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Social and psychological risks in workplace

المخاطر النفسية والاجتماعية في الوسط المهني

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Abstract:

among the factors that threaten the worker within the workplace are Psychosocial risks, they are caused by several psychological and social factors related to work pressures, and the workers' relationships with the employee, and with each other, which have a negative effects on the worker or the organization itself, the main factor are anxiety, depression, sexual and moral harassment, violence, alienation and psychological burnout... which constitute a major challenge in the field of health protection at work, whether for institutions by providing means that ensure limiting the worker's exposure to it, or for countries by developing legislation that guarantees prevention. Among them, and taking care of those who are exposed to them, in this research, we will try to focus on some of the elements related to psychological and social risks within the work environment and calling for attention to protect from them and reducing their danger.

Keywords: risks, psychological and social risks, worker, institution, prevention.

المخلص:

تعتبر المخاطر النفسية الاجتماعية من العوامل التي تهدد العامل داخل أماكن العمل، والتي تتسبب فيها عوامل نفسية واجتماعية عدة مرتبطة بضغوطات العمل، وعلاقات العمال مع المستخدم، ومع بعضهم البعض، والتي لها اثار سلبية سوء على للعامل او المؤسسة بحد ذاتها ، و لعل من أبرزها القلق، الاكتئاب ، التحرش الجنسي والمعنوي، العنف، الاغتراب والاحتراق النفسي... اذ تشكل تحديا كبيرا في مجال حماية الصحة في العمل، سواء بالنسبة للمؤسسات من خلال توفير الوسائل التي تكفل الحد من تعرض العامل لها، أو بالنسبة للدول من خلال وضع تشريع يكفل الوقاية منها، والتكفل بالمعرضين لها.

ومن خلال هذا البحث ستحاول التطرق لبعض العناصر المتعلقة بالمخاطر النفسية والاجتماعية داخل بيئة العمل والدعوة للاهتمام بالحماية منها والحد من خطورتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية : المخاطر، المخاطر النفسية والاجتماعية، العامل، المؤسسة، وقاية.

1. INTRODUCTION

Employees working in organizations that provide a healthy work environment exhibit a high levels of activity, psychological well-being, productivity, and motivation. When the nature of the work is suitable with the employee's abilities, goals, and limitations, occupational risks and the work environment are kept under control. Moreover, work has a positive role in ensuring the physical and mental health of employees and enhancing their physical abilities. Achieving these goals makes work an important source of satisfaction and self-esteem.

The workplace is the space where employees spend the majority of their time, the organization significantly influences the physical, psychological, and social health of its employees. The work environment encompasses the overall social climate, the nature of social interactions, the relationships among human resources at the workplace, and the existing organizational conflicts among employees. These aspects have a great impact on the psychological and social well-being of those working in the organization.

Recently, particularly in the industrial sector, the world has witnessed notable developments in many fields. These changes include the complexity of machinery and technology, alterations in work organization, and shifts in work and rest hours, as well as the complexity and evolution of work methods and operations. Such transformations have negatively affected workers in multiple ways, leading to the emergence of numerous occupational hazards in the work environment that can harm employees'

physical, mental, and social health. These hazards represent the potential for harmful (dangerous) situations that may lead to workplace accidents or occupational diseases. Ensuring the occupational physical and psychological health of employees is one of the primary responsibilities of the organization, as it is the key to guaranteeing good performance and productivity. However, psychosocial risks in the work environment remain some of the most challenging issues for both employee health and the organization as a whole. Examples of these risks include occupational stress, poor adaptability, and violence, among others. It is certain that the modern era, with its rapid pace, changes, values, challenges, and prevalent professions with their specific conditions and social demands, contributes to the widespread nature of these risks.

From what is mentioned before we will try in our study to discuss a set of elements as follows

- The concept of psychosocial risks in the workplace.
- The components of psychosocial risks.
- The main psychosocial risks.
- The Factors of psychosocial risks.
- Problems arising from psychosocial risks.
- The role of the individual in managing psychosocial risks.
- The role of the organization in managing psychosocial risks.
- The Methods of protection from psychosocial risks in the workplace.

2. Definition of Psychosocial Risks in the Workplace

Psychosocial risks refer to a set of risks faced by employees in the professional field that impact their mental health and occupational safety. These risks have several causes, including workload, management, working conditions, and social relationships, among others.

