**Capstone Research Dissertation**

**BA (Hons) in Human Resource Management**

# Do Employers Have a Responsibility For Supporting Their Employee's Mental Health?

**National College of Ireland**

**Project Submission Sheet – 2022/2023**

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| **Programme:** | BA Honours Human Resource Management | **Year:** | 4 (Work placement) |

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## Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

**National College of Ireland**

**Research Students Declaration Form**

*(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)*

**Name:** Jade O'Hagan

**Student Number:** 19396126

**Degree for which thesis is submitted:** BA Honours Human Resource Management

**Title of Thesis:** Does the employer have a responsibility for supporting their employee's mental health?

**Thesis supervisor:** Robert McDonald

**Date:** 7th July 2023

**Material submitted for award**

A. I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself.

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## Acknowledgements

## Abstract

Employee mental health is something that is becoming more and more important within the workplace. Various studies have investigated both the employer's attitude in terms of an employee's mental health and the understanding that they have around issues regarding mental health and some effects that it may have on the productivity of the workplace. This study focuses on what kind of mental health issues an employee may have and how it can affect their day-to-day work life.  This study aims to gather a broader understanding of the relationship between employers and employees and how the relationship can influence better job satisfaction, culture, job commitment and performance.

To gather information this research takes an interpretive approach. Four companies were selected to gather evidence around the issue. The findings that were collected showed that most companies have an open-door policy in their organization but have little knowledge about what kind of illnesses can affect a person's work life. However, most companies agreed that having training in place for their employees is now of high importance. They believe that by doing this it will result in less absenteeism. Providing both employers and employees with training on how to deal with their feelings will be a positive aspect as their relationships will be stronger and more trust will be established. This recommendation would have a huge positive impact on the team and achieve more productivity.

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# Chapter 1

## 1.1 Introduction

This study will examine the importance of mental health strategies and good relationships within the workplace to achieve a trustworthy culture that is open to identifying and supporting    mental health issues that may arise in the company. The research questions were designed to ascertain the various employers understanding and current thinking on mental health issues and to assess the input, if any , of supportive structures and processes available to employees.

## 1.2 Background

The mental health  of  employees is something that has received more focus in recent years. In contemporary  society there are many  more stressors evident than there previously were. The research question explores if there has been any change in staff/employee training and development of a strategic plan within the workplace. A great example of an unseen consequence of a culture that is lacking in support systems is that  employees productivity can be seen to decrease in cases where employees feel reliance on their job "Over half of the working population (55 per cent) report that facing financial pressures affects their behaviour at work and ability to perform in their job" (*CIPD | Employee financial well-being: a HR concern*, no date) This statistic  shows just how reliant people are on their jobs to help them get through their financial situations. If we compare this statistic to previous years when things such as electricity, heating and mortgages were not that expensive,  workers would have not have that much reliance on their professional career. This pressure can be a huge stressor for employees, and it may negatively affect their mental health. Workplace stress is a huge contributor to mental health, employees who feel like they have to live to work rather than work to live may suffer hugely within a company with little support systems.

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## 1.3 Rationale

This study allows me to investigate and research a matter that interests me. I get the opportunity to discover if organisations take mental health into consideration when they are considering the objectives and priorities for their employees. I would hope that when I join the workforce there are strategies in place which help people to deal with mental health in the workplace. During my study for my research, I became familiar with material that studies mental health strategies and the advantages of early and immediate interventions for companies and to the importance of establishing a good company culture.

## 1.4 Research Question

Do employers have a responsibility for supporting their employee's mental health? I believe that this question is extremely important to both ask and investigate an answer to. Mental health is something that employees struggle with on a day to day basis. Discovering the level of awareness of this issue and the supports, if any ,that an a employer offers is something that I find extremely interesting .

## 1.5 Aims and Objectives of Research

Below are aims and objectives to help me break down my main research question. I start by investigating the understanding of mental health issues, I believe that this is the basis of my research question as nothing can be done in an organisation which does not understand the importance. From this I aim to investigate if company's fund/implement strategies for employees and how effective they have been. Lastly I will research of some benefits that an employer may face when implementing intervention's for the mental health of their employees.

- To investigate employers understanding of mental health issues.
- To explore if organisations fund interventions for mental health.

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- To examine interventions and strategies within organisations.

- Identify possible barriers that managers may face.

## 1.6 Outline of Research

- **Chapter One-** Discuss my research question, my aims and objectives for my study.

- **Chapter Two-** Discusses a review of the current literature around the topic of mental health within the workplace.

- **Chapter Three-** Discusses the methodology for this research study.

- **Chapter Four-** Provides insights of the findings from the data collection carried out for my research project.

- **Chapter Five-** concludes the factors discussed within my chapters along with highlights the limitations and recommendations for this research study.

- **Chapter Six-** I will discuss some main points in my research

- **Chapter Seven-** I will conclude my study along with naming some limitations and recommendations.

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## Chapter 2

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## 2.1 Literature Review:

While completing my research, I have discovered various insights when looking at mental health within the workplace, looking at the employer's approach and responsibility of their employee's wellbeing. Overall, in my research I have seen that mental health is something that employers are becoming more concerned about with their employees in the workplace. Employers are noticing that the high number of employees with mental health issues within the workplace is resulting in things such as absenteeism, low productivity, and higher turnover. Higher turnover is an extremely interesting one as it can questioned if employees are leaving companies at a faster rate because the Companies do not have the supports and services to retain staff members who are suffering mentally. Companies are becoming aware that their employee's mental health and wellbeing is heavily connected to productivity. Having an employee who feels good in their mental health will help them to be more motivated to complete tasks. Companies are realizing that good wellbeing of an employee = high productivity = success in the company. Looking at a study done in 2018 by Mental health Ireland, we see a very interesting statistic " On average, those who are unemployed and those who are full-time homemakers have a lower score than those who are in full-time or part-time employment" (Mental Health Ireland, 2018)

## 2.2 The Employer's Understanding of Mental Health:

Looking at a CIPD article tells us that *"Mental health issues can affect one in four people at some point in their lives and have a significant impact on employee wellbeing."* (CIPD, n.d.) this is a significant number of employees who suffer mentally at some point in their lives and proves that mental health affects many of us during our life. Looking at research with the question do employers have a responsibility for the mental health of their employees, it is critical to consider mental health issues which are so common in the workplace. This

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shows just how important it is to have services for employees to help them feel supported and protected in the workplace. With recent issues seen in our society lately, we have seen struggles in areas such as housing, education, and many others in relation to COVID-19. People are relying on their jobs more than ever lately to feel like they have financial security to get through such issues. In the CIPD article we can see that organizations are working hard to reflect the issues their employees may be facing *"Our 2021 Health and wellbeing at work survey report shows that since the onset of COVID, more organizations are stepping up their efforts to foster mentally healthy workplaces with wellbeing activity is increasingly focused on mental health."* (CIPD, n.d.).

