Impact of Work Life Balance Policies on Work Related Outcomes: An Empirical Study on Views of Nurses in the Health Care Sector

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ABSRTACT

Balancing the work and non work life of working professionals is must for corporate sustainable development. The health care industry in India is one of the largest economic and fastest growing professions. Nurses are the first ones who are thought about when we talk about health care and thus it is necessary that their needs have to be taken care and a congenial atmosphere is created for them. Mounting stress and work overload are cited to be the most obvious reasons for lowering nursing population. This present study focuses on the work-life balance of nurses working in private hospitals. Questionnaire is designed with the objective of collecting personal data, available work life balance programs, and impact of work life balance policies on satisfaction and turnover intentions. The data will be collected from 100 nurses working in different private hospitals in Surat city. Percentage Analysis will be used to analyze the primary data collected. The paper attempts to provide some recommendations to human resource professionals to deal with work life balance issues.

Key Words : Work life balance, health care industry, stress

Introduction

Work-life balance has become the foremost issue in the workplace especially in a society packed with differing responsibilities and commitments. Balancing time for work, parents, children, spouse, friends, health and spiritual development is a great challenge one is faced with. It is extensively acknowledged that workforce who accomplishes a work–life balance that suits them, work more professionally, are more dedicated to their work and are less likely to become ill as a result of stress involved in the work. WorkLife Balance is a state of balance in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life weigh equal. The term 'Work Life Balance' usually refers to organizational support for dependent care, flexible work options, and family / personal leave (Estes & Michael, 2005). Human resource personnel are finding the innovative ideas to get the win-win situation. Flexible work hours, work from home, job sharing, family leave programs , onsite childcare, and financial and/or informational assistance with childcare and eldercare services are some of the aspects of work life balance. The value system of the organisation is reflected by its values and norms . The work life balance policies need to be supported by the workplace culture and should be properly communicated to existing and future employees.

Effective work-life balance policies helps to reduce staff turnover rates, becoming an employee of choice, increased return on investment in training as employees stay longer, reduced absenteeism and sick leave, improved morale or satisfaction, greater staff loyalty and commitment and improved productivity. An employee with better work-life balance will contribute more meaningfully towards the organizational growth and success.

Role of Nurses in Health Care Sector : Research Statement

Nurses play a critical role in dealing with problems of access within the primary health care (PHC) system. The role and scope of nursing in PHC is continually evolving in response to various changes/pressures in the health needs of human societies. Such changes/pressures include increased knowledge and technology, increased specialization and interdisciplinary collaboration, coupled with PHC workforce shortages At the global level , there is a great shortage of nurses. One reason for this shortage is due to the work environment in which nurses practice. De Lucia, Otto, & Palmier (2009) concluded, "the profession of nursing as a whole is overloaded because there is a nursing shortage. Individual nurses are overloaded. They are overloaded by the number of patients they oversee. They are overloaded by the number of tasks they perform. They work under physical overload due to long work hours and patient handling demands which leads to a high incidence of musculoskeletal disorder. In short, the nursing work system often exceeds the limits and capabilities of human performance. The service quality provided by the hospitals is of eminent importance for improving its in-patient rate and the nurses in the hospitals play a vital role maintaining this level of service.

So in order to improve the quality of service of its nursing staff and organizational effectiveness , hospitals must ensure high commitment from its patient-care personnel which is derived if they experience balance in their work and personal lives. Thus, in the present paper, the key providers of improving organizational performance of hospitals, that is, nurses, have been studied in the context of their Work Life Balance policies   provided   to   them,   at   few   sample   private   hospitals   of   Surat.

Review of Literature

Work Life Balance has been driven forward by the need to change the way we work and live as a society. Organizations believe in providing a balanced life for their employees as they know that today's knowledge workers are less concerned about just financial security which earlier bound them to their employers.