Psychosocial risks are defined as the possibility that one or more workers may suffer psychological harm due to exposure to a hazardous work situation. Such situations may arise from work organization, the content of work, the nature of relationships, or working life conditions.¹

According to Carnes (1995), psychosocial risks are defined as “anything that causes psychological, mental, or physical disturbance, leading to an inability to perform our duties and tasks optimally, often it is the result of social interaction”.² Moreover, a comfortable work environment enhances employees’ motivation and productivity. In contrast, environments characterized by psychological conflicts (such as violence, anxiety, etc.) characterized by numerous psychosocial risks. Studies on absenteeism and medical leave have shown that psychosocial risks place a significant burden on organizations. The negative impacts associated with high professional demands, uncontrolled supervision, or threatening environments are often major contributors to stress.³

As well as mistreatment, isolation, poor interactions, lack of educational opportunities, stress, and pressure all

contribute to the emergence of psychosocial risks.⁴

Psychosocial risks have been described as the different pressures that an individual may face, which impact their work situation. Others consider these risks as situations that has negative effect on person’s life or mental health, including issues related to suicide, harassment, violence, and discrimination.⁵ The psychological or health condition of employees can influence their normal performance during work hours, reducing their productivity, efficiency, capabilities, and ability to perform work tasks, which expose them to risks.⁶

3. Elements of Psychosocial Risks

There are three main elements of psychosocial risks, which are explained as follows:

- 1) Stimulus Element: This refers to the various factors related to both the external and internal environment of the organization, as well as factors related to human resources that create feelings of stress.
- 2) Response Element: This involves the psychological, behavioral, and physiological reactions exhibited by the employee when exposed to a set of stimuli.
- 3) Interaction Element: it is the interaction that occurs between stimuli and responses. In another way, the psychosocial problem faced by an individual results from the complex interaction between factors associated with the organization’s external and internal environment and those related to the individual.⁷

4. Common Psychosocial Risks

Different studies and research on psychosocial risks have identified a set of the most common diseases, which are as following

- ✓ Professional anxiety or occupational stress.
- ✓ Moral harassment or psychological oppression.
- ✓ Occupational anxiety.
- ✓ Severe anxiety.
- ✓ Occupational burnout.
- ✓ Workplace violence.
- ✓ Conflicts.⁸
- ✓ Musculoskeletal disorders: These disorders account for more than half of the occupational diseases reported annually. They affect soft tissues at the level of the neck, shoulder, wrists, upper limbs, and back, causing pain in the joints, back, and neck.⁹

Musculoskeletal disorders can be explained by several factors:

- 1) Mechanical Factors: These include repetitive movements, heavy lifting, poor posture at work, and humid environments.
- 2) Organizational Factors: Such as work steps and pace, and inappropriate job organization.
- 3) Psychosocial Factors: Including stress, urgency in task completion, and weak professional relationships.¹⁰

In addition to that, other factors, as indicated by Skeel (2023), include workplace stress, work-related depression, alienation at work, etc.¹¹

5. Factors of Psychosocial Risks

Psychosocial risks are present in all fields and sectors, and the causes of these dangers are different and cannot be exhaustively listed. These include work organization and conditions, duration, means, and relationships between the employee, colleagues, supervisors, and employers. Due to the significant impact on both professional and personal life, addressing these dangers requires a comprehensive personal approach to the worker's life.

The increasing number of occupational accidents and diseases is further exacerbated by the use of various chemicals and the diversity of corporate activities. While some of these risks may be simple and without consequences, a significant number of them are serious, dangerous, and even fatal. They also have material, social, and psychological implications for the life of the employee. The initial costs are unproductive, disrupting economic, social, and psychological life.

These risks lead to different occupational accidents and very serious occupational diseases, resulting in situations that cannot be resolved. This has burdened industrial establishments due to compensation offered to workers, and the lost working hours, decreased productivity, and loss of worker efficiency due to occupational accidents or diseases.

