

Research Paper

## Counselling at Workplace

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### ABSTRACT

In today's fast paced corporate environment, mental health and wellbeing plays a crucial role. It's as important as physical health. This paper explores the significant role of workplace counseling in enhancing employee well-being and productivity. It examines the benefits, challenges, and strategies for effective implementation and evaluation of workplace counseling programs. This research focuses on providing an insight of how counseling services can be beneficial in the workplace to support employee mental health and organizational productivity. Employee well-being and productivity are critical components of a successful organization. The mental health of employees plays a significant role in success of any organization. With increasing demand in a workplace, the mental health of employees has gathered significant attention. Workplace counseling emerges as a proactive measure to address mental health issues, reduce stress, and boost overall productivity. Hence to be productive of an organization, workplace counseling should be organized for the employees. This paper aims to explore the impact of workplace counseling on employee well-being and productivity, highlighting strategies for effective implementation.

**Keywords:** *Workplace Counselling, Employee, Organization, Productivity*

**W**orkplace counseling is the counseling provided to people for their problems at their workplace. The term workplace counselling has three conjoined concepts, namely, work, workplace, and counselling. Let us see what each term means:

### Work

According to Oxford dictionary, the term work refers to the activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result.

### Workplace

The workplace is the physical or virtual environment where work is performed. It includes offices, factories, organization and any other locations where employees carry out their job responsibilities.

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### **Counselling**

Counseling is a professional service that help individuals to manage their personal, psychological or emotional problems and achieve their goals. It involves a trained counselor or therapist who provides guidance, support, and strategies to help individuals cope with challenges, improve mental health, and achieve personal goals. In the context of workplace counseling, counseling services are provided to employees to help them deal with work-related stress, interpersonal conflicts, career concerns, and other issues that may affect their job performance and well-being.

By integrating these definitions, workplace counseling can be understood as a structured intervention provided within the work environment to support employees in managing work-related and personal challenges, thereby enhancing their overall well-being and productivity.

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, BACP (2016) has defined counselling as “Counselling and psychotherapy are umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies. They are delivered by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help them bring about effective change or enhance their wellbeing”.

Workplace counselling refers to, “Counselling provided in the work setting (whether this is internal or external service provision), to help employees with any mental health issues that have arisen from, or are worsened by work” (Bajorek& Bevan, 2020)

### ***Need for the Study:***

Organizations in India have certainly realized the need for protecting employee's mental health and have started offering policies and programs that promotes positive mental health. Most programs are more employee growth oriented and family-friendly. Although, numerous organizations have introduced policies to ensure the physical wellbeing of their employees, very few organizations have explicit policies for mental health promotion and programs addressing employees' mental wellbeing. Stress at workplace is a problem less understood and more neglected among the developing nations like India. It is not only the service sector that has been facing this problem but also every workplace all over the globe. Organisations have to realize that stress at workplace has a direct impact and sometimes indirect impact on the employees work performance. Working under stress caused by various factors external to the organisation and internal to the organisation results in loss for both the organisation and the individual. Tackling stress at work can minimize the number of production problems, quality problems and other interpersonal problems at work. The present study is conducted with reference to service sector.

Based on a survey on HR managers to find out the reasons for providing workplace counselling in organizations, Bajorek (2016) reported the following purposes of workplace counselling. It provides,

- Health and well-being plans for employees (67%);
- Support to staff for specific issues (48%);
- Helps in reducing the sickness leaves (49%); and
- Improves the productivity of the organization (33%).

### ***Benefits of Counselling to Organizational Work Performance***

When an organization pays less attention to the welfare of its employees, the organization is bound to suffer reduced productivity. This is because many employees are often affected by personal problems, which result in decreased job performance. Counselling is one of the instruments that can help improve work performance in any organization.

Counselling may have many benefits:

- Counselling helps the employees to deal with problem in an effective way.
- Counselling helps to increase the productivity of the organization by keeping the employees mentally healthy.
- It helps the employees to maintain work-life balance leading them to satisfaction.
- It also improves teamwork and resolve the conflicts.
- Employees are less likely to leave an organization if they feel happy in their job.
- Counselling helps to improve coping skills and develop effective solution to the problems.
- It helps to reduce the cost of hiring new members and also saves times.
- It helps to reduce stress among their staff.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Koburtay and Alzoubi (2020) in their research entitled, “The linkages between person-organization spirituality fit and workers, psychological well-being” explored the association between workplace spirituality and psychology among employees working in the service sector. By highlighting the theoretical implications of workplace spirituality within psychology literature, the current study attempts to enhance its theoretical impact. The researchers primarily aimed towards exploring how aligning Person-Organization (P-O) spiritually can boost employee psychological wellness. A sample of 231 employees working in the service sector in Jordan was gathered using a questionnaire. There exists a significant linkage amid workers' spirituality and the workspace's religious values, and this correlation enhances the perceived fit between the two. Researchers concluded that employees who are exposed to spirituality at work have higher mental stability. In the end, the researchers concluded that to encourage the psychological well-being of workers, workplaces need to integrate a set of spiritual values. In the workplace, individuals and management should think about how to blend intelligence, awareness, motivation, ingenuity, and compassion.

