Chapter 13
Mindfulness-Based Well-Being Interventions in Organizations and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Safiye Şahin

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1734-9586

Istanbul Medeniyet University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Dramatic changes in social, economic, and working life have occurred with the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes cause stress for employees. Therefore, it is important to implement cost-effective and purposive interventions targeting employee well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of these interventions is Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs). MBIs are generally implemented as a face to face with 8-session program. However, in the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work has been adopted widely by organizations, causing an urgent need for digital well-being interventions. This study aims to investigate effectiveness of digital mindfulness-based interventions on employees' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. To do this, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on employee well-being will be explained in the first part. In the second part, mindfulness and mindfulness-based interventions will be discussed. In the last part, digital mindfulness interventions and their effects on employee well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic will be clarified.

INTRODUCTION

The new coronavirus disease is a pandemic that have developed beyond human control, like all other diseases and natural disasters. The uncertainty created by the uncontrollability of this pandemic makes individuals worry (Zabaniotou, 2020). This uncertainty has caused psychological distress and mental disorder symptoms (Bao et al., 2020). Both the fear, anxiety and anger experienced due to the pandemic and the stress experienced by individuals diagnosed with or suspected of COVID-19 inevitably reflect on the working life (Yu et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected many living areas, especially daily life and social relations (Suppawittaya et al., 2020). One of these living areas is working life. In order to prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, remote work has been mandatory in many countries (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). With the help of remote work, employees have been enabled to continue their business activities. However, on the one hand employees are struggling to cope with the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental well-being (Majumdar et al., 2020), on the other hand they are trying to adapt to the new working conditions (Trougakos et al., 2020; Wang, Liu, Qian, et al., 2020). This situation is especially important as it affects the employees well-being and the organizational performance (Möhring et al., 2021). The previous studies support the positive relationship between employee well-being and job performance (Lin et al., 2014; Salgado et al., 2019; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). Therefore, managers should be concerned with the well-being of employees, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to contribute to the wellbeing of the employees, a series of wellbeing interventions are applied in organizations (Kersemaekers et al., 2018; Slutsky et al., 2019). One of them is Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs). In this book chapter, firstly, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on employee wellbeing will be discussed. Then, detailed information will be given about MBIs applied to support the well-being of employees. In the last section, the COVID-19 pandemic and digital MBIs will be discussed.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

The novel coronavirus illness (COVID-19), which began in Wuhan, China in December 2019, was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Since COVID-19 is a droplet-borne disease, it can be transmitted from person to person through close contact. It can also be transmitted to other people by close contact from people who have COVID-19 disease and do not show symptoms. Social distancing is one of the most important measures used to reduce the spread of the disease, since the drug used for the treatment of the disease is still in the research phase and vaccination studies continue (Yanti et al., 2020).

Social distance (also known as physical distance) is attitudes and behaviors that include reducing physical contact, maintaining 6 feet of physical distance in coexisting environments, and reducing contact in order to prevent transmission of the disease agent (Suppawittaya et al., 2020). In order to ensure social distance, various new regulations regarding education, business and social areas have been made in the countries. These are lockdown, distance education in schools and the remote work at workplaces. With the mandatory transition to remote work, especially the human resources managers have made more effort to keep up with this situation. For example, before this pandemic, most of employees were working at office for a certain time (e.g., 08:00 – 17:00). However, during the pandemic they must swiftly adapt to remote work settings. This situation has made the distinction between work and private areas even more difficult (Chawla et al., 2020). Therefore, the burden of parental duties for employees increased due to the closure of schools and childcare services, which cause distress. In addition, single and childless workers have also been exposed to negative effects of loneliness and perceived lack of purpose, turning into adverse effect on their well-being (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Therefore, managers had to be concerned with the well-being of their employees in this process.

In this study, well-being will be discussed in both physical and psychological terms. While physical well-being relates to somatic experiences or physical symptoms such as feeling sick, pain or weakness

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