According to Lobel (1999), work life programmes are initiatives adopted by organizations to help employees manage the interface between their paid work and other important life activities, including family. Burke (2002), observed that both women and men prefer working in organisations that support work-life balance. Men feel more satisfied when they achieve more on the job even at the cost of ignoring the family. On the other hand, women stress that work and family are both equally important and both are the sources of their satisfaction. Marcinkus etal. (2007), Work based support to women is positively associated with job satisfaction, organisational commitment and career accomplishment. Colley, Linda . (2010) , identified the extent of the employees' awareness of their work-life balance options, and employee perceptions about access to flexible working arrangements. The research finds high levels of awareness. But it identifies a gap between employees' awareness and their perceptions of access, and uncovers many local-level barriers to access to flexible working arrangements. Bloom, Nick , Kretschmer, Tobias and Van Reenen, John. (2011), studied the determinants and consequences of family-friendly workplace practices (FFWP) using a sample of over 450 manufacturing firms in Germany, France, U.K., and U.S. Strong positive correlation was found between firm productivity and FFWP. Pandey (2012) found unsaid long working hours and stress because of strict deadlines for project is major cause of work life imbalance in women professional lives. The Fourth Work-Life Balance Employee Survey (2011) found that the majority of employees were satisfied with their hours and current working arrangements. The vast majority of employees agreed that having more choice in working arrangements improves morale (90 per cent), although over one third (35 per cent) thought that people who work flexibly create more work for others. Linda Flynn (2007) found that various factors such as work hours, schedules, time off, professional development and training, job quality, workload, job satisfaction and employment characteristics affect the work environment and work life of healthcare providers particularly nursing staff . A study conducted at in the UK (Zurn, Dolea and Stilwell 2005) showed that when health workers were asked for suggestions to improve their working lives, 'better pay' ranked only fourth on their 'wish list', behind 'more staff, 'better

working conditions' and better facilities'. A study conducted by Academy for Nursing Studies,2005 found that the critical factors which affect the Indian nursing systems are shortage of staff, poor infrastructure and facilities, weak administrative structure, lack of systematic training programmes on the job or off the job, lack of autonomy and gender disparities. Pandit and Pant (2010), the QWL factors that have an impact on job satisfaction level of nurses in hospitals are provision of free working lunch, job related training program, hired family accommodation and a proper health and safety policy. Rania etal (2011) found high correlation exists between work task and employee satisfaction with a mediator variable namely work-life balance. Manju shree (2012) studied relationship between work/ life balance of critical care nurses in private hospitals at Coimbatore and found that no changes in shift timings for their personal emergencies is the major cause of discontent among the nurses.

An insight of literature view given above it can be seen that lots of research work is going in the area of work life balance. Several researches have been done related to work life balances in the health care sector too , but few studies have been conducted on work life balance of nurses in Gujarat state, especially, Surat. The present study has been conducted to bridge the gap.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the impact of work life balance policies on employees job satisfaction and turnover intention.
2. To assess the reasons for non-take up of work life balance program.
3. To evaluate the work place culture in relation to work life balance.
4. To assess awareness about work life balance

Research Methodology

Sampling

The present study is confined to nurses in private health care sector in Surat city. Convenient sampling was administered for the purpose of study. The sample size of the present study has been fixed at 100 nursing population, however 98 completed questionnaire were taken for the study

Data Collection

The study being based on survey method, primary data on various dimensions of work life balance were collected through self administered questionnaire. Besides, informal discussion were also held with nursing staff to get insight into various matters connected with work life balance.

Tools and Techniques

Data collected have been presented in tabular form and analysis has been made, using simple percentage and mean score. Likert"s three-point scale has been used to measure the responses of sample population to ascertain the level of satisfaction with various work life balance progammes.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study examines the level of work life balance on the basis of opinions collected from nurses working in private health care sector in Surat city only. Since there could be different requirements for various industry sectors, so the results could vary accordingly.
2. The findings may not be the same all over India, as it depends on the work environment, culture and other dimensions.

Results and Discussions

Likert"s three-point scale has been used to measure the responses of sample population to ascertain the level of satisfaction with various work life balance progammes.

