



EXPLORING THE PREFERABLE MENTALLY HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT AMONG COLLEGE TEACHERS

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Abstract

As part of the World Mental Health Day observation on October 10, the Psychology Department at Periyar University conducted a survey on Mental Health in the Workplace, the theme proposed by World Federation of Mental Health (WFMH), USA for the World Mental Health Day 2017. The present study is the report of the one question survey among the assistant professors who teach in the colleges affiliated to Periyar University Jurisdiction. The study aims to explore the attitude towards mentally healthy workplace among faculty members. In order to raise awareness in social media the WFMH requested the mental health professionals across the globe to enquire into the question "For me mentally healthy workplace is ____?". The pamphlet containing this question was circulated among 115 assistant professors in the colleges affiliated to Periyar University. The data were content analysed in an exploratory manner. The one question survey yielded 105 different themes and the total frequency was 152 from 115 people. The frequency analysis revealed that for these faculty members peaceful environment topped the most preferable mentally healthy workplace following an environment that gives freedom and motivation. The sample consisted of assistant professors from Colleges affiliated

to Periyar University and generally they differ based on the organizational climate of their campuses. In the main paper strategies will be discussed to promote peaceful environment, freedom and staff motivation in the college campuses.

Keywords: WFMH, Mental Health, Workplace and Teacher.

Introduction

As the individual/ individual organization has to globally compete with their counterparts in across the world, present day workplace has become highly stressful. Locally, for instance, in Tirupur - also known as "T-shirt city" which accounts for approximately 80% of India's total production of knitwear for export- 32.6% of the 514 garment industry workers, in a study by (Padmini & Venmathi, 2012) reported that the psychosocial hazards were one among the other five reasons for their ill health. It has been further explored that frustration due to type of work, risks involved in work, monotony, long working hours, lack of recognition, lack of job satisfaction, poor man/woman management, lack of welfare activities and tensions at home and place of work (Padmini & Venmathi,) were some of such psychosocial hazards. Young workers in Tirupur were found reported to have health complaints that were



more common among older people (Prithiviraj et al., 2002). Besides, it has been observed by the investigator in the newspapers that the elder members of the family in Tirupur were found giving obituary in the newspaper for their younger adult members who were in international business. The case of Tirupur is a visible example for the psychosocial plight of individuals at the workplace. India has many such cities and each city is known for its industrial specialization (eg. Coimbatore for Motor Industry). Stéphane Dujarric (2017), Spokesman for the Secretary-General, UN quoted WHO saying “a negative working environment may lead to physical and mental health problems, harmful use of substances, absenteeism and lost productivity. However, employers and managers who put in place initiatives to promote mental health and to support employees who have mental disorders see gains not only in the health of their employees but also in their productivity at work”.

According to the WMHD 2017 report 10% of the employed population have taken time off work for depression. An average of 36 workdays is lost per depression episode. 50% of people with depression are untreated. 94% Cognitive symptoms of depression, such as for instance difficulties in concentrating, making decisions and remembering, are present up to 94% of the time during an episode of depression (1) causing significant impairment in work function and productivity (2) 43% of managers want better policies.

The concept of mental health at the workplace has been studied by many scholars systematically right from the ages of Hawthorne Studies (1920-1930s) which tried to improve the productivity by improving working conditions.

Stansfeld and Candy (2006) conducted a meta-analysis on the psychosocial work environment and mental health focussing on longitudinal studies. They revealed that Job strain, low decision latitude, low social support, high psychological demands, effort-reward imbalance, and high job insecurity were found to predict common mental disorders. Of them the strongest effects were found for job strain and effort-reward imbalance. Further they concluded that the psychosocial work environment is important for mental health.

Against this backdrop as part of the World Mental Health Day (WMHD) observation on October 10, a survey was conducted on Mental Health in the Workplace, the theme proposed by World Federation of Mental Health (WFMH), USA for the WMHD 2017. The WFMH is an international organization founded in 1948 to advance the prevention of mental and emotional disorders, the proper treatment and care of those with such disorders, and the promotion of mental health (WFMH, 2018). The present study is the report of that survey.

