Introduction

The third sustainable development goal was defined by the United Nations as good health and wellbeing. One of the most important issues to tackle underneath this broad goal is the issue of stress-related illnesses in the workforce and how that causes mortality rates to increase. Stress-related illnesses are on the rise all around the world due to the increase in societal pressure. Societal pressures in the case of the workforce can be indicated by many factors. These can range across being poor living conditions due to poverty, lack of control over workloads, overtime, lack of medical coverage or care in the workforce, and workplace discrimination. In addition, when thinking about the impacts of these mortality rates on the economy, a study conducted by WHO indicated that over 1 trillion US dollars are lost yearly due to work related stress and its consequences.

There are many factors that foster work related stress such as impoverished areas, lack of control over workloads which entails long work hours, lack of health insurance, and finally workplace discrimination. This can all relate back to more complex issues such as high mortality rates, lack of education, lack of human capacity resulting in short staffing in key public service areas such as nurses and teachers, rapid increases in populations refugees fleeing conflict, and other more complex factors. But poverty does cause an increase in work-related stress due to the pressure of providing money to sustain themselves and the pressure of sustaining their families. Especially in lower economically developed countries, the service fees, and therefore wages of those in the service industry are extremely low due to the bad economic status of the country. Stress increases and so this causes illnesses and other health-related problems.

However, another main focus should be the health factors of how stress can cause mortality rates to soar higher than ever in the 21st century. Another important factor to consider is how the international community is dealing with the issue and in what ways do the sustainable development goals aim to combat and resolve this issue.
Definition of Key Terms

Psychological Distress

This term is usually defined by clinical practitioners and physicians as symptoms of distress and anguish in a person’s internal life. In this case, the person is usually going through extreme mental issues and so this has a toll on their mental and physical state. In the case of this committee, stress would be referred to as psychological distress to maintain accuracy.

Mortality

This refers to the state of being mortal (destined to die). It is also a term also used for death rate or the number of deaths in a certain population at a certain period of time.

Chronic Stress

This refers to the response of the body as a result of constant emotional pressure that goes on for long periods of time. Chronic stress in most occasions is completely out of the control of the individual in experiencing it. This is mostly caused by long term exposure to stress and so formations of hormones happen leading to high blood pressure and other issues.

Psychological Hazards

This refers to any hazard that affects the mental well-being or mental health of the worker by overwhelming individuals with pressure.

Burn Out

To work extremely hard to the point where an individual health becomes ruined and their mental state is significantly impacted. To relate to the issue on hand, this causes mortality rates due to the health issues correlated to burn out symptoms.

Depression

A medical condition that negatively affects how you think and feel. It is a mood disorder that is identified by persistent sadness and lack of interest in anything. Causes of depression include psychological and social (psychosocial), environmental or prescription drugs.
Anxiety

Multiple mental disorders that are identified by feelings of fear, nervousness, and constant worry. There are physical symptoms associated with this as well which include rapid heart rate and shakiness. In terms of causes, they are rooted in environmental, psychological, and biological factors. In addition, anxiety is often present in conjunction with other mental disorders such as depression.

Suicide

The intentional act of ending a person's own life.

Background Information

Stress is very beneficial for our bodies. In short periods of time, it triggers fight or flight hormones that can help us achieve wonderful things in the workforce. However, continuous exposure to those stress hormones are extremely damaging. Prolonged stress is as bad for us as smoking 5 cigarettes a day, as shown by a study from researchers at Columbia University. The main consequences of stress on our bodies is a reduced immune system, mental instability, cardiovascular disease, obesity, insulin resistance leading to diabetes, and even suicide.

