

SHRM Foundation's
Workplace Mental Health & Wellness Summit
October 4th, 2020

Summary Prepared By

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**“We Need to Teach People as Much about Their Mental Health
as Their Dental Health.”**

The SHRM Foundation has identified the positive mental health and wellness of workers as both a business and social imperative, along with being one of the critical issues of our time.

In an effort to address these concerns, the foundation brought together over 150 Fortune 500 CEOs and CHROs, Industry Luminaries, and Experts, to focus on actionable and forward-looking workplace solutions HR professionals can use to create a culture of assistance and acceptance, helping to eliminate the stigma of mental illness.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., President and CEO of SHRM, opened the summit by expressing his goal of, “People being able to walk into their human resources department and say, ‘Listen I am having a hard time,’ without being concerned about being judged or without the stigma that keeps people from getting the help that they need.”

Mr. Taylor challenged employers to equitably review their Employee Assistance Programs (EAP's) and compare the quality, availability, and access to the physical health care programs, verses their employee's mental health care options.

Craig S. Kramer from Johnson & Johnson, explained how focusing on employee's mental health care is actually a preventative physical health care measure because according to the World Economic Forum, "Mental health care costs are forecast to account for more than half of all the economic cost of all chronic illness."

He claims this is due to the pervasiveness of mental illness, which 1 in 5 of "us" experience yearly. It is also the only widespread, chronic illness of the young. 2 in 3 people never seek or find care, 1 in 3 that do, take 8 to 10 years to successfully navigate treatment.

The estimated economic costs to not addressing mental health care issues run into the trillions of dollars because of the additional required investments in healthcare, disability expenses, and losses in productivity over individual's lifetimes. People experiencing mental illness challenges are disproportionately represented on the pivotal side of the ledger with Heart Disease, Stroke, Diabetes, and Cancer.

Audrey Gross from the Hope for Depression Research Foundation, shared research from CDC and US Census Bureau that showed that 85 million adults or 1 in 3 have clinical depression and anxiety, accentuated by the pandemic and a shortage of mental health professions able to proffer care. This includes over 48.5 million adults in the workforce.

She expressed concerns about the absence of new research into pharmaceutical treatments for depression and how hit and miss the effectiveness is for existing medicines, given 50% of people don't respond to them or experience even worse side effects related to the medicine.

Depression accounts for 95% of all mental illness and needs to be treated as a medical disorder which impacts the entire body and a person's genes. It is also found to be much more common in people experiencing different kinds of physical pain or trauma.

It is recently understood that men and woman experience depression at the same rate, but men don't admit it or ask for help. Depressive incidents in men can manifest themselves as acting out or other poor behavior. Children as young as two-years-old are being diagnosed with depression.

Eric J. Nestler, the Director of Friedman Brain Institute at Mount Sinai, explained how hundreds of genes determine each individual's vulnerability to stress, which can precipitate depression.

Some genes are protective (Resilience Genes) and others make us susceptible. Every one of us are born with different amounts of each kind. Toxic Stress, our environment, and positive or negative experiences can have the ability to turn on or off a gene to either enhance or undermine our own ability for natural resilience. This process is called, "Epigenetics."

The brain interacts with all other organs to determine stress vulnerability. Resilience and susceptibility genes are found not only in the brain but in the stomach and intestines as well.

Our gut microbiome and diet impact our genes, and each person is impacted differently.

There is no personalized approach yet for treatment. But the drug Tianeptine is in testing to see if it is effective in treating depression in people with low levels of the resilience gene.

Peter S. Paine III, from Bristol Myers Squibb and Susan Conway Jablonski, Founder of The Leadership Consortium, reiterated the importance to normalize the conversation around mental health by sharing stories from their own backgrounds. Many times, the use of coping mechanisms like drugs and alcohol can mask the larger issues surrounding depression and anxiety people may be suffering. Please remember that Mental Health is Physical Health.

Dr. Arthur C. Evans, Jr., CEO, American Psychological Association, lead a panel including Keaton Fletcher, Ph.D., Georgia Institute of Technology; Ashley Nixon, Ph.D., Willamette University; & Dr. Enrica N. Ruggs, University of Houston, which addressed the need to design psychologically Healthy Workspaces when over 80% of employees are experiencing stress from COVID-19 and have unhealthy mental health fitness.

