

Research Paper

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and the Promotion of Mental Health Services in Different Industries: An Analysis of the Indian Workplace

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ABSTRACT

The mental health of employees in the workplace is an integral factor of productivity, job satisfaction, and work engagement, and mental health interventions like Employee Assistance Programs must not just be carried out for the same on an individual level but to a much greater extent, so as to improve the work environment and psychological climate of the workplace as a whole. This research paper aims to analyze the effectiveness of EAPs in different industrial sectors and suggest ways to improve said practices in these industries in the context of India.

Keywords: *Employee Assistance Programs, Workplace, Mental Health, Occupational Stress, Productivity, Psychosocial Safety Climate*

A general lack of work well-being greatly influences work motivation, job satisfaction, product quality, and productivity. When employee well-being is optimized, employees focus more on their work, and their productivity increases significantly, while the poor mental health of the employees can seriously affect their ability to contribute properly in both their personal and professional lives. Mental disorders are impacting millions of working populations in India, and brief and effective mental healthcare is the need of the hour. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are work-based intervention programs that are designed to help employees address personal issues that may be adversely affecting their performance, thereby enhancing the mental well-being of employees and leading to higher levels of productivity. There are four main types of EAPs:

- External EAPs are characterized by low cost and confidentiality, these are independent EAP providers who are hired by a firm to deliver EAP services to their employees and can work with several companies at the same time.
- Internal EAPs function a lot like External EAPs but are provided by a company's own HR team or any other assigned internal team.
- Embedded EAPs are part of additional services provided by health plans to add value to their services and tend to be of lower quality.
- Modern EAP alternatives usually provide digital mental health services for companies while offering the same services as Traditional EAPs.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

World War I saw the emergence of psychological testing as a way to assess soldiers' fitness for military service and evaluate mental health in a work-related context. EAPs became an element of workplace health and safety regulations in the United States in the 1940s, initially to address issues of alcohol and substance addiction before expanding to encompass a wider range of personal and workplace problems, and began to link the employees overall well-being with their performance in the workplace. EAP services grew considerably in the 1970s, assisting employers in handling employee concerns that impacted performance and productivity. This trend continued into the 2000s, when many major businesses began employing these services, and numerous Indian organizations began incorporating EAPs within their employee support initiatives, and EAPs in India responded to a changing work environment and struggled to find a foothold in the Indian cultural set-up that was starkly different than that of the West.

Clause 5.2.8 of the Mental Health Policy (2014) provided by the government of India states that “Programmes to assist adults in handling stressful life circumstances should be incorporated in the workplace (workplace policies) and residence support programs. Workplace policies should cover those employed in the organized as well as unorganized sectors.” While EAPs in particular are not mandated by laws in India, several regulatory bodies have recognised their importance, for example, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has acknowledged their role in fostering employee well-being, and by extension, the general health of insured individuals, and have recommended that EAPs are to be incorporated in group health insurance policies. Though in the last two decades, EAPs have gradually been adopted by big corporations in India, smaller companies have been slower to incorporate such programs, and EAP providers too continue to face hurdles when it comes to raising awareness and reaching employees at all levels of the organization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Industry-Specific Analysis

For the purpose of this paper, three main industries will be analyzed, and their mental healthcare services including the efficiency of EAPs will be discussed. (IT Sector, BFSI, and Healthcare Sector.)

1. Information Technology Sector:

Stress is high in software professions because of their nature of work, target, achievements, night shift, over workload, and employees working in this industry are at great risk of developing a number of health problems due to the continuous physical and mental stress of their work. According to research, up to 80% of IT professionals report feeling stressed as a result of their work, and more than 71% of these stressed individuals were showcasing symptoms of psychiatric disorders such as anxiety, depression, psychosomatic illnesses, insomnia, and more as a result of occupational stress. EAPs have been found to be beneficial in dealing with work-related strain, inconsistent schedules, and providing an adequate environment for IT professionals, but even then high-pressure work settings, short deadlines, erratic work hours, and the need to keep up with swiftly developing technologies are all factors to consider when employing personalized sector-based EAPs. To reduce this, it is essential that the distinct workplace stressors of the IT Industry are addressed in individual EAP sessions, but it is also extremely important for corporations to take steps towards

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creating a positive psychosocial safety climate where employees are not constantly over-worked and burdened, eliminating the major source of occupational stress at its roots.

