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Mental Health In The Workplace And Its Effect On Work Life Balance And Health

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Abstract:

The conceptual paper reviews and deals with various ways as an actionable item to improve mental health in the workplace. It is a general opinion that establishing a healthy work culture would prove a lot beneficial in the prevention of work-related stress which will in turn help in arresting issues of mental illness amongst employees. In spite of a healthy work environment being fostered in an organization there still lingers some mental problems amongst employees which can again be addressed with the support of the workers and colleagues.

It has been repeatedly felt and understood that Work life and Personal life are two most critical components of human life. In order to live a happy one a proper balance between the two is very much required. The same becomes a challenging issue especially for women managers. The paper explored the various aspects of work life balance issues and mental health of female and male managers in different sectors of organization, various factors of stress in the workplace, what are the deadly effects of those affected medically and how an organization jointly with the help of theoretical frameworks and various intervention strategies cope with the same

Keywords: Mental Health, Workplace, Healthy, Environment. Work-Life Balance, Managers

Introduction:

Post-pandemic with the advent of various technologies and improvisation in the ways of working and challenging the existing ones. It has been seen that there has been a major change in the business world with respect to its working where most of the organizations are moving towards hybrid mode of working which is a new way of working style as compared to the one which existed pre-covid. Not to forget the fact that employees over here are not only managing their work but also their responsibilities which they have in their personal lives. There will be stances when people will be suffering either from work to family conflict or family to work conflict and in both of these cases one side or the other will be affected somehow or the other leading to stress and adverse mental health.

Also due to ongoing recession and change in business environment leading to restructure of various organizations, mergers and acquisitions there has been various news circulating about layoffs, suspension of contracts happening without prior notice leading to a state of fear in the mind of various employees where they are feeling insecure, afraid with respect to their jobs leading to mental stress which is definitely taking a toll on work-life balance.

The review paper becomes more important and prevalent with today's context because with the ongoing restructuring of various organization as an intervention with respect to its mode of working style, mergers and acquisitions happening in the business environment for survival and expansion, it has been felt that the employees over there are mostly vulnerable and affected in most of the scenarios. An organization might lay off a few employees thinking about their future growth prospects and cost cutting measures in order to survive but in most of the scenarios they are forgetting the aftermath of the layoffs happening mentally with the laid off employee and what the family is going through. So, it can be assumed that with the decision of laying off or changing the way of working; only one individual is not affected but the entire dependent family gets affected and its high time that these things are pondered upon.

This paper deals with various factors of stress in the workplace, what are the deadly effects of those affected medically and how an organization jointly with the help of theoretical frameworks and various intervention strategies cope with the same.

Review of Literature:

Ross & Vasantha, 2014; Jones and Bright, 2001 opined that the issues and effects of work-life balance are almost nearly equal across all states of working professionals but the effect of the imbalance are more severe for professionals at managerial level. The managers did express the fact that the tension to run their organization effectively by keeping all the employees motivated to do their work productively and at the same time managing their duties at home makes it all challenging. With the aggressive advent of new technology like video conferencing modes, high connectivity internet facility, mobile phones and virtual work settings have made them almost available throughout the day either from home or workplace. It is true that technology did help all to become multitasking but has also snatched the freedom and space of personal time at home and with family. This becomes one of the major factors of conflict and imbalance in work life.

Frone (2000) in his research did reveal that employees who experience work to family conflict in their daily day to day lives are more prone to being affected with mood disorders, anxiety disorders and substance dependence disorders which are all kinds of psychiatric disorders. Now for employees who experience family to work conflict are even more vulnerable towards the disorders.

In fact, researches done by Kinnunen and Mauno (1998) revealed that consequence of work to family conflicts does result in job anxiety, job depression and job exhaustion and psychosomatic symptoms in the working class irrespective of gender.

The concept of work life balance can be traced back to as far as the Industrial revolution where mainly men dominated the work forces and women were mainly involved with household chores but a critical turn took place in the mid-20th century. With the advent of technology and computers it was less of physical work involvement and more of mental pressure and that did open up space for the entry of women in the workplace. In the last 25 years there has been a significant change demographically in the workplace. Increased education and social changes did result in the incoming of more women employee in the workforce but shockingly the rate has reduced. Two of the major reasons are lack of flexibility in working condition by the organization and increasing trend of

nuclear families where the lack of social support has been created and women workers are finding it difficult juggling between the two as a result adversely affecting the work life balance.

Although employees are aware about well-being and maintaining good health, in reality it becomes very difficult to actually act upon the same. As there arises conflict managing between work and personal life. The problem is even more for female workers as they have to manage both in maximum scenarios which adversely affect their wellbeing.

