

## **PROMOTION OF MENTAL HEALTH** **Employee Well-being & Healthy Workplace**

**Do you know that** unrecognized and untreated mental illness is costing organizations billions of dollars every year in lost productivity and insurance claims as studies indicated.

BUT, then the converse is also true: the promotion of well-being will increase the productivity and profitability of organizations.

### **How important is employee's well-being?**

While studies have yet to show whether employee well-being is the cause or effect of positive business outcomes, chances are, both are true.

Productivity promotes well-being and well-being promotes productivity. Studies have shown that individuals with "positive affective states" think more efficiently and creatively and are more likely to engage in positive social behavior.

### **Are there any relationships between employee well-being and business outcomes?**

Yes, Study<sup>1</sup> have shown the followings:

- Employees who are more satisfied with life and work are more cooperative, punctual, take fewer sick days and remain employed for longer periods than dissatisfied employees.
- Employees who report higher emotional well-being receive higher performance ratings
- Employees who report greater workplace satisfaction, personal development through work and friendships at work report higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, profitability, productivity and greater employee retention

### **Where is the origin of emotional well-being?**

Employees' emotional well-being is a product of both work and home. Study<sup>2</sup> has shown the followings:

- A high level of negative "spillover" stress between work and home was associated with poorer physical and mental health.
- Conversely, high levels of positive spillover in both directions were associated with better physical and mental health.
- Negative spillovers in either direction were often paired with higher levels of stress, drinking, obesity and lower levels of exercise.
- Negative work or family environments have the potential to undermine a person's resistance to physical and psychological illnesses by compromising the immune system and affecting negative hormonal responses.

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<sup>1</sup> Corey Keyes, Stuart Hysom and Kimberly Lupo from the Department of Sociology of Emory University

<sup>2</sup> A study by Dr. Joseph G. Grzywacz, National Institute of Mental Health post-doctorate fellow at the University of California at Irvine

### **What is stress?**

Stress is increasing in the workplace, and it is taking its toll on human lives and organizational effectiveness. While some level of stress is healthy, in that it motivates us to take action and make adjustments, too much stress is harmful and one of the main contributors to mental illness at work. Some studies suggest that corporations lose about 16 days annually in productivity per person due to stress, anxiety and depression. There are different kind of stress i.e. positive stress, excessive stress and prolonged stress.

- While positive stress can be viewed as an exciting or challenging situation which enhances our lives, excessive stress can pose a threat to our physical and mental well-being when it is allowed to build up unchecked.
- Prolonged stress can cause physical and/or emotional problems such as anxiety, increased heart rate and blood pressure, headache, tense muscles, stomach problems, inability to concentrate, insomnia and fatigue. It is also linked to the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and drugs and can lead to depression.

### **What are the main causes of stress?**

As productivity demands rise and technology quickens the pace of life, emotional health becomes more and more a workplace issue.

Research shows the following phenomenon:

- People blame stress at work for problems with mental health more than any other cause – more than marriage breakdown, bereavement or loneliness.
- Much of this stress is because people are working more, losing their boundaries between work and home and dealing with the effects of the information and technology revolution.
- In technologically developed countries, modern conveniences such as computers, modems, pagers, faxes, cellular phones, voice and e-mail have all but eliminated the traditional boundaries between home and work. This means workers have less “down” time between home and work to relax, spend time with their families and pursue hobbies, exercise and entertainment.
- The rapid advances in technology have produced an information explosion. Experts estimate that the information supply is doubling every five years.
- Employees must deal with the challenge and frustration of information management in a business environment where new technology is antiquated in a matter of days. It is no surprise that researchers find that employees are “emotionally drained” and “burned out” at the end of the day.

### **What are the indicators of employee’s overall health (physical & mental)?**

- Employees who rated their health the highest were those who exercised regularly, drank only in moderation, did not smoke and did not take medication regularly.
- Social environment at work, home life, personal resources and availability of support – were also clear indicators of employee health.
- Excellent health was reported twice as often among those who felt in control of their own health and had influence over their work and had at least one person they could count on for help.
- Employers can have a positive impact on employee health by increasing social support among workers and improving their sense of control over things that happen to them at work.

This article is an excerpt from the World Mental Health Day 2001 Planning Kit, “**Section One: Mental Health and Work, [Part 3 – Promotion of Mental Health](#) : Employee Well-being & Healthy Workplace**” and has been edited for local use.