

Golden Research Thoughts

Abstract:-

Health is wealth. Since health is very much required for the effective functioning of an individual, it is very important to enhance and maintain it. With the increase in the amount of money spent by employers on health insurance, companies have started realising the importance of workplace wellness programs and have started taking initiative towards implementing it. Wellness programs aims at improving the overall health and with its benefits on the work life of employees, it is important to understand if these programs affect the quality of work life of wellness program participating employees. The main objective of the study was to understand the impact of participation in workplace wellness programs on quality of work life among IT employees. The researcher collected data using the Quality of Work Life Scale from a sample of 71 IT employees among 36 who participated in workplace wellness programs and others who do not. The results of the study concluded that quality of work life of employees participating in wellness programs were higher than employees who did not participate and the quality of work life of male employees participating in wellness programs were not different of that of female employees participating in wellness programs.

IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAMS ON QUALITY OF WORK LIFE AMONG IT EMPLOYEES IN BANGALORE



Keywords:

Quality of Work Life; Work place Wellness Program, IT employees.

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INTRODUCTION :-

Employees spend about one-quarter of their lives in work setting. Today's workplace is so demanding and challenging that employees feel stressed out in completing their jobs, maintaining good relationship with co-workers, coping with the technology and organizational changes and creating a work life balance. The workplace is one of the key environments that affect mental well-being and health (Harnois & Gabriel, 2000). Mental health and physical health of employees play an important role in their lives as it affects their performance in the organization.

Stress is a serious issue in the workplace and it is one of the factors that can affect the physical and mental health of employees at work. The source of stress varies from situation to situation but it is present in every workplace. Stress has a negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of employees. Employees may engage in unhealthy behaviors such as drinking, smoking etc. to cope with the stress at work. Thus, stress can create measurable changes in the body. According to a periodical Health Canada, "Employees in the extreme workplace stress conditions suffer more than triple the rate of cardiovascular problems; over five times the rate of colorectal cancer; up to three times the rate of back pain" (Workplace wellness, 2013). Stress also leads to psychological disorders. Stress also affects the organization's quality and productivity. Poor employee health can lead to poor performance and increased absenteeism.

Apart from the health problems which stress can cause, it can affect the workplace in the form of violence, absenteeism, accidents, productivity and direct medical, insurance and legal costs. It is important for any organization to deal with stress and help employees cope with it for better performance and productivity. Better employee health leads to increased productivity, decreased absenteeism and the money spent by employers on insurance. Since better health definitely has its benefits, employers are legally bound to take care of the welfare of their employees. There is a tremendous rise in the money spent by employers on medical insurance and health care costs.

Quality of work life is a serious concern in the workplace. It has a great impact on the productivity of the employee and it also affects the individual's physical and mental health (Dhar, Dhar & Roy, 1971). According to Robbins (1996), "Quality of work life is a process by which an organization responds to employees needs by developing mechanism to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work". Quality of work life can also be defined as the set of favourable conditions and environments of workplace that support and promote employee satisfaction by providing them with rewards, job security and growth opportunities. The employee's ability to cope with stress affects the quality of work life. Poor quality of work life has detrimental impact on individual's mental and physical health and this impact can affect an employee's ability to adjust with the environment.

Physical activity can lead to the improvement of both quality of life and life satisfaction (Lu, 2010). It was found that 90% of the companies implemented at least one kind of wellness programs for its employees (Mattke, Schnyer and Busum, 2012). Wellness is not just absence of disease but it is also the presence of physical, psychological and spiritual well-being. According to Berger and Tobar, "it is found that regular exercise improves individual's mental well-being and mood state. Such similar effects are experienced from a wellness program as well and this helps to change and lead a healthy lifestyle" (Anshel, Brinthaup & Kang, 2010). Landers and Arent conducted a study on the effects of exercise on various measures of mental health. They concluded that regular exercise program significantly reduces depression, helps to deal with stressful life events and improves cognitive functioning (Anshel, Brinthaup & Kang, 2010). This suggests that to get the desired results from a wellness program regular participation and commitment is essential.

Halbert in 1961 coined the term 'Wellness'. According to him, "Wellness is a complementary sum of the whole person which includes mind, body and soul" (Simmons, 2007). Wellness is a holistic approach to best health and requires individuals to be self-responsible that focuses on maintaining health rather than treating illness. It is a proactive approach. Workplace wellness is defined as any workplace health promotion activity or organizational policy which intends to support healthy behaviour in the workplace and to improve health outcomes. Health promotion is nothing but the process through which it enables people to increase control and improve health. Health promotion activities can be carried out in the workplace as well as many other settings. It is also known as 'corporate wellbeing' and it consists of a variety of activities such as health fairs, health education, medical screenings, health coaching, weight management programs, wellness newsletters, on-site fitness programs and/or facilities and educational programs (Workplace wellness, 2013).