The panel reported that 2/3 of people in the US have experienced unwanted weight gain, and 1/3 of people have unwanted weight loss sense the pandemic began. The majority of Americans are also reporting experiencing disturbing sleep patterns. And a quarter of people report using alcohol as a coping mechanism in the last year.

A survey from the APA reports that 87% of employees believe that decisions made by HR professionals and employers can make changes that would benefit their mental health.

Although that idea doesn't seem to be penetrating the national workplace conversation because 70% of employees reported that stress, they were feeling at work is contributing to them looking for other employment. Workers in historically oppressed groups, all felt a higher sense of wanting to leave because of stresses in their workplace environment.

Employees are more successful and have better cultural outcomes in psychologically safe spaces. These are areas at work where people have the voice to speak up about things without repercussions. They can be especially positive for the more vulnerable populations at work who have to advocate for themselves in different ways.

Unfortunately, it seems that employees usually only respond to what is measured or incentivized. That is why it is even more important to make cultural workplace changes, prioritized and modeled from the top down. Emotional intelligence and mental health trainings can help focus and bring people together around not seeing mental health as an issue for "people with an illness," but as something everyone has, and everyone needs.

Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, California Surgeon General, spoke to the power of "Adverse Childhood Experiences" (ACEs), and the impact of Toxically Stressful environments on people from zero to seventeen years old.

ACEs have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood. Some examples are experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, or having a family member attempt or die by suicide.

Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding, such as growing up in a household with substance use problems, mental health problems, or instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison.

ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems in adulthood.

ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential.

People with high ACE scores can be triggered by stresses at work, discrimination, separation or deportation.

ACEs are treatable through regulating stress responses, integrating mindfulness practices, and nurturing personal relationships.

A website for resource is <https://numberstory.org/>

Michelle Nettles from the Manpower Group, lead a panel including Ruth Harper, Manpower Group and Ginnie Carlier, Talent, EY; about adopting new leadership styles in the Post-COVID world.

People are generally not looking forward to returning to work, and we need to do more to retain the people we have. From a Manpower report, about 40% of employees under 30 years old and 50% of those under 25 are willing to quit their job after one nudge or adverse experience at work.

The pandemic has caused a “She-Session” with the volume of women who have left the workforce to go back home to serve as caregivers for their family. An average family caregiver is someone who is in service to a family member and not getting any pay for the time in service.

There are over 40 million full time workers who also serve as full time caregivers for family members. On average that caregiver needs to take an average of 12 to 24 days off of work a year to help the person they are caring for.

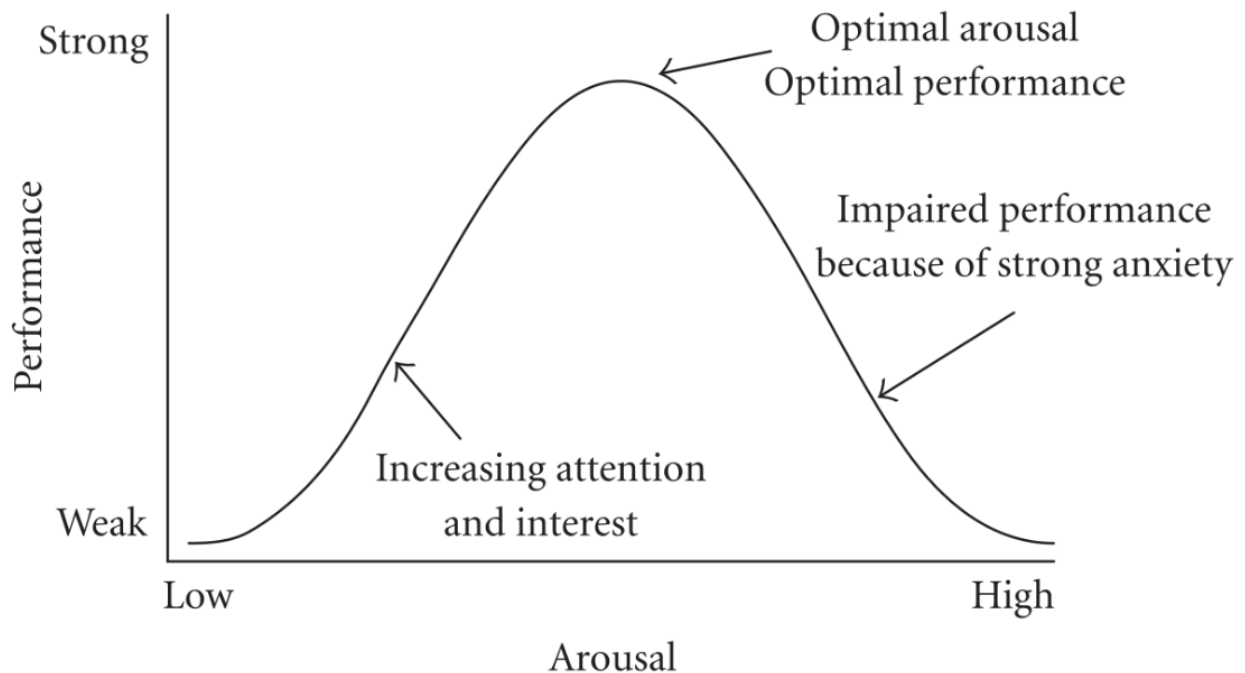
Covid has shown a need for a general empathy for what people are going through at home, expressed at work. Companies that relied on one-size-fits all modeling solutions are realizing that “One Size Fits None” in the Post COVID workplace.

