SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND POTENTIAL MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS TO ADDRESS EMPLOYEES' POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

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Abstract *Post-traumatic stress is common in the global workforce. An employee can develop it from exposure to a shocking or dangerous event occurring in or out of a work setting. Post-traumatic stress can disrupt employees' job performance, job attendance, interpersonal relationships, and personal lives. Current trends suggest that, for moral and economic reasons, employers increase their assistance to employees with post-traumatic stress. Although not every employer can provide all forms of assistance, initiatives such as supportive leadership styles, mental health first aid training, healthcare coverages that include post-traumatic stress therapies, and in-house therapists are ways employees can be assisted.*
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JEL classification: *J2, J3, M52, M53*

1. Introduction

Post-traumatic stress affectsan estimated10% ofemployees at some point during their lives (Admon, Milad, &Hendler, 2013), and it can have unfortunate personal and work-related consequences that far exceed those of common employee stress, but employers are able to provide some assistance. Although there are limits to employers' resources, and managers tend to already have many responsibilities, the literature review presented herefoundtrendsindicating employers are likely todo more to assist employees with post-traumatic stress in the coming years. And while the

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highest levels of assistance to employees with post-traumatic stress are likely to be offered by employers that have superior resourcesand are in industries where post-traumatic stress is especially relevant, there are ways any manager can provide some assistance.

Post-traumatic stress is a social concern that some managers will want to address for moral reasons, and it is also an economic concern that other managers will want to address for financial reasons (Apostol, &Näsi, 2014). While all forms of employee stress are important and potentially harmful (Vlăduț, &Kállay, 2010), post-traumatic stress is an ailment worthy of special attention from management scholars and practitioners.Post-traumatic stressdisorder (PTSD) is a chronic condition an individual can develop following exposure toa potentially traumatic eventsuch as an accident, assault, combat, ora naturalor human-caused disaster.Approximately 50% of all people will experience at least one potentially traumatic event in their lives, and among those who experience potentially traumatic events, roughly 20% will develop PTSD (Admon et al., 2013). According to the *International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision* (ICD-11), PTSD involves symptoms of (a) intrusive memories of the traumatic event, (b) avoiding reminders of the trauma, and (c) becoming hypervigilant or having an enhanced startle reaction (World Health Organization, 2018). Another form of post-traumatic stress recognized by ICD-11 is complex post-traumatic stress disorder, which has similar symptoms to PTSD but is more likely caused by prolonged exposure to stressful situations from which escape is difficult or impossible, such as domestic violence or severe bullying. PTSD and complex post-traumatic stress disorderare chronic psychological conditions that can last for years, and for many sufferers the condition never remits.

Post-traumatic stress can disrupt employees' job performance, job attendance, interpersonal relationships, and personal lives. Alonso et al. (2013) reported that PTSD caused more days out-of-role (the inability to perform one's job or usual activities) than nearly any other physical or mental health related condition. Individuals with PTSD averaged 42.7 days out-of-role per year. Additionally, employees experiencing posttraumatic stress report a high number of days per month with reduced work effort (5.0 days), lower quantity of work (5.2 days), andlower quality of work (4.4 days) (Bruffaerts et al., 2013). Post-traumatic stress impairs cognitive functions, such as verbal memory (Johnsen, Kanagaratnam, &Asbjørnsen,

2008), that are required of many jobs. Interpersonal relationships can also be difficult for employees with post-traumatic stress as workplace conflict can make themespecially anxious, agitated, and irritable (McFarlane & Bookless, 2001).

The effects of post-traumatic stress tend to be episodic rather than continual, which can create confusion and suspicion. A manager might observe an employee who suffers from PTSD showing no signs of the condition for months, and then, seemingly without explanation, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress can re-emerge. When post-traumatic stress symptoms emerge months or even years after a traumatic experience, observers may misattribute the causes of the symptoms. Managers often misattribute employees' performance problems to motives (DeVoe, &Iyengar, 2004). Managers frequently suspect that their employees suffering from post-traumatic stress are malingering (Potik, Feldinger, & Schreiber, 2012). Disseminating information about post-traumatic stress can promote fair treatment of employees who suffer from it.

