

Mental Health in Organizations: A Guide for HR Practitioners in the Caribbean.

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Abstract

Mental health has become a critical workplace issue that affects employee well-being, productivity, and organizational effectiveness. This study examines strategies that Caribbean organizations can implement to reduce mental health stigma and improve employee well-being, with particular emphasis on the role of employers, human resource practitioners, and coworkers. This study aims to answer the question: “What strategies can Caribbean organizations implement to reduce mental health stigma and improve employee well-being in the workplace?” The study employs a qualitative conceptual analysis using an interpretive and analytical design. Data were obtained from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, reports, and credible online sources. The analysis revealed that workplace mental health can be strengthened through supportive leadership, mental health awareness initiatives, employee assistance programs, open communication, anti-stigma policies, flexible work arrangements, and coworker support. The findings also highlight cultural barriers and stigma within Caribbean workplaces that often discourage help-seeking behaviors. The study concludes that organizations can improve employee mental health by institutionalizing support systems, fostering inclusive workplace cultures, and strengthening organizational resources that promote psychological well-being and long-term organizational success.

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1. Introduction

Mental health is a serious issue that can affect the lives of anyone. And so, employees within organizations are not immune to having mental health issues, and therefore, employers must be prepared to deal with employees and their various mental health issues if and when they arise. Promoting mental health care in the workplace is essential for cultivating a positive and effective work environment. Acknowledging and tackling mental health concerns among

employees not only boosts the general welfare of the workforce but also plays a pivotal role in elevating productivity, job satisfaction, and the overall success of the organization (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

According to Copper and Quick (2017), our mental health encompasses our thoughts, emotions, and our capacity to navigate life's highs and lows, and is a universal aspect of human experience. The authors added that optimal mental health brings a sense of purpose and clarity, providing the vitality to pursue our goals and effectively handle life's hurdles. It can be argued that drawing a parallel to physical health, where we acknowledge the importance of staying fit and seeking timely assistance for improvement, mental health operates on a similar premise. Just as we prioritize our physical well-being, the significance of nurturing our mental health is equally crucial (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

There are occasions in our lives when we may feel low, stressed, or anxious. While these feelings often subside, in some instances, they can evolve into more persistent mental health challenges, such as anxiety or depression, significantly influencing our daily routines (Dollard and Bailey, 2021). The author proceeded to add that in certain cases, mental health issues can become intricate, necessitating ongoing support and treatment. Grawitch and Ballard (2019) explained that various factors, including poverty, genetic predispositions, childhood trauma, discrimination, or enduring physical illnesses, may heighten the likelihood of developing mental health problems. However, it is important to recognize that mental health challenges can affect anyone.

According to Mental Health Foundation (2017) research shows that most people have some experience of a mental health problem, and the latest large-scale survey in England suggested that one in six people experience the symptoms of a mental health problem in any given week. Sadly, over 6,000 people a year die by suicide in the UK, and having a long-term mental health problem may reduce life expectancy by as many as 21 years due to associated physical health problems (Chesney, et al, 2014). Research shows that different individuals experience various mental health problems uniquely, emphasizing the importance of understanding an individual's specific journey (Grawitch and Ballard (2019). A diagnosis does not offer a complete comprehension of a person's experience. For instance, individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia may effectively manage their condition and experience minimal symptoms, while others with anxiety may find their daily lives significantly impacted by the challenges associated with their condition (LaMontagne et al, 2014).

Prioritizing mental health care in the workplace is an investment in the overall success and well-being of both employees and the organization. Mental Health Foundation (2017) suggests that by fostering a culture that values mental health, organizations can create an environment where individuals feel supported, engaged, and able to perform at their best. Highlighting mental health in the workplace is essential for enhancing overall employee well-being, productivity, and organizational success (Nielsen and Miraglia, 2017). The authors added that

key considerations include promoting awareness and reducing stigma, cultivating a supportive work environment, providing training and education on mental health, ensuring access to resources, offering flexible work arrangements, managing workloads effectively, involving leadership in fostering a mentally healthy culture, conducting regular check-ins, and establishing clear policies that address mental health. This research suggests that by investing in mental health care and fostering a culture that values well-being, organizations create an environment where employees feel supported, engaged, and capable of optimal performance.

2. Research Methods

Theoretical Framework

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding workplace mental health and the role of employers in promoting employee well-being. Originally developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) and further refined by Bakker and Demerouti (2017), the theory proposes that every occupation contains specific job demands and job resources that influence employee health, motivation, and organizational outcomes. The JD-R framework is particularly relevant to this study because it explains how workplace conditions can either contribute to mental health challenges or support psychological well-being among employees.