In order to help support their workers, some businesses are creating “Well-Being Indexes” to facilitate awareness and conversations at work and looking to charter school models of “wrap around services” as inspiration for ways to reach out and support workers needs outside of work.

Manpower has extended its employee support offerings to other members of the employee’s families. Those offerings included mental health counseling, coaching, and assisting people in finding their own “Purpose.”

Dr. Joshua Gordon, Director of National Institute of Mental Health, shared insights on stress and resilience in the workplace.

There are good stresses and bad stresses identified with the Yerkes-Dodson Law chart which illustrates how anxiety affects performance, stress exists in a continuum.



The law dictates that performance increases with physiological or mental arousal, but only up to a point. When levels of arousal become too high, performance decreases. The process is often illustrated graphically as a bell-shaped curve which increases and then decreases with higher levels of arousal.

Employers need to give people a chance to recover from the stress and anxiety they are going through. Focusing on team events and activities within the company will allow people to strengthen relationships and to build new ones. Implementing and using a “stress thermometer” at work facilitates conversations about what people are going through. Or businesses can create “All Hands-on Deck” meetings where groups get together and specifically not talk about work at all.

As a country we have not seen the increase in mass suicide because the government has been offering more support to the people. But now the supports are decreasing, and we need to be particularly aware of the stressors being added to employees' lives.

Moira Forbes from ForbesWomen, lead a panel including Subha V. Barry, Seramount; Debra Lerner, Tufts SOM; and Carmilla Tan, Bank of America. They focused on the impact of COVID on Caregivers and Working Mothers.

Information from the Carter Center on caregivers show that 60% of caregivers are fully employed or full-time students. One in five employees are in care of a disabled or aging family member. Caregiving usually requires over 20 hours of time a week and requires a more flexible schedule to attend doctor appointments or other events. 20% of caregivers are in service for 3-5 years, and 25% of caregivers will be in service over 5 years. Women and women of color are overrepresented in the group of caregivers.

15% of caregivers are self-employed or serving as contractors for other companies, because most feel the need to and want to work outside of the caregiving. Although, “emotional strain” is the number one reported problem often caused by trying to manage both aspects of their service and working.

Part time work is what generally preferred by the women surveyed, but it forces them into “making long term decisions” to solve “short term problems” which impact their long-term earning potential and chance to achieve higher levels of success in the workforce.

Out of pocket expenses are also an added stressor for most people caregiving. The average caregiver covers over \$20,000 of expenses for the person they are taking care of.

In an effort to understand what their workers were experiencing, Forbes conducted a survey of their workers one month into the pandemic and found with both parents working from home, 81% of Moms said that their ability to engage effectively at work had already been negatively impacted compared with 41% of Dads. 66% of working Moms claimed their mental state was poor.

Surveys indicated that managers lost trust in the women as they had to assume more roles at home. Women lost trust in their employers as they were feeling unsupported.

“You don’t leave your company; you leave your manager” became a reality for many women leaving the workforce.

By September of 2020, after being surveyed again, women were leaving the workforce in large numbers to handle home schooling. The impact was particularly felt by women of color.

