

A Literature Review: Potential Ethical Risk in Mental Health Research at Workplace Setting

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Abstract

Introduction: Research on mental health in the workplace presents a complex ethical landscape due to the dual relationships and power dynamics inherent in employer-employee interactions. Workers may feel pressured to participate in research due to real or perceived pressure from their employer, which may affect the voluntariness of their consent. The aim of this review is to describe ethical issues in informed consent related in mental health research interventions in the workplace.

Methods: We conducted a search at the Google Scholar database in May 2024, examining various publications and journals from the past five years related to ethical issues surrounding informed consent for mental health research in the workplace using the keywords: informed consent, mental health, ethics, workplace.

Results: Total of 3 journals as literature review. Significant impacts from such stigma and discrimination were found in all the journal. Disclosed mental health situation increased a positive impact result at workplace eventough the outcome is influenced by many factors. The findings indicate a need to provide support mechanisms and to change the culture of workplaces to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for people living with mental health problem.

Conclusions: Ensuring ethical informed consent in mental health research within workplace settings requires careful consideration of confidentiality, voluntariness, and transparency. Addressing these issues through multi-stakeholder engagement and fostering a supportive organizational culture can enhance ethical standards. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics and develop strategies to protect participants' rights and well-being.

Keywords: informed consent, mental health, ethics, workplace

Abstrak

Pendahuluan: Penelitian tentang kesehatan mental di tempat kerja menghadirkan lanskap etika yang kompleks karena adanya hubungan ganda dan dinamika kekuasaan yang melekat dalam interaksi pemberi kerja dan karyawan. Pekerja mungkin merasa tertekan untuk berpartisipasi dalam penelitian karena tekanan nyata atau yang dirasakan dari pemberi kerja, yang dapat mempengaruhi kesukarelaan dalam memberikan persetujuan. Tujuan dari tinjauan ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan permasalahan etika dalam informed consent terkait intervensi penelitian kesehatan mental di tempat kerja.

Metode: Kami melakukan penelusuran di database Google Scholar pada bulan Mei 2024, memeriksa berbagai publikasi dan jurnal selama lima tahun terakhir terkait isu etika seputar informed consent untuk penelitian kesehatan mental di tempat kerja dengan menggunakan kata kunci: informed consent, kesehatan mental, etika, tempat kerja.

Hasil: Total 3 jurnal sebagai tinjauan literatur. Dampak signifikan dari stigma dan diskriminasi tersebut ditemukan di semua jurnal. Situasi kesehatan mental yang diungkapkan meningkatkan dampak positif pada acara di tempat kerja meskipun hasilnya dipengaruhi oleh banyak faktor. Temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya menyediakan mekanisme dukungan dan mengubah budaya tempat kerja untuk meningkatkan peluang dan hasil kerja bagi orang-orang yang hidup dengan masalah kesehatan mental.

Kesimpulan: Memastikan persetujuan berdasarkan informasi etis dalam penelitian kesehatan mental di tempat kerja memerlukan pertimbangan yang cermat terhadap kerahasiaan, kesukarelaan, dan transparansi. Mengatasi permasalahan ini melalui keterlibatan multi-pemangku kepentingan dan menumbuhkan budaya organisasi yang mendukung dapat meningkatkan standar etika. Penelitian di masa depan harus terus mengeksplorasi dinamika ini dan mengembangkan strategi untuk melindungi hak dan kesejahteraan peserta

Kata kunci: informed consent, kesehatan mental, etika, tempat kerja

Introduction

Health issues in the workplace are receiving increasing attention due to their prevalence and impact on individuals and organisations. Mental health has become an important issue in the modern workplace, with profound implications for individuals, organisations and society as a whole.¹ As discussions about mental health gain increasing attention, understanding the dynamics of disclosure, stigma, and their impact in the workplace has become a focus of research efforts and intervention.