According to the JD-R theory, job demands refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that require sustained effort and are therefore associated with physiological and psychological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Examples include excessive workload, role ambiguity, workplace stress, interpersonal conflict, discrimination, and the stigma associated with mental health issues. Within Caribbean organizations, employees may face additional pressures stemming from cultural expectations, limited mental health resources, and workplace norms that encourage individuals to endure stress silently rather than seek support. Such demands can increase the risk of emotional exhaustion, burnout, anxiety, and reduced job performance.

Conversely, job resources are the physical, psychological, social, and organizational factors that help employees achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the context of workplace mental health, job resources include supportive leadership, effective human resource practices, employee assistance programmes, flexible work arrangements, mental health awareness initiatives, training opportunities, and positive coworker relationships. These resources can buffer the negative effects of job demands while enhancing employee engagement, resilience, and overall well-being.

The JD-R theory aligns closely with the purpose of this study, which seeks to identify strategies that Caribbean organizations can implement to reduce mental health stigma and improve employee well-being. The framework provides a basis

for understanding how employers, managers, human resource departments, and coworkers can act as sources of organizational support that mitigate workplace stressors. By strengthening job resources and reducing harmful job demands, organizations can create psychologically healthy workplaces that promote employee mental health, increase productivity, and contribute to long-term organizational effectiveness. Therefore, the JD-R theory offers a comprehensive framework for examining the relationship between workplace conditions and employee mental well-being and serves as an appropriate theoretical foundation for this study.

This study employs a qualitative conceptual analysis approach to examine the concept of mental health in our organizations and the role of the human resource department. A conceptual analysis is appropriate for this research as it focuses on identifying key role of HR and what co-workers and organizational leaders can do to assist employees who suffer silently with mental health.

The purpose of the paper is to answer the question: What strategies can Caribbean organizations implement to reduce mental health stigma and improve employee well-being in the workplace?

The study adopts an interpretive and analytical design, emphasizing the examination of theoretical perspectives, experiences and ideologies within existing literature. Rather than collecting empirical data, the research systematically analyzes texts to uncover underlying assumptions and recommendations associated with the topic.

Data for the analysis were drawn from secondary sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Academic books
- Policy documents and reports
- Credible online sources

These materials are selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the understanding of the concept.

Sources were included if they:

- Provide explicit discussions of the concept
- Represent diverse perspectives or disciplines
- Are published within a relevant timeframe (last 10 years, unless seminal works)

To ensure rigor, the study applies credibility through the use of reputable academic sources; transparency by clearly documenting the selection and analysis process; and consistency by applying the same analytical framework across all sources.

As a conceptual study, the findings are limited by the scope and interpretation of existing literature. The absence of empirical data means conclusions are theoretical and may require further validation through empirical research.

3. Results

Mental Health & Co-Workers

It can be argued that understanding mental health and fostering positive relationships with co-workers is crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive environment. Organizational leaders should create programs and avenues to promote awareness and education about mental health to enhance understanding among employees. These can be facilitated through conducting workshops or training sessions to provide information on common mental health issues and reduce stigma. Dollard and Bailey (2021) explained that open communication is also another important factor. They added that leadership should encourage open and non-judgmental communication about mental health by fostering an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their mental health concerns with co-workers. This will cultivate empathy and compassion towards co-workers who may be dealing with mental health challenges and allow them to demonstrate understanding and support, creating a culture of care and acceptance. This paper proposes that working with co-workers who might be affected by mental health issues, one should have respect for privacy and avoid prying into personal matters. Employees should recognize that individuals may choose to disclose their mental health status on their terms. In the same breath, implementing inclusive practices that accommodate diverse mental health needs should be a priority for workplaces. Employees should consider flexible work arrangements or provide additional support during challenging times. Organizational leaders should try to foster a workplace culture that discourages stigmatizing language related to mental health and so encourages the use of respectful and inclusive language when discussing mental health matters.

Hobfoll et al (2018) suggested that co-workers through their various work units can incorporate team-building activities that strengthen relationships among themselves. The authors added that this should help to foster a sense of community and support within the workplace, emphasizing that everyone plays a role in creating a positive atmosphere. They went on to explain that one's co-worker should recognize the signs of coworkers struggling. This paper indicates that the human resource department should endeavor to train employees to recognize signs of mental health struggle in their co-workers. Co-workers can encourage a supportive approach, such as suggesting available resources or offering a listening ear. In the same vein, equip managers and supervisory staff with the skills to address mental health concerns within their teams. Create an environment where managers are approachable and can provide necessary support.

Leadership should implement clear organizational policies that address mental health inclusivity and support. By so doing, they ensure that policies emphasize confidentiality, non-discrimination, and the availability of mental health resources. These resources should also promote work-life balance. Encouraging a healthy work-life balance to prevent burnout and support overall mental well-being. And have the entire staff acknowledge and appreciate the importance of downtime and personal time.