Batista & Reio Jr. (2019) found that stress at workplace increased an individual's inclination to participate in unfriendly behaviours. People facing occupational stress had lower ability to cope with stress. This resulted in a habit in these individuals to emote increased level of unfriendly behaviour in the organization.

Amiri & Baghbanbashi (2018) suggest that job induced psychological stress is one of the stresses that, if excessive, can lead to physical, psychological and behavioural complications that may endanger the health of the individual.

Himani Bhasin (2018) studied on employee satisfaction and morale and had written a research paper titled “Employee Satisfaction and Morale among the Skilled Workforce of Steel Manufacturing Plant.” The purpose of the study is to identify the correlation between satisfaction and productivity; researcher studied the factors affecting employee morale and identified the HR initiatives that boost the morale of the employees. The researcher used primary data and used descriptive methodology. The study is conducted for the Tata Steel

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Processing and Distribution Ltd. The study is conducted in Faridabad in Haryana. The researcher used 100 employees as a sample; out of which 28 employees are working at associate level and 72 as a contract workers. The data is collected through structured questionnaire; also observation and structured interview was taken. The results showed that there is a relationship between satisfaction and productivity. The job satisfaction is one of the factors that affect the employee morale. Also work stress leads to low morale among the employees. The workplace cleanliness and flexibility for family responsibility also plays a vital role in increasing employee morale. The researcher did the research for a single manufacturing organization which is located in Haryana. The researcher did not study the workplace wellbeing programs as one of the factors that affect the morale of the employees. However, the researcher identified some HR initiatives that helps boost employee morale.

Khaled Al-Omari & Haneen Okasheh (2017), investigated the influence of work environment on job performance. An engineering company was taken as a case study with a sample size of 85 employees. A quantitative methodology implying a cross-sectional survey was used to satisfy the study objectives in addition to the literature review. Different dimensions were examined in relation to the work environment factors, including noise; temperature; air; light and colour; space and employers' satisfaction. The collected data was analyzed using (SPSS, Version 22).

Findings revealed that the situational constrains constituted of factors such as noise, office furniture, ventilation and light, are the major work environment conditions that have negative impact on job performance and should gain more attention. It is suggested that employers should take initiatives to motivate employees by improving their work environment. As employees are motivated, their job performance will increase, and they will achieve the desired outcomes and goals of the job. Thus, employers 'satisfaction is taken care of.

*According to guidelines of mental health at work recommendation of WHO:*

- Reasonable work accommodations should be implemented for workers with mental health conditions, including psychosocial disabilities, in line with international human rights principles
- Training managers to support their workers' mental health should be delivered to improve managers' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours for mental health and to improve workers' help-seeking behaviours
- Training workers in mental health literacy and awareness may be delivered to improve trainees' mental health-related knowledge and attitudes at work, including stigmatizing attitudes.
- WHO gave recommendation for Universal individual interventions
  - **8A:** Universally delivered psychosocial interventions that aim to build workers' skills in stress management – such as interventions based on mindfulness or cognitive behavioural approaches – may be considered for workers to promote positive mental health, reduce emotional distress and improve work effectiveness.
  - **8B:** Opportunities for leisure-based physical activity – such as resistance training, strength- training, aerobic training, walking or yoga – may be considered for workers to improve mental health and work ability.

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WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour (2020) includes recommendations for physical activity in working-age persons and notes that the relevant recommendations confer health benefits, including reduction of symptoms of anxiety and depression. Where resources are available, Recommendation 8B applies to activities that can be conducted within work settings.

- **WHO 9A** Universally delivered psychosocial interventions that aim to build workers' skills in stress management – such as interventions based on mindfulness or cognitive behavioural approaches – may be considered for health, humanitarian and emergency workers to promote positive mental health and reduce emotional distress.
- **WHO 9B** Psychosocial interventions – such as stress management and self-care training, or communication skills training – may be made available for health, humanitarian and emergency workers who are experiencing emotional distress.

WHO is committed to improving mental health at work. The WHO global strategy on health, environment and climate change and WHO Comprehensive mental health action plan (2013– 2030) outline relevant principles, objectives and implementation strategies to enable good mental health in the workplace. These include addressing social determinants of mental health, such as living standards and working conditions; reducing stigma and discrimination; and increasing access to evidence-based care through health service development, including access to occupational health services.

In 2022, WHO's World mental health report: transforming mental health for all, highlighted the workplace as a key example of a setting where transformative action on mental health is needed.

The theme for World's Mental Health Day on 10th Oct 2024 by WHO was “ Mental Health At Work”. WHO united with partners to highlight the vital connection between mental health and work.