Wellness programs include three main components. The first one is screening activities which is to identify health risks (e.g. measurement of body weight), then preventive interventions mainly to address manifest health risks (e.g. weight-reduction counselling) and health promotion activities to further healthy lifestyles (e.g. healthy food options in cafeterias). In addition, employers offer other benefits related to health and well-being (e.g. occupational health and safety programs).

There is increasing evidence for the need for workplace wellness programs in companies. Studies support more companies to implement health and wellness strategies as it helps to reduce injuries, health care costs and long-term disability. There are additional benefits such as reduced absenteeism, higher productivity, reduced use of health care benefits and increased morale and loyalty. With such benefits it is not surprising more and more companies are choosing to implement workplace wellness programs. More emphasis on the positive employee health and well-being directly influences the individual or group productivity, better quality of products and innovation and enhanced intellectual capacity (Hillier, Fewell, Cann & Shepard, 2005).

The essence of wellness programs is that healthy employees tend to be happier and more productive. Industries which implement wellness programs develop a name of concern about their workers. Finally, companies that promote healthier work force make a positive contribution to a healthier nation. Both employees and employers benefit from workplace wellness programs. The benefits for employers are obvious. Employees are the most important assets to any company and employers are obliged to take care of their employees' health. Companies are improving employee well-being and job satisfaction, as well as trying to raise retention rates, by providing employees with these services. The welfare of employees has a direct impact on the growth of the company. Workplace wellness programs can help employees to become healthier, it can include learning how to reduce stress and muscle strain during work. Such programs make the employee feel that the employers care about them and hence increase in productivity and morale (Shillingford & Mackin, 1991).

The business world incorporated wellness programs with the main aim of cutting health care costs for the employees. Introducing the programs of fitness, nutrition and weight control, and stress management as well as counselling for the addicted to improve the quality of an employee's life became significant corporate and company objectives (Shillingford & Mackin, 1991). It is worth talking about wellness programs in organizational settings as it can affect the quality of work life and job satisfaction. Since quality of work life is all about job satisfaction, work life balance and reduced stress, wellness programs help employees to enhance all the mentioned components of quality of work life. Wellness programs benefits the employees as well as the employers. The quality of work life affects the individual's physical and mental health (Dhar, Dhar & Roy, 2008). Wellness programs aims at improving the overall health of an individual. Hence, it is important to understand if wellness program affect the quality of work life.

Various job characteristics influence employees' mental and physical well-being. IT professionals deal with sitting in one position in front of the monitor for long hours and this involves a lot of strain that could impair the health. The majority of the working population in India is part of the IT sector. The Information Technology (IT) sector is a growing sector in India which has contributed to the substantial increase in gross domestic product (GDP), employment and exports. With the rising demands and competition there is a lot of pressure on the workers and this can affect the physical and mental well-being of the workers. This can in turn affect the productivity and quality of work life of employees.

There are studies which support the benefits of wellness programs to improve the health, work environment and other factors such as job satisfaction and absenteeism. These studies are conducted in organizations in the overseas. The present study has tried to understand the extent to which wellness programs influence quality of work life in the Indian organizational setting mainly in the IT sector. Wellness programs have so many advantages on the employees as well as on the employers. The extent to which companies are spending on health insurance and other health factors, it would be cost effective if companies spend on wellness programs and get the desired effect. Hence, the study on wellness programs and its effect on quality for work life seem to be worth studying.

Workplace wellness program is a developing concept especially in India. Employers are realizing the benefits, workplace wellness programs can have on employees and on the overall company. With an understanding of the benefits of wellness programs on absenteeism, job satisfaction, productivity, employee morale and turnover, the researcher aimed to understand the impact of participation in workplace wellness programs on quality of work life. The researcher explored if gender has an impact on the quality of work life of employees participating in workplace wellness programs.

METHOD

The plan and procedure for the investigation is presented under various headings.

Sample

A sample of 71 full time IT employees of age range 25 – 40 years, who work in IT companies in Bangalore were selected for the study. Out of the participants of the study, 36 participated in wellness programs and 35 did not.

Tools

1. Quality of Work Life Scale.

This scale was developed by Santhosh Dhar, Upinder Dhar and Rishu Roy (2008). This scale measures ten factors which contribute to quality of work life which are stability of tenure, growth opportunities, employee satisfaction, competent employees, value orientation, innovative practices, work-life balance, human relations, learning organization and challenging activities. These factors are then subjected to second factor analysis to find out the four main dimensions of quality of work life which are proactivity, work life balance, learning organization and human relations. It consists of 45 questions. Reliability coefficient is 0.89 and content validity score is 0.94 (Dhar, Dhar & Roy, 2008).