It is important that employers and companies make themselves aware of the different types of mental health issues and the effects that it can have on the productivity of their work. *"Mental ill health can range from anxiety and depression (the most common mental health conditions) to severe mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia"* (CIPD, n.d.). Their day-to-day work can be affected by things such as e.g., lack of sleep, ability to see things rationally, emotional outbursts. Employers having early interventions for employees is crucial to be able to deal with potential mental health issues within the workplace, there is a broad range of interventions that can be done in order to make the employee feel safe and listened to. "Actions taken include identification strategies to determine vulnerability in the workplace, management programmes including modifications to job structure and environment in order to tackle problems , and a range of strategies to help those who have had longer periods of time away from work reintegrate back into their workplace" (McDaid, 2007)

I believe that this CIPD source relates hugely to my proposed question as it is outlining common mental health conditions an employee may face regarding current societal issues and how these issues can affect their productivity of their day-to-day work. The author's article was very persuasive and well written, and

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I believe that it will aid my project by providing me with realistic stats of employees who suffer from mental health issues and what kind of issues that they can suffer with.

A survey that I researched links hugely to the above. This survey was done to gauge the changes in employers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices in England between 2006-2010. *"The issue of mental health in British workplaces is currently the focus of much economic and social interest. In 2008 mental health problems accounted for an estimated 442,000 cases of work-related illnesses annually"* **(Henderson et al., 2013)**

The main aim and objective of this survey was to discover if employers' knowledge around how to deal with and support mental health in the workplace has improved throughout the years. This survey was conducted through telephone interviews.

Interestingly, it was found that employers had an increased awareness of mental health issues and problems in the workplace, however employers believe that this information should be disclosed to them in advance. This point would prove just how important it can be to disclose such matters to the employer to avoid any miscommunication as discussed above. I feel that this is a huge positive step forward for workplaces, businesses, and employers as they are becoming more aware of the issues with their employees.

Like **(N. Thisted, Cecille et al, 2018)** the study suggests that employees may be more unlikely to disclose this information in fear of other colleague's attitudes, this is seen to be a barrier in disclosure of information. By providing open communication, friendly and positive culture this may help to eliminate the fear for employees of sharing such matters. Positively it was found that it is more common to see policies and procedures and support on mental health issues within the workplace as employers are becoming more aware of mental

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health issues that can occur.  It is positive to see that the author is achieving an awareness of how employers are now more aware of mental health issues than they were before. This will be hugely beneficial to my research as it shows that more interventions are being put in place as employers are more aware of their employees' mental health issues within the workplace.

## 2.3 Culture in the workplace:

With more employers being made aware of their employee's mental health state in the workplace it is interesting to see how companies will deal with the information they are now more commonly seeing. Looking at a study of 17 participants, I discovered during my research a very interesting article which focuses on various perspectives of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety from employees, co-workers, and employers. It was found that one the most common issue was having poor colleague relationships, and this was found to be resulting in poor mental health *"poor collegial relationships can result in distrust and insecurity, and few of being discriminated by coworker's and employer is found to be a major barrier for help-seeking and disclosure of disability in the workplace"* (**N.Thisted, Cecille et al, 2018**)

Most importantly in this study it was found that both employers and co-workers believe that open communication is important to ensure good wellbeing and mental health is promoted in a company. As discussed below, sometimes employees may not feel comfortable enough to confide in their employers or feel as though the culture within the company does not promote open communication. However, this study shows that many employers were concerned that they may be entering an employee's privacy bubble by intervening in mental health matters.  I myself believe that employers already withhold much information about you which may be confidential, I don't believe that knowing about your employee's mental health is over-stepping their privacy bubble when depression is becoming more commonly seen within groups of employees *"Globally, major depression is a commonly occurring disorder with*

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*an estimated lifetime prevalence ranging from 1.0% (Czech Republic) to 16.9% (USA)"* **(N.Thisted, Cecille et al, 2018).** The results show structural intervention is needed when promoting employee well-being when dealing with employees with mental health issues.

We can see just how beneficial structural intervention can be beneficial by looking at an article by (**Secker, J et al, 2003)**, the research shows that although employees having mental health issues in the workplace is very common, it is very common for employees to decide to not to disclose their mental health issues to their employer. This can come down to not having a trusting relationship with their employer or feeling as though the support is not in place for them to deal with mental health issues. In this research we can see how undisclosed information about an employee's mental health can cause miscommunication between an employer and employee. Miscommunications we may see is employees being less productive as they are suffering with a mental illness, if this is not brought to the employer's attention it can be very hard for the employer to see this act as anything else but underperforming. If the employer is not aware of how the employee is suffering mentally it may become difficult to put support in place to support and protect your employees.

Following the miscommunication, in a workplace we can see that there may a higher level of absenteeism and unemployment, this is because employees have not been open and honest with their employer about their mental health and how they may need more support and they may feel as though they do not have any other option but to miss work as they cannot cope. I feel as though this piece of work raises the argument that if the support was already in place and was a core part of the company policy then  the problem could have been potentially avoided?

