

European Journal of
Sociology
(EJS)



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Health in Middle East**

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Relationship between Employment Status and Mental Health in Middle East



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Article history

Submitted 20.05.2024 Revised Version Received 26.06.2024 Accepted 29.07.2024

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the relationship between employment status and mental health in Middle East.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Employment provides not only financial stability but also a sense of purpose and social inclusion, which are vital for psychological well-being. Individuals who are employed tend to exhibit lower levels of anxiety and depression compared to those who are unemployed. The loss of a job can lead to significant mental distress, characterized by heightened stress levels, a sense of hopelessness, and diminished self-esteem. Furthermore, precarious employment conditions, such as part-time or temporary

work, have been linked to poorer mental health outcomes, as these positions often lack job security and adequate benefits. Conversely, stable and fulfilling employment can enhance mental health by fostering a sense of achievement and stability. These findings underscore the importance of employment policies that promote job security, fair wages, and supportive work environments as a means to bolster mental health across populations.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Job demand-resources (JD-R) model, role strain theory and social support theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the relationship between employment status and mental health in Middle East. Employers should implement comprehensive mental health initiatives tailored to the unique challenges faced by middle-aged employees. Policymakers should focus on strengthening social safety nets for unemployed or underemployed individuals.

Keywords: *Employment, Status, Mental Health, Middle*

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between employment status and mental health is a multifaceted and critical area of study, reflecting the significant impact that employment can have on an individual's psychological well-being. In the United States, mental health issues are prevalent, with approximately 19.1% of adults experiencing mental illness in 2020, translating to around 50 million individuals (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly exacerbated existing mental health challenges, resulting in soaring rates of anxiety and depression across diverse demographics. A study by Twenge and Joiner (2020) highlighted that depressive symptoms among U.S. adults increased sharply during the pandemic, emphasizing an urgent need for effective mental health support systems. The findings illustrate that many individuals are not receiving adequate care, leading to a public health crisis that requires immediate attention. Integrating mental health services into primary care settings is critical for improving accessibility, reducing stigma, and ensuring that individuals receive comprehensive care that addresses both physical and mental health needs.

Japan's mental health landscape is gradually evolving, though numerous challenges persist. The National Health and Nutrition Survey revealed that about 5.3% of adults exhibited depressive symptoms in 2019 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2020). The phenomenon of "hikikomori," characterized by extreme social withdrawal, has gained increasing attention, particularly regarding its impact on youth mental well-being. Research conducted by Nakagawa et al. (2021) underscores the necessity for community-based mental health initiatives focused on early intervention and support. As awareness of mental health issues rises, it becomes essential to implement comprehensive strategies that promote mental well-being and address the unique societal pressures that contribute to mental health disorders in Japan. Addressing these challenges is crucial not only for improving individual health outcomes but also for fostering greater social cohesion and overall public health.

In Brazil, mental health issues have garnered increased attention, with recent research indicating that approximately 9.3% of the population experiences common mental disorders, particularly anxiety and depression (Nunes, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these mental health challenges, leading to greater distress among vulnerable populations. A significant barrier to effective care is the limited access to mental health services, which leaves many individuals without the support they need. Furthermore, the ongoing stigma surrounding mental health often prevents individuals from seeking treatment, exacerbating the prevalence of untreated mental disorders. To effectively address these challenges, the implementation of community-based mental health programs is essential. Such initiatives can provide accessible, culturally sensitive care and promote awareness, thereby enhancing the overall mental health landscape in Brazil and reducing the associated burden on individuals and society.

India faces a growing mental health crisis, with studies indicating that around 14% of the population experiences mental disorders (Gururaj et al., 2020). Contributing factors include socio-economic issues like poverty, unemployment, and a lack of awareness surrounding mental health. The National Mental Health Survey highlighted that nearly 83% of individuals with mental disorders do not receive adequate treatment, emphasizing the urgent need for better integration of mental health services into primary healthcare systems. Raising public awareness to reduce stigma is critical for improving access to care and fostering a more supportive environment for those in need. Comprehensive mental health policies that focus on prevention, early intervention, and community engagement are essential for effectively addressing the mental health challenges faced by millions in India. By prioritizing mental health, the country

can significantly improve overall public health outcomes and enhance the quality of life for its citizens.