2. Demographic data sheet.

This sheet would request information regarding respondents name, age, gender, marital status, date of joining, designation, and participation in wellness program and the type of wellness program

Procedure for data collection

The data was collected using the survey method from the sample. The initial part of the assessment included briefing about the study to all the participants and getting their informed consent. Then rapport was established and the scale along with the demographic data sheet was given to them. After the subjects completed responding to the scale, it was collected back and was verified and processed for further data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objectives of this study were to compare the quality of work life of employees' participating in wellness programs and who do not. Another objective was to find out if gender had an impact on the quality of work life of employees' participating in the wellness program. Based on the objectives, the data was analysed and the results are presented in table 1 and 2.

Table 1
The Quality of Work Life of Wellness Program Participants and Non- participants

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	t- value
Participants	36	173.78	20.13	3.42**
Non-participants	35	153.83	28.39	

Note. ** indicates that the t-value is significant at 0.01 level.

The results of the t-test analysis presented in table 1 indicate that there is significant difference in the quality of work life of employees' participating in wellness programs and who do not.

In today's world, employers focus more on positive employee health and well-being as it directly influences the productivity (Hillier, Fewell, Cann, & Shepard 2005). Wellness programs are a way to reduce the rising health care costs and to improve the quality of life. Workplace wellness programs are any health promotion activity or organizational policy which supports healthy behavior in the organization and to improve the health. Employees participating in wellness programs are more aware of the importance of following a healthy lifestyle.

According to Cser (2010), participants of wellness program could focus and concentrate better and also they performed better than non-participants. High performance leads to high job satisfaction. The present study has tried to understand if these wellness activities can have an impact on the quality of work life as good health leads to high job satisfaction and performance which in turn leads to high quality of work life. Allen (2001) defined quality of work life as the variety of efforts to improve productivity through improvement in humans. Wellness programs improve health and it affects performance thus it improves the quality of work life.

Positive health can have an impact on the well-being of the employees. Benefits of wellness programs include better physical and mental health, decreased absenteeism and employee turnover and cost savings to the organization (Lynch et.all, 1990). It also helps to improve mood, decrease anxiety, increase job satisfaction and other psychological benefits (Parks, 2007).

From the results of the study, it was understood that effective wellness programs can have an impact on the quality of work life. Thus, the hypothesis of the study which was "There will not be any significant difference in the quality of work life of wellness program participants and non-participants" is rejected.

Table 2
The Quality of Work Life Males and Females who participated in Wellness Programs

Variable	N	Mean	S.D	t- value
Male	19	172.00	23.79	.56 [#]
Female	17	175.76	15.55	

Note. # indicates that the t-value is not significant at 0.01 level.

The results of the t-test analysis presented in table 2 indicate that there is no significant difference in the quality of work life of male and female employees' participating in wellness programs. In the current scenario, the number of women working in the business sector has increased. Organizations ensure that gender does not influence one's growth in the organization and equal opportunities are given to both males and females. Also, women are increasingly getting involved in roles which were considered only for men. These changes have resulted both men and women to expose themselves to the same amount of pressure and stress. This could be one of the reasons why there is no significant difference in the quality of work life of male and female participating in workplace wellness programs. Hence, the hypothesis, "There will not be significant difference in the quality of work life of male and female employees' participating in workplace wellness program" is accepted.

The present study is having its own limitations especially with regard to sample size. A detailed study with a large sample will yield better understanding regarding the importance of work place wellness programs and then the results can be generalized.

CONCLUSION

Wellness programs aims at improving the health and help employees to lead a healthier life style which will allow them to cope better with stress at work. In short, it is a proactive measure taken by organizations to reduce medical care costs and to improve the quality of work life. With so many benefits being noted, it is important for every organization to consider workplace wellness program as part of their strategic plan.

Workplace wellness programs are a proactive approach offered by employers to improve the health of the employees which in turn will help them to cut health costs and increase performance. Wellness programs have so many benefits to the employees and employers. Thus, the topic under study has so many implications in an organizational setting. The results of the study showed that the wellness program participants have higher quality of work life than non-participants. Hence, organizations should implement effective wellness programs to improve the health of their employees which in turn improves productivity and reduces health care costs.

It is also essential to encourage employees to participate in such programs. Implementing wellness programs and if the employee participation rate is low then it will not be cost effective. The literature supports that wellness programs help to increase performance and decrease absenteeism, turnover and healthcare costs. Hence it would be beneficial for organizations to implement workplace wellness programs.

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