

**HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEES' MENTAL HEALTH IN
THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY,
KENYA**

Lilian Khaindi Wafula ¹ & Benjamin Kimolo ²

^{1,2} *Department of Public Policy & Administration, Kenyatta University, Kenya*

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ABSTRACT

The research examined the mental health and HRM relationship in the ODPP Head Office in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The investigation was motivated by increased mental problems among the Kenyan civil servants especially within the ODPP where cases are generally stressful. The key research questions examined the effects of recruitment transparency on employees' psychological health. The research was conducted anchored on the Equity Theory. Study design was mixed method. Questionnaires were used to sample the employees of the ODPP, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to achieve a response rate of 91 percent. The outcome of the inferential analysis revealed positive and statistically significant effects on mental health with recruitment transparency. The researcher finally states that HRM practices for ensuring equity and effectiveness in implementing them in a strategic manner is of great importance in shaping a conducive employees' mental health. Significant recommendations include institutionalizing the recruitment process based on merit, openness in recruitment process and incorporating mental health policy within HR systems by updating its HR manual in accordance with the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 2022.

Key Words: *Mental Wellness, Civil Servants, Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

In light of the direct impact of employees' mental health on organizational performance, productivity and job satisfaction, it has become a main focus of practice and organizational research. Therefore, mental well-being encompasses depression, anxiety, job related stress, exhaustion and wellness in general, which can impact employees' ability to manage their work responsibilities. To further support the context and accuracy of mental health measurement tools, Watson, Kaiser, Giusto, Ayuku and Puffer (2020) used hybrid methods to verify the robustness of mental distress assessment items that included culturally adapted questionnaires and items they had developed locally against a clinical “*gold standard*.” In a public service environment, workers may be required to do emotionally challenging work, must meet challenging accountability requirements, and have a high workload, which can lead to mental health issues. They pose issues of service delivery, employee retention and sustainability of the institution because they cause loss of productivity among staff, employee absenteeism and turnover rates. This means that mental health issues are not just about personal health and well-being but are also a strategic priority within the organization, impacting public administration outcomes and Human Resource Management (HRM) practices.

Globally, HRM practices and mental health have become an emerging concern due to the growing number of cases of anxiety, stress, depression and burnout occurring in the workplace. As reported by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), mental and emotional wellness disorders in the world economy cost approximately USD 1 trillion a year due to lost productivity. Not having enough autonomy, not getting sufficient support, not knowing what to do or too much work also make a big contribution to the distress of employees. WHO has highlighted the crucial role of supportive HRM practices for enhancing mental and emotional wellness and prevention of work-related stress. More organizations are being asked to design and implement policies for their Human Resource (HR) that decrease work-related stress, promote mentally healthy environments and support employees' wellness (Ravi and Noronha, 2021).

In developed countries like China, HRM practices and mental health of employee are significant aspects for innovation and economic growth. Yet, these economies often face significant challenges in maintaining, recruiting, and engaging staffs because of the deteriorating mental health of employees (Hengrui 2021; Zhao & Miao 2022), resulting in reduced productivity, employee attrition and rising healthcare expenses for companies. HRM practices have become essential tools for coping with mental issues in the workforce in the European Union (EU) member states. Employees' mental health and organizational performance have, therefore, benefited from the adoption of efficient HRM practices, facilitating employee well-being, conflict resolution, fair appraisal systems and performance-based rewards (Ludviga and Kalvina, 2024).

African countries are also facing mental health issues related to negative working conditions, especially in the public sector, on the continental stage. Tolla, Bukenya and Amponsah (2023) argue that many African countries have not made enough investments in workplace mental health initiatives and that the rate of burnout among public servants has been high. The authoritarian leadership styles present in many countries, structural inefficiencies and nontransparent performance indicators further increase mental stress among workers, which makes for a negative working climate that hampers open dialogue and fosters mental health problems. For instance, in Nigeria, a study done by Mela, Dumbari and Ali (2023) reported that civil servants were subjected to increased occupational pressure and poor mental health owing to poor organizational communication and lack of autonomy. Stigma remains significant in many settings, though, and many public sector workers are not seeking out help, resulting in absenteeism, suicide, early retirement and loss of productivity.