I	Listed below are the items of Work Life Balance policies. Please indicate your response by circling the appropriate number.	Provided	Not Provided	Don't Know
	1) Family leave	45 (45.91)	37 (37.75)	16 (16.32)
	a) Shorter work days for family issues	18(18.36)	73(74.49)	7(7.14)
	b) Extended paid maternity leave	0(0)	80(81.63)	18(18.37)
	c) Elderly care leave	8(8.16)	76(77.55)	14(14.29)
	d) Paid leave to care for sick family members	8(8.16)	76(77.55)	14(14.29)
	2) Employee Assistance Programs	**80(81.63)**	**10(10.20)**	**8(8.16)**
	a) Professional counseling .e.g. family/ career	24(24.49)	**69(70.41)**	5(5.10)
	b) Life skill programs. e.g: stress management	**65(66.33)**	**21(21.43)**	**12(12.24)**
	c) Subsidized exercise or fitness centre	**0(0)**	**98(100)**	**0(0)**
	d) Referral services for employees' personal needs	**8(8.16)**	**84(85.71)**	**6(6.12)**
	e) Health programs	**44(44.90)**	**37(37.16)**	**17(17.35)**
	f) Parenting or family support program	**28(28.57)**	**56(57.14)**	**14(14.58)**
	g) Relocation or placement assistance	**6(6.12)**	**74(75.51)**	**18(18.37)**
	h) Equal access to promotion, training and development	**54(55.10)**	**22(22.45)**	**22(22.45)**
	3) Flextime	**46(46.94)**	**34(34.69)**	**18(18.37)**
	a) Flexible scheduling program	**44(44.90)**	**36(36.73)**	**18(18.37)**
	b) Job sharing (several employees doing the same job)	**56(57.14)**	**24(24.49)**	**18(18.37)**
	c) Part time work	**54(55.10)**	**42(42.86)**	**2(2.04)**
II	Please circle the appropriate number to indicate you agreement/disagreement to the following set of statements	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**
	a) I am satisfied with my working hour.	**69(70.41)**	**12(12.24)**	**17(17.35)**
	b) I am satisfied with my co-workers.	**59(60.20)**	**5(2.10)**	**34(34.69)**
	c) I am satisfied with my supervisors.	**28(28.57)**	**64(65.31)**	**6(6.12)**
	d) I am satisfied with my pay.	**18(18.37)**	**42(42.89)**	**38(38.78)**
	e) Managers in the organization are accommodating of family needs.	**30(30.61)**	**46(46.94)**	**22(22.45)**
	f) Higher management in this organization are sympathetic towards employees' personal concerns.	**18(18.37)**	**6(6.12)**	**74(75.51)**
	g) I am satisfied with my leave arrangements.	**4(4.08)**	**27(27.55)**	**67(68.38)**
	h) I think a lot about leaving the organization.	**16(16.33)**	**61(62.24)**	**21(21.43)**
	i) I am actively searching for an alternative to the organization.	**10(10.20)**	**64(65.31)**	**24(24.49)**
III	Are You happy with current work life balance policies(If Yes skip the following set of questions)	**Yes 45(45.92)**	**No 26(26.53)**	**Can't Say 27(27.55)**

		18(69.23)	2(7.69)	6(23.08)
	a) Too much work to not take up program	18(69.23)	2(7.69)	6(23.08)
	b) Carry or accumulate days for longer holidays following year	16(61.54)	3(11.54)	7(26.92)
	c) Didn't need to take up work life balance program	18(69.23)	2(7.69)	6(23.08)
	d) Wasn't told how much holidays was available	15(57.69)	6(23.08)	5(19.23)
	e) Don't feel comfortable enough to ask my employers	19(73.08)	3(11.54)	4(15.38)
	f) Not eligible to request working arrangement	14(53.85)	12(46.15)	0(0)
	g) Others			
IV	Please indicate your response to the following set of statements	Yes	No	Don't Know
	a) Does this organisation have written copies of their 'work-life balance' policies?	0(0)	0(0)	98(100)
	b) Have you seen or been given a copy of these policies?	0(0)	98(100)	0(0)
	c) Is it easy to understand when and how these policies can be used by employees?	0(0)	24(24.49)	74(75.51)