Mahal, 2014; Rehman and Roomi, 2012 in their research did find that as compared with men, women face a greater conflict in balancing work and family roles as they are associated with maternity, childcares, household works etc. which are not so highly associated with men. All these stages often coincide with their career progression for senior positions in their organization.

Through research it has also been found that the employees in public sector organizations experience a better work life balance than that of private sector organizations. Major reasons could be better supportive work environments, more private time to spend with families and friends, better sleeping hours (Buelens & Broeck, 2007).

So, it can be assumed that employees working in public sector organizations will differ in the context of work life balance and mental health as compared with employees working in private sector organizations.

From the research conducted in the past it has been proved that there is a close relation between work life balance and psychological wellbeing and mental health. Hence it can be deduced that there is a positive relation between work life balance and mental health. Also work life balance predicts mental health.

It has also been seen that there happens to be a significant difference in the dimension of psychological distress and overall mental health between the groups. For example, it has been seen that the managers working in the public sector exhibit less psychological distress than that of private sector managers and employees.

Work-place Stress: Factors

1. **Poor relation with Supervisors, Colleagues and Boss:** One of the common reasons for stress in an organization could be poor relations. Often it has been seen that dealing with a difficult boss can be a reason for stress. Work politics amongst colleagues against someone can be highly stressful for the targeted one. Another reason could be that in order to impress the superiors; few employees' resorts towards aggressive working in order to build an image and might try to create a negative image about someone from whom that employee feels threatened and always boasting about the work done by them in a way that makes others feel inferior.
2. **Perception:** It has often been seen that in a group of employees there will always be one or two working religiously in order to deliver the assigned task and whenever they feel their productivity might get hamper due to distractions in the workplace or in the group. They seclude themselves as much as possible so that they can continue with their continued productivity which is often perceived by others in a negative way as a person who is not social or tagged as changed person. Now these behavioral changes by colleagues and superiors do contribute to stress for these employees whose intentions are just to give their 100%. On the other hand, most of the times these groups do get successful against the religious employee and when such things continue for long the obvious thing happens that is burnout due to stress and as a result the organization loses their efficient workforce.

3. **High demand for performance:** Unrealistic expectations from the senior management can be detrimental and still now also remains as one of the most important causes for stress. Major reasons could be extended working hours, pressure of delivering always at peak level. Even more frustrating is when someone has finished his/her work is told to stay back since the other team members haven't finished their work, which may be due to various nonproductive activities during the working hours.
4. **Job Security:** With change being the only constant and rapid transformations in an organization. Transfers are becoming frequent with vertical movements and lateral movements across verticals; which does create a sense of insecurity amongst employees. Also, mergers, takeovers do create a sense of tension.
5. **Rage Applying amongst Gen Z:** Due to frustration amongst current workforce attributing from various reasons like unhappy professional life, unfair bosses, low pay, lack of promotion and opportunities in terms of ignorance during promotion cycles have pushed the current work force towards rage applying. It means that out of frustration they send out their resumes towards multiple organizations and that is leading to mass resignations in the current generation.

Stress and Mental Health: Adverse Effects

After an extensive literature review it was the opinion of many authors that to a certain extent mental stress related illness and behavioral health problems are correlated with each other. The claim has been further supported by Goetzel et al, 2002 where in a business case presented by him directed towards investment in mental health programs at the workplace where it was revealed that health care costs are rising at an un-imaginable way surpassing the general inflation rate of a country. All though the data presented by him showed that physical health expenditures far exceeded the mental health payments, more shockingly it has been found that mental disorder related illness tops the charts of being the most burdensome and costly surpassing the expenditures of heart related illness, stroke, cancer and obesity. Further deep-down analysis showed that mental health cost burden is related to loss of productivity, unemployment, disability and lower work performances. Through a research survey it has been further studied and claimed that poor mental health can lead to the development of physical health conditions which can further develop into adverse health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and musculoskeletal- respiratory disorders.

Data from insurance companies revealed that the majority of the claims with respect to patients with comorbid mental health and substance use disorders are two-three times higher than that of patients without comorbid conditions. There is a high chance of developing diabetes (27%) and asthma (45%) for those with high prevalence of depression. In fact, depressed persons are more likely to develop coronary artery disease. Luppino et al did find a strong link between depression and obesity where in his study he found out that those with depression had a 58% greater risk of developing obesity than non-depressed individuals.