According to WHO, Safe, healthy working environments act as a protective factor for mental health. Unhealthy conditions including stigma, discrimination, and exposure to risks like harassment and other poor working conditions, can pose significant risks, affecting mental health, overall quality of life and consequently participation or productivity at work. With 60% of the global population in work, urgent action is needed to ensure work prevents risks to mental health and protects and supports mental health at work. Hence the focus was on Mental Health at Workplace.

In 2024, multiple cases of employee deaths due to excessive work pressure have come to light in India. Here are the highlights of the cases that has called attention to toxic workplace environments.

1. **Ernst & Young (EY) Employee in Pune:** Anna Sebastian Perayil, a 26-year-old chartered accountant, died in July 2024, four months after joining EY. Her family attributed her death to extreme work stress, citing long hours and unmanageable workloads. The case brought to light the need for corporate reforms to address mental health and well-being.
2. **HDFC Bank Employee in Lucknow:** A tragic incident occurred in September 2024 when an HDFC Bank employee, Sadab Fatima, collapsed and died at her office in Lucknow. Suspected to have suffered a heart attack, her death raised concerns about work-related stress. The incident prompted political discussions, with opposition leaders linking the event to economic pressures and poor workplace conditions. This

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case followed widespread outcry over similar cases in other companies, including Ernst & Young.

- 3. Suicide by Bajaj Finance Area Manager at Lucknow:** A 42-year-old man, who was working as an area manager with Bajaj Finance, has died by suicide in Uttar Pradesh's Jhansi. Tarun Saxena has said in a note that his seniors at work had been pressuring him to meet his targets for the past two months and threatening him with salary deductions. Tarun Saxena's death by suicide and his letter blaming his senior managers come amid a nationwide conversation over toxic work culture after death of 26-year-old chartered accountant Anna Sebastian Perayil.

### **Nearly 90% Indian employees suffering or struggling: Gallup Workplace report 2024**

The 2024 Gallup State of the Global Workplace report, which examines employee mental health and wellbeing worldwide, categorized respondents into three levels: thriving, struggling, or suffering. A recent Gallup report highlights a troubling state of employee wellbeing in India, with only 14% of employees feeling they are "thriving" in life, while a staggering 86% are either struggling or suffering.

These are all the reminder of the importance of mental health in the workplace. There is a growing demand for organizations to take tangible steps toward creating healthier work environments.

### ***Psychological issues in an organization***

- Lack of recognition, motivation, appreciation and job satisfaction can reduce employee enthusiasm for their work and decreasing the productivity.
- Excessive work pressure may lead the employee to substance use such as drugs and alcohol as a way for coping through it.
- Poor communication and unhealthy relations between the colleagues of the organization can lead to tension, frustration and reduced job satisfaction.
- Long working hours and overload of work can increase stress affect mental health and decreasing the productivity.
- Discrimination on the basis of caste, gender, and religion affects negatively to the organization and the morale of the employees. It can lead to stress anxiety, and feeling of isolation among employees.
- Pressure of completing the given goals, fear of job loss and unable to balance work-life can all trigger anxiety of the employees.

### ***Suggestions:***

- Relaxation Techniques such as deep breathing exercises, muscle relaxation techniques and meditation can be used to manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. These activities help to calm the mind and body, leading to reduced stress and tension. Relaxation lowers blood pressure, respiration, and pulse rates, releases muscle tension, and eases emotional strains. It helps to stay calm and relaxed and the individual learns to focus the attention and awareness.
- Setting SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound Goals): It includes breaking down large tasks into smaller and manageable objectives that are clear and attainable. It helps the employees to enhance focus productivity.
- Taking time to laugh in the mid of the work pressure in the organization relieves stress and boredom. Studies have shown laughter can decrease stress hormones in the blood, as well as increase our feel good chemical, endorphine.

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- Counselors should be available for the employees in the workplace and if not then a counselor visit to the workplace should be must time to time.
- Appreciation and motivation by the employers and managers to the employees must be done to keep their motivation high.
- Avoiding discrimination in the workplace can increase the productivity of the employees. Treating employees fairly and with respect increases their sense of belongingness. Hence a positive workplace culture leads to higher job satisfaction and motivation leading to increase in productivity.
- Introducing game section in the workplace can helps to increase the wellbeing of the employees. Team based games during the break hours can helps to build strong relationship among employees increasing their bond.
- Providing spaces for employees to rest when feeling overwhelmed during work would be beneficial for employee well being and their productivity as power nap helps to restore the energy, reduce irritability and can have significant benefits for both employee well- being and workplace productivity.
- Ensuring that the organization has the proper facilities of sanitization and access to fresh water significantly impacts the well-being and mental health of employees. A clean and well-organized physical environment positively impacts their mental health.
- Scheduling wellness activities such as yoga, meditation can also helps in wellness of employees.
- Providing work from home to the employees during time of crisis can help in supporting employees mental health and provide flexibility to manage their personal and professional life. Being at home during emergency such as health issues can provide employees emotional support from their family or loved ones.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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