Sources: Calculated from primary data, Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.
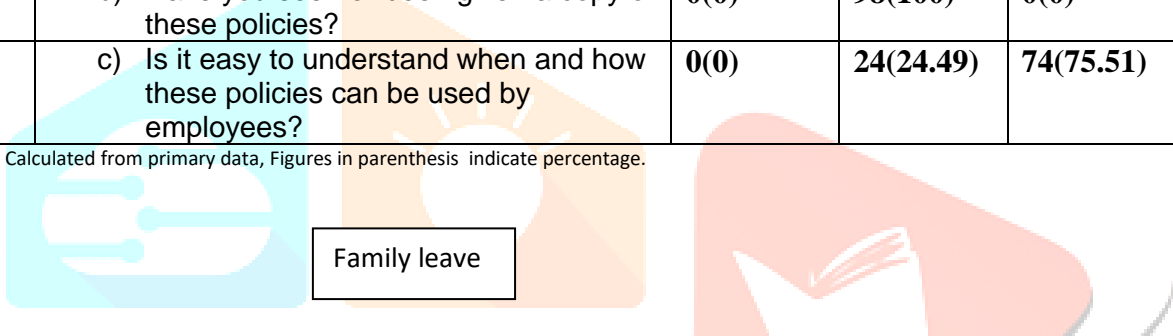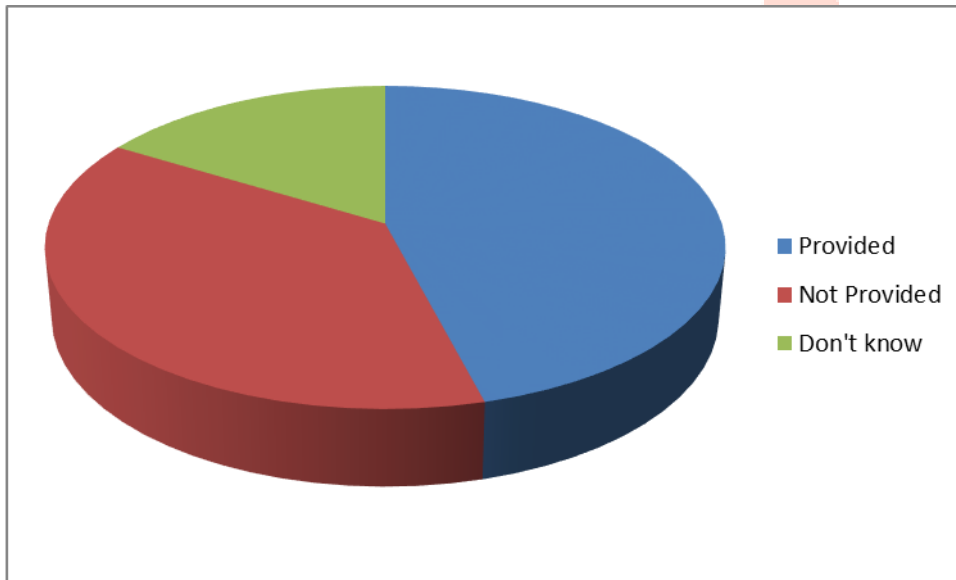
Family leave
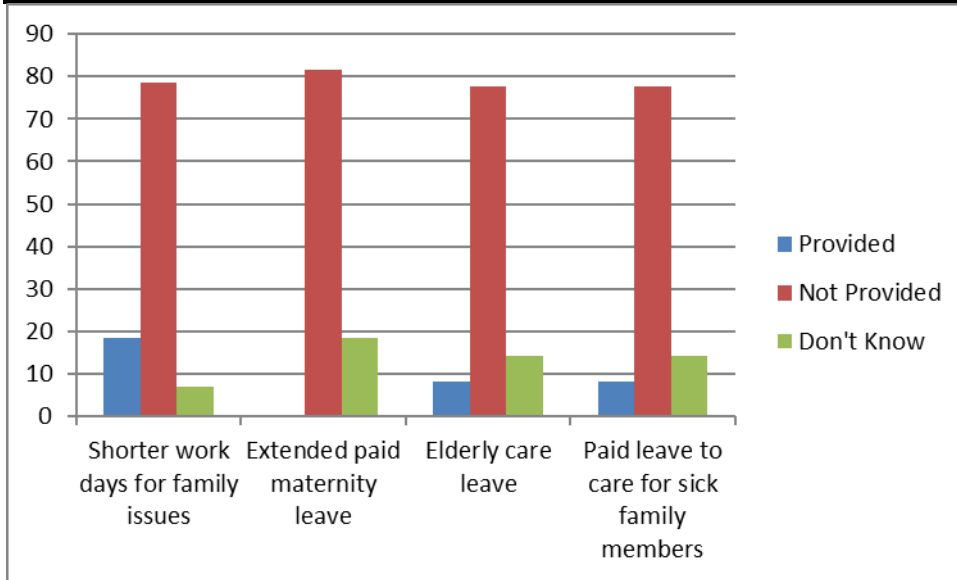