Physical Hazards

Of the main hazards that often appear in the workplace, there are plenty of physical hazards that are present in the workplace which pose a threat to the physical and mental health of the person. To begin with, there are plenty of occupations where employers do not provide the right safety measures to protect against physical hazards. For example, in the medical field, staff are around MRI’s and other radioactive equipment, this causes radiation exposure which is harmful to humans in many different ways. Unfortunately, the problem is that employers and owners of hospitals do little to nothing to change these physical hazards and so employers are still harmed. Another unexplored aspect of this is the mental stress/strain is put on the employers knowing that they are exposed to these hazards and harms on a daily basis. Radiation from medical equipment is not the only example of physical hazards others include construction work, temperature extremes, and high exposure to ultraviolet rays. This increases the prominence of this issue as it causes work-related stress to increase proving that physical hazards are also a factor in increasing the stress caused by the workplace portraying another facet to this issue.

Psychological Hazards

Of the main psychological hazards, an important sub hazard is the control over the person’s work load. Although this is often moderated by the management of the workplace, an increase in abuse of power and control over workload can be very dangerous for the mental health of the worker. Lack of control over employee workloads result in overworked employees, and adversarial employer–employee relationship,
where each player is seeking to capitalize off the other. This triggers constant fight or flight stress hormones within our bodies, leading to toxic work environments, and problems with mental and physical health experience burnout syndrome also known as burnout syndrome.

In addition to this, another important factor to consider is the maintenance of a safe workplace that avoids discrimination of all kinds including gender, racial and disability discrimination.

Workplace discrimination can be on ethnic, gendered, or abilities. An example of this, is sexist policies that mean that preferential treatment is given to male workers in favour of female workers, or that female complaints are dismissed as “hysterical” by managers whereas male complaints are listened to and addressed. In addition to that, another important issue that arises which can cause work related stress is unequal pay due to gender or racial discrimination and prejudice. Unfortunately, this is present in most organizations in the world. Another example would be the gender pay gap, and sexual harassment in the workplace. Globally, the gender pay gap means that women earn 20% less than men on average. Sexual harassment in the work force is not only a problem of gender inequality, but a major factor in stress in the workplace, creating an hostile environment where women are not believed, and men are not empowered to advocacy. Finally there is discrimination against mothers of young children, pregnant and lactating women, who have reported experiencing feelings of discrimination when requiring time off to feed their babies, or take their children home.

Disability discrimination in the workforce has been increasing, and this in itself adds to and is the original cause of stress. Disability discrimination claims cost companies dearly, and urgent measures must be taken to reduce work stress and prevent this. An example of this is firing a person diagnosed with a stress disorder as their health concern would be considered a burden by the employer.
Health, Safety, Well-Being

One of the most important factors in considering this issue is the profound effects of work related stress on the health and safety of the individual. The first two obvious profound effects of work related stress are depression and anxiety. As known, both of these effects are readily seen as being a cause of mortality in the 21st century however, how are these two effects created? Depression and anxiety are both easily created by the constant pressure and stress of all the work related factors that were previously mentioned. This includes, long hours, unequal pay and general discrimination, and finally sexual harassment. To delve deeper, it is important to look at chronic stress disorders. As defined above, chronic stress is clearly defined as the long term effects of emotional pressure. Depression and anxiety are caused by chronic stress are directly correlated to mortality rates in high numbers. For example, it has been proven that due to chronic stress, hormones are released as a body instinct raising the heartbeat. The increased release of these hormones can lead to various critical health issues including but not limited to; heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver and suicide, according to the Miami Herald. It is also important to not dismiss the other health issues that are also raised such as the effects on the brain which surpass the thyroid, increase in blood pressure, and also the decrease of immunity proteins. However, direct medical conditions are not the only ways in which stress causes mortality rates, there are various other indirect methods that also contribute to the high mortality rates. To further elaborate, the increase of work related stress often causes negative changes in lifestyle behaviours. Studies have proven (according to the International Labour Organization), that psychological risks such as job insecurity, low control, high demands, effort-reward imbalance and work-related stress are associated with health-related behavioural risk do in fact cause negative behaviours. A few examples of negative lifestyle choices as a result of stress related conditions include: substance and alcohol abuse, sleeping disorders, and weight fluctuations, all of which contribute to mortality rates.