Since the enactment of Mental Health Act (Amendment) Act, 2022, workplace mental health now a public concern in Kenya. This law is an effort to prioritize mental health in all aspects of life, including in public service. Therefore, even with this new policy, the public service remains insecure and lacks appropriate rollout of supportive frameworks for HRM. Kariuki and Gichure (2020) indicate that mental health problems are

experienced continuously by Kenyan public staff, particularly those working in highly stressful positions, because they lack career progression opportunities, psychological supports, rigid bureaucratic structures and support from supervisors.

While some research has been conducted in areas like the education, manufacturing and health sectors, there is a lack of scholarly research in the prosecutorial and judicial sectors. In particular, prosecutors have to deal with emotionally upsetting cases, under intense pressure, public scrutiny and strict deadlines. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) is an important feature of the judicial system in Kenya as it is an independent body tasked with conducting criminal prosecutions in the country. Of particular interest, staff in this office often have to witness highly emotional and visual proceedings involving case details.

However, few studies have explored the influence of HRM practices of such a sensitive organization on employees' mental health. This recent study by Mwangi and Wanjiku (2022) revealed that despite the emotional fatigue and high workloads among ODPPs employees, minimal efforts are being made to support their psychological health through any institutional framework, pointing to the need for better HRM practices to improve mental health of ODPPs employees in such high stress environment. Thus, the study focused on addressing the knowledge gap and augmenting existing literature on the subject of ODPP.

Statement of the Problem

Kenyan civil servants grapple with mental health issues triggered by emotional exhaustion, financial problems and work overloads, according to a recent report by the Directorate of the Public Service (Standard Media, 2024). Therefore, the population of civil servants who needed mental health assistance had almost tripled over the years as the number of cases that were reported rose to a high of more than 14,000 in 2023 (MyGov Kenya, 2023). Despite government's efforts to tackle the mental health issue through various national programs, including tele-counseling services and counselling centers, these shocking figures showed that it was a failure at all levels to really care for mental and emotional wellness problems of staff.

However, the problems associated with mental health among public servants have been increasing, particularly in a strenuous work setting in investigative and prosecuting bodies. The organizational stress, emotional cases and workloads that were experienced by employees working in the ODPP had a significant effect on their psychological state. While the mental health of workers had been recognized at the international and national level, many public agencies in Kenya including the ODPP did not have any formalized HRM practices to meet workers mental health requirements.

Despite acts of legislation such as the Mental Health (Amendment) Act of 2022, and the creation of mental health assistance programs in the governments of counties, there has been no scrutiny of HRM practices. Important to note, the ODPP was characterized by highly convoluted criminal cases and thus was very stressful and unique. There were, however, limited empirical inquiries examining the influence of HRM practices on mental health among ODPP employees, including recruitment transparency. This lack of knowledge signified limited knowledge in both hands-on and practical terms. This research addressed this gap by giving an in-depth insight into the effect that HRM practices had on mental health.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to establish the role of recruitment transparency on employees' mental health within the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the theory used in the study, empirical literature and the conceptual framework.

Equity Theory

J. Stacy Adams (1963) was the first to theorize about Equity. The theory states that work ethic determination for fairness has been determined by the comparison of the proportion of input/output. Therefore, when workers feel they aren't getting the results for their efforts, skills and experience, they can become stressed, discontented, or even mentally unwell. The theory emphasizes the importance of fairness perceptions in HRM processes like recruitment, appraisal in shaping psychological responses and employees' attitudes. Equity Theory is a key determinant in the analysis of public sector since public sectors' accountability, equity and transparency are always challenged.

In this study, this theory is linked to the independent variable, i.e. recruitment transparency. On recruitment transparency, open and fair hiring practices create a balance among workers, influencing their mental well-being. On the same note, it highlights that employee training is essential to staff who feel they are accorded a fair opportunity to participate in skill-building exercises do not face the same level of psychological stress and are more satisfied with their jobs.