In Nigeria, mental health issues present a significant public health challenge, with studies revealing that approximately 29% of the population experiences mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety (Afolabi, 2021). Despite the high prevalence of these disorders, access to treatment remains severely limited, often due to stigma and cultural beliefs that prevent individuals from seeking help. The lack of mental health professionals and inadequate facilities further complicate the situation, creating barriers to care that must be addressed. Community-based interventions aimed at increasing awareness and reducing stigma are essential for promoting mental health literacy and encouraging individuals to pursue treatment. Additionally, integrating mental health services into primary healthcare settings can improve service delivery and provide holistic care to those affected, thereby enhancing the overall mental health landscape in Nigeria.

In Kenya, mental health challenges are increasingly recognized, especially among youth, with the Kenya Mental Health Policy (2015) indicating that about 10% of adults aged 15-65 experience mental health issues (Kilonzo, 2021). Socio-economic factors such as poverty and unemployment significantly contribute to the growing prevalence of mental disorders. Despite efforts to improve mental health services, access remains limited, particularly in rural areas where resources are scarce. Initiatives aimed at enhancing mental health literacy and promoting community engagement are crucial for fostering early intervention and support for those in need. Strengthening the mental health infrastructure in Kenya is essential for effectively addressing these pressing issues and ensuring that individuals receive the care and support necessary for their well-being.

Employment status significantly influences mental health outcomes, with various statuses contributing differently to well-being. Four primary employment statuses can be identified: full-time employed, part-time employed, unemployed, and underemployed. Full-time employment is often associated with financial stability and social integration, which can enhance mental well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Conversely, part-time employment may lead to feelings of insecurity and reduced access to benefits, potentially affecting mental health negatively (Kahn, 2020). Unemployment is strongly linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and overall psychological distress, as job loss can lead to financial strain and loss of social identity (Mynarska et al., 2021).

Underemployment, where individuals work in jobs that do not utilize their skills or provide adequate hours, also has detrimental effects on mental health (Hirsch & Macpherson, 2019). This status can create feelings of inadequacy and frustration, impacting self-esteem and life satisfaction. The social determinants of mental health are crucial in understanding these relationships, as employment provides not only financial support but also social connections and a sense of purpose (World Health Organization, 2020). Addressing employment issues through policy interventions and support programs can lead to improved mental health outcomes, demonstrating the intertwined nature of economic and psychological well-being. Ultimately, fostering stable and meaningful employment opportunities is essential for promoting better mental health among various populations.

Problem Statement

The relationship between employment status and mental health in middle-aged adults presents a significant public health concern, particularly as this demographic faces unique economic and psychological pressures. Research indicates that employment status directly impacts mental health outcomes, with unemployment and underemployment linked to increased rates

of anxiety and depression among middle-aged individuals (Mynarska, 2021). Furthermore, the stress associated with job insecurity can exacerbate existing mental health issues, contributing to a decline in overall well-being (McKee-Ryan et al., 2020). Despite the growing body of evidence, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies specifically examining how varying employment statuses—such as full-time, part-time, unemployed, and underemployed—affect mental health in this age group (Hirsch & Macpherson, 2019). Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing targeted interventions that support mental health and economic stability in middle-aged adults, ultimately enhancing their quality of life (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) Model

The Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) Model, formulated by Bakker and Demerouti, categorizes job characteristics into demands and resources that impact employee well-being. High job demands can lead to significant stress and burnout, particularly affecting middle-aged adults who are often balancing work with family and financial responsibilities. Conversely, job resources such as support from colleagues and job autonomy can help mitigate these stressors and enhance mental health. This model is particularly useful for examining how various employment statuses—whether employed, underemployed, or unemployed—can influence mental health outcomes in this demographic. By identifying the balance between job demands and resources, interventions can be designed to support mental health in the workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Role Strain Theory

Role Strain Theory, originally proposed by Goode and expanded in recent research, focuses on how competing social roles contribute to stress. Middle-aged adults often navigate multiple roles, including those of parent, employee, and caregiver, which can lead to role strain, especially when employment status changes. Unemployed individuals may face heightened societal expectations that exacerbate their stress, negatively impacting their mental health. This theory highlights the complexity of how employment status interacts with other life roles, shaping overall well-being. Understanding these dynamics can aid in developing support systems that alleviate role strain and improve mental health outcomes (Wang & Croucher, 2020).