The Legal Aspect

International Level of Analysis

As for the current legal aspect and international laws, according to the international Labour organization, there are only two key instruments that tackle health in the workplace. The first being “ Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention” of 2006 and the second is “Occupational Safety and Health Convention” of 1981. Both of these specifically tackle the physical aspect of the workplace and the physical dangers on the body rather than the mental related issues that the house is discussing. This shows the lack of information, support, and action taken against mental health incidents caused in the workplace. In addition, it is seen that both of these are extremely outdated which reinforces the fact that there has been no initiative to start the conversation again and make sure to prevent further mortalities due to work related incidents.
National level of Analysis

On a national level of analysis, it is apparent that in most nations across the world face two main issues. The first being the fact that there is no legal framework specifically tackling mental health disorders and psychological distress. The furthest, many countries go is placing laws and regulations for the general well-being and general health of the worker such setting boundaries on work hours and attempting to combat physical hazards. General well being laws cover predominantly the health and safety of the physical body at the workplace, with hygiene standards, and protective clothing at work. However the problem with that is that this is not addressing the need to protect mental health or the seriousness of the problem; stress related illness costs the US government alone $1 trillion annually in lost productivity, and globally we can extrapolate how much bigger the problem could be. A Major factor in the lack of frameworks is how difficult it is for governments to recognize the different types of abuse of workers in the workplace.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

International Labour Organizations (ILO)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a United Nations sub organization that was formed in 1919, almost 100 years ago to combat, advance, and develop social justice, working conditions, and international labour standards. In general, all UN members are automatically admitted to the ILO after signing to multiple agreements. However, despite this, UN members Andora, North Korea, and Monaco among many are not members of the ILO. The ILO works continuously with many governments, corporations, and other non-governmental organizations to advance laws and regulations protecting labour workers and advance the social standards for people in the workforce. The way in which laws and regulations are passed using the ILO is by creating ratifications that must be accepted by enough governments to enforce them with force, in addition, when ratifications are passed, they are considered to be laws in which countries must abide by.

In terms of the work related stress mortality rates, the ILO has made multiple efforts in combating this issue in the past through laws and regulations. First of all, setting the three main principles which include: “(i) work should take place in a safe and healthy working environment; (ii) conditions of work should be consistent with workers’ wellbeing and human dignity; and (iii) work should offer real possibilities for personal achievement, self-fulfilment and service to society” (ILO, 11). These principles are basic guidelines that all countries should comply with despite their status on their ratification process. This first step is very important as it sets a boundary and limit for governments to comply with. In addition, since the early 1900s the ILO has made efforts to adopt over 40 international about regulations and standards to
combat this issue more effectively. Although most of these discuss the risks of occupational accidents (radiation, cancer causing chemicals, etc..) they also target promoting mental health wellbeing for employees.

**Japan**

Japan is greatly involved in this issue as it is one of the main culprits in the high mortality rates due to work related stress. In Japanese, “Karoshi” is the word that describe the employees that comitt suicide or are suffering from heart failuers and strokes due to long work hours. The issue in Japan stems from the aftermath of World War II during the late 1950s. This was a rebuilding stage for the country and so the prime minister at the time Shigeru Yoshida “made rebuilding Japan’s economy his top priority.” Due to this mission, Japan has one of the largest and most powerful economies in the world however there are major drawbacks to this since this came at the expense of the heath of the Japanese workers. Even 65 years later, there is little to no improvement at all as there have been recent reports claiming that 20 percent of a survey of 10,000 people have stated that they have worked 80 hours a month in overtime. In an attempt to improve the high mortality rates due to work related stress conditions, Japan has tried to allow one day in a week where employees must be released by 3 PM however little no improvement has been shown. To show improvement, there must be an increase in inspection and other rigorous regulations that pass from the government that prevents companies from disregarding employee mental health and stability and overall general wellbeing. Japanese companies have also launched daily communal exercises and meditations such as Tai-chi to help reduce stress levels in the workplace, support for paternity and maternity leave, and caps on working time. These and other initiatives have yielded positive returns on better worker mental health, productivity and worker retention in the workforce, making Japan a positive example in reducing stress in the workforce.