The literature review presented in this article has three facets. First, the literature on employers' social responsibility is reviewed, which finds there is agrowing consensus that employers should assume social responsibility beyond merely offering employment. Second, the literature on employers' social responsibility to their employees is presented, which suggestsproviding assistance with post-traumatic stress will become increasingly common. Third, the literature on types of assistance with post-traumatic stress is examined, and the types of employers and managers that could feasibly offer each form of assistance are specified. The article concludes with a discussion of directions for future research on the assistance provided, the motives behind providing assistance, and the work-related outcomes of assistance.

2. The evolving consensus thatemployershave social responsibility

Reviewing scholarly writings and observing managerial practices reveal that perspectives on organizations' social responsibility have been evolving.In the most fundamental sense, employing organizations (henceforth, "employers") can be thought of as entities that engage in trade of goods, services or both, and that hire labor to do so. Trade has occurred throughout human history (Smith, 2008). The primary reason entities engage in trade is to offer something of valuein exchange for something

they value more. In this way, trade is a process that can improve the traders' circumstances as they pursue their self-interests through such exchanges (Smith, 1776/1933). Similarly, employeestrade their labor to employers in exchange for compensation.But is pursuing self-interests enough, or should employers concern themselves with others' interests? For instance, employers canhave advantages that allow them to negotiate terms for employment that are far more beneficial to them than to their employees, which society may find intolerable (Marx, 1867/1906).In the developed world, the terms of employment are currentlyinfluenced by formal labor laws and regulations, and also by informal social norms (Bertrand, 2004). In other words, employers in the developed world are not boundlessly free to pursue their self-interests in ways that society considers unjust or insensitive to employees.Employing organizations operate in social contexts that formally and informally require employers to take responsibility in various ways, including some responsibility for their employees' well-being, such as minimizing employees' risk of injury (Vasilescu, Ghicioi, Draghici, &Mija, 2014). Managing an organization effectively requires employers to monitor and address the societal context in which they operate (Pfeffer&Salancik, 1978), and managers would do well to recognize the current trend that society expects them to accept an increasingly broad range of responsibilities.

During the twentieth century in the developed world, as consensus regarding employers' social responsibility was rapidly expanding, the expansion was met with objection. Levitt (1958), for instance, asserted that social responsibility was the proper role of governments and not of business organizations. Economist Milton Friedman (1970) famously argued that it was inefficient for business organizations to use their resources for social goals other than maximizing financial returns to their owners. The owners, on the other hand, could use the profits their businesses returned to them to support social causes if they chose to do so. Friedman believed that the most responsible actions managers could take were simply to comply with laws and regulations, engage in honest trade, and return maximum profits to owners.

Liberal economists such as Friedman who have bemoaned the inefficiency of corporate charity and social responsibility may have overstated employers'inefficiency at achieving social goals. A tenet of market-based economics is that the profit motive is a powerful force that

promotes efficiency (Smith, 1776/1933). Consequently, employersthat are successful at pursuing profits in competitive contexts can become very efficient at doing so. Porter and Kramer (2002) argued that business organizations, while in pursuit of profits, can develop business competencies that also make them uniquely suited for charitably assisting with social causes. Given the impressive competencies of employers, many believe managers have a moral obligation to use those competencies for the benefit of society, and not solely for the owners' self-interests (Badulescu, & Petria, 2013).

It must also be noted that when an organization fulfills a social responsibility, it is not always an altruistic sacrifice that merely provides intrinsic rewards to owners and managers. Instead, an act of social responsibility can be motivated by enlightened self-interest, which is managers' awareness that their organization can attain benefits from acting in a socially responsible way that exceed their costs for doing so (Keim, 1978; Năstase, 2009). For instance, demand for the products of employers perceived to be socially responsible can increase (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Oroian, Ratiu, &Gheres, 2015). Recent research has found charitable giving was associated with profitability, and also that charitable giving was sustained among businesses that were unprofitable—perhaps for moral reasons, but perhaps in hopes that continuing to give might eventually contribute to future profitability (Hategan, Sirghi, Curea-Pitorac, &Hategan, 2018).Social responsibility pertaining to employees (including contracts with medical clinics)has been found to be positively associated with businesses' financial returns (Dumitrescu&Simionescu, 2015). Advantages in recruiting and retaining employees might help explain those findings. Prospective employees can have expectations about corporate social responsibility (Stoian & Zaharia, 2012), which can extend to their expectations of their employers' responsibility toward them (Stihi, Covaş, &Solcan, 2011). Being perceived as socially responsible helps employers attract prospective employees (Albinger& Freeman, 2000; Muscalu, Fraticiu & Ghitulete, 2012) and promote employee engagement and commitment (Apostol, &Näsi, 2014).