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Interestingly, in this piece of work the research shows how it is found that 'natural supports' worked very well overall when trying to support a mix of employees who have disclosed their mental health issues and those who have not. By using these natural supports employees who don't feel as if they can share their issues or don't feel ready too can still benefit from these wellbeing supports which may help to minimize the effects that their mental struggles have on their work life.

These natural supports include things such as having learning opportunities for all whether that be in their current position or an opportunity to progress and change within their role. Ensuring growth for all employees.  Having supportive colleagues and good relationships which can be achieved by having regular events/outings or encouraging a positive work environment for all . Having a good work culture to help the employees feel supported .by managers who are willing to understand matters and have a genuine care for their wellbeing. This is extremely important for the employee to feel that they can go and talk to someone if they need help to seek some supports etc. Having these natural supports put in place for employees aims to help reduce issues in the workplace such as absenteeism and high employee turnover. This source outlines ways in which a company can use natural support in a business to eliminate employees feeling as though they are not supported in their work and hopefully feel more comfortable to confide in their employers resulting in a much more positive relationship. Having natural support within the company may help to reduce miscommunications in the workplace. This a study that is hugely beneficial to me during my research as these natural supports may be seen in some companies to help reduce issues of absenteeism etc. I believe that the author was trying to achieve awareness about supports that can be put in place.

 As well as early interventions, more discreet interventions can be put in place such as providing physical health interventions. This can be done by providing

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discounted gym memberships, funding an on-site gym and providing lunch time yoga classes etc. implementing such interventions will ultimately benefit the business long-term, for example "Research has shown that employees who get at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week miss an average of 4.1 fewer days of work per year." (Workplace Health & Occupational Wellbeing Consultants Australia & New Zealand, 2020)

## 2.4 Challenges:

Some challenges may be seen when dealing with employees with mental health issues in the workplace. Some company's and businesses may find it extremely difficult to implement a support system in the company which will make all employees feel supported and protected, *Gary, nd* says that "*The best we can do is be there for people we are responsible for and hope our efforts help make the world a better place, even if it's just for a handful of people*" Recently with new issues arising such as the housing crisis etc., more companies may find that they are  dealing with increased instances of mental health issues in the workplace. Some companies may find it more challenging than others to deal with their employees depending on the type of company/business and what company culture is applied.

We can see that there may be a negative impact on businesses when dealing with employees with mental health issues. Like **(Secker, J et al, 2003),** these issues can vary between things such as the high number of absenteeism, less productivity of employees and high turnover of staff. This of course, can be a huge issue for businesses as employees may present themselves sick in work more often than the company can deal with, lowered productivity in a company can suggest to others that their standards have dropped and that they don't manage, motivate, and engage with their employees as much as they need to. Ultimately in dramatic circumstances and big numbers this can give the company a bad look or reputation.

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We can see crucial key points on how companies can provide and promote a good working culture for their employees *"it's important to create an environment that promotes mental well-being and provides resources and benefits for employees with such illnesses" (Gary,nd)* we can see that this can be achieved by things such as, by having a better work output, healthier employer-employee relationships, promoting workplace equality so that nobody feels discriminated against and can share their concerns in confidence, and equally distributed workload ensuring not to burden or overload employees to avoid anxiety, depression and exhaustion. We can see the importance of workplace cultures again in this study and how it can play a massive role. This is an interesting piece of work as it investigates if workplace cultures can heavily impact mental health and will be one of the main areas that I will look at when considering employees wellbeing and support in the workplace.

Another negative impact on a company can be seen when looking at my next source, this source shows how big anxiety and depressive disorders have a huge cost effect on a company regarding economic and workplace performance costs. Costs can be seen in therapy for employees, paid leave, long-term absenteeism. This article looked at mental health in the workplace from a different angle and explored how supporting employees with mental health issues can be a financial strain on a company. It's shown in this article that investing a lot of money in the mental health of employees in cases when they may need psychiatric care and support can be very expensive for a company.

This article suggests that providing mental health support can be costly, so can dealing the effects of mental health in ways such as lost work time, absenteeism and presenteeism. Presenteeism is a major concern within the business communities. This is *"when an employee goes to work sick but cannot work at full capacity" (Langlieb and Kahn, 2005).* Presenteeism is something that may

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be seen in a company when an employee does not feel like they can be open and honest with their employers, so they try and pretend like they are fine and are not suffering mentally. This is bound to have a major effect on a company's success if it is left to go unnoticed. Mental health matters that go unnoticed for such a long period of time may result in the employee needing more intense professional psychiatric help. The view of negative effects on a business will benefit my study hugely as it will help me to research just how much implementing supports into a business is costing and if the investment is worth the results. For example, if a company is investing a certain amount of money in mental health support, are they gaining employment commitment back.

From my findings, I can see that there are many similarities between my various research sources. We can see that these similarities are mental health issues not being disclosed to their employers and are resulting in a high level of miscommunication in the company. We can see that employee mental health issues and an employee feeling as though they are fully supported in a company is heavily related to the productivity of an employee in a business. It is shown that a common factor in the above sources is that if an employee is suffering from a mental illness the risk of high absenteeism and low productivity is commonly seen within this niche of employees. I believe that the resources mentioned will be useful in my current research project as they have outlined the different employee/employer perspectives and the different ideas relevant to my research title.

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# Chapter 3

## 3.1 Methodology

My Research title is "Do employers have a responsibility for supporting their employee's mental health" this research is Interpretive in nature; meaning that my study is aided by people's own experiences that they have within their workplace and what experience that they have with policies and procedures regarding mental health and stress management. This Interpretive research allows me to continue to explore how managers and leaders approach mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and what sort of strategies they use to help their employees. This is an interesting topic to me, one that I have a huge interest in finding out more about it. I am interested in exploring different managers and organizations perspectives and finding out if they believe that they have any responsibility for their employee's mental wellbeing. I feel that this research question is important, and I feel like it is something that I am passionate about. I anticipate finding out lots of information in the interpretative paradigm, I will be looking at research previously done by researchers and how they managed to form different perspectives. I believe my answer can be interpreted in a few different ways and there will not be a definite answer or yes or no to my research question. Having a definite answer would not be possible in the case of my research question as I will be interviewing different managers and companies which will all have slightly different morals, strategies and policies and procedures.