Empirical Literature

O'Connor and Crowley (2019) investigated the power of recruitment in keeping employees in foreign enterprises. They found that open and transparent hiring resulted in higher retention and trust values in their study using a qualitative approach of case studies. The study found that fairness and communication to recruit are important to build institutional commitment. However, there is a need for further research within the state sector as the research used only international companies. The study addresses this gap by creating a discussion on the effect of transparency in recruitment and mental health of the employees in the ODPP.

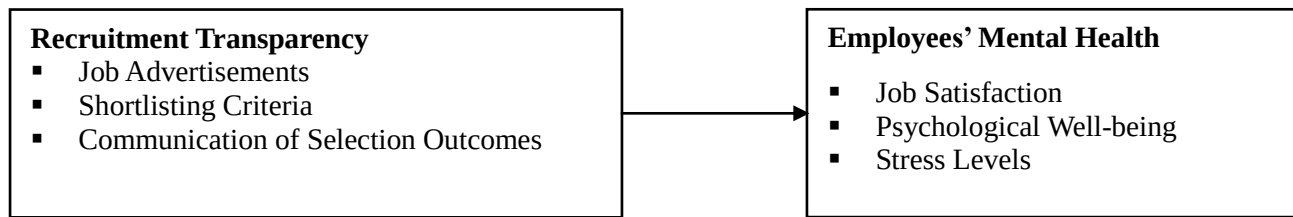
In Zambia, Chifunda (2022) conducted a qualitative inquiry on the problem of clarity in the hiring and selection of employees. They looked at the recruitment policies of the local councils and identified the uncertainty in the recruitment process as a reason for the perceptions of nepotism and favoritism, which negatively affected both institutional effectiveness and staff morale. Although the area studied was Lusaka Province, councils, this study reveals the need for research in other sectors and regions of Africa. To fill this gap the research focused on HR capital and what role can be played in the mental health of employees by recruiting transparency.

Nyamoko *et al.* (2024) evaluated the influence of employee hiring and institutional effectiveness on traditions and regional cross-border agencies in Kenya. They had adopted a descriptive design in the survey of 218 employees in Kenya. The findings indicated that a positive correlation exists between transparency of recruitment practices and organizational effectiveness, which demonstrates the importance of hiring based on merit. Our work continues the observations made by the research in this section, which also focused on border and customs agencies, and examined the same dynamics at the ODPP.

Ali, Mathuya and Mwenda (2019) assessed the role of diversity-based recruitment and selection in parastatal organizations in the Mombasa County. They came up with a descriptive design and concluded that transparency largely contributed to better diversity management and satisfaction among employees. The research highlighted the importance of equitable and non-discriminatory hiring to embrace diversity and staff welfare. The research aimed to bridge the research void by assessing transparency of recruitment processes from an inclusive and fair perspective and its effect on mental health.

Conceptual Framework

As indicated in Figure 2, the conceptual framework illustrates the hypothesized association between the independent and dependent variables. HRM practices formed part of the independent variable which includes recruitment transparency; while employees' mental health as dependent variable.



Independent Variables

Dependent Variable

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Research Study (2025)

METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study was mixed methods of research that examined the relationship between HRM practices and Mental Health of employees. The design was appropriate because it allowed both qualitative and quantitative approaches, described the features of the study phenomena as they occurred and provided demographic information about the phenomena (Kothari, 2004). The study was conducted in Nairobi City County where the ODPP is headquartered.

The population of target was taken from the employees at the ODPP Head Office. It was made up of HR officers, prosecutors, departmental heads or supervisors and administrative staff. The group was appropriate for the study as these individuals were actively engaged in HRM processes such as grievance process, performance appraisal, recruitment and training. This group was a well-qualified to provide feedback on the effectiveness of HRM practice, and the mental effect experienced in public prosecution services. Table 1 shows a summary of the composition of the target population.

Table 1: Target Population

Category of Staff	Target Population	Percentage
Human Resource Officers	24	15
Prosecutors	60	37.5
Departmental Heads/ Supervisors	42	26.3
Administrative Staff	34	21.3
Total	160	100

Source: Internal Staff Records - ODPP (2025)

Purposive sampling was used in identifying the respondents of the ODPP headquarters in Nairobi City County. This was deemed appropriate as the researcher wanted to select respondents with certain professional experience and knowledge about the topic of study (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). In addition, proportionate stratified sampling method was used to identify the sample population from the whole population. Yamane's (1967) formula was used in this study to identify a sample size of 114 respondents as illustrated in Table 2 below (Khowaja, Ghazanfar & Tayyab, 2025).