Management should strive to build organizations and engender a culture that supports mental health by fostering understanding, empathy, and open communication, workplaces can become environments where employees feel acknowledged, supported, and empowered in their mental health journey (Kelloway and Day, 2018). This not only benefits individual well-being but contributes to a more cohesive and resilient organizational culture.

Mental Health Awareness in the Workplace

How aware should employees be about mental health? Awareness surrounding mental health is on the rise; however, the global reality is one in which individuals grappling with mental health issues often encounter discrimination and struggle to access the necessary support (World Health Organization, 2022). Many individuals facing distress tend to conceal their feelings due to apprehensions about others' reactions. The fear of discrimination and feelings of shame consistently rank among the primary reasons for individuals not disclosing their mental health challenges to colleagues (Mental Health Foundation, 2017). Research suggests that fostering workplace cultures that embrace authenticity facilitates open discussions about mental health concerns, providing individuals with the confidence to share without fear and seek assistance when needed. Nevertheless, the decision to reveal distress at work is a weighty one, underscoring the importance of creating workplaces where individuals feel secure enough to be authentic (Kelloway and Day, 2018).

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Table 1. This is a table. Tables should be placed in the main text near to the first time they are cited.

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4. Discussion

Employees have the capacity to enhance our mental well-being and cultivate resilience, which is our ability to navigate challenges effectively (Chesney et al, 2014). The authors added that developing self-care as a skill requires consistent practice, particularly when dealing with feelings of anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem. The authors further explained that consider exploring the following 10 evidence-based strategies to enhance employees mental health. Individuals may benefit from identify those they already excel at: consider them assets and reliable methods for promoting well-being. Recognize any that present difficulties (these are one's challenges, aspects that might be neglected during stressful times) such as excessive drinking, isolation, or comfort eating. These coping mechanisms contradict evidence-based recommendations for mental health. Lastly, pinpoint one or two areas one's willing to explore or improve: these are your goals. While goals and challenges may overlap, it's often gentler on oneself to set goals that can be achieved more readily.

Table 1: Ten Ways to Improve Your Mental Health

Strategy 1	Talking about your feelings
Strategy 2	Keep active
Strategy 3	Eat well
Strategy 4	Drink sensibly
Strategy 5	Keep in touch
Strategy 6	Ask for help
Strategy 7	Take a break
Strategy 8	Do something you're good at
Strategy 9	Accept who you are
Strategy 10	Care for others

1. Talking about your feelings

Engaging in conversations about your emotions is beneficial for maintaining positive mental health and navigating challenging times (Kellyoway amd Day, 2018). The authors added that expressing your feelings is not a sign of vulnerability; instead, it reflects a proactive approach to managing your well-being and striving for overall health. Discussing emotions in a workplace setting can be challenging. However, having colleagues or a supportive manager who inquires about your well-being during supervision sessions can be immensely helpful. Employees may benefit from identifying a trusted individual with whom they can comfortably discuss workplace concerns. Consider what you are comfortable disclosing, to whom, and when and where to have this conversation. Being open about your emotions at work, particularly if you are in a leadership role, may inspire others to do the same (Dollrd and Bailey, 2021). If discussing feelings at work seems challenging, ensure that you have someone to talk to about

work-related pressures. Whether it's a partner, friend, or family member, having a sounding board can provide valuable support.

The literature suggests that addressing and prioritizing employee mental health has become increasingly important in contemporary workplaces. A key component of this acknowledgment lies in the significance of encouraging open communication about feelings. Mental health is a complex and multifaceted aspect of overall well-being (Nielsen and Miraglia, 2017). The authors added that it encompasses emotional, psychological, and social factors that significantly influence how individuals think, feel, and act. The workplace, being a central sphere of daily life, has a profound impact on employees' mental health. Acknowledging and addressing mental health concerns is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic investment in the productivity and satisfaction of the workforce.

Grawitch and Ballard (2019) explained that historically, discussing emotions, especially in professional settings, was often stigmatized. However, contemporary workplaces are recognizing the detrimental effects of such silence. Breaking the stigma surrounding mental health conversations is crucial for creating an environment where employees feel safe, heard, and supported (Kelly and Day, 2018). It is essential to convey that discussing feelings is not a sign of weakness but rather a proactive step towards personal well-being. And so, it is suggested that talking about one's feelings serves as a powerful mechanism for individuals to navigate the complexities of their mental states. It provides an outlet for the expression of emotions, fostering self-awareness and self-reflection. Cooper and Quick (2017) suggest that this process is vital for individuals to understand and manage their mental health effectively.