While undergoing my own research on my proposed question I plan to use interpretive methods. I hope to conduct semi-structured interviews with a broad range of employees from different sectors. This will allow me to get individual experiences about my research question. I plan to conduct these interviews with managers from a Grocery Shop, Leisure Centre, Community Employment

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Supervisor, Fire Brigade/Emergency Services By conducting these interviews, I hope to investigate whether any support is already in place and whether the employers feel there should be. I plan to use a semi-structured interview style as I feel it will be most appropriate for the topic to allow the interviewee to chat about their individual experiences around the matter.

I feel this style would work better than an intense interview. As the employer may feel like he can get involved in the interview and share his/her ideas on strategies. Along with interviews, I plan to use methods such as analysis, looking at relevant documentaries, research that has already been completed on my topic or one which is similar, company and country policy and legislation that may be relevant to my research question, these different sources will aid me to complete my study.

## 3.2 Philosophical Presumptions

This research is interpretive in nature. It is evident from my literature review that people have more knowledge about mental health and the variety of mental illnesses and stress disorders which are present. With this knowledge people tend to have more courage to speak about their mental health with people who they feel like they can trust with and who will support them with the information that they are disclosing, these people can vary from their friends, colleagues and managers. I discovered that mental health and the supports available are spoken about more publicly than years before hand, when people may have felt that their illness was a burden or that there would not be any supports available for them. When we look at managers, some individuals may feel that mental health is a complex issue which cannot be dealt with in a workplace environment, looking at the literature review we can see that there are many supports that can be put in place for the employee to feel supported with their mental health or illnesses before professional advice or intervention is needed. It can be proven that a full-time employee spends the majority of their  time  in

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the work environment as they spend 40/168 hours a week in a workplace environment.

I believe this proves just how important workplace culture is and how it can have an impact on how one is feeling. During my study I discovered that an employee's mental health can affect their productivity in the workplace, as any sickness. When looking at the last couple of years, people have experienced more pressure than anticipated with a global pandemic, an extreme the housing crisis. These stressors may been seen to make employees more reliant on their jobs like never before. Looking at worldwide stats "*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of anxiety and depressive disorders grew. Depressive symptoms grew from a base of about 193 million people worldwide to 246 million, which is about 28%. Anxiety disorders grew from about 298 million people affected to 374 million, which is about a 25% increase*" (*Goodman Duszynski, Lizzie, 2023*)

This extreme stat may suggest that managers may need to be trained on things that they might not have to be trained on previously to such an extent. For example, before the percentage of people wo have suffered with mental health of distress might have been much lower to the percentage now, so the idea of training and having policies in place may be a newly introduced for a lot of companies. As seen in the lit review many companies are still struggling to establish a strategy to put in place for mental wellbeing and stress management in the workplace. It is also seen in the lit review that companies are starting to understand in recent times some of the mental issues an employee may have. This is a positive step as it means we are moving in the direction of employee well-being being a core pillar in a company's induction and everyday process. An employee must feel they can talk openly with their employer and discuss their worries and concerns without and judgement. Building this trusted relationship may be hard when it is only a newly built policy.

A high percentage of people who are struggling with a mental health illness or stress which is work related may be reluctant to confide in anyone at all. This

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causes issues as discussed in my lit review. Interestingly, according to Jou Allison et al, 2020 the below stats are the reason that people are reluctant to reach out.

**What is keeping you from receiving mental health support?**
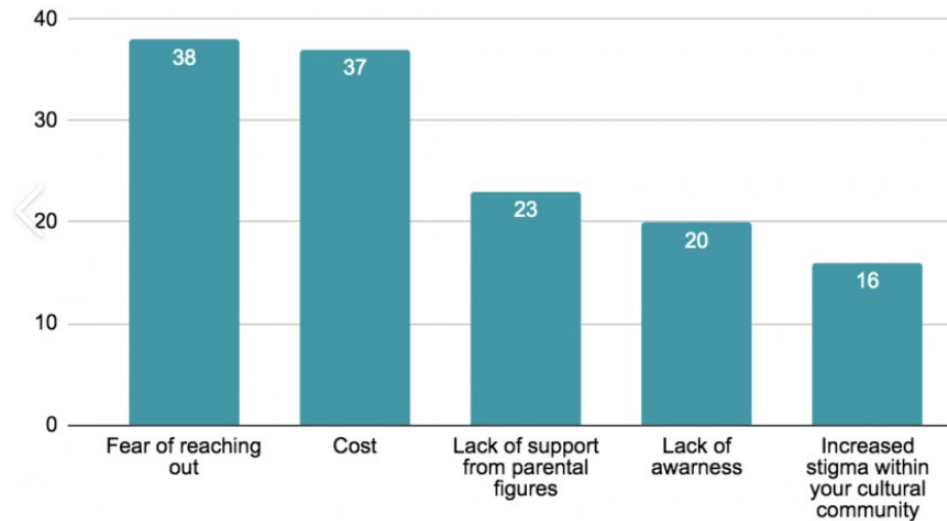
The fear of reaching out is the highest rate out of them all, this shows just how important it is for the employee to feel like they can reach out to the employer or their managers if they are feeling down and that they may need a little bit of help or guidance in a stressful time. This can be done by having an open-door enviroment or giving your employees monthly 1-1 meetings where you can check in on your employees and see how they are feeling and if there is anything they might need to discuss or need help with. Looking at the lit review, there is supports that can be put in place in the company to help them feel suppported and guided throughout their working time in the company and this results in less absenteeism and low productivity in relation to wellbeing and stress.

## 3.3 Research Design

This work is interpretive in nature. As I need to consider that each company and manager's approaches are going to differ from the other when dealing with their employee's well-being and how they deal with stress in the company. It is

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important that in this study that I consider all the different types of approaches that managers have and if there are policies in place which the next manager can follow so that there will be the same supports for all employees when joining the company, I will research to look at how different manager's deal with their employees in a situation such as wellbeing and stress management.