Stigma was identified as a barrier to seeking help. In the workplace, obtaining good working conditions depends on the willingness of workers to seek help from managers and supervisors; this requires disclosure of the mental disorder. The protection of personal health data must be respected according to bioethical principles of justice and respect for autonomy.²

Stigma associated with mental illness may prevent workers from seeking help and disclosing that they have a mental health problem because they fear public stigma (i.e. prejudice related to mental illness and environmental discrimination).³

In addition to public stigma, workers with mental health disorders may also experience internalized bias and self-stigma. Self-stigma arises from people believing in external stigma associated with mental disorders and applying it to themselves.⁴

Because the benefits of employment are significant for people with mental illness and the costs of unemployment are significant, it is important to investigate the effects of work-related stigma and discrimination.⁵ The existence of bias and discrimination in the workplace is confirmed by ongoing research into issues surrounding disclosure of mental illness to employers.^{6,7}

Informed consent is a fundamental ethical principle in research involving human subjects, ensuring that individuals are fully informed about the nature, risks and potential benefits of their participation in a research study before giving informed consent. This principle is especially important in mental health research in workers, where the sensitive nature of the topic and the potential vulnerability of participants. Ensuring informed consent not only protects the rights and autonomy of participants but also promotes the integrity and validity of research findings.⁸

This literature review synthesizes findings from a collection of scholarly articles to elucidate the complex interactions between disclosure of mental health problems, stigma, and employment outcomes, providing insight into the challenges faced by people experiencing mental health problems in occupational contexts.

Mental health research in the workplace presents a complex ethical landscape due to the dual relationships and power dynamics inherent in employer-employee interactions. Workers may feel pressured to participate in research due to real or perceived pressure from their employer, which may affect their willingness to consent.

The aim of this review is to describe ethical issues in informed consent related to mental health research interventions in the workplace.

Methods

We conducted a search at the Google Scholar database in May 2024, examining various publications and journals from the past five years related to ethical issues surrounding informed consent for mental health research in the workplace using the keywords: *informed consent, mental health, ethics, workplace*. Google Scholar excels in accessibility and multidisciplinary coverage although it does not always provide full access to paid articles. Other sources offer more specialized information in a particular field, but often require a subscription or membership.

For searches using these keywords, more emphasis is placed on filtering the search title and summary. The research journals that meet these criteria will be included in. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria involve many journals that do not meet the previous criteria.

Results

In the discussion in these 3 journals, several important results were found. From the first Journal from Brouwers are three particularly important findings warrant further research because they may help increase work engagement among people with mental health or mental illness. First, due to contrasting views, differences have emerged between human resource managers on an issue and those with mental illness and mental health advocates.

On the other hand, second, job reintegration experts were convinced that the recruitment period was a good time to disclose, whereas all others were convinced of it and second. Third, the results suggest that with careful preparation, workplace disclosers themselves can have a positive influence on outcomes.⁹

From the second journal from Carolyn Dewa, three quarters of workers disclosed their mental health issues to their managers, which were the result fall with several previous research.¹⁰ Emotions seem to play an important role in decisions. In particular, feelings toward manager contribute to disclosure decisions.

Positive emotions encouraged information disclosure. Approximately one-quarter of the sample chose not to disclose. Internal factors played a relatively greater role than external factors in the decision. The main reason for not disclosing was that they prioritized dealing with it alone.¹

And from the third Journal from Hampson, the results showed that stigma and discrimination have a serious impact on job seekers and workers living with mental illness. This impact affects many aspects of the employment experience, including job search, employment, workplace relationships, workplace communication, and employee mental health.¹¹

Discussion

Informed consent is fundamental to ethical research, ensuring participants understand the nature, risks, and benefits of the study. In mental health research conducted within workplace settings, additional complexities arise due to the sensitive nature of mental health issues and the potential power dynamics between employers and employees.

