

MANAGING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES: RETURNING TO THE OFFICE

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PROVIDING LIFELONG SUPPORT TO PAST AND PRESENT ICAEW MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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‘A Pandemic is as much a Psychological
phenomenon as a Physical Health phenomenon’

Christian W. McMillen 2019

COVID-19 IMPACT - PEOPLE

The psychological impact of COVID-19 on employees will depend on wide range of factors, including:

- Type of sector they work in and job role
- Caring responsibilities
- Household/family circumstances
- Their individual characteristics such as their gender, age, ethnicity and health for example
- Their personal make-up/resilience and pre Covid wellbeing levels

COVID-19 IMPACT - GROUPS

The psychological impact of COVID-19 will also vary for different groups within organisations:

- Those who have carried on working and attending their place of work through the COVID-19 crisis
- People working from home
- People who have been working from home or have been furloughed and are now returning to the workplace

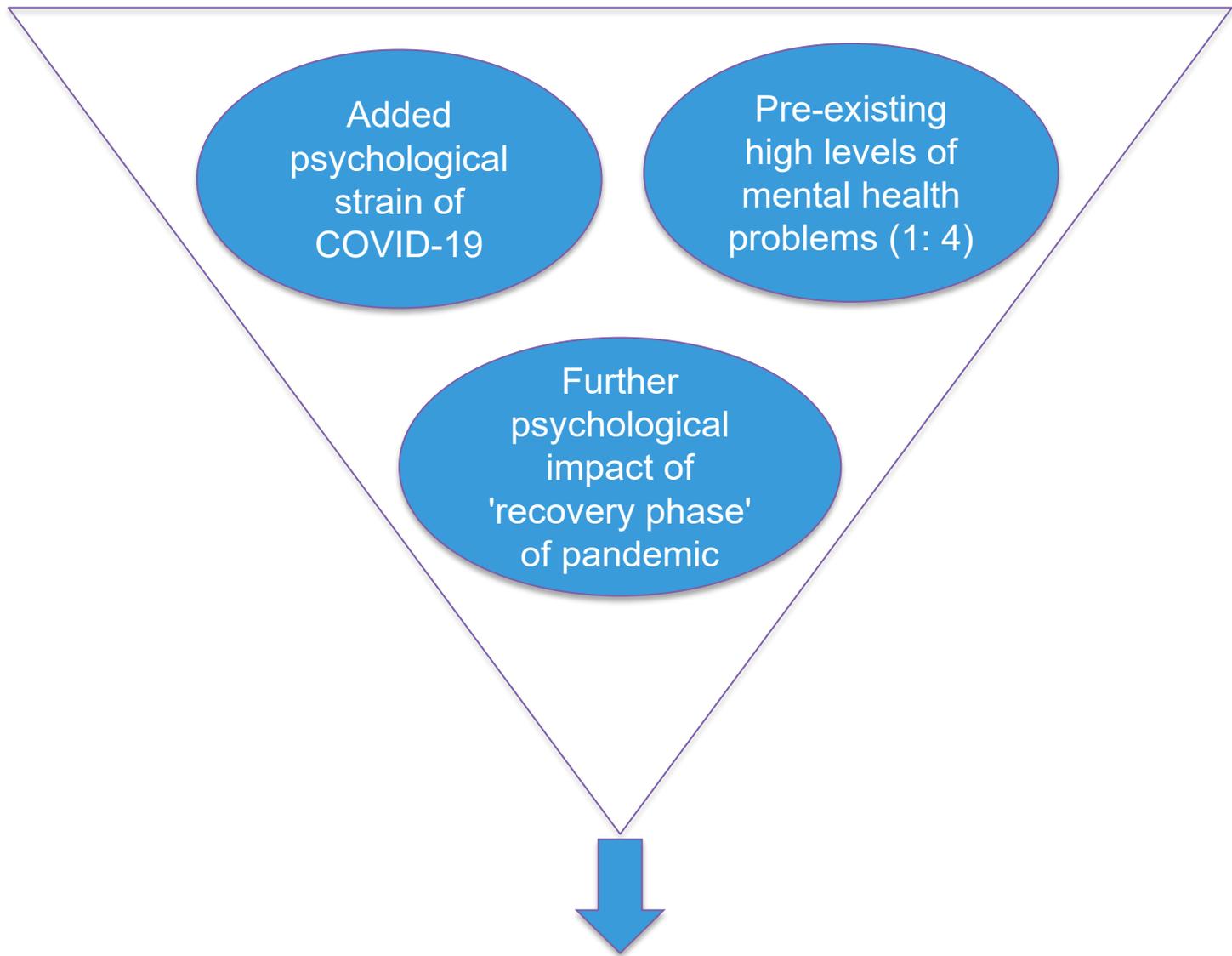


CIPD: three key tests before a return to workplace

- ***Is it essential?*** Working from home must continue wherever possible; if not possible, is the work deemed essential and/or are there are options?
- ***Is it safe?*** People's health and safety is paramount, including their mental health; any return should be gradual to test H&S measures can work for larger numbers
- ***Is it mutually agreed?*** There needs to be a clear dialogue to ensure people's circumstances and worries are taken into account.

THE LAW AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Employers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees
- This includes mental health and wellbeing
- Employers have duties to assess the risk of stress-related poor mental health arising from work activities and take measures to control that risk
- Mental health conditions may amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010
- Where an employee is disabled the employer must make reasonable adjustments to support them in the workplace
- Adjustments will vary depending on the specific circumstances



anxiety, uncertainty, sadness, grief, anger, stress, tension, isolation, loneliness, overload, overwhelm...