**The World Health Organization (WHO)**

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a sub faction of the international organization; the United Nations. Founded in April of 1948, the organization aims to develop and coordinate international health within the international community and all countries across the globe. The main areas WHO targets include: “health systems, health through the life-course; non communicable and communicable diseases; preparedness, surveillance and response; and corporate services.” (who.int/about). Specifically in terms of the mental and physical wellbeing which is the focus of this issue, WHO focuses on social determinants, and developing "intersectoral approaches for health". In addition, they aim to target health regulations and laws that protect the wellbeing of people. In terms of the issue of mortality due to stress from work, WHO has helped tremendously by passing regulations, important policies, and recommendations to combat the issue. Other means of combating this issue include raising large amounts of awareness and advocating for this issue to governments and multinational and transnational corporations.
United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

The United Nations Economic and Social Council is one of the most important organs of the United Nations and was established in 1945. One of the most important aspects of this organisation is the implementation and coordination of policies regarding economic, social and environmental issues, however the most important task of this organ is to develop sustainable development goals which is why it’s extremely crucial for this issue. The ECOSOC has tried to work on this issue with a lot of efforts through developing the third sustainable goal further through funding and other methods of tackling its sub goals. However, in terms of resolving mortality due to work related stress, ECOSOC has yet to make measures to combat this specifically.

China

China is also greatly involved in this issue as it also has one of the highest mortality rates due to overworking and stress related conditions. In fact, in China, more than 600,000 people die yearly of work related stress conditions including suicides caused by mental disorders. The main reason comes from long hours, rough conditions, rather poor opportunities for career advancements, and most importantly extremely low pay have all been major factors contributing to the high amounts of stress death related incidents in China and in the general East Asian region where overworking is embedded in the culture. In fact, an employee is discouraged to resign from their jobs because if they were to be employed anywhere else, their employers would force them to start at the very beginning positions of their careers even if they were in higher positions previously. This forces people to remain in their jobs and so still exposed to the competitive nature of their occupations causing stress related incidents.

European Union Countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland)

Multiple European countries have set out similar efforts in terms of tackling the issue, this is done through acts and regulations. The first act that tackles the issue of psychological distress due to the workplace is the "The Danish Working Environment Act (1977)". The combating of this issue was drastically increased in the next years following the release of the "The Danish Working Environment Act" in north Europe. Countries such as Sweden and Norway also began to release similar resolutions and as a result it can be seen that these same countries also score very highly in terms of employment happiness internationally. The resolutions presented by these countries usually tackles the issues in constructive ways such as but not limited to: indication of the sources of stress in the workplace such as bullying, inappropriate behaviour, psychosocial strain, violence, and solitary work. Iceland specifically goes a step further and tackles the issue to a small extent by indicating that employers must "carry out systematic preventive measures including risk assessments of the psychosocial working environment." (International Labour
Organization). However this can only go so far, this is due to the fact that this still stays under the control of employers and organizations rather than the government.

**United States of America**

For the United States specifically, workers do have the right to make a stress claim to their employers however this can only happen once the worker has clinical depression, or other medically diagnosed psychological distress. The problem with this approach is that making a stress claim after these symptoms appear is too little too late; that person is already in a health crisis. The other problem with this issue is that it doesn't tackle the issue directly, the issue in this case is treated on a personal basis rather than on a bigger scale which is not a good model because there might be people that are too fearful of losing their employment if they speak up.