Brouwers conducted an in-depth multi-stakeholder focus group study to explore the decision-making process around disclosing mental health issues in the workplace. By soliciting diverse perspectives, including employees, employers, and mental health professionals, the study uncovered a myriad of factors that influence individuals' choices in disclosure of their mental health problems. Fears of stigma and discrimination, concerns about negative consequences, and desires for adjustment and support emerged as central themes, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the situation.⁹

Complementing Brouwers' research, Dewa (2021) delved deeper into the implications of workers' decisions

to disclose mental health issues to their managers and the subsequent consequences. Drawing on empirical evidence, Dewa examined the impact of managerial support and organizational culture on employees' willingness to disclose, highlighting the pivotal role of supportive workplace environments in promoting mental health disclosure and well-being.

However, the study also illuminated the pervasive influence of stigma and discrimination, revealing the challenges individuals face in navigating disclosure decisions amidst fears of reprisal and career setbacks. By illuminating the complex interplay between organizational dynamics and individual experiences, Dewa's study enriches our understanding of the nuanced pathways through which mental health disclosure unfolds in the workplace.¹⁰

Ethical issues in informed consent for mental health research at the workplace are multifaceted. Confidentiality concerns are paramount, as employees fear potential negative consequences of disclosure.¹¹ Mitigating these fears requires robust confidentiality measures and transparent communication about data use and protection. Additionally, addressing the potential for coercion involves ensuring that participation is genuinely voluntary and that employees understand they can withdraw without repercussions.

Organizational culture plays a significant role; workplaces promoting openness and support are more likely to foster environments where ethical research practices thrive. Multi-stakeholder involvement is also critical for designing and implementing ethically sound research protocols. Recent studies have also highlighted the need for support for workers with mental health issues around disclosing their mental health condition to employers due to discrimination.⁶

Conclusion

Ensuring ethical informed consent in mental health research within workplace settings requires careful consideration of confidentiality, voluntariness, and transparency due to its possibility to get positive handling from working environment. Addressing these issues through multi-stakeholder engagement and fostering a supportive organizational culture can enhance ethical standards. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics and develop strategies to protect participants' rights and well-being.

Table 1. Selected article overview

Article title	Study Design	Population	Result
To Disclose or Not to Disclose: A Multi stakeholder Focus Group Study on Mental Health Issues in the Work Environment	Qualitative study focus groups	Five (homogeneous) focus groups were conducted, including 27 participants in total. Groups consisted of: (1) People with mental illness; (2) Human Resources (HR) managers, involved in hiring decisions; (3) employers; (4) work reintegration professionals; and (5) mental health advocates.	Results Concerning (dis-)advantages of disclosure, six themes emerged as advantages (improved relationships, authenticity, work environment support, friendly culture) and two as disadvantages (discrimination and stigma). Of influence on the disclosure outcome were: Aspects of the disclosure process, workplace factors, financial factors, and employee factors. Stakeholders generally agreed, although distinct differences were also found and discussed in the paper. Conclusion As shown from the theoretical model, the (non-) disclosure process is complex, and the outcome is influenced by many factors, most of which cannot be influenced by the individual with mental illness. However, the theme ‘Aspects of the disclosure process’, including subthemes: who to disclose to, timing, preparation, message content and communication style is promising for improving work participation of people with mental illness or mental health issues, because disclosers can positively influence these aspects themselves.
Workers decision to disclose a mental health issue to managers and the consequences	Descriptive Quantitative Random Sampling	From Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel, a random sample of 1,671 participants was selected to receive the link to a web-based questionnaire. The response rate was 73.5% (n = 1,228) there were 1,224 respondents who voluntarily completed the survey	About 73% of respondents with lived experience with mental health issues told their managers about their mental health issue. The structure of the survey questions identified four groups of workers who either: (1) disclosed and had a positive experience (64.2%), (2) disclosed and had a negative experience (9.0%), (3) did not disclose and had a positive experience (22.6%), or (4) did not disclose and had a negative experience (4.2%). ⁹
Impacts of stigma and discrimination in the workplace on people living with psychosis	Qualitative study focus groups	Workers barriers and support needs of people living with psychosis	Significant impacts from such stigma and discrimination were found in this study. The findings indicate a need to provide support mechanisms and to change the culture of workplaces to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for people living with psychosis

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