Thus, it can be said that psychosocial risks are the sum of the dangers that threaten

the psychological well-being and social stability of the worker, arising from various factors related to the worker, work environment, or employers. Consequently, these risks affect the worker's performance, health, and, subsequently, the overall productivity of the organization.⁵

6. Problems Resulting from Psychological and Social Risks

These risks lead to the emergence of several issues, including:

- 1) Economic problems.
- 2) Emotional and psychological problems related to illness, general fears, feelings of guilt, and inferiority.
- 3) Problems of social relationships, both familial and external.
- 4) Behavioral problems.
- 5) Problems related to chronic illness.
- 6) Environmental problems and their capabilities.
- 7) Problems stemming from ignorance and inactive beliefs.¹²

7. The Role of the Individual in Managing Psychological and Social Risks

❖ Self-Management: An individual can avoid and manage work-related stress through various methods, the most important methods are:

- Physical Exercise: Studies have shown that people who engage in various forms of physical exercise are less susceptible to stress and pressure in comparison to the others.

- Relaxation: This can be achieved by adopting a comfortable position, closing the eyes, and using humor and meditation.
- Self-Behavior Regulation: This involves controlling the factors and circumstances that precede behavior and hinder it, thereby enabling control over one's own behavior.
- Cognitive Restructuring: Encouraging individuals to adopt the belief that occasional failure does not define them as failures.
- Social Network: Encouraging individuals to engage with different groups and strengthen friendships with colleagues.
- Focus on the Individual: This method goes beyond merely reducing stress, aiming instead to achieve a harmonious, balanced, and productive relationship between the physiological, mental, and social aspects of the individual's life.
- Minimising Tasks: Listing tasks that need to be completed and setting their priorities.
- finding a Vision for Life and the Future: Setting personal goals based on this vision.¹³

8. The Role of the Organization in Managing Psychological and Social Risks

The organization's management should first identify the nature of the psychological pressures faced by individuals, analyzing and categorizing them and investigating their causes, whether they are related to personality, role, tasks, physical environment, or personal

relationships. The main strategies used by organizations in this area are:

- Redesigning work.
 - Adopting a logic of change and flexibility as much as possible by enriching and expanding tasks.
 - Job exchange to avoid boredom.
 - Acknowledging the risks of these issues.
 - treating behavioral problems.
 - Designing motivation systems that help to reduce stress levels.
 - Working to Plan training programs that treats psychological problems in different fields.
 - Involving employees in decision-making, giving them a sense of importance and responsibility, leveraging their creative abilities, and providing a participative leadership style.
 - Leader gives an example through good listening to workers' problems.
 - Social support, such as clubs and outings.
 - Solving workers' social problems, such as providing housing, transportation, education, entertainment, and healthcare.
 - Proper selection to the employees.
 - Integrating psychological tests in the employment process, such as tests for psychological stability, to place the right person in the right position.¹³
- ❖ Providing specific care for new employees to give them the opportunity to adapt to the new lifestyle through continuous training.
 - ❖ Avoiding job monotony by changing tasks whenever possible.
 - ❖ Involving employees in decision-making, making them feel important and responsible, and benefiting from their creative capabilities.
 - ❖ Following proper management methods to prevent conflicts and friction among employees.
 - ❖ Creating a suitable social environment through clubs and outings.
 - ❖ Solving employees' social problems such as housing, transportation, education, entertainment and healthcare.
 - ❖ The regular psychological control of workers by monitoring absenteeism and accident rates for early detection of psychological disorders.¹⁴

9. Protection Measures for Psychological and Social Risks in the Workplace

10. Conclusion

The individual in the entourage of work is considered in a continuously interact with their colleagues, that creates relationships that can be sources of social and psychological issues, such as workplace conflicts arising from the lack of acceptance of certain work-imposed values and norms. This is particularly for displaced workers that seek to improve their living conditions, which often results from the absence of a work culture and differences in work pace. Such dynamics create psychological stress for workers due to an inability to adapt to work, whether in terms of time management, interaction with machines, feeling mecha-

nized, the salary and motivation systems, or disparities at work that can affect employees' psychological and social well-being. To protect from these social and psychological issues in the workplace, the following measures are recommended:

- Adopting flexible work methods, trying to manage stress, and avoiding manifestations of boredom and dissatisfaction.
- Relying on training strategies to prepare individuals to adapt to the work environment.
- Creating a suitable social climate and providing a motivation system.
- Trying to deal with job conflicts by placing the good employee in the right position.
- Regular control and ensuring the health and safety of employees.¹⁵
- Developing assistance programs to help employees understand psychological stress, depression, anxiety, and their different dimensions, as well as strategies to deal with them.

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