I plan to gather this information by conducting semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be 30-40minutes long and will have 17 questions. The interview will begin with an introduction question and outro question which allows the employer to introduce themselves and at the end give any additional ideas or strategies that may be put in place in the future. These interviews will be done in a few different industries to gage the difference that each company has with dealing with wellbeing and to understand the experience, appearance and knowledge of people who are in this field. The interviews will be semi-structured so they will allow for the interviewee to discuss experiences they may have. This will be achieved by interviewing with broad questions so that the interviewee can discuss and express his/her experiences in the field. What I intend to find out in these interviews is to figure out if there is a policy or procedure in place for employee's mental well-being and if the employer feels that they may be responsible for supporting thier employees' well-being. By having the semi-structured interview, I may discover that different strategies are in place in accordance with different management styles.

I feel that conducting these interviews is essential to my studies as it helps to shape my research project and gives me an idea what it is realistically like in the working world regarding mental/wellbeing management, and how managers are supporting their staff daily. By having such a broad range of interviewees from industries such as the emergency services, retail, community centre and leisure it will give me a broad range to be able to compare the work that the company does do and how they manage and engage with their team members.

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*Q1-6-* These questions introduce the company and gauge if they think that they have a responsibly for their employee's mental health and if the company has a policy already in the company regarding well-being. These questions are crucial to set the tone for the interview as it will give me an idea of how the manager believes in mental wellbeing and just how serious they may take it in the company. These questions both investigate current policies that they may have in their company, but they also leave the question open for the employers' ideas on whether they think that policies etc should be in place and if not, why they aren't.

*Q7-9* These questions investigate if the company has training for their managers on well-being and stress management and if this training is available for their employees. This will allow employees to be aware of how to access support for their mental health if they are needed. These questions also investigate if good mental health is encouraged, and activity made aware of good well-being in their day to day working life. These questions determine whether the company has invested into employee wellbeing and created a training plan for managers so that they have the tools to be able to deal with employees with their wellbeing. A company that has put money into training their managers suggests that they have thought about strategies when dealing with wellbeing and stress management.

*Q10-12* Discusses if good wellbeing plays a part of their induction process. And explore that when the employee is in the company are 1-1 meetings available to employees and explore if there is support given to the employers and employees and that they are made available to them. The answer to these questions will help me to form an idea of how hands-on the company are with their employees and if they like to reach out and help their employees on a personal level.

*Q13-17* Explores issues with the manager to see if they have a strategic plan in place regarding employee wellbeing if the employer has been made aware of a rise of mental health issues with such things as covid and the current social issues. We explore here if hybrid working is something that the company

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embraces and if not when rostering do they consider people's mental wellbeing. The answers to these questions will help me understand the manager's idea of wellbeing and if they have been considering the current situation when trying to deal with the wellbeing and stress management of their employees. Covid-19 and the housing crisis may have a huge impact on an employee's mental health and may cause an employee to be much more reliant on their jobs than they were before.

## 3.4 Sampling

I plan for the interviews to be conducted on an in-person basis and will be semi-structured. The interviews will be with several different managers in different positions, be store manager, district manager etc. All my managers will have different types of experiences as their jobs are very varied and different to each other. Two managers were men, and two managers were women, and this was just to have an equal opportunity during my research. My sample size was heavily based on the availability of managers to do the interviews, the information that I gained for the interview and likelihood to participate in my research.

| Pseudonym | Gender | Area of Employment |
|---|---|---|
| Interviewee 1 James | Male | Emergency Services |
| Interviewee 2 Mila | Female | Retail |
| Interviewee 3 Jessica | Female | CE Scheme |
| Interviewee 4 Bradley | Male | Leisure Industry |

All interviewees were giving the equal opportunities to answer each question and each manager had different years of experiences, each manger had different views and beliefs as my interview sample was from a broad range of sectors. There was a broad range of questions which allowed the interviewee to express their views and opinions. There were some opinions which showed difference in employees mental health with the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected the workplace.

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## 3.5 Limitations

During my research I discovered that there are some limitations which included getting interviewees who were willing to do the interview. Once I got a participant who agreed to participate, it was a slight challenge to organize a time that best suited the manager as they had a very busy schedule. Because of this it was extremely important that I had to be extremely organized to ensure I got the answers to the questions that I needed for my research within the time slot that I had. I believe that If I had more time to conduct this interview, I may have got a more in-depth view of the question I am asking and more opinions on the matter from the interviewee. Another push back is if I had more time to conduct my research project, I could have had been able to contact more managers to interview and therefore my results could have varied slightly as I could have interviewed managers from industries that I didn't get a chance to with the limited amount of time. Having more variety to my results would been able to help my study as I would have had more insight into the workforce and what policies, if any, that they use in their company and if they are deemed an effect in the business or not.

## 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Throughout this research project I made sure that I carefully followed the National College of Irelands guidelines. Before any interview was conducted, I verbally explained what the interview consisted of, letting the interviewee know that their anonymity would be always kept and presented the interviewee with a consent form, I made sure that the consent form was read carefully and signed before we began the interview. Managers were made aware of the NCI retention policy and that all the answers given during the interview would be used for research purposes only. They were made aware that following National College of Irelands guidelines the voice recording would be kept in accordance with the required amount of time. Interviewees were made aware that all voice recordings will be kept in a safe space such as a USB stick in a file which is password protected. National College of Irelands guidelines were followed when drafting my questions while making sure that they were not overstepping any of the ethical lines.

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# Chapter 4

## 4.1 Analysis

My findings will discuss the data received through interpretative sections to help see the question of do employers have a responsibility for supporting their employee's mental health. This allows me to have a further insight to how different companies are managing the topic of mental health in the workplace, and to explore if mental health has had more of an effect on employees in the recent years along with the knowledge that employers have had in the last couple of years.

## Interviews:

- The interviews that were conducted over a space of a month
- My interviews were aimed at people working in a managerial/supervisory position.
- My interviews that were conducted were face to face interviews which were done during a time that suited the interviewee.

