

Health Insights

July 2021

Workplace Pandemic Protocols Impact Employee Behavior Outside Work

A recent study found that workplace cultures that adopted COVID-19 prevention measures, such as daily health checks and encouraging sick workers to stay home, resulted in less "sickness presenteeism" or going places when feeling ill. This means that fewer employees with COVID-19 symptoms showed up to work and other public places.

The same held true for attitudes toward the COVID-19 prevention measures recommended by the CDC, such as mask wearing and social distancing: employees working for companies with strong COVID-19 prevention measures were more likely to have positive attitudes toward the CDC guidelines.

"The workplace COVID-19 climate had a direct effect on shaping employee attitudes towards the personal, preventative health actions that the CDC recommends," said Tahira Probst, WSU psychology professor and lead author of the study. "Public health officials and employers should be aware of the impact that organizations and workplaces can have on stemming the tide of the pandemic. It's not just that employers have an impact on transmission that occurs within the workplace, but they are also influencing those same employees' attitudes and behaviors outside of the workplace."

Researchers surveyed more than 300 working adults, recruited on a crowdsourcing website in three waves during the pandemic holiday surge. They first surveyed the workers in October 2020 to assess the COVID-19 climate of their workplaces, then again in December 2020 about their attitudes toward the CDC prevention guidelines, and finally in February 2021 about their work and non-work behaviors when sick or exposed to COVID-19.

The study found a significant connection between the workplace COVID-19 climate, employee attitudes toward the pandemic prevention measures, and ultimately whether they showed up to work or other public places while feeling ill with COVID-19 symptoms or following known exposure to the virus.

During the survey period, about half of the respondents were working onsite and half remotely. Interestingly, the study found that even the remote workers were influenced by their employers' COVID-19 workplace climate. Remote workers were less likely to frequent public spaces after exposure to the virus or while ill when working for a company with strong prevention measures in place.

The researchers noted that many U.S. organizations have long-standing cultures stigmatizing sick leave and encouraging sickness presenteeism. Workplaces can curb the spread of COVID-19 by actively encouraging sick employees to stay home, instituting daily health checks, and adopting other CDC workplace health and safety precautions. The pandemic has forced some organizations to examine their culture around sick leave.

The authors explained how one of the more enduring consequences of the pandemic is that organizations are offering more sick leave and encouraging sick employees to stay home. The pandemic has shown how change in policies and are moving the norm forward.

Washington State University. "Workplace pandemic protocols impact employee behavior outside work." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/05/210519080432.htm (accessed June 17, 2021).



Mental Health Moment

Are Low Wages an Occupational Health Hazard?

"Workers earning low wages may be at greater risk for disease and injury than workers earning high wages," write the authors of a new study on the subject J. Paul Leigh, PhD, and Roberto De Vogli, PhD, MPH, of University of California Davis School of Medicine. They believe that low wages should be considered among the psychosocial factors – such as long work hours and high job strain – identified as occupational risks to health.

While the reasons for the link between low wages and adverse health outcomes aren't clear, most hypotheses suggest that "[A]t least part of the correlation between wages and health can be attributed to low wages resulting in poor health or health behaviors rather than vice versa," the researchers write. Low wages may also have indirect health effects – for example, if workers are forced to choose between essentials such as rent or healthy food.

Several lines of evidence suggest that higher wages lead to improvements in health or health behaviors. For example, a study using a "natural experiment" design found reduced anxiety and depression among people affected by an increase in the UK minimum wage. In addition to health benefits, higher wages have been shown to improve workplace outcomes such as absenteeism and productivity.

The link between low wages and health has important implications for legislation and policies related to minimum wage/living wage and labor unions, Drs. Leigh and De Vogli believe. Although there's room for debate as to how minimum wages affect overall employment, the researchers conclude, "There is little debate about the effects of hikes in minimum wages on the health of low-income employees."

Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. "Are low wages an occupational health hazard?" ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160503153029.htm (accessed June 17, 2021).

Stigma 'Key Deterrent' in Accessing Mental Health Care

Approximately 1 in 4 people have a mental health problem, yet in Europe and the US, up to 75% of people with mental health disorders do not receive treatment.