It has been observed that patients when presenting about their problems to doctors often feel reluctant to bring out their mental health related problems due to the social stigma associated with the illness. As a result, the illness does go unattended leading to masking of the illness and may be missed due to the same. In short if an employee is facing mental health issues, then other dimensions of health are also similarly affected which in turn increases the health care expenditure and diminish individual performance at work.

Productivity & Efficiency Vs. Stress and Mental Health

Studies in the US have shown that employed adults exhibit anxiety, depression and substance use disorders but sadly most of them don't get themselves treated and even if they get treatment also substantial damages have been done which in turns become the reason for other diseases like social, physical and other emotional impairments. Also, to be noted that in addition to the expenses related with mental illness there are other added indirect costs as well like increase in absenteeism rate, under performance and stress.

It has been evident from various reports that adverse mental health does take a toll on work performance and productivity. Researches have shown that employees in the organization are remaining absent not because of physical illness or injury but because of work related stress and anxiety which has developed at the workplace. The same of which affects the most on those employees whose mental acuity and knowledge are key job requirements.

Research Goetzel and his colleagues made a partnership with the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO). The study revealed three major findings, the first of which is that employees who had high levels of depression also had a high level of medical expenditure. Secondly employees with psychosocial risk factors have a clear connection and relationship with future detrimental adverse effects on an employee productivity. Third major finding was that employees with poor mental health conditions are more likely to have poor lifestyle behaviors.

It has been seen those rates of being affected by depression and anxiety and their after effects such as suicides are rising globally at a tremendous rate (Hasin et al, 2018, Swartz, 2015). According to Follmer and Jones, 2018, it has been felt and observed that all though individuals with mental illness did receive attention medically in health-related disciplines but shockingly in the field of management it does continue to lag behind. The major reason could be lack of organizational research with respect to mental illness does make it a challenge to understand the employee's behavior for HR professionals and practitioners as well.

In the 21st century it becomes very important to understand the increasing mental illness affecting people for both economic and humanistic reasons. It has been seen in the past that an employee affected with mental illness can cost an organization adversely in a huge way. Through research it could be analyzed that most of the economic losses happen due to loss and decreased productivity resulting in increased absenteeism rates which are all again related to the effects of mental illness. Although there has been evidence that productivity in an organization does get highly affected by mental illness, there remains a major chunk where still researchers don't know about the effect of these disorders on an employee's productivity and work performance.

According to Corrigan et al, 2005 in his research he found out that an organization does share and express a kind of reservations about hiring people with mental illness as according to them they are seen to be unstable and incompetent for a role in the organization. Such a stigma towards the affected group in an organization result in negative stereotypes about them and it does increases discrimination towards the affected group which in return might impact their career trajectories and often experience thwarted opportunities for career and development as they have to explain their career gaps in employment history (Follmer and Jones, 2017). It has also been seen that work place factors can significantly affect suicidal related thoughts and behaviors especially when organizations are not supportive.

Managers and senior professionals who enjoy the right to make employment decisions lack both conceptual and procedural knowledge that is considered necessary to support the employees (Martin et al., 2015). This is where the Organizational scholars can contribute significantly in the area of the study by developing existing theories in the context of mental illness.

Top Management's Strategy: Mental Health Issues at Work

In an organization there remains stances when senior management decides to value privacy, ignorance in the face of disclosure with a tinge of compassion towards the affected. According to them they feel reluctant to ask about mental health conditions since they feel respectful towards an employee's privacy. Such a behavior itself creates a cycle of ignorance which positively precludes the extent of addressing the workplace stressors which may be positively contributing to poor mental health. Another possible reason behind such a behavior could be that the senior management is itself unaware about the best of the practices to tackle such a situation that's why resorting to privacy mode (Quinane, Bardoel, and Pervan).

Mental Illness: Effect on career decision and job ability

In a study conducted by Hennekam, Follmer, and Beatty on how mental illness influences employee's career decisions and their ability to perform a task. Their report did show an important dimension that people affected with mental illness self-select their own preferred job sector based on their likings and skills to fulfill their needs by applying the concept of "Person-Job fit role". Their report characterized such persons as perfectionists, organized and detail oriented. Such persons did carry a more empathetic side towards their fellow employees. However there remains also a flip side to the positivity's which are that during high stressful situations in the workplace such employees show an abrupt output due to high stress which does take a toll on their psychological well-being level.

It is pretty evident from the research conducted that the existing research on employees affected with mental illness has been conducted in the fields outside management like psychiatry, psychology, occupational health and other studies based on rehabilitation employing various perspectives and assumptions on the research. In order to dive more deeply into the field keeping in mind the corporate employees; inter-disciplinary research is the need of the hour where various researchers throughout the world can bring innovative approaches and solutions to tackle the rise of mental health issues with the help of pre-existing theoretical knowledge (Follmer and Jones, 2018).

