

# Exploring The Post-Disaster Conceptual Impact And Its Effect On Employee Performance

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## ABSTRACT

Disaster refers to an unexpected, calamitous event that severely interrupts the functioning of the society at large and results in environmental, material, human, and economic losses that outdo the society's capability to cope utilizing its resources. Disasters are grouped into two main categories, including manmade and natural disasters. The ferocity and frequency of recent natural disasters have led to an increased need for disaster-related research in order to mitigate risks. The purposive of this study was two-fold. First, the study sought to determine how the conceptual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have influenced employee performance. Secondly, it sought to determine some of the coping techniques that individual employees and companies can embrace to improve employee performance. The study adopted a qualitative research design and use of secondary data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. The study's findings revealed that the psychological outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic affects the employees' mental health and performance, increases employee absenteeism, and reduces job satisfaction among the employees. Consequently, this reduces the performance of the employees. The identified coping mechanisms include the provision of training workshops, promoting supportive work relationships, team building exercise, pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, progressive muscle relaxation, and diaphragmatic breathing.

**Keywords:** Disaster, Psychological impacts, COVID-19 Pandemic, Coping Strategies.

## Introduction

The ferocity and frequency of recent natural disasters have led to an increased need for disaster-related research in order to mitigate risks (Morrish & Jones, 2020). Disaster refers to an unexpected and sudden event that results in great destruction, damage, and human suffering (Sweileh, 2019). Disasters are grouped into two main categories, including manmade and natural disasters.

A natural disaster refers to a naturally occurring event caused by slow or rapid onset events that can be climatological, geophysical, biological, hydrological, or meteorological (Sweileh, 2019). Manmade disasters include road accidents, terrorist attacks, industrial accidents, financial crises, and pollution.

Disasters exert a heavy toll across the world, imposing immediate and long-term impacts on the well-being and health of individuals, communities, and economies (Green et al., 2019; Sandifer & Walker, 2018). Green et al. (2019) further revealed that disasters are associated with major social, cultural, health, and environmental effects at the community and local level. Disasters also have severe psychological effects, which include Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, stress, and anxiety disorders (Nagamine et al., 2016).

According to Sakurai and Chughtai (2020), pandemics may be considered a form of natural disaster. One of the most recent pandemics is Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, involving over 114 nations and more than 118 000 infection cases (Davico et al., 2021). To contain the spread of the disease and prevent overload of the emergency rooms in hospitals, governments imposed strict measures, including lockdowns and closure of non-essential services and businesses such as schools, and imposed movement restrictions and social interactions (Freedman, 2020; Tušl et al., 2021). With the restrictive measures, most of the working population faced sudden changes in their daily lives (Kniffin et al., 2021). For instance, employees who commuted to work and had rich social lives were forced into mandatory Work From Home (WFH) situations, while other employees were laid off as several businesses and industries were shut down. Furthermore, healthcare employees in emergency rooms, supermarket staff, and other employees faced increased workload and job strain (Tušl et al., 2021).

Additionally, such a period of health crisis has severe impacts on human well-being and health and is associated with psychological distress and its related symptoms such as anxiety and stress among the general population (Al Dhaheri et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). On the same note, Davico et al. (2021) reveal that the increased risks of infection, social isolation, and inadequate access to protective devices led to increased levels of psychological stress among individuals. Although researchers have examined the conceptual effects of disasters on workers' productivity and the overall organizational performance in the past years, most of these studies focus on more frequent manmade disasters such as wildfires, floods, and earthquakes. Little attention has been focused on pandemics as natural disasters that adversely affect people's health and the economy. This study sought to fill this research gap by exploring the post-disaster conceptual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees and how this has influenced their performance.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to increased stress among employees. Johari (2021) reveals that although it is not possible to completely eliminate stress in the workplace, appropriate means of coping with stress must be put into practice to reduce it. The

author further asserts that an efficient coping mechanism improves the employees' quality of life, increases employee productivity, and reduces the employee cost of healthcare. Thus, there is a need to investigate the strategies for coping with the conceptual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic among employees to help reduce their stress levels. Thus, this study also sought to determine coping mechanisms that individual employees and organizations, in general, can adopt to deal with the conceptual effects of the pandemic and improve performance.

### **Materials and Methods**

This study used a qualitative research design. A qualitative research method was ideal for this study since it is a naturalistic, emergent, inductive, and interpretive method suitable for studying social problems. Furthermore, a qualitative research approach was ideal for this study since it assists researchers in gaining insights into how groups or individuals experience or associate with various social or human problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Notably, the main objective is to obtain information from people who have experienced the Covid-19 pandemic and felt its conceptual impact. Gunnel (2016) further explained that the use of the qualitative research method allows for an in-depth extraction of information. Consequently, this allows the researcher to sufficiently address research questions.

The study used secondary data obtained from journals articles, books and book chapters, government publications, and approved thesis and dissertations retrieved from reputable databases including Science Direct, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Research Gate, Google Scholar, and Emerald Insight. To select the most relevant sources, inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed. The search strategy was limited to the English Language, peer-reviewed journal articles published from April 2019 onwards. To ensure that the researcher captures a wide range of literature, the research design was not restricted. To make sure that the gathered data addressed the research questions, several search terms such as "Conceptual effects of COVID-19," "Impacts of COVID," "COVID-19 and employee health outcomes," and stress coping mechanisms" were used. Based on the inclusion criteria, studies published from April 2019 were included. This is because COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2019. Also, studies included were those focusing on employees who experience physical or mental health-related outcomes due to COVID-19. All studies that were not published in English and lack free and open access were excluded. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

### **Result**

The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, the study sought to determine how the conceptual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced employee performance. Secondly, to determine some of the coping techniques that individual employees and companies can embrace to improve employee performance. The conceptual impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were found to affect the employees' mental health and performance, increase employee absenteeism, and reduce job satisfaction among the employees. Consequently, this reduces the performance of the employees.

Some of the coping mechanisms that were found to be useful in coping with postcrisis stress among employees include the provision of training workshops, promoting supportive work relationships, team building exercise (Brooks et al., 2019), pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, progressive muscle relaxation, and diaphragmatic breathing (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020).

## **Discussion**

Based on the study findings, conceptual outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic affect employees' health, which adversely impacts organizational performance. These findings are supported by several other scholars. Firstly, Makwana (2019) reveals that communities and individuals who experience a disaster experience mental instability, which may precipitate PTSD, depression, and anxiety disorders among the affected populations. On the same note, Brooks et al. (2019) revealed that employees who experience a disaster are psychologically affected and experience increased levels of distress and mental health problems. These effects adversely impact the performance of the affected employees. Consequently, this results in poor organizational performance. For instance, high levels of distress and mental health issues have been noted on pentagon workers who were serving at the time of the terrorist attack of the New York (Griege et al., 2003).

The research findings established that COVID-19 conceptual impacts contribute to increased absenteeism among employees. These findings align with those of Morganstein and Ursano (2020), who reveal that the employees working in health care institutions experience distress, which is fueled by the fears of becoming infected, concerns relating to the sufficiency of protective equipment, and the fear of being ostracized by family and friends; thus, increasing absenteeism among the health care employees.

Concerning the coping strategies that individual employees and companies can embrace to improve employee performance, the study found that employee performance in a postcrisis environment can be improved through providing training workshops, whereby mental education is incorporated in education to reduce stigma, promoting supportive work relationships, engaging in physical exercises, and use of pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy to reduce the symptoms and functional impairment in cases where the psychological impacts include psychiatric disorders (Morganstein & Ursano, 2020).

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