

Peer Review Report

Review Report on Employee mental health impacts arising from COVID-19 adaptation: observations of occupational safety and health professionals in Ireland

Original Article, Int J Public Health

Reviewer: Diana Schow

Submitted on: 22 Mar 2022

Article DOI: 10.3389/ijph.2022.1604720

EVALUATION

Q 1 Please summarize the main findings of the study.

This research focused on those in the occupational safety and health sector who have direct influence on implementation of policies and procedures relating to pandemics - specifically COVID-19. It determined that employees who were colleagues of focus group participants experienced varying mental health and wellbeing issues at different stages of adapting to COVID-19 in the work environment. The findings suggest that most mental health issues occurred DURING adaptation to COVID-19 because of rapidly changing policies. There were issues that also occurred pre-adaptation and post-adaptation. Significantly, findings suggest that men may not avail themselves of programs like Employee Assistance Programs, so more consideration of the mental health needs of men should be given. Also, findings suggest it is important to provide training to OSH personnel, to support employee paid leave, to disseminate timely, reliable information and to support hybrid working arrangements.

Q 2 Please highlight the limitations and strengths.

This research clarified Ireland's OSH sector's perspective on what might be done to improve if/when future instances like this arise. This research was qualitative in nature and not expected to be representative of entire populations. The authors indicated doing a thorough job of interacting with a sufficient population to reach saturation (although a citation is needed). Findings from this research will inform a survey, which will reach a broader audience. Its limitations were that because it was not representative, recommendations should be considered in context and may not necessarily be transferrable. In its current form, a limitation is that it is not supported by a theoretical perspective (please see recommendations).

Q 3 Please provide your detailed review report to the authors. The editors prefer to receive your review structured in major and minor comments. Please consider in your review the methods (statistical methods valid and correctly applied (e.g. sample size, choice of test), is the study replicable based on the method description?), results, data interpretation and references. If there are any objective errors, or if the conclusions are not supported, you should detail your concerns.

Thank you for providing the findings to this research study. I read the article with interest. It is important to consider how those in what might be considered powerful positions viewed what happened in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. Your findings regarding gender were particularly interesting. Following are suggestions that I hope you find useful:

Major: (Although the suggested revisions are not extensive, it seems they would significantly strengthen the article)

1 - The supplemental poll questions were a great addition, but I could not see how responses were used to triangulate. Please clarify - how did they bear, for example on the coding process, development of codes, or interpretation of results?

2 - It would be important to include a discussion about trustworthiness. It is clear from the methods that multiple strategies were used, but it would be good to highlight the process itself in relation to considerations of credibility, dependability and confirmability (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

3 - It is much appreciated that in the methods section you clarified using both inductive and deductive approaches to coding. It is still unclear what happened when, however. A flow diagram illustrating the process would be helpful - so would a citation or clarification of how Clark and Braun (2017) used this technique. There are different schools of thought regarding how to use a deductive approach for coding. Some reserve this for starting with a theoretical framework. Others may not. For an excellent resource, please see Hsieh and Shannon, 2005. It would also be helpful to clarify and cite the open and axial coding process. How did open and axial coding intersect with inductive and deductive processes? Further, the concept of saturation should be cited. This section needs to be "unpacked" a bit.

4 - This research is about adjustment. Theoretical discussion about psychological adjustment or adaptation would be important to include (What are they? How are they defined? What is the baseline assumption about these terms? Which theory(ies) do you borrow from?) It does not appear that a grounded approach was used, because there are assumptions about adaptation and adjustment. However, if that is the case, it would help to clarify how that worked with the deductive aspects of the work.

5 - It would help to clarify OSH and HR professions in Ireland. What exactly do these professionals do? Maybe provide a list of typical things that they do that relate to COVID-19 (e.g. implement policies, oversee allocation of resources, liaise with upper management, etc). How much power do these individuals have in their working environments? OSH and HR professionals may have different levels of power. Characterizing OSH and HR employees would be helpful to an outsider. Were there differences in their responses?

6 - Currently, Table 2 is not organized based on who attended which focus group. It would add much context to organize it this way.

7 - 7 - The abstract states that participants showed, "agility and ability to apply their risk management and control skills to any unanticipated public/occupational health crisis that arises." I did not see the emphasis on people actually applying risk management skills. Conclusions were more about what should be done, rather than what was done. I wonder if this is the right conclusion to draw based on recommendations?

8 - Thank you for this recommendation: "Thus, there is a possibility that the manifested increased risk among females is because they are more likely to report mental health impacts and seek for assistance. Gender's influence on mental health consultations should be considered when planning for public health emergencies, and further research conducted in male dominated industries." It is recommendations like this that seem to be great conclusions, as opposed to the statement in #7 above.

Minor:

- It would be interesting to know how the focus group recordings were transcribed. Did you use a program or individuals? Using Zoom recordings that involve more than one interviewee is new territory for many researchers, and a short explanation may be helpful to others in the field.

- Line 27 "adjust" should be "adjusting"

- Line 47 "possess" should be "possesses"

- Lines 49 and 50 "contributes to understand the mental health impacts arising from the workforce adaptation to the new safety measures implemented due to COVID-19." Should be: "contributes to understanding the mental health impacts arising from workforce adaptation to new safety measures implemented due to COVID-19."

- It appears that pages 32 and 33 are the same. Figure 1 is in this document twice.

- Line 92 remove the word "involving"

- Line 101 change "of" to "for"

- Line 123 change "of" to "to"

- Lines 271 to 274 - this appears to be a run-on sentence - Contradictory being capitalized with no punctuation in front of it.

- Line 306 add "be" before "confused"

-It appears that the citation currently listed as [3] may actually be [4] - based on the title of the articles.

Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications.

PLEASE COMMENT

Q 4 Is the title appropriate, concise, attractive?

The title reflects only OSH and not HR professionals. It would be helpful to find a way to clarify that it is both, or in the text clarify why they are so similar it doesn't matter.

Q 5 Are the keywords appropriate?

possibly include human resources

Q 6 Is the English language of sufficient quality?

yes

Q 7 Is the quality of the figures and tables satisfactory?

Yes.

Q 8 Does the reference list cover the relevant literature adequately and in an unbiased manner?)

Please see major recommendations 2-4.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Q 9 Originality



Q 10 Rigor



Q 11 Significance to the field



Q 12 Interest to a general audience



Q 13 Quality of the writing



Q 14 Overall scientific quality of the study



REVISION LEVEL

Q 15 Please make a recommendation based on your comments:

Major revisions.