Social Support Theory

Social Support Theory underscores the importance of social networks and relationships in promoting mental well-being and buffering against stress. Employment status significantly influences the availability and quality of social support, particularly for middle-aged adults who often rely on work-related relationships for emotional and practical assistance. Unemployment can lead to social isolation, which may worsen mental health issues, while stable employment fosters strong social connections. This theory is crucial for understanding how the presence or absence of social support can either alleviate or exacerbate the mental health impacts associated with different employment statuses. By enhancing social support systems, mental health outcomes can be improved across various employment contexts (Taylor, 2020).

Empirical Review

Marmot, Stansfeld, Patel, North, Head and Marmot (2020) examined the impact of job loss on the mental health of middle-aged adults in the UK through a longitudinal survey. Their findings indicated that unemployment significantly increases the risk of depression and anxiety among

this demographic. The study highlighted that individuals who experience job loss often struggle with feelings of worthlessness and social isolation, which can exacerbate mental health issues. In light of these results, the authors recommended policy interventions aimed at providing mental health support and retraining programs for unemployed individuals. Such measures could play a crucial role in mitigating the negative mental health effects associated with unemployment.

Bruck and colleagues (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study focusing on the effects of job insecurity on mental well-being among middle-aged adults. The survey results revealed that those experiencing job insecurity reported significantly higher levels of stress and depressive symptoms. This study underscores the psychological burden associated with uncertain employment conditions, emphasizing that even when individuals remain employed, the threat of job loss can adversely affect their mental health. The authors suggested enhancing job security and providing mental health resources within workplaces to better support employees facing these challenges. Addressing job insecurity is essential for promoting overall mental well-being.

Kawakami, Araki and Kawashima (2019) investigated the mental health effects of changes in employment status in Japan, utilizing a mixed-methods approach. Their findings indicated that transitions from full-time employment to part-time work or unemployment were linked to increased feelings of worthlessness and social isolation. The study highlighted the emotional toll these transitions can take, particularly for middle-aged adults who may feel their identities are closely tied to their employment. The researchers emphasized the need for community support programs designed to help individuals cope during such transitions. By fostering supportive environments, mental health outcomes can be improved for those facing employment changes.

Rantakeisu, Lindholm and Möller (2022) explored the correlation between employment status and mental health outcomes in Sweden, finding significant disparities between employed and unemployed middle-aged adults. The study revealed that those who were unemployed experienced markedly poorer mental health, characterized by higher levels of anxiety and depression. This research highlights the essential role that stable employment plays in maintaining mental well-being. To address these challenges, the authors recommended enhancing social safety nets and increasing access to mental health services specifically tailored for the unemployed. Such initiatives could help mitigate the mental health burdens associated with unemployment.

Ettner and Huang (2021) assessed the relationship between part-time work and mental health among middle-aged adults in the USA. Their analysis demonstrated that individuals in part-time employment reported higher levels of stress and dissatisfaction compared to those in full-time positions. The study pointed out that the lack of benefits and job security often associated with part-time work contributes to these negative mental health outcomes. The authors advocated for policies promoting full-time employment opportunities to improve mental well-being among this demographic. Enhancing job stability could serve as a protective factor against mental health challenges related to employment status.

Pérez, Lechuga and García (2020) examined the effects of self-employment on mental health through a quantitative study. Their findings revealed that while self-employed individuals reported lower levels of stress overall, they faced unique challenges, such as financial insecurity and the pressures of being their own boss. The research highlighted the dual nature of self-employment, which can offer flexibility but also introduce stressors that affect mental health. The authors recommended tailored mental health resources for self-employed

individuals to address these specific stressors. By providing targeted support, mental health outcomes can be improved for those navigating the complexities of self-employment.

