect of Covid-19 and employees' motivation. The below table indicates that negative correlation is found at the point of $r=-.045$, $p<.650$. Therefore, the result concluded that significant negative effects are established due to Covid-19.

Table 2: The correlation matrix

Variables	r	Effect of Covid-19	Employees Motivation
	Pearson Correlation		1
Effect of Covid-19	Sig. (2-tailed)		-.046
	N	100	100
	Pearson Correlation	-.046	1
Employees Motivation	Sig. (2-tailed)	.650	
	N	100	100

According to the study of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a comprehensive study was conducted. A survey with 1767 participants was conducted to determine the level of understanding and attitude of individuals. A modest level of sensitivity was displayed by 58 percent of the participants, 95 percent of the participants showed a high attitude was presented and 81 percent of participants considered sufficient practice. This study found that a small improvement in the level of knowledge was seen in males (60 percent) relative to the female participants (57 percent). On the other hand, females showed better performance (82 percent) than males (80 percent) with regard to Covid-19 practice (Alahdal, Basingab, & Aalotaibi, 2020).

Like previous studies, this study results also illustrated that male participants have more differences as compared to females. The male participants average mean ($M=2.60$, $S.D=.49$) which is higher compared to the mean female ($M=2.34$, $S.D=.55$). The results of the survey illustrated that there is a significant gender difference founded between Covid-19 in the employee's motivation. The resulting outcome indicated that there is a gender difference at the value of $t=-2.467$, $p<0.15$. The results concluded that male participants have more motivation compared to females during covid-19.

Table 3: Group statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Employee Motivation	Female	50	2.3400	.55733	.07882
	Male	50	2.6000	.49487	.06999

Table 4: showing the independent samples test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			Std. Error	95%CI	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.		Mean Difference	Lower
Employees	.366	.546	-2.467	98	.015	-.26000.10540	-.4691	-.05083
Motivation			-2.467	96.64	.015	-.26000.10540	-.4692	-.05079

Research conducted at two high-impact Covid-19 private industry universities found that there is an apparent contradiction between supervisor support and the psychological fatigue of their workers (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020). Another study highlighted that the pandemic has upended almost everyone's lives and wellbeing, but healthcare workers had the highest drop in motivation in any sector (approx. 48 percent).

With double-digit rises in work stress (11 percent), disordered sleep (14 percent), burnout (23 percent), and roughly 40 percent decrease in morale, workers in the tech sector saw the most generally negative shifts in any industry. Motivation saw a serious decline, with workers under 40 suffering a decline of 45 percent, while workers over 40 experienced a 14 percent decline in motivation. The result shows that there is a 19 percent rise in the risk of burnout amongst the younger age group, while the older age group experienced a 3 per cent decreased threat of burnout between December 2019 and June 2020 (Ritchey, 2020).

This study's results also illustrated that there is a significant adverse effect found. According to table 5, the results reveal that there is a 46% effect of Covid-19 on the employee's motivation. This study results illustrated that the Covid-19 has a significant negative impact on the employee's motivation at the level of $F=.207$, $p<.650$. So the result concluded that Covid-19 has an adverse and significant negative impact on employees' motivation level during this situation.

Table 5: showing the MODEL summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the F Estimate	Sig.
1		.46.052	-.008	.54257	.207
(Constant)	2.588				
Effect of Covid-19	-.046				



6. CONCLUSION

Among workers who feel abandoned by their employer, the rate of growth in job stress was much more than ten times higher than others who feel strongly supported by their employer. For those who did not feel supported by their employer, rises in the effects of burnout, disordered sleep, and motivational problems were also all significantly greater. Company encouragement for the wellbeing of employees can help reduce the risk of behavioural health, as well as improve employee engagement and commitment," (Smith,). Resilience is a key skill, as the adverse effects of COVID-19 were managed considerably better by study participants with the highest responsiveness levels than those with low and moderate resilience. Action plan's and preventive measures must be tracked and revised periodically. Workers and their delegates should be consulted and should engage in COVID-19 workplace growth, monitoring and updating.

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