Figure 1(A) Responses to Family Leave

Figure 1(B) Responses to individual component of Family Leave
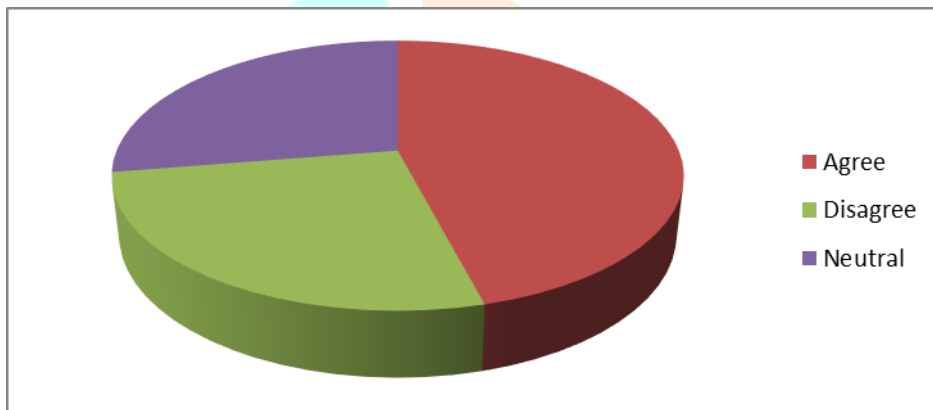
Employee Assistance Programs

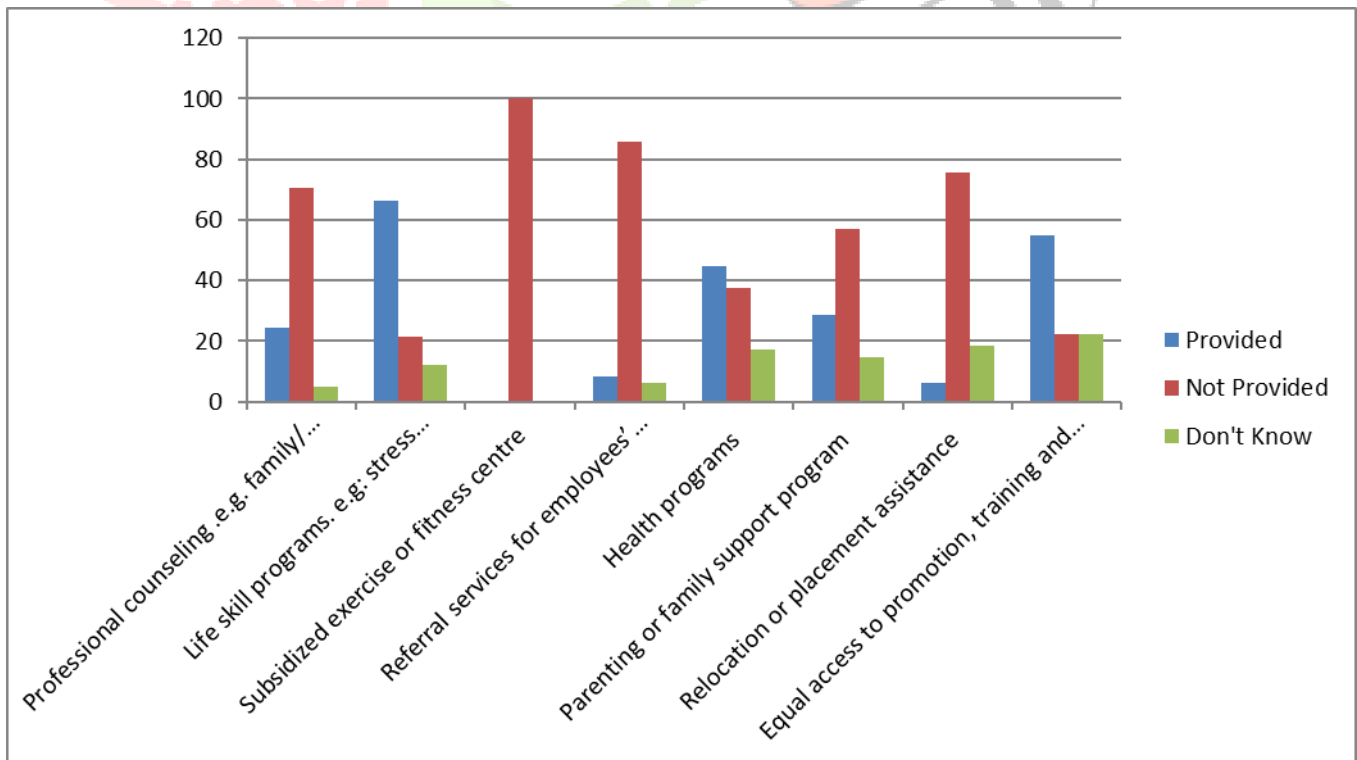Figure 2(A) Responses to Employee Assistance Programs

