

Editorial

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Building 'A Mental Health - Friendly Workplace': Employer's Cost Effective Investment

Health and safety in the workplace mainly considers physical, biological, chemical and ergonomic issues as their top priorities. Workplace mental health is often neglected in the overall wellbeing of a person although people spend most of their time in their workplace. Hence, the healthy workplace vision in the organization should encompass a mental healthy workplace vision too to mitigate the economic impact to the organization. The estimated annual cost for mental health issues in the United States is 2.5 trillion US dollars and the number is expected to climb up to 6 trillion US dollars by 2030. In Europe, the cost of work related depression was €617 billion a year.

Stress, depression and anxiety are common mental health issues in the workplace. One in five workers experience mental health problem while 50% depressive people are untreated. In Japan, 32.4 % of workforce is reported to have anxiety, worry and stress from work. These numbers will keep rising due to the current global issues which includes the economic crisis. Restructuring, downsizing, layoff, subcontracting, outsourcing and many more organizational changes contributes to job difficulties, burden, burn out, financial problems leading to stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health difficulties. In addition to the economic impact, mental health issues at workplace increases absenteeism, presenteeism, workplace injury, reduction in performance and productivity. In the UK, six in 10 people state lack of concentration at work due to poor mental health resulting in nearly 70 million work days being lost each year. Symptoms and signs of mental health problems such as poor sleep, extreme tiredness, lack of focus and reduce concentration certainly can cause workplace injury.

Despite massive impacts on health, safety and economy, mental health in workplace have received less attention as compared to other health issues. The stigma attach to the people with mental illness is one of the major issue for not addressing this problem at workplace. Hiding the symptoms, delay in seeking treatment, reluctance to discuss the problem openly are the consequences of the stigma. Even to tell their colleague that they have a family of mental illness is an embarrassment for some people. Worry about losing the job, places the employee in a dilemma as to whether they should disclose their mental health condition or not. Almost 80% of individuals with serious mental illnesses loose their jobs. Support in the workplace is limited when it comes to mental health issues and workers fear discrimination. This is due to the lack

of awareness in the organization. A survey done among 500 employers in UK revealed 44% believed workforce despite under stress was still able to work effectively. 42% thought workplace mental health policies / stress were made just to avoid litigation.

Workplace intervention is needed to reduce stigma and improving workers wellbeing for maximum productivity. Employer's engagement and investment in mental health awareness are proven to be cost effective. Building a mental health-friendly workplace is a good investment in human capital. It has several characteristic, specific practices and policies. Firstly, the workplace must welcome all qualified job applicant without discrimination. Mental health receives due attention similar to any physical illness. The work-life balance is also a priority in health promotion. Apart from health promotion, the mental-health friendly workplace should not neglect the training needed by the managers and supervisor to detect early warning sign of mental illness, basic counselling skills to assist employee in need and training of mental health first aid among the employees. An Employee Assistance Program can be provided by the organization to help in the workers or managers in need. The employee who requires hospitalization due to mental health problem must be supported by the employers including the plan to return to work. If the employee need to be terminated or leave the company, it must be done with respect and the exit must be dignity. These are some of the policies and practices to ensure a mental health-friendly workplace

Developing mental health awareness and wellbeing in the work culture is a responsibility of every individual at different levels in an organization. Employee takes several steps in the prevention while employers provides mental health awareness and design appropriate policy. It requires patience, courage and dedication to build the workforce equipped with a healthy mind and body. They are the workforce who produce maximum output to generate economic growth for the organization as well as to the nation. Let us all become a change agent promoting mental health in workplace.

REFERENCE

Mental Health in the WorkPlace.wfmh.global/wmh-day 2017 Report

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