The men surveyed in both cases had better outcomes and reported not feeling as impacted by the changes brought on by the pandemic.

In an effort to help its’ employees, Bank of America retrained its managers to do a better job of “Leading with Vulnerability.” A process in which people share more about what is

happening in their life to relate and build bonds with workers. They also implemented a series of supports for the family members of employees, complete with college coaches for their children and access to Teladoc for convenient access to medical care 24/7.

Garen Staglin and The Honorable Patrick J. Kennedy, both Co-Founders of One Mind, shared insights into their work of spreading the idea, "There is no health without mental health."

They focused on the responsibility's insurance companies should take on in regard to extending and adding mental health services for people paying for their services. Mr. Kennedy spoke to the flaw in the system that provides no punitive responsibilities to the provider when they don't cover what they should according to people's policies.

Many times, insurance companies get away with not covering rehab expenses or related mental health costs because people don't want to have to admit to what they are going through in face of the stigma that exists.

They both support Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Evidence Based Care Models, and Mental Health Literacy for everyone. "People with mental health issues shouldn't be alien to our affections."

Marjorie Morrison from the Psych Hub lead a panel including Maria Colacurcio, Syndio; Harriet Dominique, USAA; Sonja Hughes, MD, Aetna a CVS Health Company; Sabrina Spitaletta, Milken Institute.

The focus of their discussion was on the importance of companies developing cultural humility and empathy within their workplace, while finding value in encouraging their employees to be able to bring their whole self to work.

How a company handles its' mental health and wellness benefits is all about equity because it illustrates where the company's values are, how it cares for their people, and the manages things within their control.

Companies that lead with transparency within their operations, including pay ranges or exact salaries, are finding reductions in workplace stress and more cohesive organizations.

They need to see their employees for who they are and recognize them for the contributions they bring. If there are people who are feeling excluded, under-valued due to processes or personalities, that is a mental health issue within the business.

Daryl Tol from One Mind, lead a panel including Cesar Carvalho, Gympass; Joanne P. McCallie, NCAA Basketball Coach; David Stark, MD, Morgan Stanley, which discussed Trauma and Purpose in the workplace.

Early Results from One Mind SHRM Foundation Report, Mental Health in the Workplace 2021.70% of people have 3.2 major traumas in their lifetime.

1 in 4 people globally are estimated to be living with the symptoms of post-traumatic stress. 2 million US workers victims of violence in the workplace.

Recommended Steps From Experts and Employers to help combat trauma in the workplace include recognizing the many dimensions of trauma, including the workplace. Practicing traumatic event responses. Integrating trauma into informational sessions and mental health discussions.

We are experiencing an extended period of trauma and for most people, they can't separate work and life balance anymore. Our usage of words like Burnout and Stress are cover words for mental illness so we don't have to address the stigma of what people are facing.

Coming from the sport model, our default to trauma is normally strength, but not for everyone based on their genetics and environment. Finding the way to grow resilience and get the benefit of strength even through the trauma is what organizational leaders have to figure out.

Good leaders inspire trust, but you can't be a good leader if your wellbeing bucket is empty.

Working on prevention is important, but positive mental health is not the absence of trauma.

Companies can attend to mental health issues that are under their control and culture by addressing modifiable risk factors and educating employees to positive health behaviors: sleep, nutrition, exercise, and mindfulness.

In the past, coaches were supposed to be humble and not vulnerable, but now they have to be both and able to tell their story to let other people share in it.

When a person has a sense of purpose and a sense of control, they can be resilient. The problem is currently companies are scaling away from relationships with their employees into investments into machinery.

Joey Hubbard from Thrive Global shared research around the brain and functional MRI's.

1 in 4 people will experience mental illness in their lives, with a cost to the global economy of \$6 trillion by 2030.

Our brain is a battery that needs these four things to remain charged. Sleep, Movement, Nutrition, and Connections.

We all experience stress in 8 distinctive ways or thought patterns, and each of us has a predisposition for one more than others. When stress is left unchecked, these thought patterns can become "Stuck." A Biotype is like a "stuck" pattern pathway of thought or emotion- like a short circuit in your brain.

These are the eight stuck biotypes: Rumination, Emotional Numbness, Anxious Avoidance, Context Insensitivity, Negative Bias, Threat Response, Inattention, and Cognitive Fog.

We can change our habits and behaviors through a process called neuroplasticity.