Table 2: Sample Size

Category of Staff	Target Population	Sample Size
Human Resource Officers	24	17
Prosecutors	60	43
Departmental Heads/ Supervisors	42	30
Administrative Staff	34	24
Total	160	114

Source: Researcher (2025)

Interview guides and questionnaires were used to collect data for this research. A questionnaire was given to HR officers, prosecutors and administrative staff. The departmental heads/ supervisors, on the other hand, were extracting the qualitative information from the interview guides. A pilot test was conducted in the ODPP in Mombasa Regional offices of Mombasa County. The site was chosen for pre-testing of research instruments because it has functional and structural similarities with the ODPP, Nairobi City County Offices. Creswell and Creswell (2017) noted that the good rule of thumb when using a pilot study is to have 10% of the sample size. From this, the pilot study drew 11 respondents, which include departmental heads or supervisors, HR officers, prosecutors and administrative staff.

Construct and content validity were used to validate accuracy. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of the variables. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) stated that the reliability index less than 0.70 signifies that the instrument used in the study is not acceptable while a reliability index of 0.70 and above is acceptable. Hence, a minimum threshold of 0.70 was used for the research. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires was analysed using SPSS version 20. For investigating the association between HRM practices and employees' mental health, inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis were used. The study employed simple linear regression to test the effect of the independent variables (recruitment transparency) to the dependent variable (employees' mental health). Themes and patterns were identified from the qualitative data that was collected through the interview guide.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

A total of 114 employees were used as the sample, with a 91% response rate, with 104 employees returning questionnaires. This was an excellent rate based on the criteria that were developed by various researchers, such as Sataloff and Vontela (2021). The two scholars explain that a response rate of more than 60 percent is always regarded as sufficient to represent the target population, which improves the research validity by minimizing the risk of non-response bias.

Pilot Test Results

The pilot test has given Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84 between the likert scale items. It therefore means that the scale has high internal consistency and reliability. The pilot participants gave comments that led to minor alterations in the wording of the questionnaires on the determination recruitment transparency with the aim of making them comprehensible and significant, as far as the context of the ODPP is concerned.

Reliability Analysis

The reliability test was conducted by calculating the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the items of the Likert scale of the objective studied and the dependent variable (mental health). Based on the studies conducted by social science researchers, it has been determined that a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 and above is acceptable and the instrument is reliable (Taber, 2018). The study results revealed recruitment transparency had a Cronbach Alpha 0.952 while employee mental health had 0.971 making a conclusion that the research instruments were reliable.

Demographic Information of Respondents

Gender

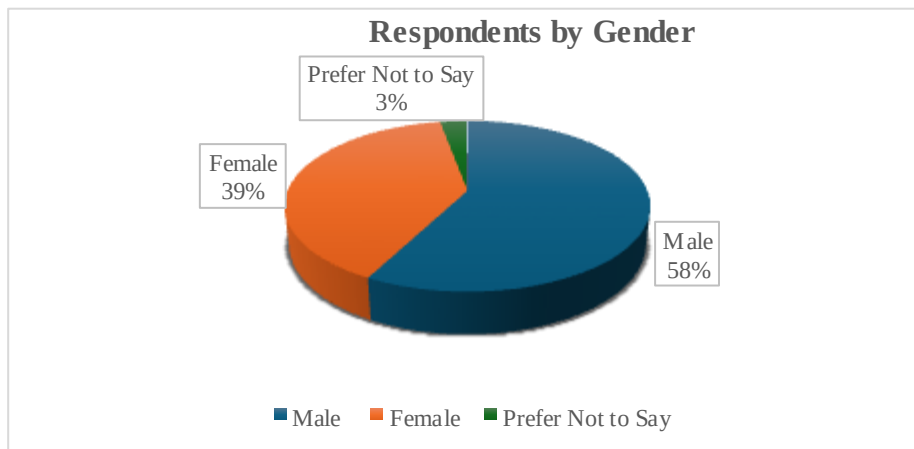


Figure 1: Distribution of Responded by Gender

Source: Survey Data (2025)