## 4.2 Interviews

During my research I conducted the below interviews to get some knowledge and feedback from different industries and how they feel about mental health. Through my semi structured interviews, it allowed the interviewee to be at more ease and answer questions more truthfully and to even offer suggestions to what they have planned to do or hope to do in the future. By having a semi structured interpretive interview style, I feel as though companies felt as though they can engage in the conversation with me.

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| Pseudonym | Gender | Area of Employment |
|-----------|--------|--------------------|
| Interviewee 1 James | Male | Emergency Services |
| Interviewee 2 Mila | Female | Retail |
| Interviewee 3 Jessica | Female | CE Scheme |
| Interviewee 4 Bradley | Male | Leisure Industry |

Through my Interpretive research it was evident that there were parts of mental health in the workplace that needed to be highlighted more than it had been, it was clear that there was not enough learning and development opportunities for both employees and employers to be able to face these issues in the workplace.

A key point that could be seen throughout my interpretive research is that companies shied away from dealing with mental health matters with employees and they did not have any company policy or procedure put in place to deal with any situations if they were to occur in the company. It was evident that some companies had investigated professional help if employees needed a counselling session etc. But there was no prevention tactics in the company to so that professional help would not need to be sought.

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# Chapter 5

## 5.1 Findings

Findings that I discovered from my research and the four semi-structured interviews which I carried out:

The main themes that were identified were:

- The importance of employee's physical health
- Barriers affecting the implementation of mental health strategies
- The importance of early interventions for mental health issues in the workplace
- Years of experience.

The semi structured interviews helped me gain perspective on the employer's knowledge of mental health strategies ,how strategies are used in a company and if they have any effect on their employees.

## 5.2 The importance of physical exercise

The importance of physical exercise was one of the main themes which occurred during my interviews about employee's mental wellbeing. This theme was not much of a surprise as during my research it was highlighted just how physical activity can benefit a person's mental health which ultimately is a positive to the business we according to the (Workplace Health & Occupational Wellbeing Consultants Australia & New Zealand, 2020) employees are more likely to miss less days in their workplace by having 75hrs a week of exercise. Two interviewees commented on just how important employees getting physical exercise can help with their mental well-being. And creates a routine for individuals who may be struggling with their mental health.

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*"We have put money into creating a gym for our employees onsite to encourage employees to embrace their physical health- we hope that this helps with their mental health also" (James Participant 1)*

*"we strongly believe that employees should embrace psychical exercise and that is in our company culture, the interest for fitness is something that our employees have in common" (Bradley Participant 2)*

Some participants believed that physical exercise contributed to the employee having more confidence in themselves and more likely to engage with nearby gyms. This is something that employers felt was hugely important for their employees for both their fitness and the social aspect.

*"We offer discounts to our employees when they join up local gyms, we understand that gyms can be expensive so we try our best to encourage gym memberships in hope that our employees get involved in fitness activity's" (James Participant 1)*

**"*we feel very privileged that we can offer our employees free memberships for our gym facilities, we encourage employees to get involved in creating fitness events for charity's close to their hearts etc." (Bradley Participant 2)*

Interestingly enough, when looking at Mental Health Ireland who conducted a survey in 2018, the results show that infact, physical exercise was proven to be one of the most beneficial ways to deal with their mental health ((Mental Health Ireland, 2018))

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The majority of people (93%) reported that there are things we can do to improve our mental health and wellbeing. Most commonly cited tools by these people are:

| 39% | 28% | 13% | 10% | 10% |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Exercise | Talking to a Family Member/Friend | Eating Healthy Food | Speaking with a Counsellor | Practicing Mindfulness/Yoga |

*(Mental Health Ireland Mental Health Insights Survey, 2018)*

This study interested me as it proves my research to be correct and highlights, that exercise is something that is seen hugely beneficial. exercise was touched on in my literature review I was surprised how much emphasis there is put on it in workplace, this is something that I found to be really highlighted in my own research.  I believe that this is a great step forward in supporting employees and providing them with a service that they can take advantage of. This Is whether it be free, partly paid gym memberships.

## 5.3 Managers perceptions of mental health in the workplace

Managers expressed a variety of different perceptions on mental health in the workplace and if they had a direct responsibility for their employees. This was an interesting factor as from my research the survey completed by (CIPD, n.d.). it was shown that employers are only now stepping up interventions and gaining more information as Covid as affected employees mental health hugely. I believe that the interview showed aspects of the reality of the statement. For example, participant one spoke about how the nature of the line of work that he is involved in mental health is something that has to be monitored very carefully and thought about on a daily basis. He spoke about how it can take time for a new employee to adjust to the mentality of the line of work.

> *"if we felt that our employees had a hard day, we may organise a debrief and the end of the shift to check in with the employees to make sure everyone is feeling okay" (James Participant 1)*

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Participants focused on their industry and how they understood the concept of mental health in accordance to their line of work. Some participants admitting to not knowing much about mental health so they find it hard to relate to some issues that may arise. Participants explained that they believe mental health is very individual and there is no one perception of the term mental health.

> " I think finding and meeting the needs of the individual is the best course of action to understand mental health" (Bradley Participant 4)

Participant three discussed that they found it more difficult to relate to men in situations regarding mental health and could never grasp the perception of a males mental health when never had to experience an encounter. I found this finding extremely interesting, I discovered in my research that employees may feel that relationships need to be built and trust established before they feel they can confide in their employer. This opened up the idea that men may find creating these relationships more difficult.

> "it is more likely that woman will tell us that something is up than men and this makes it tough to understand completely what to do" (Mila Participant 3)

From a broader perspective, my research shows that employees are becoming more aware of their employees mental health. Mental health is an issue that is extremely complex so it is important that effort is made to implement interventions.

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## 5.4 Barriers affecting the implementation of mental health strategies.

Barriers in relation to the implementation of mental health strategies was hugely discussed in the interviews and identified as a central theme. Some of these barriers included lack of training, lack of funding and lack of knowledge.