2. Banking Financial Services and Insurance:

Stress in the banking sector has reached critical levels, and it can have severe psychological and physical repercussions on employees, as well as on businesses. The nature of this industry is target-based and requires people to handle significant sums of money, make difficult financial decisions, and manage risk, all of which can be mentally exhausting. Most studies demonstrate that mental health problems, particularly occupational stress-related ones, have increased in the banking sector due to these reasons, hence making it essential to employ mental health intervention measures for the well-being of employees in this sector. EAPs in the banking and financial services industry can help employees deal with work-related stress, performance pressure, issues with work-life balance, and employee motivation, as well as improve the decision-making of the employees and the financial services of the organization as a whole. For instance, Bank of Baroda (BOB) implemented EAPs as a trial initiative in its Mumbai zone and corporate offices in late 2020 in collaboration with EAP India, and it employs multiple forms of aid via technology, in addition to workplace counseling, which is available to both the employees and their family members.

3. Healthcare Sector:

Healthcare workers are experiencing high stress and burnout, at rates up to 70%, and they experience stressors not just at the individual level, as seen in personal life stressors, but experience stressors that extend outward to their work environment. High-pressure conditions, long job hours, life-or-death decisions, exposure to traumatic scenarios, along with problems in their personal life can all have a detrimental impact on healthcare workers' mental health, and it has become essential to develop and employ interventions to address the numerous stressors that constantly affect healthcare workers. According to research, when a positive approach to stressors, problem-solving, and social support systems are utilized in the healthcare sector, symptoms of stress, sadness, or physical illness decrease, whereas when resigning or denial is used, these symptoms of stress tend to increase. Lazarus and Folkman provided similar findings in their theories and stated that when individuals refuse or fail to address the root cause of the problem and instead avoid or suppress it, more stress emerges. This leads to a condition of inability that includes burnout, depressive symptoms, and weariness. Not only is this harmful to the employees in the healthcare sector, but it also adversely affects the quality of patient care and services provided by the organization. Patient care and performance is greatly hindered when healthcare workers face such issues, and EAPs in the healthcare profession can offer critical assistance such as counseling to manage such stress, fatigue, and emotional well-being. Apart from stress management, EAPs can assist these employees with crisis intervention, and work-life balance, and can also promote mental health awareness in this sector.

Small Businesses

Small-scale businesses in these sectors either do not have any system in place for employee well-being or use Internal EAPs that are often not up to the mark in terms of care and quality. These small firms are not availing EAP services by providers because:

- They are usually unaware and uninformed about the benefits and return on investment (ROI) of these mental health services for the employees.

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- Investing adequate resources and capital for such services is often expensive and time-consuming, and cannot be availed by smaller companies.
- They face difficulty in finding EAP providers that are suited to the specific needs of their industry.

CONCLUSION

Although EAPs are slowly being incorporated by major large-scale companies in the industries of Healthcare, IT, and BFSI in India, our research shows that there is an imminent requirement of mental healthcare services and support in these industries. The employees in the IT Industry face the challenges of irregular schedules, workload, and having to keep up with constant technological changes in the workplace, which all negatively impact the mental health of employees. The Banking Financial Services and Insurance industry faces the primary problem of making mentally exhausting decisions regularly, and there are very few corporations in the industry that are actually appointing mental healthcare services for their employees that are compatible and blend with the requirements of the industry. The healthcare sector is severely lacking when it comes to mental health interventions and instead, doctors and other healthcare professionals often have no proper support system in place to manage their occupational stress, rather having to turn to suppressing or ignoring their stress, which in turn affects their quality of performance and productivity.

Mental health care services and systems can only be made possible and effective when mental health interventions like EAPs are specifically modified to the needs of each industry, keeping in mind past trends, cultural differences, stressors that are distinct and unique to the industry, and also the psychosocial safety climate (PSC) of the workplace. It was found that the PSC, which is the organizational climate for employee psychological health and safety, includes how management values and prioritizes worker psychological health, and according to PSC theory, the corporate climate for psychological health has a key impact in determining whether a workplace is stressful or not. Just as certain aspects of EAPs must be adjusted to better suit the context of the Indian Workplace rather than a western one, the role of the corporate climate of different industries must also be taken into consideration when planning and employing EAPs, which can be done through proper implementation and examination of policies, practices and procedures for psychological health and safety alongside individual interventions in the workplace.

For more organizations to avail external mental health care for their employees, EAP providers in India must be adjusted and adapted to meet the requirements of different industries and sectors, keeping in mind not only big corporations but also small companies so that mental health of the employees can be prioritized, and quality mental health services can be availed by all working persons. Modern EAP alternatives used by small firms must also be led by trained mental health professionals, ensuring confidential and secure workplace counseling that assists employees and their families in navigating through psychological and emotional issues. Furthermore, a holistic and eclectic approach must be employed when planning and providing mental healthcare services in various industries in order to create lasting change, and better the lives of millions of working Indians.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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