



# The Relative and Incremental Effects of Mental Health and Physical Health on Job Performance

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## Abstract

Employee health is critical to an organization's ability to produce and succeed. It is well-established that there is a positive relationship between health and job performance. When employees are in poor health, millions of dollars in productivity can be lost. Health is a multidimensional construct composed of both physical and mental aspects and each of them have been found to positively relate to job performance separately. However, the combined influence of physical and mental health has not been examined extensively. Data collected on employees during the COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to explore how physical and mental health together relate to job performance. In the current study, over 400 remote workers responded to a survey assessing their physical and mental health as well as their job performance. We expected both physical and mental health to relate positively to job performance, and these hypotheses were both supported. We also expected mental health to account for unique variance in job performance above and beyond physical health, but not vice versa. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed support for these hypotheses as well. Theoretical and practical implications for individual employees and organizations are discussed.

## Introduction

- It is well-established that poor mental health and poor physical health are related to decreased job performance (Ford et. al., 2011)
- The Episodic Process Model of Affective Influences on Performance (Beal et. al., 2005) proposes that when a person is experiencing diminished health, their working memory and information processing is diverted away from work tasks and towards regulating physical symptoms and negative emotions
- Mental health in particular has been overlooked in the workplace and has recently gained more awareness. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem of mental health in workplace as the US faces its ninth consecutive month of strained mental health (Morneau Shepell, 2020).
- Previous research has focused on the separate relationships between physical health and job performance and mental health and job performance, but not the combined impact of the two.

## Method

- This research was conducted as part of a larger study in which 405 individuals working from home completed a survey assessing their well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Participants were recruited through authors' personal and professional networks via email and social media posts and "snowballed" from there.
- The age of participants ranged from 20 to 73 years ( $M = 39.58$ ,  $SD = 10.24$ ) and were majority White/Caucasian (88%), female (68%), married (68%), and had a Bachelor's degree or higher ((93.5%).
- Both mental health and physical health were measured with one item inspired by Matthews et. al. (2010) asking participants to rate their mental and physical health on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = terrible and 5 = excellent)
- Job performance was assessed using 4 items from Williams and Anderson (1991) in which participants were asked to rate the extent to which they performed the listed work-related activities over the past 2 months on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = to no extent, 5 = to a great extent)

## Hypotheses and Results

1. Physical health is positively related to job performance  
Supported;  $r = 0.13$ ,  $p < .05$
2. Mental health is positively related to job performance  
Supported;  $r = 0.15$ ,  $p < .05$
3. (a) Mental health will account for unique variance in job performance above and beyond physical health but  
Supported;  $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$ ,  $p < .05$   
  
(b) Physical health will not account for unique variance in job performance above and beyond mental health.  
Supported;  $\Delta R^2 = 0.00$ ,  $p < .05$

## Results

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Physical Health	3.40	0.957	--		
2. Mental Health	3.26	0.900	0.465*	--	
3. Job Performance	4.31	0.771	0.129*	0.154*	--

Note: \*  $p < .05$

	Unstandardized B	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
1. Physical health	.103	.017	.017
2. Mental health	.103	.028	.012*
1. Mental health	.132	.024	.024
2. Physical health	.057	.028	.004

Note. Beta from step of entry.  $p < .05$

## Conclusions and Future Research

- Mental health was more strongly related to job performance than physical health
- Mental health accounts for unique variance in job performance above and beyond physical health but not the other way around; suggesting that employers should pay more attention to mental health, possibly even more than they do to physical health
- Future research should utilize longitudinal designs to model the short and long-term effects of health on job performance over time
- It may be interesting to explore the extent to which physical and mental health influence two types of job performance: task and contextual performance
- This research supports the continued need for workplace interventions targeted at physical health (e.g., Hoosain et al., 2019) and mental health (e.g., Lo Sasso et al., 2006)