Thompson and Hughes (2019) focused on the mental health implications of premature retirement in Australia through a longitudinal study. Their research found that individuals who retired earlier than planned reported increased levels of depression and anxiety. This highlights the potential mental health risks associated with significant life transitions, such as leaving the workforce. The authors suggested developing programs that facilitate gradual transitions into retirement to support mental health during this life change. By easing individuals into retirement, it may be possible to mitigate the adverse mental health effects commonly associated with this significant life event.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gaps: The existing literature primarily focuses on specific employment statuses such as unemployment, job insecurity, part-time work, self-employment, and premature retirement. However, there is limited exploration of the interplay between these statuses and how they cumulatively affect mental health across different phases of middle age. Additionally, while some studies emphasize individual psychological responses, there is a need for more comprehensive frameworks that incorporate social and economic factors influencing mental health outcomes, particularly the role of social support systems and community engagement in buffering against the adverse effects of employment transitions (Kawakami, Araki, & Kawashima, 2019; Rantakeisu, Lindholm, & Möller, 2022).

Contextual Gaps: Most research has concentrated on Western countries like the UK, Germany, and the USA, with limited attention given to the unique socio-cultural contexts of non-Western countries or regions. For instance, studies conducted in Japan and Spain provide valuable insights but do not address how cultural attitudes towards work and mental health can influence outcomes in diverse populations. Additionally, there is insufficient examination of how economic conditions, such as recessions or labor market changes, uniquely affect middle-aged adults in different contexts, highlighting the need for localized studies that consider these factors (Pérez, Lechuga, & García, 2020).

Geographical Gaps: While studies are prevalent in Europe, North America, and Australia, there is a notable absence of research in developing countries and regions with distinct economic challenges. Understanding how employment status impacts mental health in these areas can provide a broader perspective on global mental health issues. For instance, research on middle-aged adults in Africa, Asia, and Latin America could uncover different employment dynamics and their mental health implications, particularly in contexts of high unemployment or informal labor markets (Thompson & Hughes, 2019). This geographical gap underscores the importance of expanding research efforts to encompass a wider variety of cultural and economic contexts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The relationship between employment status and mental health in middle-aged adults is complex and multifaceted. Studies consistently demonstrate that job loss, job insecurity, and transitions between different employment statuses significantly impact mental well-being, often leading to increased rates of depression, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness. These effects are particularly pronounced in middle-aged adults, who may face additional pressures related to family responsibilities and financial stability. Furthermore, the role of social support and community resources emerges as a critical factor in mitigating these mental health challenges. To effectively address these issues, it is essential for policymakers and mental health professionals to develop targeted interventions that promote job security, provide mental health resources, and facilitate smoother transitions in employment status. By recognizing and addressing the interconnectedness of employment and mental health, society can enhance the overall well-being of middle-aged adults.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Future research should focus on combining theoretical frameworks such as the Job Demand-Resources Model and Role Strain Theory to create a comprehensive understanding of how employment status affects mental health across different situations. This integration can clarify the pathways through which employment impacts psychological well-being, ultimately enhancing our understanding of the underlying mechanisms.

Practice

Employers should implement comprehensive mental health initiatives tailored to the unique challenges faced by middle-aged employees. Such programs could include stress management workshops, resilience training, and peer support networks to enhance emotional well-being and job satisfaction. Furthermore, providing flexible work arrangements can alleviate the pressures associated with balancing work and personal life. Community organizations need to develop specific support programs for middle-aged individuals experiencing job transitions. These initiatives could offer counselling services, mentorship opportunities, and skills development workshops to assist with job searching. By providing these resources, individuals can better manage employment changes and reduce feelings of social isolation.

Policy

Policymakers should focus on strengthening social safety nets for unemployed or underemployed individuals. This may involve increasing unemployment benefits, ensuring access to mental health services, and promoting retraining programs to facilitate transitions to new job opportunities. A robust safety net can help mitigate the mental health challenges associated with job loss and insecurity. Governments ought to consider enacting laws that support job stability and protect employees from unjust termination. Such measures would create a more secure work environment, reducing anxiety and stress related to job insecurity. Additionally, policies that incentivize companies to offer full-time positions with benefits could significantly enhance mental health outcomes for middle-aged workers.

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