2. Keep Active & Eat Well

Consistent physical activity has the potential to enhance your self-esteem, concentration, sleep quality, and overall well-being (Cooper and Quick, 2017). The authors propose that engaging in exercise doesn't necessarily entail participating in sports or going to the gym. They recommend incorporating approximately 30 minutes of exercise into your routine at least five days a week is generally recommended. It's beneficial to integrate physical activities you genuinely enjoy into your daily schedule. For individuals with physically demanding jobs like construction or teaching, the impact of a decrease in activity due to illness or injury on mood can be noticeable (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). This paper argues that recognizing this connection emphasizes the importance of maintaining an active lifestyle. Even in office-based roles, introducing physical activity into your day can have a substantial positive effect. Whether it's taking a walk or attending a class during lunchtime, or incorporating exercise before or after work, these practices can serve as effective transitions between work and personal time. LaMontagne et al. (2014) suggest that exercise triggers the release of chemicals in the brain that contribute to a positive mood, ultimately leading to

an improvement in self-esteem, concentration, sleep quality, and overall emotional well-being.

World Health Organization (2022) posited that the food we consume has a direct impact on our immediate and long-term emotional well-being. A diet that supports physical health is equally beneficial for mental health. Maintaining a healthy eating routine at work can be challenging, but it is crucial. Kellyoway and Day (2018) recommended that optimal practices include regular meals and staying well-hydrated with ample water intake. It is reasonable to argue that efforts should be made to plan meals during work hours, whether by bringing food from home or making health-conscious choices when purchasing lunch. Taking breaks away from the desk to eat is encouraged. Collaborative lunch clubs at work provide opportunities for sharing meals and experimenting with new culinary options. During hectic or emotionally taxing periods, consider reducing or eliminating the intake of caffeine and refined sugar (Grawitch and Ballard, 2019). The authors posited that we should ensure easy access to fruits, vegetables, and nutrient-rich snacks such as nuts or trail mix. It's important to recognize that some individuals may find communal eating at work stressful due to past or ongoing struggles with eating disorders. In such cases, if someone opts out of work dinners or makes different food choices, it's essential not to make comments or exert pressure on them to conform. Respecting individual choices fosters a supportive and inclusive workplace culture.

Therefore, the symbiotic relationship between physical health and mental well-being is foundational for a flourishing workforce. This paper proposes that the human resources department or line manager should encourage employees to maintain an active lifestyle, incorporating diverse forms of exercise, and prioritizing a nutritious diet are integral components of a comprehensive approach to mental health in the workplace. Recognizing and fostering this connection not only benefits individual employees but also contributes to the creation of a positive and supportive organizational culture (Kellyoway and Day, 2018). Ultimately, investing in the physical and mental well-being of employees is an investment in the sustained success and resilience of both individuals and the organization as a whole.

3. Drink Sensibly

Frequently, individuals turn to alcohol as a means to alter their mood (Chesney et al., 2014). The authors added that some may use it as a coping mechanism for dealing with fear or loneliness, although the relief it provides is only temporary. While most people refrain from drinking during work hours, many are familiar with the tendency to consume more alcohol on weekends or evenings, especially when facing challenging work situations. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) emphasized that employees should exercise caution during work-related events that involve alcohol. The desire to seek "Dutch courage" by having a drink may be tempting, particularly in situations where work is demanding. However, it's crucial

to be mindful, as excessive drinking in response to anxiety can lead to behavior that one might regret, subsequently intensifying feelings of anxiety in the medium to long term.

4. Keep In Touch & Ask for help

The foundation of our mental well-being often lies in the relationships we form, particularly in the workplace where being part of a supportive team is immensely significant for our mental health (Hobfoll et al, 2018). The authors recognized that in the professional realm, we may not always have the luxury of choosing our colleagues, managers, or clients. Instances where there is friction in these relationships can lead to tension. The study contends that during such times, practicing self-care becomes crucial, but it might also necessitate addressing underlying difficulties. Kellyoway and Day (2018) posited that navigating work politics can pose a considerable challenge, especially when dealing with mental health concerns. The authors added that establishing a support system, whether through a mentor or a trusted group of colleagues, offers a valuable outlet to discuss work-related feelings, seek advice, and overcome challenges. Even during periods of intense work, it's essential to maintain connections with friends and family. Striking a healthy work-life balance is pivotal, as experts now posit that loneliness can have health implications comparable to smoking or obesity (Grawitch and Ballard, 2019). Prioritizing both professional and personal relationships contributes significantly to overall well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

None of us possess superhuman abilities. There are times when we all experience fatigue or feel overwhelmed, especially when things deviate from the planned course. Your employer might offer an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), providing confidential services that can be accessed freely without your workplace being informed. Additionally, you may have the opportunity to utilize occupational health support by reaching out to your line manager or HR service. For health-related concerns, your initial contact should be with your General Practitioner. Mental health constitutes a significant portion of General Practitioner's visits, with over a third of appointments addressing these issues (Chesney et al, 2014). Your General Practitioner may offer advice on self-help strategies for you or your family, recommend referrals to specialists or other health services, and potentially connect you with a counsellor.