Professor Graham Thornicroft, from the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP) at King's College London and senior author, says: "We now have clear evidence that stigma has a toxic effect by preventing people seeking help for mental health problems. The profound reluctance to be 'a mental health patient' means people will put off seeing a doctor for months, years, or even at all, which delays their recovery."

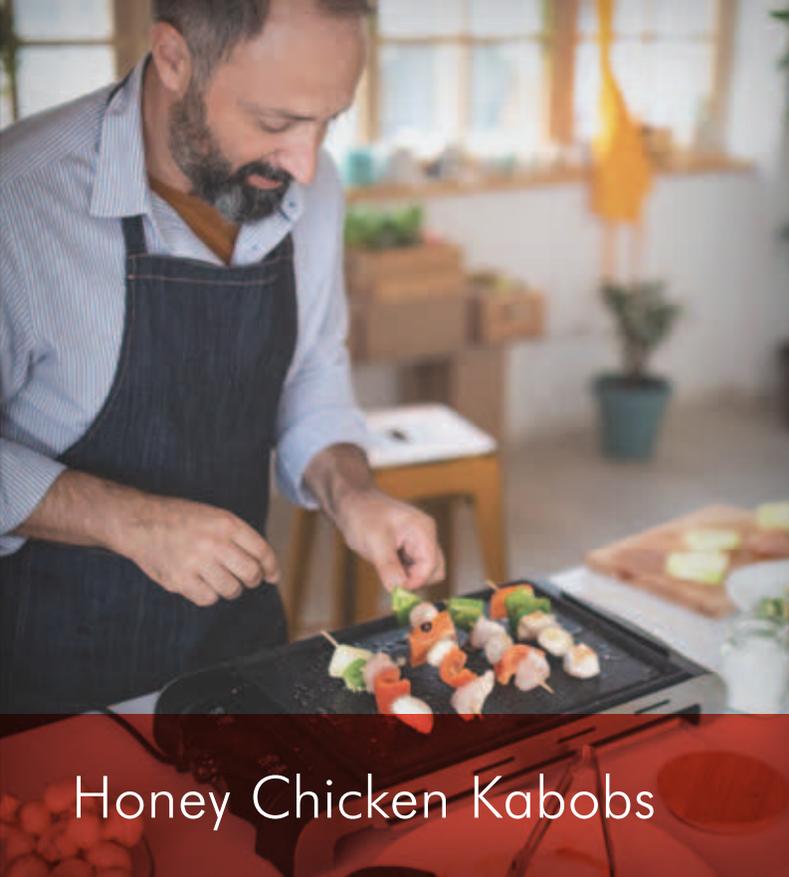
A new study by the IoP looked at the effect of stigma on how individuals with mental health problems accessed and engaged with formal services, including GPs, specialist mental health services, and talk therapy.

Stigma was the fourth highest ranked barrier out of ten. The main types of stigma preventing people from accessing care were "treatment stigma" (i.e., the stigma associated with using mental health services or receiving mental health treatment) and "internalized stigma" (e.g., shame, embarrassment). Other important barriers preventing people seeking help were fear of disclosing a mental health condition, concerns about confidentiality, wanting to handle the problem on their own, and denial of condition.

The study identified certain groups for whom stigma had a stronger effect on preventing people seeking help. These included young people, men, people from minority ethnic groups, those in the military, and health professions.

Dr. Sarah Clement from IoP and lead author discussed how the study demonstrates mental health stigma playing an important part in preventing access to treatment. Dr. Clement also talked about how supporting people to talk about their mental health problems through anti-stigma campaigns may mean they are more likely to seek help.

King's College London. "Stigma 'key deterrent' in accessing mental health care." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/02/140225193406.htm (accessed June 17, 2021).



Occupational Health Quiz

Honey Chicken Kabobs

Ingredients:

- ¼ C Vegetable oil
- ½ C Honey
- ½ C Soy sauce
- ¼ tsp Ground Black Pepper
- 8 Skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 Cloves garlic
- 5 Small onions, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 Red bell peppers, cut into 2-inch pieces
- Skewers

In a large bowl, whisk together oil, honey, soy sauce, and pepper. Before adding chicken, reserve a small amount of marinade to brush onto kabobs while cooking. Place the chicken, garlic, onion, and peppers in the bowl and marinate in the refrigerator at least 2 hours (the longer the better).