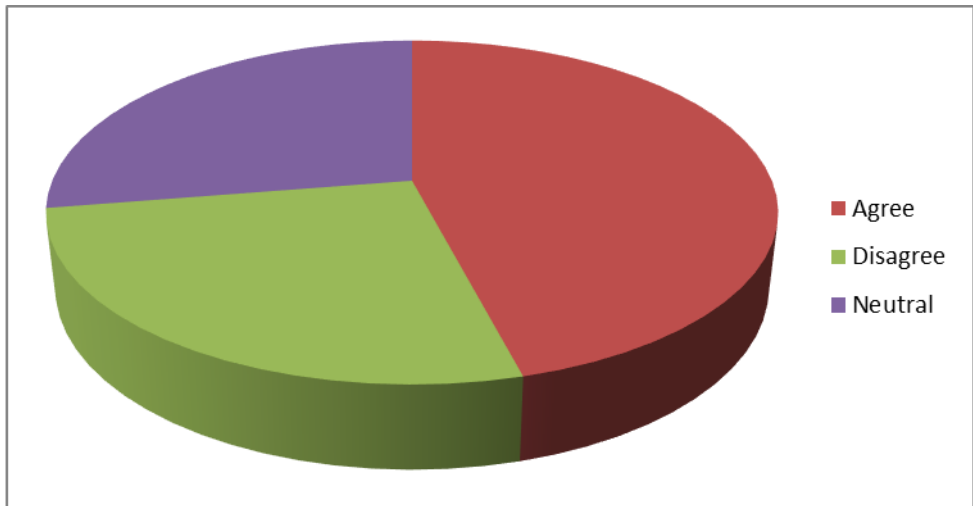Figure 2(B) Responses to individual component Employee Assistance Programs