5. Take a Break

Introducing a change of scene or altering your pace can have positive effects on your mental well-being (Hold-Lunstad et al, 2010). The authors added that whether it's a brief five-minute break from your current task, engaging in a book or podcast during your commute, taking a half-hour lunch break at work, or spending a weekend exploring a new place, even a few minutes can effectively

alleviate stress. This study that prioritizes giving yourself some dedicated 'me time.' If your employer provides mental health days (discretionary leave designed to support your well-being) make sure to avail yourself of these opportunities and utilize them effectively. Additionally, recognizing the importance of sleep in maintaining mental health is crucial. Grawitch and Ballard (2019) admonish us to listen to our bodies and acknowledge that without adequate sleep, mental well-being may decline, and concentration may suffer. This highlights that taking holidays and time off from work can be challenging, especially during stressful periods when the need for breaks is most apparent. Make an effort to plan periodic leaves throughout the year, ensuring that you always have a break to anticipate. While on leave or at home, resist the urge to check in with work. If you find it challenging to detach, it could be an indication that reassessing your workload to manage stress is necessary.

6. Do something you're good at

What activities bring you joy? What pursuits allow you to immerse yourself fully? Reflecting on past interests can provide valuable insights into what you might currently enjoy. Engaging in activities that bring you pleasure can be an effective strategy for managing stress. Pursuing an activity, you love likely implies a level of proficiency, and accomplishing tasks in areas of strength contributes to an enhanced sense of self-esteem. Focusing on a hobby, whether it's gardening or solving crosswords, Copper and Quick (2017) explains offers a temporary escape from worries and has the potential to positively influence your mood. The authors stressed that it's perfectly acceptable to take pride in your professional capabilities. During times of stress, it's common to overlook your talents or grapple with imposter syndrome (feeling like a fraud or questioning your deservingness of success). Employees may benefit from organizing your workload to include tasks that align with your strengths, creating a 'sandwich' effect where challenging or stressful tasks are interspersed with those you excel at. Kellyoway and Day (2018) emphasized that in the workplace, there may be opportunities to share or participate in hobbies with colleagues. Joining a work cycling club, book group, or crafting collective provides an excellent platform for sharing skills and fostering camaraderie among colleagues.

7. Accept who you are

Individuality is a universal truth, and embracing your unique qualities is a much healthier approach than longing to be someone else. Hobfoll et al (2018) expressed that cultivating a positive self-image not only enhances your confidence but also empowers you to explore new skills, venture into unfamiliar places, and build meaningful connections. The authors further explained that robust self-esteem becomes a valuable asset in navigating life's challenges. Employees should be encouraged to recognize their individuality, strengths, and developmental areas. Focus on what you can accomplish well, and if there are aspects you wish to

change, consider whether your expectations are realistic. If so, embark on the journey of change gradually, taking small steps toward your goals. Cooper and Quick (2017) admonish workers that the journey of self-acceptance and self-care becomes more challenging when grappling with mental health issues. It requires ongoing effort and dedication. The authors posited that while it might be tempting to anchor your self-esteem solely in professional success, especially for individuals with mental health challenges, this approach poses risks. This paper argues that striving for excellence in the workplace can lead to overcommitment and high achievement. However, it also exposes individuals to the vulnerability of taking setbacks, mistakes, or necessary changes personally when they occur. Balancing self-esteem with a broader perspective on personal well-being is essential for a more resilient and holistic approach to life.

Mindfulness, a type of meditation, entails purposefully directing attention to the unfolding present moment (LaMontagne et al., 2014). The authors added that engaging in mindfulness practice facilitates a heightened sense of presence in various aspects of our lives (within ourselves, our professional endeavors, or our relationships with family). The authors further explained that the practice fosters a deeper connection, encourages self-reflection, and nurtures compassion both for ourselves and those around us.

The workplace plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves. Fostering an environment that encourages self-acceptance creates a foundation for robust mental health. As employees embrace their uniqueness, build confidence, navigate challenges with resilience, and maintain realistic expectations, they contribute not only to their own well-being but also to a thriving and harmonious workplace culture. Employers and employees alike stand to benefit from recognizing and prioritizing the importance of accepting who they are as a fundamental pillar of mental health in the workplace.

8. Care for others

Nielson and Miraglia (2017) posited that nurturing relationships often involves caring for others, a vital aspect of maintaining close connections. The authors explained that within the professional realm, opportunities to extend care abound, particularly in roles such as nursing or caregiving, which can profoundly impact mental health. Regardless of the job, individuals can choose to support colleagues either as team members or in managerial roles, employing strategies like coaching and training to assist others. Engaging in acts of assistance not only fulfills a sense of purpose but also enhances self-esteem by fostering feelings of being needed and valued. Volunteering is a deeply rewarding avenue, offering a different perspective on the world and aiding in gaining a nuanced understanding of one's own challenges. Numerous companies facilitate volunteer opportunities and Corporate Social Responsibility programs, enabling employees to actively participate in community service (Kelloway and Day, 2018). While caring responsibilities at home, such as parenting or tending to relatives, can be