Particularly for multinational corporations, compliance with social responsibility guidelines such as Directive 2014/95/EU can give legitimacy to an employer and ease access to resources such as supply chains and capital markets (Björkman, 2002; Ogrean, 2017).The standards of Directive

2014/95/EU are an example of socially responsible values transitioning from informal to formal requirements (CSR Europe, 2017). Additionally, employers that take leadership positions in making what appear to be sacrifices for the benefit of society can foster implicit and explicit expectations that their competitors will follow by matching those sacrifices, thereby putting pressure on the competitors' resources (Porter & Kramer, 2002).

Whether motivated by a sense of moral obligation, the desire to improve their competitive positions, or both, there is a trend of employers striving to achieve superior social performance (Muscalu, &Badiţă, 2016). The triple-bottom line framework has been used to analyze employers' social performance. In contrast to the position of Friedman and others that employers should focus on maximizing returns to shareholders, advocates of the triple-bottom line want employers to maximize and report their (a) economic performance for a broad range of stakeholders, (b) net effects on the natural environment, and (c) net effects on people (Elkington, 1998).The triple-bottom line was developed as a way to operationally define and structure the auditing of the sustainability of organizational activities, and the increased use of the triple-bottom line and similar reporting systems shows the trend of employers accepting greater social responsibility (Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, & George, 2016).

The origins of triple-bottom line reporting can be traced back to the United Nations' (UN's) decades-long promotion of sustainability, and the UN continues to influence social responsibility by employers. The Brundtland Commission Report of 1987 has been credited with advancing sustainability to the forefront of the UN's priorities (Daly, 1990).The UN recently published its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the year 2030. Although the UN does not regulateemployers, there are sets of guidelines employers can voluntarily use to monitor and report their performance in economic, social and environmental realms. UN guidelines also serve as the frameworks for many regulatory and reporting systems adopted by governments and industry groups. Of particular relevance to this paper, promoting employees' wellness and offering employee assistance programs are traditionally considered elements of socially responsible performance by employers (Clarkson, 1995). Accordingly, improvement of mental health is explicitly referenced in an SDG, "Goal 3: Good health and

well-being" (Votruba, Thornicroft, &FundaMentalSDG Steering Group, 2016).

3. Positioning post-traumatic stress assistance as employers' social responsibility

In the coming years, the percentage of employers accepting responsibility for assisting employees with post-traumatic stress will likely increase. Guidelines for sustainability reporting are beginning to explicitly include criteria relating to traumatic stress.

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards align with the triple-bottom line and are among the most commonly used principles for organizations that want to monitor and report their social performance, including programs that promote employees' well-being. GRI reporting is voluntary.Chersan (2016) found GRI reporting is more common among organizations of developed nations (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development member countries) than of organizations from lesser developed countries. Additionally, most of the organizations reporting are large. Nevertheless, the overall trend is of increasing adoption of GRI guidelines by organizations in all size categories and throughout the world.

GRI includes reporting criteria for employees' healthcare and disability insurance (Global Reporting Initiative, 2016). GRI also includes work-related PTSD as a form of ill health to be documented in GRI reports.For instance, physical assaults on bank employees are identified as occupational hazards (Dura, 2014), and such assaults can lead to work-related post-traumatic stress. In addition, GRI references the List of Occupational Diseases published by the UN's International Labour Organization, which includes post-traumatic stress (International Labour Organization, 2012). Although GRI does not specify the range and level of assistance employers should provide to employees, the inclusion of the criteria illustrates the relevance of work-related post-traumatic stress to an employers' social performance.