The outcomes depicted in Figure 1 above show that 58% ($n = 60$) of the participants were female while 48% ($n = 39$) were male with 3% ($n = 3$) refusing to identify their gender status. This kind of distribution shows that the proportion of both genders in the ODPP in Nairobi City County is fairly balanced. The underlying composition can be attributed by the introduction of the one-third gender rule in Kenya that supports equal employment opportunities and inclusiveness in the workplace.

Age

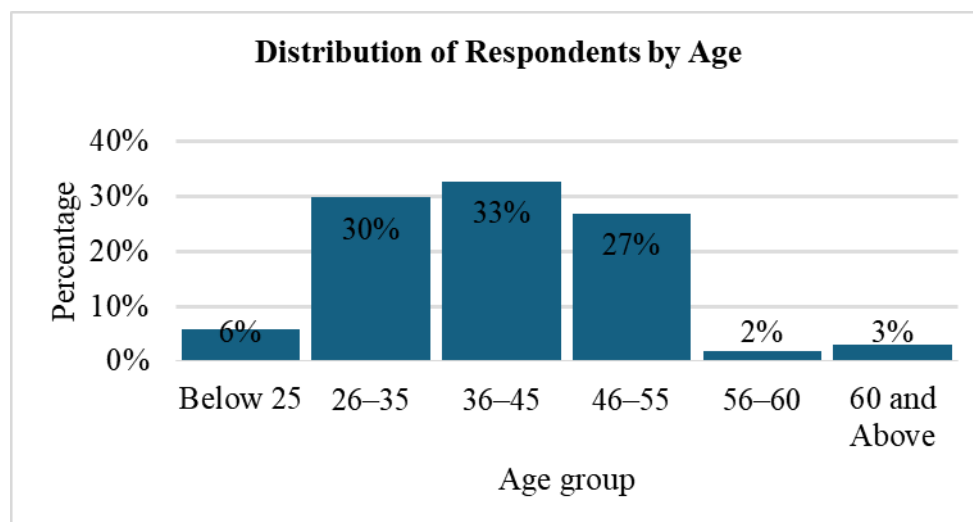


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Source: Survey Data (2025)

The majority of the workforce (33% of those involved) is aged between 36 and 45 years, followed by the 26-35 group (30%) and the 46-55 group (27%) as seen in Figure 2. The youngest age group of 19 and under make up 6% of the workforce and over 56s make up the smallest at 5%. This distribution is somewhat notable to this study because individuals in middle-aged have a more mature workforce and are in the middle of their

careers, which may be used to balance high levels of work stress with several personal and family related demands.