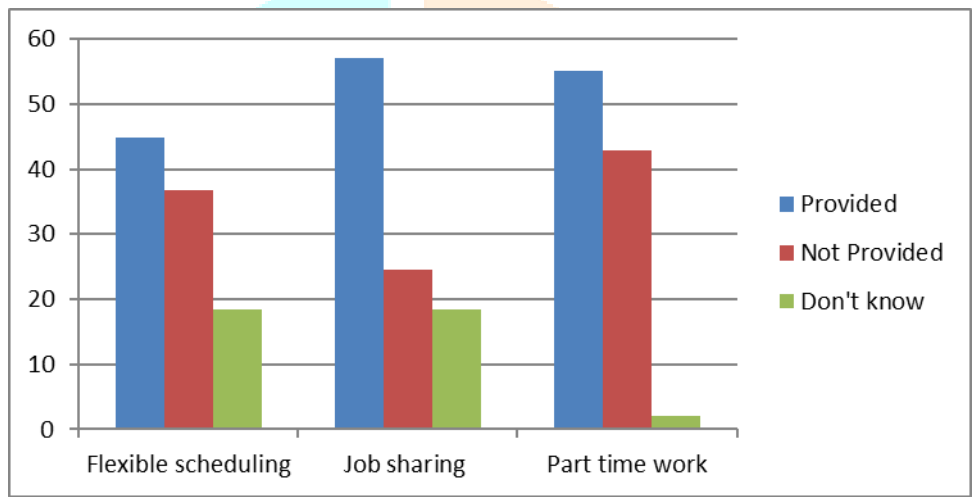**Flextime**

Figure 3(A) Responses to Flextime provisions

Figure 3(B) Responses to individual component of Flextime provisions

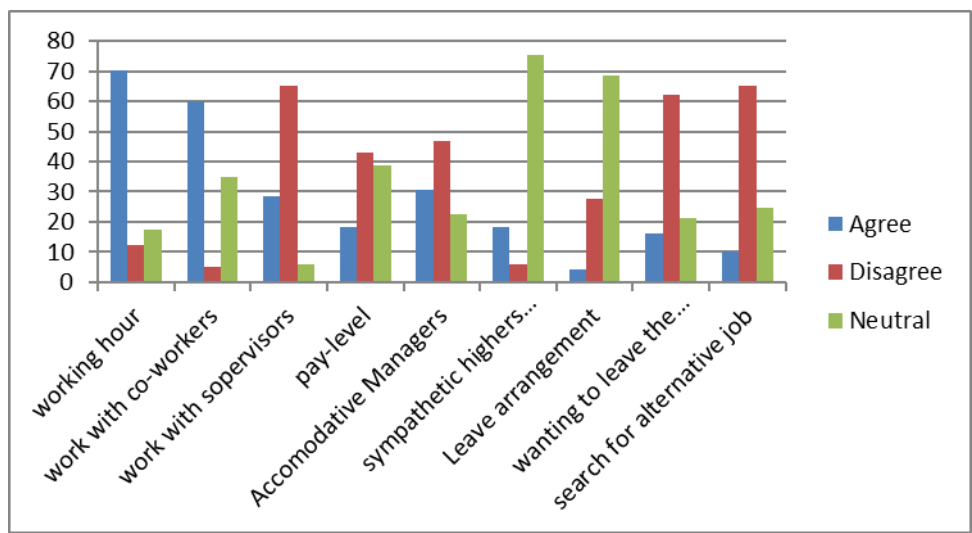Satisfaction level of employees

Figure 4 Satisfaction level to various work related arrangement/component

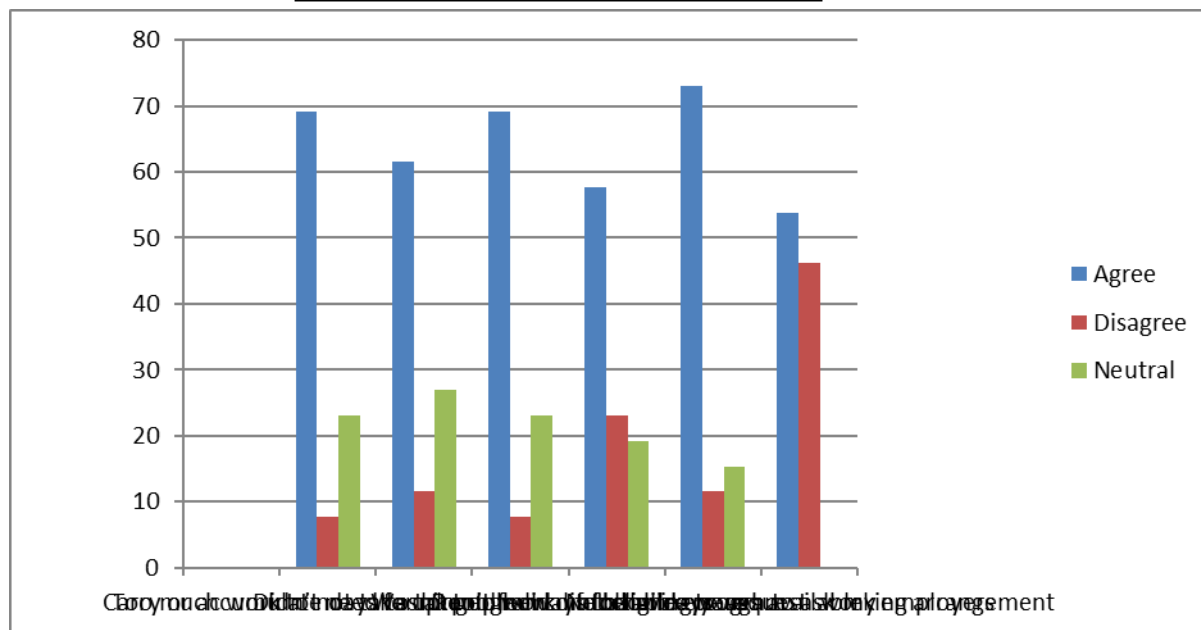Reasons for partial implementation of work-life balance Policies