As the area evolves, qualitative approaches will act helpful in understanding the approaches of the affected. According to Fried & Robinaugh, 2020 multilevel studies are required to understand the intersection point of individual, biological, organizational, social levels to understand more about the complexities of mental illness in the workplace and organization. Longitudinal research can be very helpful to understand how the concept of perception and behaviors are evolving with changing time.

The one's affected with mental illness does represent a social identity and can be attributed as one of the many amongst the social identities that a person holds (Follmer & Jones, 2018). It has been found that till date that various researches in the field of mental illness and work have revolved around the negative stereotypes and the cost which the organizations had to bear because of the same. So there lies a huge opportunity to explore the positivity of mental illness that is how the one affected can yield positive and productive outcomes in their working environment. According to Meyers et al., 2013 the concept of positive psychology interventions in a workplace by the organizations are quite common, so the time is proper to study the interventions related to mental illness and their possible outcomes.

It is thought that employees with mental illness do carry a bouquet of unique attributes and skills which can in turn if employed or utilized properly can bring positive outcomes in the workplace but there are very few studies as to how these employees in particular get the benefits out of the same.

Mental Health: Theoretical Frameworks

Selection, Optimization and Compensation (SOC) theory which elucidates how an employee prioritizes their goals with the aim of maximizing their performance and adapting to limitations can be applied to understand how an individual successfully navigates their career path over a period of time. With this theory one can understand the personal struggles and strategies one adapts to survive in the organization with an aim to promote long term success and well-being so that they don't fall into the trap of being affected with mental illness (Burnett-Wolle & Godbey, 2007).

An example could be for a person who is transitioning from school to workplace for the very first time as it is one of the important times in one's career and the transition phase could be really challenging for the ones affected with mental illness. Now here if the organization is giving adequate training, work practices with mentors allocated, supportive friendly work environment where the senior continuously monitors the new comer with love and affection and understanding the requirements could help a lot for the new comer in the transition phase.

It has been stated by some of the researchers that employees suffering with mental illness can opt to become entrepreneurs to fulfill their wish and desired way of working as it could be a reason that they are restricted in the organization, so they decide to move out of the system and start something on their own. So here comes a very important question that "Does an individual's desire to become an entrepreneur stem from the inability to find a stable employment or does their desire to become one; stems from the very fact that they need a flexible environment to manage their mental illness?"

Further in a study it has been said that employees who have gaps in their employment tenure due to mental illness find self-employment as an attractive opportunity as that gives them more time for self-care (Ostrow et al 2019).

It has been felt and understood that competitiveness with an aim of increased productivity and cost control measures have greatly taken control in terms of operation excellence in an organization but the long-term effect of mental health and its adverse impact is getting neglected. All though researchers are relying on cross sectional design or retrospective analysis to deal with the long-neglected issue but the very point of fact is that neither of them provides a causal link between mental disorder and dysfunction in the workplace as cited by Simon, 2003 in his research which is true still today in many sectors within the industry.

It has been found out that Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) by organizations did prove a lot better in treating depression symptoms amongst workers. It has been seen that 80% of the affected employees with mental illness can be diagnosed and treated effectively during the early stage if recognized early. In some studies, it has been seen that treatment of depression has reduced absenteeism and increased productivity by almost 40%-60%. There has been moderate evidence of the fact that work place effectiveness can increase if the interventions are infused with mental and physical health interventions as one of the strategies to tackle the issue.

Suggestions:

Following areas could be explored to better understand the area:

- A. Understanding the various factors which contribute to workplace stress which can be a risk factor for psychiatric disorders and for the people they might affect.
- B. Possibly developing screening tools for mental illness and functional impairment in the workplace with a check mechanism of regular timely evaluation and developing a scorecard.
- C. Evaluating the various EAP interventions with respect to the impact it is having on stress, burnout and psychiatric disorders.
- D. Based on the observations and recommendation of the above possible areas one can develop guidelines for the management of mental illness in the context of the Occupational mental health system.
- E. Partner With a Business School to Establish an Executive Training Program

Conclusion:

It is true that almost 40-50% of our life span is spent behind our career and on our job's, so it becomes very crucial that our workplaces become a ground for implementing the initiatives for our public health which will promote our mental and behavioral health issues in a positive way. All though it has been agreed that mental health and wellbeing of an employee in a workplace can be attainable but for that there needs to be a dedicated concentrated holistic effort to maintain the records and the information. Effectively disseminating the information through implementation of policies and procedures targeted towards achieving the said objectives.

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