### 5.4.1 Lack of Training

Most of my participants expressed how lack of training is one of the biggest issues when implementing mental health strategies for employees. They expressed how training for managers is very limited and costly for organisations to implement.

*" I think there should be more training with us as managers and our staff because if there is no training for us it's hard to know what to do" (James Participant 1)*

*"Only recently we have gone on a mental first aid training day, which was very good but it hasn't been introduced to supervisors or staff members" (Jessica Participant 3)*

*"There is no training in place for us as managers so we just really do what we think is best but that could be different for each manager" (Mila Participant 2)*

It is evident from my research that the lack of training is one of the main barriers of mental health strategies not being put in place for employees. Many of participants disclosed that they would be more than willing to go on some

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training so that they can be more involved in mental health for their employees and develop company strategies.

## 5.4.2 Lack of funding

Most of my interviewees expressed how funding is one of the main barriers when implementing mental health strategy's. Participants explained that they may be working on tight budgets and have no say where the money is invested in, others mentioned that there is not enough funds to introduce training to their workforce of 100+ as it can be quite expensive.

> *"There is training that is offered to managers but not the employees at this time for funding issues" (Jessica Participant 2)*

> *"we have no supports for employees as we do not have the funding, but we do encourage to come and talk to us if they are suffering with an issue" (Mila Participant 3)*

Although I had a participant who felt that their company did not need to put rigid strategies in place for their employees and would find better use for the money somewhere else within the business.

> *"we strive to have an open door policy in our work place, and I do believe that this works for us and no further funding is needed" (Bradley Participant 4)*

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### 5.4.3 Lack of Knowledge

The lack of knowledge around mental health illnesses was another theme that was found in my series of interviews. This knowledge streamed from the different types of mental illnesses a worker may have to how the workplace can support the worker with their mental health.

This finding was not surprising to me after participants disclosing just how little training that they received  for a number of reasons such as funding and opportunity also as funding was not given to the organisations to fund any campaigns or inhouse strategies to deal with employees who may be suffering from a mental health illness that compromises the productivity.

Participants explained ways in which they try and understand their employees and their mental health or the stress that they may be experiencing with is work related or effects their ability to work.

*" I think a chat with employees which can result in finding and meeting the needs of the individual is the best course of action to understand mental health"* *(Bradley Participant 4)*

*"Only recently we have gone on a mental first aid training day, which was very good but it hasn't been introduced to supervisors or staff members" (Jessica Participant 3)*

### 5.5 The importance of implementing early interventions for mental health issues in the workplace.

Participants spoke about the importance of having early interventions in a company to reduce the cases of employees feeling like they are in over their heads with stress and their mental state. As participants spoke about the

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importance of early interventions it proved to be extremely similar to an article by (**Secker, J et al, 2003)**, which discussed how natural interventions can be extremely beneficial and eliminate issues developing into a serious situation. Participants made it clear how important it is for them as employers that they feel that they have the right culture for an employee to disclose information if they were feeling like they needed help and the strategies in place were not enough.

> *"if we felt that our employees had a hard day, we may organise a debrief and the end of the shift to check in with the employees to make sure everyone is feeling okay" (James Participant 1)*

> *"We strive to have an open door policy in our work place" (Bradley Participant 4)*

Overall, participants felt that having a welcoming trustworthy culture allows employees feel as though they can come to their managers if an issue arises and that they are aware of that support.

## 5.6 Years of experiences

Employer's years of experience in the managing field was a theme that came up during my interviews. Like everything, management styles and ways of working change all the time. It was mentioned in one of my interviews that the more old-fashioned approach to management wouldn't be seen to be the most empathetic, now this can be seen as a stereotypical statement, but I found this to be interesting. This was compared to the newly qualified managers who present themselves with more understanding, compassion, and empathy for their employees.

*"I believe that I am an empathic person and I like to ask my staff how they are doing, but sometimes I think.. will the next manager do this?" (Mila, Participant 2)*

I believe that there are both positives managers who are only recently qualified compared to managers who are there for years. Managers who are recently qualified may suggest more beneficial strategies for recent times such as Covid,

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housing crisis whereas the more experienced manager may advise how some interventions have already been tried and have not been successful. Having a diverse team is the most beneficial to an organisation to ensure that ideas can be shared.

## Chapter 6

## Discussion

### 6.2 Introduction

This chapter is going to go into detail with the findings presented above. I will explore some of the main factors about mental health in the workplace and how organisations and employers feel on the matter. I will also compare my findings with the literature discovered on this matter. From studying this matter, clear themes were identified which were the importance of physical exercise, managers perceptions of mental health, barriers that affect the implementation of mental health strategies, the importance of implementing early interventions for mental health and years of experience. From my research question it is clear to see from the literature review and my findings that there is a slight gap in the study and growth needed within the workplaces.

### 6.3 The importance of early intervention of mental health strategies in the workplace

An important theme in this research is the early intervention of mental health strategies in the workplace. Throughout my research project intervening early was something that was highlight both in the literature and my research. Participants who took part in my research explained how important it was for an employee to feel safe and for them to know where to go to and who to speak to in a case where they felt they needed to reach out to someone for some

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guidance. The participants explained how there are many different ways in which early interventions can be put in place like McDaid (2007) stated ways such as management programmes and job structure modifications to make the transition back into a normal day to day working life a lot easier for employers. This links to *(N.Thisted, Cecille et al, 2018)* who tells us that it is so important that there is a strong relationship with the employer and the employee to ensure that these early interventions and strategies can be trusted and effective.

The importance of this trusting relationships between managers and their staff was proved through my series of interviews in which the interviewees explained just how important it is to have a relationship with your employees so that they can feel as though they can open to you, many participants felt that this approach was very successful. This backs up my research within the lit review on how important relationships are to individuals in order to succeed.