Years of Service

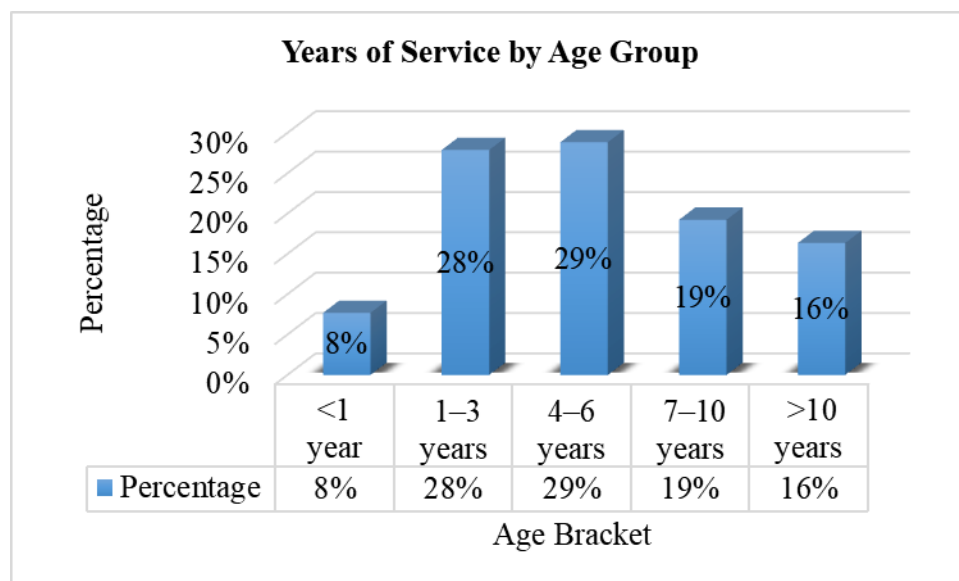


Figure 3: Illustration of Years of Service

Source: Survey Data (2025)

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of the employees (29%) stayed at the institution for 4 to 6 years followed by 28% who stayed from 1 to 3 years. In general, it indicates that there were a lot of people working in the middle experience classification, which is indicative of a stable workforce. In addition, 19% of respondents have worked for 7-10 years and 16% of these have worked for more than 10 years, indicating the existence of long-term employees with a good knowledge of the institution. There was a low proportion of newly hired staff with the percentage of those staff who have worked for less than one year being 8%. The distribution suggests that the answers are based on the experiences of a consistent team of staff who have been through the ODPP recruitment, training and appraisal processes over an extended period.

Descriptive Analysis Results

Employees' Mental Health

The current analysis compares the mental health of staff in the workplace, focusing on the effect of organizational support and HRM practices on workers. It examined the connection between psychological contentment and general work experience and the availability of mental-health facilities, good working conditions and equitable HRM practices.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Mental Health

	Mean	Standard Deviation
The workplace setting is supportive of my psychological needs.	3.8462	0.7854
I have access to mental health support if required.	3.8558	0.7297
HR practices here foster positive outcomes influencing my mental health.	3.8365	0.7518
I am mostly satisfied with my mental well-being at work.	3.9327	0.7538
Aggregate Score	3.8678	0.7552

Source: Survey Data (2025)

Like in Table 3, the descriptive outcomes on employees' mental health at the workplace depict perception of the measured items is generally good. Statements about psychological help, access to mental health services, positive effect of HR activities and general satisfaction with mental health scored between 3.8365 to 3.9327 on a 5-point scale statistically. Standard deviations of between 0.7297 and 0.7854 imply that the level of variability is fairly low. The perception pattern of the respondents, therefore, is discernible. Also, the overall mean of the scores, 3.8678, was used to determine the presence of the general positive assessment of psychosocial health assistance in the workstations. It helped to illustrate the quality of current HR practices, and the overall satisfaction of the employees regarding their psychological functioning in the organizational context.

Recruitment Transparency

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Recruitment Transparency

	Mean	Standard Deviation
I have confidence in the current recruitment procedures employed by the office.	3.9135	0.7388
A transparent recruitment process enhances employees' morale.	4.0288	0.8060
The recruitment process is fair and transparent.	3.8942	0.7230
Recruitment in this workplace is based on merit.	4.0385	0.8116
Aggregate Score	3.9688	0.7698

Source: Survey Data (2025)

The results of the outcomes show relatively positive scores ranging from mean score of 3.8942 - 4.0385 on a 5-point scale of agreement. The respondents were largely in agreement regarding the recruitment process being fair, transparent, based on merit and reliable. The average score (4.0385) on the statement: Recruitment in this workplace is based on merit was the highest, which indicates that there was strong agreement, as decisions to select are based on merit. The mean score of 3.9688 suggests that there were positive attitudes towards recruitment practices. The standard deviations measured between 0.7230 and 0.8116 with moderate consistency in responses. These findings reflect a group positive experience of employees with integrity and openness in the recruiting process.

Recent research has confirmed that recruitment of staff members, that is clear and equitable, increases their motivation, confidence and commitment to the company. In fact, Cho *et al.* (2025) have reported that procedural fairness during the recruitment procedure enhances trust in the organization and reduces turnover intentions. Hngoi *et al.* (2023) observed that one of the mechanisms that enhances job satisfaction and perceived organizational support is transparent hiring practices. Haryadi *et al.* (2025) states that merit-based selection is linked with the level of employee engagement. The results of these studies are complementary and point to the idea that fairness in recruitment leads to fairness and positive organizational attitudes.