Many employers will opt to provide some assistance to employees with post-traumatic stress that is not from work-related origins. Just as employer-provided health care offers assistance to an employee who suffers an illness or physical injury off duty, employer-provided mental health care can assist employees who experience traumas off duty or even prior to being hired. Such assistance aligns with GRI guidelines. GRI notes that

organizations can report they promote employees' health and well-being by offering healthcare and health promotion programs that, for example, help workers improve their diets orquit smoking (Global Reporting Initiative, 2018).It would also be appropriate for an employer to report initiatives to assist employees with chronic psychological conditions such as post-traumatic stress.

4. Employer initiatives to address post-traumatic stress

Before reviewing possible employer initiatives to address post-traumatic stress in the workforce, it must be acknowledged that not every employer will be able to take all the listed initiatives, nor should they. First, employers' use of the interventions will be somewhat determined by whether any of their employees are exposed to above-normal risks of trauma. For instance, any organization that has employees doing work that inherently involves elevated risks of death or serious injury should take responsibility for preventing traumaand assisting employees who develop post-traumatic stress. Work that involves exposure to transportation accidents or greater susceptibility to interpersonal violence are examples of work that requiresemployers to take greater responsibility. Organizations with a history of harassment or bullying that can lead to complex post-traumatic stress also have responsibilities to provide support.On the other hand, employers that do not have employees exposed to elevated levels of trauma risk might focus more of their efforts on areas of greater need (such as smoking cessation or weight management).

Second, intervening to address employees' post-traumatic stress requires the capacity to do so. Small businesses and microenterprises (less than ten employees), generally lack the resources to provide extensive assistance (Ceptureanu, 2016). However, organizations that are at least large enough to have human resources departments will find that there are feasible initiativesforthem. Large organizations, on the other hand, have scale economies that allow them to do far more in assisting with post-traumatic stress and other employee well-being concerns. They have the ability to negotiate relationships with insurers and care providers to assist with traumatic stress. Some large organizations also have employee wellness programs, and traumatic stress considerations can be integrated into them. Finally, industry-specific competencies allow some organizations to be particularly prepared to help employees with traumatic stress. A large

organization in the healthcare or insurance industry might be able to use all the initiatives listed here.

In summary, what follows is not a list of initiatives for all employers. Naturally, some employers will find several of the interventions infeasible.

Perhaps the most basic action employers can take to address employees' post-traumatic stress is to take reasonable measures to identify and try to reduce or eliminate risks of work-related trauma. Identifying, reporting and managing work-related hazardsis a GRI guideline. Moreover, to not do so would be negligent and also likely to be in violation of prevailing occupational safety and health regulations.

Similarly, all organizations should evaluate risks related to disasters and engage in disaster and business continuity planning (Gavriletea, 2017), and supporting employees exposed to traumatic events can easily be included. The primary focus of disaster preparedness and business continuity planning is to guarantee the continued operation of an organization's mission-critical operations following a natural or human-caused disaster (Thejendra, 2014). Preparedness begins with systematic appraisals of risks and threats. Plans to protect the interests of stakeholders and the employer's reputation in the event of a disaster are outlined.

Large organizations typically have business continuity plans, and business continuity planning would be incomplete without attention to employees.Plans are formulated for marshalling all critical personnel to maintain or resume operations as quickly as possible after a disaster.In business continuity planning, the most fundamental way of preparing for employees' responses to disasters isto recognize that some employees will not immediately return to work, but that fact is frequently omitted from business continuity plans (Riddle, Amlot, & Rogers, 2015). Business continuity plans should also not assume that the employees who do return to work will be able to perform as efficiently and effectively upon their return. The strain of exposure to a disaster can impair cognitive functioning and tax interpersonal interactions (Benight& Harper, 2002). Ideally, the business continuity planning process will educate managers on post-traumatic stress in preparation for coping with disasters, and the plans should also contain guidance to managers so that they can identify symptoms of an individual having difficulty with post-traumatic stress and instructions for referring them to counseling or other qualified assistance.