POSSIBLE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19

- Overwhelm
- Anxiety
- Low mood
- Depression
- Poor sleep / fatigue
- Grief
- Relationship difficulties
- Anger / irritability
- Distraction
- Poor diet / reduced exercise
- Musculoskeletal
- Substance misuse

The Role of Line Managers is Key

- Sensitive and supportive 121s – part of the re-induction process to discuss any changes or ongoing support needed
- Provide ongoing guidance – to help managers support employees in complex and challenging situations
- Line manager wellbeing - line managers themselves will be under acute pressure to manage conflicting demands

Generally: Manager behaviour is a potential source of stress OR wellbeing for their team

Managers influence their team's exposure to organisational sources of stress OR wellbeing

Managers are also vital for identifying and tackling problems at the local level...

...managing employee sickness absence and return to work....

...and supporting wellbeing activities

- During COVID-19: Employees who had less contact with their manager had poorer mental health (IES, 2020)
- Leadership is vital for building trust and role-modelling key behaviours, e.g. compassion (van Bavel et al, 2020)
- Being recognised had psychological benefits for frontline workers and other workers (Cai et al, 2020)

THE ROLE OF THE LINE MANAGER

Managing after absence or ill-health:

- Return to work meetings
- Phased returns
- Applying organisational policy and process
- Making reasonable adjustments
- Referrals to Occupational Health

Enabling wellbeing and good mental health:

- Managing workloads
- Being a good role model
- Spotting signs
- Effective wellbeing conversations
- Encouraging wellbeing activity at work
- Tackling poor habits (long hours working, lack of rest)

MOVING BEYOND/INSIDE BEHAVIOURAL FRAMEWORKS

- The importance of effective relationships between managers and individual employees – recognising that everyone is different

- Listening to employees – giving attention, allowing emotions – anxiety, sadness, grief, fear... accepting what can't be changed

- 'Being with' uncertainty, ambiguity, change, paradox, not knowing – neither racing to solutions nor becoming paralysed/stuck

- Creating 'psychological safety', 'time to think', opportunities for new perspectives, empowerment, compassion, kindness, care

THE COMPASSIONATE WORKPLACE?

Helping – taking thoughtful and intelligent action to help others

Understanding – arriving at a measured understanding through dialogue and perhaps having to reconcile conflicting perspectives

Empathising – feeling the distress without being overwhelmed

Attending – paying attention to the other and noticing

Early intervention key

spotting signs of
poor or declining
mental health

Physical
Psychological
Behavioural

Typical signs include:

- Working long hours / not taking breaks
- Mood changes
- Distraction, indecision or confusion
- Withdrawal
- Unexplained physical health difficulties
- Irritability, anger or aggression
- Uncharacteristic performance issues
- Over-reaction to problems or issues
- Disruptive or anti-social behaviour

WELLBEING CONVERSATIONS...

Managers may wish to use some of these prompts and questions in wellbeing conversations

- How are you today?
- How are you feeling? How have you been feeling?
- I have noticed....
- What support do you need?
- What do you need from me right now?
- How are you finding your current workload?
- What challenges are you dealing with?

MANAGING RETURNEES...

How is the employee feeling about returning to the workplace?

Do they understand what safe working guidance means in terms of how they fulfil their role?

What are their primary anxieties about returning to the workplace?

END: What working practices did the employee start during the lockdown that they now want to stop?

AMPLIFY: What working practices did the employee start during lockdown that they liked and wish to continue?

LET GO: What working practices did the employee stop during lockdown that they do not wish to start up again?

RESTART: What working practices did the employee stop during lockdown that they miss and want to pick up again?

CAUSES OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

- **Demands** - this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work
- **Support** – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- **Relationships** – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
- **Change** – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

Stress Risk Assessment Document

WELLBENG ACTION PLANS

Managers can use these questions to put together a formal plan for supporting employees with their wellbeing and mental health:

Home Working or Return to Work

- What helps you to stay mentally healthy at work?
- What can your manager do to proactively support you to stay mentally healthy at work?
- Are there any situations at work that might trigger poor mental health for you?
- Are there any warning signs that we might notice if you were experiencing poor mental health?
- If we notice early warning signs, what should we do?
- What steps can you take if you start to feel mentally unwell at work – and can we do anything to facilitate them?

Home working wellness action Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEOPLE MANAGERS

1. Check in regularly with employees
2. Look for possible signs and symptoms of poor mental health
3. Tackle unhealthy working habits
4. Raise concerns about poor mental health with the employee
5. Proactively review workloads
6. Signpost to support services
7. Promote wellbeing opportunities
8. Undertake wellbeing action plans
9. Review your own management style
10. Keep in regular contact and review support where it is provided

ADDITIONAL LEARNING RESOURCES FOR MANAGERS

- [CIPD and Mind – People Managers’ Guide to Mental Health](#)
- [CIPD President Professor Sir Cary Cooper on the role of people managers and wellbeing](#)
- Evidence on interventions to support wellbeing from the New Economics Foundation: [5 Ways to Wellbeing, 2008](#)
- [Mind on supporting yourself and your team](#)
- [CIPD – Managing stress through positive management behavior:](#)
- [ACAS – approaching sensitive conversations about mental health](#)
- [Mind – Wellbeing Action Plan download](#)