immensely fulfilling, they also pose a potential source of stress, especially when these roles intersect with one's professional identity (Cooper and Quick, 2017). Individuals should be mindful that caregivers, in particular, face an increased risk of developing mental health issues. This indicates that the workplace can serve as a respite for caregivers, allowing them to assume a different role and provide essential support. Therefore, retaining and supporting caregivers within the workplace is crucial. Work environments that endorse flexible working arrangements, offer carers' leave, implement childcare voucher programs, and introduce other initiatives supporting caregiving roles can exert a profound positive influence on staff mental health and overall productivity (Dollard and Bailey, 2021). The authors added that such workplace policies acknowledge the diverse responsibilities individuals juggle and contribute to a supportive and inclusive professional culture.

Supporting Colleagues

Discussing mental health may appear intimidating, yet we've all engaged in conversations about bereavements, breakups, and other life events. While these discussions may not always commence effortlessly, they frequently hold significant meaning for individuals navigating challenging times. Initiating such conversations begins with genuinely and warmly inquiring about someone's well-being, offering them the opportunity to recognize the sincerity and friendliness behind your inquiry. Fostering a workplace culture that emphasizes support and camaraderie among colleagues is paramount for the overall mental health and well-being of employees (Grawitch and Ballard, 2019). The authors added that the significance of supporting colleagues extends beyond professional collaboration: it creates a foundation for a positive and resilient work environment. The paper highlights that supporting colleagues cultivates a sense of interpersonal connection and community within the workplace. Also, genuine support fosters bonds that transcend professional roles, creating an atmosphere where individuals feel valued, understood, and part of a collective effort.

Hold-Lunstad et al (2010) explained that the act of providing support contributes significantly to the emotional well-being of employees. Knowing that colleagues are available for assistance, understanding, and encouragement creates a safety net for individuals facing personal or professional challenges. The authors further explained that this emotional support serves as a buffer against stress and enhances overall mental resilience. This paper indicates that receiving support from colleagues boosts individual self-esteem. Knowing that one is not alone in navigating difficulties and that colleagues are willing to offer assistance reinforces a positive self-perception. This, in turn, contributes to a more confident and empowered workforce. A workplace where colleagues actively support each other fosters a cohesive and collaborative team spirit. This sense of unity contributes to increased productivity, as employees are more likely to work synergistically when they feel a strong sense of mutual support and shared goals.

Kellyoway and Day (2018) concur with Holt-Lunstad et al (2010) that supportive workplace relationships play a pivotal role in stress reduction. Knowing that colleagues are available to share the workload, lend a listening ear, or collaborate on problem-solving alleviates individual stress levels. The authors explained that this collective approach to handling challenges promotes a healthier work atmosphere. In times of adversity or organizational changes, a supportive network of colleagues becomes a crucial source of resilience. Facing challenges as a unified team enables individuals to navigate uncertainties with greater confidence and adaptability. Grawtich and Ballard (2019) posited that a workplace characterized by supportive interactions creates a positive and inclusive environment. When individuals feel encouraged to express concerns, seek guidance, and collaborate openly, it contributes to a culture of trust and respect, enhancing the overall well-being of the workforce. The diagram below shows eight (8) issues to consider when supporting colleagues:

Table 2: Eight (8) Issues to Consider Supporting Colleagues

1	• Time and place
2	• Active listening
3	• Managing your own feelings
4	• How do I respond to thoughts of suicide
5	• How can I support a person with ongoing mental health problems?
6	• How can I support someone if they are off work?
6	• How can I support someone day-to-day?
7	• Line manager responsibilities

Chesney et al (2014) admonish that appropriate timing and setting are crucial when engaging in conversations about someone's mental health. The authors added that it's essential to choose a time and place that aligns with the individual's comfort and convenience. Avoid creating a sense of urgency, ensuring that the person doesn't feel rushed during the conversation. Allocate at least 10 uninterrupted minutes, and if a more extensive discussion is warranted, consider scheduling a longer chat either within or outside work hours. Select a location that suits the other person's preferences. Some may prefer a serene and quiet environment, while others might thrive in a more bustling setting. Tailor the setting to accommodate their comfort. Devote your complete attention to the person during the conversation, minimizing potential disruptions such as phone calls or notifications. This underscores the importance of creating an environment where they feel heard and supported without external distractions.

Active listening serves as a cornerstone for every meaningful relationship, encompassing various techniques to ensure our presence and engagement in a conversation (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). They authors suggested that you should

maintain eye contact during the conversation, unless the other person appears uncomfortable with it. Embrace openness by having open arms and subtly turning towards them. Demonstrate acknowledgment through appropriate nods and gestures, and consider repeating their statements to confirm understanding. Pose direct and suitable questions, but exercise discretion to avoid delving into details beyond what the person is comfortable sharing. When concluding the conversation, recap the discussed points and any agreements made, ensuring follow-through on commitments. This study contends that having pertinent information readily available can be beneficial. Store helpline numbers and web links on your phone, facilitating immediate assistance if needed. This proactive approach reinforces the importance of active listening and readiness to provide support.