Another rudimentary way employers can assist those with post-traumatic stress is through increasing managers' awareness of it and its effects on the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of those who suffer from it. For instance, the episodic nature of post-traumatic stresssymptoms can lead to misunderstandings when managers lack awareness. Many years after a trauma, and after months of an individual showing no signs of post-traumatic stress, it can be triggered and thereby lead to job performance problems and interpersonal conflict. Managers must hold employees accountable for their performance, and they should have conversations with their employees who are not performing well (David &Matu, 2013). A manager who is aware of what post-traumatic stress is and how the symptoms can be triggered can more effectively coach the employee to improve their performance. If employer-sponsored care is available to the employee, the manager would be able to refer the employee for care. On the other hand, a manager who is unaware of post-traumatic stress might find a discussion of its distal stressors and proximal triggers suspicious, perhaps even manipulative.

One the many benefits of a manager's supportive leadership styleis that it allows an employee withpost-traumatic stress to feel comfortable discussing their situation with the manager. A supportive leadership style is when a manager displays behaviors such as demonstrating concern for employees' well-being, fostering a friendly and psychologically supportive work setting, having sensitivity to employees' needs, and promoting interpersonal harmony(Wendt, Euwema, & van Emmerick, 2009). The interpersonal rapport and sense of psychological support can be vital following a traumatic event. For instance, a study of four employers following the devastating earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 in Christchurch, New Zealand found important differences in managers' sensitivity to employees' needs (Nilakant, Walker & Rochford, 2013). Some managers were effective at assessing employees' needs and providing emotional support and information about assistance resources, but other managers were less effective at doing so, which negatively affected employees' morale.

For employers participating in mental health awareness programs organized by governmental and nongovernmental organizations, such as the World Health Organization's *World Mental Health Day*, post-traumatic stress awareness should be included.*World Mental Health Day* is observed

annually on October 10. Its goal is raising awareness and mobilizing efforts in support of mental health. The theme in 2017 was "Mental Health in the Workplace" (World Health Organisation. 2017). In support of mental health in the workplace, the World Health Organization provided an information sheet that discussed the costs of poor mental health, work-related risk factors, cost-benefit analyses of workplace initiatives to promote mental health, and guidelines for creating a healthy workplace. Employee stress was included among the important concerns. Whether it is *World Mental Health Day* or another public health awareness campaign, managers can use the heightened public attention paid to employees' well-being to increase awareness of post-traumatic stress.

In organizations large enough to have human resources departments, training in mental health first aid can be offered to human resources professional (Brooks, Dunn, Amlôt, Rubin, & Greenberg, 2017). Mental health first aid is a standardized psychoeducational program (Kitchener &Jorm, 2002). Developed in Australia, its objectives are to educate participants about mental health and common mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress. Mental health first aid training reduces the stigma of mental health disorders and disseminates information about resources for qualified professional assistance. Trainees also develop the ability to recognize and assist a person in distress until appropriate professional treatment can be obtained. The training requires approximately twelve hours and is delivered by qualified instructors (Kitchener &Jorm, 2008).The training program has been studied in dozens of countries, and its efficacy has been demonstrated in work settings (Kitchener &Jorm, 2004). Meta-analyses show that mental health first aid programs have favorable outcomes in trainees' knowledge and attitudes toward mental health, and in their supportive behaviors toward people with mental health problems (Hadlaczky, Hökby, Mkrtchian, Carli, & Wasserman, 2014).In addition to training human resource managers in mental health first aid, organizations with sufficient resources to offer managers a wide array of training and development courses might consider including mental health first aid training in their offerings to managers.

Any employer with sufficient resources to negotiate healthcare coverage for its employees can investigate options for including mental health coverage and, specifically, attempt to include treatment for employees with post-traumatic stress in the coverage. Not all employers are

attentive to the subtledifferences in the degree to which each alternative plan provides assistance with mental health (Goetzel, Ozminkowski, Sederer, & Mark, 2002). Decision makers can inadvertently select plans that ultimately cost employers more due to less effective prevention and treatment of conditions such as post-traumatic stress. The estimated ratio of return in the form of improved health and productivity on investments in additional treatment for common mental disorders is 4-to-1 (World Health Organization, 2017).