Inferential Analysis

Correlation Results

Table 5: Illustration of Correlational Results

	Mental Health	Recruitment Transparency
Mental Health	1	
Recruitment Transparency	0.96826	1

Source: Survey Data (2025)

The research consisted of correlating the magnitude and direction of the association between HR practices and workers' mental health using the Pearson correlation. All positive relationships are found in Table 1, with a

range of correlation coefficient (r). The correlation between recruitment transparency and mental health ($r = 0.96826$), indicating that there is a virtually linear association. To the ODPP, the statistic means that an enhancement in recruitment transparency and equality will have the immediate effect of lowering workplace mental health among employees.

Qualitative Analysis

The recruitment process, including the job description and the orientation session, must be as transparent as possible and accommodate the needs of employees' mental health. The outcomes indicate that open recruitment processes have a significant effect on employees' psychological well-being. Trust, less suspicion and even a sense of fairness, were mentioned repeatedly by the respondents as advantages of merit-based recruitment. Employees have greater job security and now the organization is fair with open and merit-based hiring. This perception may be a major factor in alleviating fears of favoritism or prejudices in promotions and contributes to emotional stability. In contrast, when they noticed that the recruitment was delayed or the shortage of recruitment was observed, the problem was attributed due to workload and mental stress. The qualitative data show, in general, that transparency in recruitment enhances morale and psychological safety, and has a positive effect on workers' mental health.

The outcomes are confirmed by the literature of recent years which has shown, with a high degree of certainty, that organizational justice and equity such as recruitment that is open and fair contribute to the enhancement of psychological welfare. Research on organizational injustice and affective health of workers revealed a link between perceptions of injustice and adverse mental health outcomes like stress and emotional exhaustion, especially when workers compare themselves with others (Sarnecki *et al.*, 2024). Injustice in the organization thus reduces affective health. In addition, Ouabi *et al.* (2024) stated HRM practices, such as recruitment and selection, positively influence affective commitment and job satisfaction, which directly influence on psychological well-being in the public sector.

Discussions

A total of 114 employees were sampled. The sample had a high response rate of 91 percent with 104 employees responding. With high participation, a robust and representative data set was used for analysis. The instrument proved to be very consistent through reliability testing with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.997. Notably, the score reflects reliability and consistency for the perceptions measured by the instrument. The study found that transparency in the recruitment process is a fundamental aspect of employee morale and mental health. The overall mean score obtained was high (3.9688) and the descriptive analysis conducted showed that employees' responses were strong in saying that the most important factor in hiring the director of public prosecution is merit-based selection (mean = 4.0385). This conclusion was backed by the inferential analysis which showed a strong, positive correlation ($r = 0.968$) and the regression equation had good predictive power ($\beta = 0.9301$; $p < 0.001$). The quantitative results were supported by qualitative comments, where respondents reported that clear recruitment processes decrease suspicion in the workplace and promote feelings of justice and emotional stability in the organization.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that the HRM policies of the ODPP are valid indicators of mental health of the workers in the organization. The main finding is that recruitment transparency is a key component of psychological resilience in a prosecutorial context. The ODPP can contribute meaningfully towards the psychological well-being of its employees if it adopts proactive policies in HRM that are based on merit, transparency and continuous learning. This would not only minimize complaints but also build greater reliance and confidence among professionals and foster a positive and supportive work culture.

Mental-health sensitive recruitment process should be institutionalized in the office by the development of policies that should ensure transparent and merit-driven hiring practices. Openness in the recruitment process

leads to trust and improved perception of fairness and establishes a foundation for psychological health for the employees in the long term. The ODPP needs to incorporate mental health policy within its HR system by updating its HR manual in accordance with the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 2022. This alignment can include formal initiatives, including mandatory counselling assistance for employees working with traumatic cases and the creation of special well-being departments in the human-resources division. There would be a comprehensive embedding of policies, which would secure the psychological health of workers and would communicate the organization's commitment to maintaining the well-being of their mental health.

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