Figure 5 Reasons for partial implementation of work life balance policies

Inference

Out of the 100 questionnaires that were filled , only 98 could be considered and 2 had to be rejected. Of the total (98) 52 were female nurses and 46 male. 23% of the total females were from the age group of 20-30 years , 52% from 31-40 years , 17% from 41-50 years ,3% above 50years and rest below 20years.56% of the total males were from the age group of 20-30 years , 22% from 31-40 years , 19% from 41-50 years ,and rest below 50years.There was no male nurse below 20 years of age. Most of the nursing staff had completed matriculation level,37% were graduates and only 4% were above graduation level.69% of females and 63% of males were married.46% of the staff had been working for more than 2 years and only 9% had been working for more than 7 years.

45% of the total respondents said that their organization provided work life balance policies ,about 38% said that no such policies were provided and the rest were unaware about it. About 78% revealed that management didn't consider shorter work days for family issues. Appox. 81% of the total gave a negative response about extended maternity leave which was a primary concern for most females. There is no clarity between Elderly care leave and Paid leave to care for sick family members amongst the nursing staff as there was an exact response regarding the two questions and majority (77.55%) said that it wasn't provided. Awareness has increased about Employee Assistance Programs and about 82% said that the concerned hospitals provided such programs. Stress management is the most common program taken by most of the hospitals .The most striking response was regarding the provision of a fitness centre within the organization where 100% negative response was seen , indicating that hospitals which are the prime sources responsible for good health totally ignore the fitness of their employees. Regarding placement assistance also the positive response was quite low (6.12%). About 19% of the total were unaware about any flexi time advantage policies in their respective hospitals. Approx. 57% respondents agreed that job sharing was possible which is a very relaxing factor .

When asked about responses related to level of satisfaction, majority (approx. 70%) were comfortable with their current working hours and about 60% found their co workers co-operative, which is a prime factor for mental relaxation. There was a great degree of dissatisfaction regarding the pay packages and when asked about the sympathetic attitude of senior management 75.51% remained neutral. High degree of unrest was

seen regarding current leave arrangements and 65.31% of them were looking for another job.45.92% were happy with present work life balance policies ,26.53% were not happy and the rest were neutral. Out of the 26 % respondents , there was an equal number of agreed responses regarding excessive work for not undertaking a work life balance program and no requirement for undertaking up such a program.73.08% were not comfortable asking the management which causes high degree of stress. In this era , where work life balance is given so much importance , it was surprising to know that no hospital staff knew if their organization had written copies of their 'work-life balance' policies.

Conclusion

Surat, inspite of being the fastest advancing city of Gujarat, is quite ignorant regarding work life balance policies in the health care sector. Stress free mental health which is one of the most important indicator of positive development has been ignored by the Surat hospitals. The health care sector should lay more emphasis on better leave arrangements and employee assistance program to make the work environment more congenial.

Recommendation

In order to improve staff experience of work life balance, the following suggestion are to be considered

1. Policies regarding work life balance policies should be communicated effectively and appropriately to the employees. A formal communication strategy needs to be devised while introducing work life balance policies.
2. It has been suggested that more of employee assistance program(Career counseling, fitness centre, referral services) can be provided.
3. A supportive and congenial work life culture should be developed and implemented through out the organization.
4. Introduction of programs to create awareness about the impact of work life balance at their professional and personal lives can be considered.
5. The potential demand for greater family leave can be considered.
6. Turnover intentions can be curtailed by making more use of provisions of flextime.

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