A select few employers have the ability to provide in-house care for their employees with post-traumatic stress. Such employers are likely to be (a) large-size, and (b) in healthcare or in industries where the work poses elevated risks of employees' exposure to traumatic events. The two main categories of efficacious treatments for post-traumatic stress are pharmacotherapy and cognitive or behavioral therapy, and they require professionals to administer them (Hidalgo & Davidson, 2000). For instance, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are pharmaceuticals that have been found to alleviate PTSD symptoms. A professional license is required to prescribe SSRIs. Psychological therapies can be equally effective, but they also require licensed professional therapists (Van Etten, & Taylor, 1998). Organizations that provide mental healthcare would certainly have the capability to internally offer assistance for post-traumatic stress if the need were to arise. Additionally, institutions that train mental healthcare professionals would also be able to provide in-house assistance to employees. Employers in industries that inherently involve exposure to potentially traumatic events, such as police and emergency services,may choose to hire a staff psychologist or other licensed professional. But even employers with the capabilities to offer in-house assistance might still prefer to refer their employees to third parties for care in order to protect their employees' confidentiality.

Directions for future research

The wide range of employer initiatives that can benefit employees with post-traumatic stress, and the trends in employer social responsibility that suggest such initiatives will become more common, generate abundant opportunities for research. Indeed, the suggestions that follow are only a few of the interesting and important avenues for research.

For employers in highly competitive markets, a better understanding of the cost-benefit analyses for employer assistance with post-traumatic stress is important. For instance, finer-grained analyses of the overall ratio of 4-to-1 presented by the World Health Organization is needed. There is a need to specifically compare the benefits employers obtain from investments such as adding coverage for post-traumatic stress to the costs for doing so. The value of reducing the number of days out-of-role needs to be quantified, and the actual reduction of such days needs to be measured. Similarly, there is a need to study which employer interventions are most effective at reducing the number the of days out-of-role for sufferers of post-traumatic stress.

This field of inquiry also needs additional theory and research on employers' motivations beyond simply the financial reasons for providing post-traumatic stress assistance. In the trichotomy of hard, soft, and ethical approaches to human resource management, employers' requirement of a favorable cost-benefit analysis fits best within the soft human resource management philosophy. Hard human resource management views personnel in a hyper-rational way, merely as productive resources. Soft human resource management acknowledges the human needs of personnel, and assumes that caring for those needs instills higher employee commitment, which can be advantageous to the employer. Ethical human resource management, on the other hand, asserts it is a moral obligation for employers to address employee issues beyond their immediate business interests regardlessof the business case for doing so. Another interesting perspective to study regarding employers' motivations to assist with post-traumatic stress is the role of institutional pressures by entities such as the World Health Organization and the European Union.

Studies are also needed of the initiatives that have little or no direct costs but are still believed to be useful. Research should examine whether supportive leadership styles of managers reduce post-traumatic stress consequences such as difficulties with workplace conflict and days out-of-role. Many questions about the effectiveness of campaigns to increase awareness of post-traumatic stress should also be addressed. To what extent do managers learn from these campaigns? Is it better to focus the campaigns on specific mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress, or to emphasize mental health more generally? Do awareness campaigns interact

with the presence or absence of employer-sponsored care for post-traumatic stress such that the campaigns are of little value without access to care?

Last but certainly not least, research is needed to test the assumption that employers should assist employees' with post-traumatic stress in ways that differ from how they help employees deal with the common variety of stress. Research in clinical psychology and psychiatry has found that post-traumatic stress needs different treatment, but would the same necessarily be true for most employer interventions? It seems logical to hypothesize that even managers will be of greater assistance if they approach employees' post-traumatic stress differently than common stress. For instance, a manager encouraging an employee to discuss a source of routine stress can be very helpful, but research on psychological debriefing indicates doing so following trauma can be counterproductive (Van Emmerik, Kamphuis, Hulsbosch, &Emmelkamp, 2002). Evidence-based rather than intuitive approaches to assisting those suffering from post-traumatic stress should be used, and therefore more research is needed.

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