**Timeline of Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 11, 1919</td>
<td>The formation of the International Labour Organization after World War 1 with the treaty of Versailles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969-1978</td>
<td>The first ever death due to work stress was ever reported in Japan, and so in 1978 the term Karoshi was invented after witnessing the increase of people dying due to work related stress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 23, 2007</td>
<td>The release of the first ever Workers’ health: global plan of action by WHO to combat the issue of mental health and stress at the workplace in efforts to decrease the number of deaths due to those reasons.</td>
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**Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

Please do use either British or American spelling throughout your Research Report. When listing past UN Resolutions, it is suggested that you make use of bullet points and the specified format below:

- Health, morbidity, mortality and development, 9 September 2010 ([E/CN.9/2010/9](#))
- United Nations action on sexual exploitation and abuse, 13 September 2018, ([A/72/PV.115](#))
The role of the United Nations system in implementing the ministerial declaration on the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health adopted at the high level segment of the 2009 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council,

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There has been brief attempts to solve the issue. To begin with, the initiation of the ILO aimed to combat issues through laws and regulations to place boundaries on governments and corporations. In addition, the World Health Organization is involved in combating this issue by enacting policies that discourage the harsh work mentality and discrimination which impacts the mental state of employees. Finally, multiple governments have also tried to combat the causes that result in workplace stress and mortality rates. For example, the Japanese government have made an effort in launching a campaign for all Japanese companies that have more than 50 employees called the Stress Check Program in which outline defined laws and regulations that ensure the mental wellbeing of employees so that mortality rates due to stress can be avoided. Important factors that are unique to this program is the policy set out by the Japanese government that prevents employers from demoting employees from their position due to various reasons. Finally, the stress check program is also good for targeting stress through requiring "(1) a survey of psychosocial stress for workers, (2) report to each individual worker his/her results, (3) arrange for an interview by a physician when requested to do so by a worker with high stress" (Journal of Occupational Health).

Possible Solutions

Inspection

Immediate action must be taken to create a framework to tackle mental health in the workplace. A framework would insure regular inspections and better regulation of workplace wellbeing policy, as it would all fall under the same well being umbrella. One of the most important methods in combating this issue is through the use of consistent and surprise periodic inspection made by the non governmental organizations or international organizations in order to avoid biased and unauthentic inspections which might negatively impact a certain economy. These inspections will serve the purpose of monitoring major national and transnational corporations in terms of various factors that could potentially impact the mental health of employees. Factors include but not limited to, gender discrimination, racial or ethnic discrimination, workload, and disability discrimination. If any company or major organization is found in violating the laws and regulations that have been set previously will be subjected to consequences under
the discretion of a judge and that company will have to undergo a fair trial at court. Charges include but are not limited to sanctions, tariffs, or other consequences aimed at punishing the companies earnings. In addition, if a government has been found conspiring with a company or is committing these violations directly, the government must be punished fairly and placed under close inspection from NGO’s.

Guiding Questions

1. In what ways can the workplace cause stress?
2. How can governments and people in authority reduce the stress on the employees?
3. Why might the mortality rates of employees cause a decrease in economic growth?
4. In terms of physical wellbeing, when a person is stressed, what is physically being affected?
5. What are some consequences for companies that violate guidelines and regulations for maintaining a good employee mental wellbeing?
6. How can governments ensure and enforce policies, laws, and regulations on organizations and companies that combat employee stress?

Bibliography


Appendix or Appendices
For Example:


   This website is extremely useful as it is meticulous in outlining the problem along with the various attempted solutions and the reasons they have not worked.

II. [www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/joh/58/1/58_15-0001-ER/_html/-char/ja](http://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/joh/58/1/58_15-0001-ER/_html/-char/ja)

   A very clear outline of an example in which a country has taken effective action and attempted to solve the issue. This website is also very detailed and gives strong real life claims that helps in looking into possible solutions and also how have countries with a high mortality rate due to work stress attempted to solve the issue.

III.