When ready to cook, preheat the grill for high heat. Drain marinade from the chicken and vegetables and discard it. Thread chicken and vegetables alternately onto the skewers.

Lightly oil the grill grate. Place the skewers on the grill and cook for 12 to 15 minutes, or until chicken juices run clear. Turn and brush with reserved marinade frequently.

Nutrition facts per serving: Calories: 179; Protein: 17.4g; Carbohydrates: 12.4g; Fat: 6.6g

Marie, A. (n.d.). Yummy Honey Chicken Kabobs. Allrecipes. <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/8626/yummy-honey-chicken-kabobs/>. (accessed June 17, 2021).

Workplace Pandemic Protocols Impact Employee Behavior Outside Work

1. What happened when workplaces adopted COVID-19 prevention measures?
 - a. Resulted in less “sickness presenteeism”
 - b. Had more absenteeism
 - c. Saw more employee support for prevention measures
2. **True or False:** Remote workers were influenced by employers’ COVID-19 measures. They were less likely to frequent public places or work while ill.
 - a. True
 - b. False

Are Low Wages an Occupational Health Hazard?

3. What was a positive effect of having high wages?
 - a. Showed improvement in health and wellbeing
 - b. Increase in absenteeism
 - c. Improvements in health and healthy behaviors
4. What health factor does low wages affect?
 - a. Physical
 - b. Psychosocial
 - c. Intellectual

Mental Health Moment

5. Which of the following is NOT a type of stigma that prevent people from accessing mental health services?
 - a. Treatment Stigma
 - b. Internalized Stigma
 - c. Social Stigma

See page 5 for quiz answers

Healthy Habits Calendar

July 2021 - Occupational Health

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Welcome to July: Get started on the Connect 4 Challenge.	2	3 Service Saturday: Pick up garbage at the park.
4 Have a Safe Holiday: Remember to use sunscreen.	5 Motivation Monday: Write down what your "why" is.	6 Thirsty Tuesday: Drink 64 oz. of water today.	7	8 Challenge Check-in: What have you learned so far from the challenge?	9 Fitness Friday: Work out in nature.	10
11 Self Care Sunday: Do something that brings you joy.	12	13 Tip Tuesday: Stretch during your 10 minute break today.	14 Wellness Wednesday: Go for a walk with co-workers.	15	16	17 Saturday Snack: Try a new fruit or vegetable today.
18	19 Motivation Monday: Set goals to accomplish this week.	20	21	22 Challenge Check-in: Who have you connected with this week?	23 Fitness Friday: Try out a new fitness class.	24
25 Self Care Sunday: Set out your work outfit the night before.	26	27 Tip Tuesday: Introduce yourself to someone new at work.	28 Wellness Wednesday: Tell a co-worker you appreciate them.	29	30	31 Social Saturday Try a new restaurant with friends.



Employee Name _____

Date (m-d-yyyy) _____

Challenge: Office Connects 4

30 Day Challenge:

Your challenge for the next 30 days is to talk to 4 new people at work each week or, if you feel like you already know everyone, reach out to people that you don't talk to very often. This can brighten their day as well as yours. By the end of the challenge, you will have a new or strengthened connection with 16 different people you didn't before.

Week 1

Name of new person you talked to.

Day 1:

Day 2:

Day 3:

Day 4:

Week 2

Name of new person you talked to.

Day 1:

Day 2:

Day 3:

Day 4:

Week 3

Name of new person you talked to.

Day 1:

Day 2:

Day 3:

Day 4:

Week 4

Name of new person you talked to.

Day 1:

Day 2:

Day 3:

Day 4:

Answers to Quiz:

Q1: a. Resulted in less "sickness presenteeism" | Q2: a. True

Q3: c. Improvements in health and healthy behaviors | Q4: b. Psychosocial | Q5: c. Social Stigma