## 6.4 Culture in The Workplace

From the findings of this research, it is very evident that managers understand the importance of culture in the workplace. Participants mentioned during the interviews conducted that they believe that creating and maintaining a positive work culture is essential to having a positive employee. Participants mentioned although they believe that their employees get on well together, they do believe that they could actively do more for their employees in terms of creating that culture. Examples of creating this culture include, employee bonding days, department lunches, employee/employees of the month and more continuous random appreciation of their staff members. Looking at my lit review *(N.Thisted, Cecille et al, 2018)* relates to the importance of a positive workplace culture in their study. Like the above discussion point, the author expresses that having strong colleague relationships and a good working environment result in a more open space for employees to speak about how they feel.

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Although most participants during the interviews disclosed that the working environment is one in which they have in their organisation, (Mila Participant 2) explained how *"we don't have anything in place at the moment so employees don't tend to disclose mental health issues"* I believe that comparing research and my findings that it can be shown just how important it is to ensure that positive employee culture is kept in the organisation to allow employees to feel safe and that their concerns will be listened too. The benefits and importance of positive workplace culture can be seen in both the lit review and results from the interview's conducted,

## 6.5 Managers experience with employee with mental health.

From my findings it was evident that strategies put in place for employee's mental health and wellbeing varied on the managers experience themselves in a managerial. Role. This is something that mangers seem aware of and believe that they do not need a strategy until their own employees struggle and they then realise that they should of.

An example of this, (Mila, Participant 2) states "I have been managing here for two years and I have not come across any situations when an employee has needed guidance" compared to (Bradley, Participant 4) "I have worked here over 12 years…and many colleagues have come to my office for advice or help" I believe these findings proves that the more experience a manger may have they will be open to see more issues with staff regarding mental health etc. the more experience a manager has also gives them the opportunity to develop relationships with the staff and show that they are genuine. No matter how much experience one might have I believe my findings all relate back to (*Gary, Nd)* When he explains that it can be effective and beneficial to even help even a bunch of people, if all were not possible that one time.

This is unfortunately the case for many situations when a person/organisation will not think something is important until they have experience with it or need to deal with it. The more experienced a manager is, the more likely they are to come across situations of employees struggles and issues.

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# Chapter 7

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## Conclusion

## 7.3 Overview of Research

The aim of my research was to understand mental health in the workplace in depth and to ascertain the  responsibilities of employers in supporting their employees. While exploring and researching this topic I used both literature and data collected by conducting interviews with managers of a variety of different organisations. By comparing the two it highlighted the importance of mental health in the workplace and how it is dealt with by companies.

The key findings from this research study includes.

- The importance of employer knowledge around mental health within the workplace.

- The benefits of high-quality training to be offered to all employers and employees.

- The importance of early interventions when dealing with mental health in the workplace.

- The barriers employers may face when trying to introduce mental health prevention strategies.

Having strategies put in place at an early stage within a company minimises the chance of employees feeling as though they have no support within the organisation. Managers achieve employees trust by creating a culture where they feel as though they can come and openly talk about their issues if any.

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Company culture is hugely important to ensure that employees feel as though the organisation is a healthy environment where they can be themselves and confide in managers. Strategies such as having team bonding days, social events put on for teams and weekly lunches or coffee breaks can create a healthy company culture. "According to the study by Podsiadlowski et al., [30], such activities create and strengthen bonds in the workplace. Ultimately, it improves effective communication and creates avenues for appreciation of the workplace and co-workers alike." (ResearchGate, n.d.)

Introducing early strategies can be impacted by managers own experiences in the workplace. Some managers may be more familiar with situations of employees who may be dealing with high levels of stress and anxiety within the company by having set policy in a company it allows for managers with less experience to have some guidance and knowledge with how to deal with situations that they haven't come across before. "A mental health in the workplace policy establishes that your business sees these issues on the same level of importance as physical wellbeing" (Health Assured, n.d.)

My findings show that mental health and policies around it varied depending on the company and culture. Although, participants disclosed that they do not have sufficient funding available to put into mental health strategies and that was a big contributing factor to this.

## 7.3 Limitations

This research work was a small scale project which concentrated on information gathered through interviews with managers from different industries. The findings do not take into account any input from employees which may either verify or contradict what individual managers say.  Further research would be

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needed in order to gain a 360 degree picture of mental health awareness in the workplace.

## 7.4 Recommendations

Some of the main recommendations that came from this research project are as follows:

- For it to be compulsory to complete a mental health training module on your induction into the company. This training could then be more advanced for senior members of staff.
- Companies to really emphasise the important of having a policy on mental health, this could become a requirement just as bullying and harassment etc.
- For less experienced managers a chance to research about mental health and its importance in the workplace.

Although mental health is an extremely topical subject within society, its evident that it is not yet highlighted for all employers and that they need supports to help them implement training and prevention strategies.

We can see from literature and research that the implementation of strategies is extremely important, and helps to create a healthy culture.

I believe that employers do have a responsibility for supporting their employees mental health. They need to be aware of social , personal and environmental factors that may have a detrimental effect on their employees state of mind , ability to complete tasks and sustain performance. This awareness coupled with the introduction and continuation of interventions and supports can be expected to result in a more enlightened , happier and productive workforce.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. Can you give me more information about your company and your role.

2. How many employees do you currently have in your organization and are they part time or full time?

3. Does your company have a policy on mental health and well-being?

4. Do you think an employer has a responsibility to support their employee's mental health?

5. Does your organization have any supports in place for an employee regarding mental health issues?

6. Does your organization offer training to their managers on how to deal with employees with mental health issues?

7. Do you know if your organization encourage management to offer and deliver training to your staff regarding mental health/stress management?

8. Are managers encouraged to actively raise awareness for mental health with your employees?

9. Are employees aware how to access supports if needed?

10. Does information RE: mental health supports play a part of your induction process?

11. Are employees offered check in meetings with their line managers?

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12. Do the organization support employees to come forward to discuss their own well-being?

13. Are you aware of any absenteeism related to mental health?

14. Have you noticed/ been made aware of a rise in mental health issues with recent events such as covid-19?

15. When rostering does the organization consider peoples work-life balance

16. How do you feel about hybrid working?

17. Does your org have a strategic plan to deal with employee well-being?