Individuals experiencing mental health challenges may not always revert to their previous state, and it's essential not to presume so (Chesney et al., 2014). The authors explained that similar to managing long-term physical health conditions, individuals with mental health concerns might necessitate lasting or permanent adjustments in their lives or professional roles. Kellyoway and Day (2018) stressed that ongoing support from colleagues remains crucial, without assuming the need for special treatment but also refraining from assuming everything is back to normal after some time has passed. Cooper and Quick (2017) admonish organizational leaders to consider the following actions:

- 1) Informal Check-ins: Engage with colleagues informally within the office to gauge their well-being. If you're a manager, extend the opportunity for them to discuss their mental health during supervision sessions.
- 2) Offer Support Roles: Express willingness to serve as a mentor, coach, or simply a friendly ongoing support. Having someone consistently available can significantly contribute to a supportive environment.
- 3) Ask About Support Needs: Inquire about specific ways you can assist in managing their condition. This may involve helping them recognize signs of potential challenges that they might overlook, signaling a potential decline in their mental well-being.

This paper indicates that maintaining an open and supportive stance is vital. It involves recognizing that the journey of managing mental health is unique for each individual, and ongoing support, offered without assumptions, can play a pivotal role in facilitating a conducive work environment. And so, supporting colleagues is a cornerstone of a mentally healthy workplace. The positive impact ripples through various aspects of professional life, including emotional well-being, self-esteem, team dynamics, and overall job satisfaction. Employers and employees alike can actively contribute to a supportive workplace culture, recognizing that the collective well-being of the team significantly influences individual mental health.

A Caribbean Perspective of Mental Health

Organizations in the Caribbean tend to have a complex and evolving view of mental health (Able et al., 2012). The authors added that this is shaped by culture, stigma, resource limitations, and gradually increasing awareness. Caribbean organizations often view mental health through a lens of stigma and cultural beliefs, leading to limited workplace support, although growing awareness is gradually shifting attitudes toward greater acceptance and integration (Walker et al., 2022).

According to Hickling and Hutchinson (2022), across many Caribbean societies, mental health has traditionally been viewed negatively. The authors added that mental illness is often associated with weakness, shame, or even supernatural causes. This research highlights the fact that employees may fear being judged or discriminated against at work. Able et al (2012) postulated that even trained professionals can hold stigmatizing beliefs, and so employees may hide mental health issues, while employers may not prioritize psychological well-being, and discussions about stress, anxiety, or depression are often avoided. Walker et al (2022) explained that the Caribbean workplace culture has a “push through it” mentality where many Caribbean workplaces still reflect a high-resilience, low-disclosure culture. The author added that organizations in the Caribbean place a lot of emphasis on productivity and endurance rather than emotional well-being, and therefore, employees are often expected to cope silently with stress. The study highlights that mental health is not always recognized as a legitimate workplace concern and therefore, more focus needs to be put on it.

It must be noted that stigma affects help-seeking in organizations (Whitehorne-Smith et al., 2024). The authors point out that research shows that stigma is a major barrier to seeking help in the Caribbean. The research explains that employees may avoid counselling or employee assistance programs, fear of being labelled or losing opportunities discourages openness and therefore mental health issues often go untreated. Able et al (2012) emphasized that even when support exists, utilization is low due to the negative stigma and therefore, the problems may escalate before intervention.

The Caribbean organizations have to deal with cultural influences such as religion, community and belief systems when it comes to mental health (Whitehorne-Smith et al., 2024). The authors explained that there is heavy reliance on family, church, or community support instead of formal services. Additionally, there are beliefs about spiritual or moral causes of mental illness that still exist and so informal coping (talking to friends, pastors) is more common than therapy. Walker et al (2022) found that mental health support may be informal rather than institutionalized.

This paper highlights the fact that there is a noticeable shift towards awareness and change. In recent times, there is increased public awareness campaigns and education; younger employees are more open to discussing mental health, and one

may find that in some organizations, there is the introduction of wellness programs, employee assistance initiatives, and stress management training. This transition has resulted in organizations starting to view mental health as part of overall employee well-being and recognizing its impact on productivity and performance. In Jamaica, the following initiatives are created:

1. Since The World Health Organization (WHO) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Fact Sheet 2017, indicates that 70 percent of mental illnesses emerge by age 14, but it takes 10 years for diagnosis, in 2020, the Ministry of Education implemented the first phase of the Mental Health Literacy programme, including planning, training and the first set of cohorts introduced to the initiative, is expected to last for a year (Hunter, 2020).
2. In 2021, a 24-hour dedicated helpline (The Safe Spot National Child and Teen Helpline) was established to assist children and teenagers experiencing challenges or who may be feeling overwhelmed with adapting to changes caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (Jamaica Observer, 2021).
3. In 2023 seventeen (17) Caribbean territories through an exciting new partnership between UNICEF and the youth-led regional mental health advocacy organisation Let's Unpack It (LUI) appointed youth mental health focal points (Smith, 2023). The author added that this network will help to design and implement initiatives and campaigns around mental health and wellness; represent the opinions of Caribbean youth at regional and international meetings, conferences, and symposia; and help to mobilize other children and youth to end the stigma and prioritize mental health and wellness. Each country's focal point will also benefit from training, career development and opportunities to participate in regional and international efforts.

Employer Checklist for Creating Mentally Healthy Workplaces

- 1) Cooper and Quick (2017) recommend that managers should prioritize mental health and well-being as integral assets within your organization. In so doing, leadership should:
 - A. Pledge to establish a comprehensive approach to mental health in the workplace, aimed at safeguarding and enhancing mental well-being for all employees while providing support to those facing distress.
 - B. Assign board champions and ensure that senior leaders and middle managers take responsibility for the implementation of mental health programs.

- C. Demonstrate a commitment to reassessing business practices to cultivate a working culture that is as mentally healthy as possible. Make evidence-based mental health promotion tools, such as mindfulness and exercise, accessible to all staff.
- D. Conduct regular staff surveys and other research initiatives to gather data on staff mental health. Utilize these findings to strategize and implement actions, subsequently informing workplace policies. Acknowledge and celebrate the positive impact of existing employee benefits and corporate social responsibility activities on the mental health and well-being of the staff.

2) Facilitate the cultivation of compassionate and proficient relationships between line managers and their teams (Bakker and Demerouti (2017).

Organizations should:

- A. Offer avenues for managers to participate in pertinent training sessions aimed at aiding both staff dealing with mental health challenges and fostering the well-being of the entire workforce.
- B. Extend proactive assistance to line managers overseeing individuals with mental health concerns, ensuring access to HR resources and, when needed, occupational health services.
- C. Acknowledge that line managers with personal lived experiences of mental health challenges bring a unique and valuable asset to the company.

3) Kellyoway and Day (2018) admonish leaders to address discrimination, by:

- A. Establishing a stance where discrimination based on mental health status is deemed as intolerable as discrimination related to other protected characteristics like race, gender, or sexual orientation.
- B. Promoting a culture where staff is encouraged to report any instances of discrimination or harassment they encounter and to speak out against any discriminatory behavior they observe.
- C. Providing backing to national and local anti-stigma campaigns, including initiatives such as 'Time to Change,' 'Time to Change Cymru,' 'See Me,' and Mental Health Awareness Week.

4) Grawtich and Ballard (2019) emphasize that organizations should appreciate the diversity and adaptable skills that come with lived experiences of mental health challenges and encourage individuals to share their experiences. Organizations can:

- A. Incorporate mental health considerations into diversity and inclusion strategies, acknowledging the mental health aspect within broader equality initiatives.

- B. Forge connections with employability providers to create avenues for individuals with mental health challenges to integrate into your workforce.
- C. Promote a culture that values authenticity and openness, starting from the organizational leadership, to provide individuals with positive reasons to disclose their mental health experiences.
- D. Consider establishing peer support and mentoring programs specifically tailored for staff with lived experiences of mental health challenges.

5. Conclusions

In the modern workplace, recognizing the significance of mental health is no longer just a compassionate gesture; it is a strategic imperative that directly impacts the overall well-being and productivity of employees. Employers play a pivotal role in creating a workplace environment that not only acknowledges the complexities of mental health but actively supports the mental well-being of their workforce. This involves fostering awareness, eradicating stigma, and providing tangible support mechanisms. One of the fundamental aspects of facilitating mental health awareness in the workplace is eliminating the stigma associated with mental health challenges. Employers can contribute to changing the narrative by promoting open discussions, encouraging employees to share their experiences, and emphasizing that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. This shift in perspective creates an environment where individuals feel more comfortable discussing their mental health and seeking support. Employers should invest in educational initiatives to enhance mental health literacy among both employees and management, training programs that focus on recognizing signs of distress, promoting a supportive culture, and equipping managers with the skills to address mental health concerns can contribute significantly to a healthier workplace environment. This education empowers individuals to understand and respond to mental health challenges proactively.

Reflective Questions

- 1) How can employees help to create a positive atmosphere in the workplace?
- 2) How can employers help employees maintain a physical and healthy lifestyle while at work?
- 3) What practical ways as a co-worker can you demonstrate your care for other coworkers within your organization?
- 4) Explain how can you use active listening to support your coworker during a mental health episode?

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