

## Managers' Awareness of Employees' Mental Health in Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Underpopulated Mountainous Areas

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**Abstract :** The increase in the number of workers with mental health problems has become an issue. Many workers work in small- and medium-sized enterprises, which often support local employment and economy, especially in underpopulated mountainous areas. It is important for managers to take mental health measures for employees since there is no budget to hire health staff in small- and medium-sized enterprises. It is necessary to understand the manager's attitude toward the mental health of employees and to publicly support the manager in promoting mental health measures for employees. The purpose of this study was to study the awareness of managers of small- and medium-sized enterprises regarding the mental health of employees and to consider support for managers to take measures for the mental health of employees. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six managers of small- and medium-sized enterprises in underpopulated mountainous areas in November 2019. Managers were asked about their awareness of the mental health of their employees. Qualitative descriptive analysis was used, and subcategories and categories were extracted. Four categories emerged. Regarding the mental health of employees, the managers acknowledged that if the appearance and behavior of the employees do not interfere with their lives, the manager judges that the employees' mental health is normal. It was also found that the managers acknowledged that there is a comfortable working environment due to the characteristics of the underpopulated mountainous area. On the other hand, the managers acknowledged that employees are dissatisfied with salaries and management systems. In addition, it was found the manager acknowledged that some employees retire due to mental health problems. Although managers recognized that employees may be dissatisfied with salaries, they also recognized that there was a comfortable working environment due to the characteristics of the areas, with good interpersonal relationships. Economic challenges are difficult to solve in underpopulated mountainous areas. It is useful to consider measures that take advantage of the characteristics of the areas where it is easy to work because of good relations with each other, for example, to create a family-like workplace culture where managers and employees can engage in daily conversation. The managers judged that the employees were in good health if there was no interference with their lives. However, it is too late to take measures at the stage when it becomes an obstacle to life. Therefore, it is necessary to provide training for managers to learn observation techniques by which they quickly notice changes in the situation of employees and give appropriate responses; and to set up a contact point for managers to consult. Local governments should actively provide public support such as training for managers and establishing consultation desks to maintain valuable employment and local economics in underpopulated mountainous areas.

**Keywords :** employer, mental health, small- and medium- sized enterprises, underpopulated areas

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