Methodology

The study aims to explore the preferable mentally healthy work environment among college teachers. In order to raise awareness in social media the WFMH requested the mental health professionals across the globe to enquire into the question “For me mentally healthy workplace is ___?” Hence, in this present study a pamphlet containing the above mentioned question was used to raise the WFMH awareness on WMHD. The pamphlet containing this question was circulated among 115 assistant professors in the colleges in Salem city, Tamilnadu, India. The data were content analysed to identify different themes



related to workplace mental health. Since the theme of the WMHD 2017 is in the form of a single question to create the awareness, as the survey has to be completed before the WMHD 2017 (10th October), it was circulated among college faculty members. In its best effort to create mental health awareness among various sections of the society the WFMH has been observing and motivating other organizations to observe the day across the world.

Results

The one question survey yielded 52 different themes and totally 105 faculty members had responded out of 115. The frequency analysis revealed that for these faculty members peaceful environment topped the most preferable mentally healthy workplace following an environment that gives freedom and motivation. Table 1 indicates the frequency and the relative percentage of the themes preferred by the faculty members.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY OF THEMES FROM PREFERABLE WORK ENVIRONMENT IN THE DESCENDING ORDER

S. No.	Themes	f	%
1	Peaceful Environment	15	14.3
2	Freedom-Of-Expression	12	11.4
3	Equality	9	8.6
4	Motivation	7	6.7
5	Collaborative-Environment	5	4.8
6	Encouragement	3	2.9
7	Adopt Environment	2	1.9
8	Dedicated-To-Work	2	1.9
9	Democratic	2	1.9
10	Don't-Scold-Teachers-In front-Of-The-Students	2	1.9
11	Friendly-Manner	2	1.9
12	Helping-Tendency	2	1.9
13	No-Interpret	2	1.9
14	Positive-Workplace	2	1.9
15	Acceptations	1	1.0
16	Analyses-the- characteristic	1	1.0
17	Atmosphere	1	1.0

18	Certain-Limits	1	1.0
19	Class-Room	1	1.0
20	Clean-Neat-Environment	1	1.0
21	Clear-Conversation	1	1.0
22	Co-Ordination	1	1.0
23	Condition-To-Work-Freedom	1	1.0
24	Conduct-Tour-For-Staffs-Yearly-Once	1	1.0
25	Conduct-Training-Program	1	1.0
26	Continue-This-Similar-Way	1	1.0
27	Discipline	1	1.0
28	Don't-Interfere-My-Work	1	1.0
29	Faculty-Programme	1	1.0
30	Flexibility-Friendly -Manner	1	1.0
31	Follow discipline-Rules	1	1.0
32	following -the -rules	1	1.0
33	Full-Pledged-Interest-Work	1	1.0
34	Full-Satisfaction-Work	1	1.0
35	Good-Respect	1	1.0
36	Good-Salary	1	1.0
37	I-Want-Break-Time	1	1.0
38	Innovative	1	1.0
39	Interaction-Environment	1	1.0
40	Interaction-With-Teachers-Students	1	1.0
41	It-Gives-Happiness	1	1.0
42	Job-Satisfaction	1	1.0
43	Justice	1	1.0
44	Meditation	1	1.0
45	Mental-Comfort	1	1.0
46	Mental-Health-Awareness	1	1.0
47	No-Tension	1	1.0
48	Open-Type	1	1.0
49	Opportunity	1	1.0
50	Pleasant	1	1.0
51	Positive-Thoughts	1	1.0
52	Prevention-Stress	1	1.0
	Total	105	100.0

Table 2 summarizes the theme of preferable work environments by the faculty. It can be observed that teachers in the campus prefer Peaceful workplace, workplace that fosters Freedom-Of-Expression, Equality, Motivation and Collaborative-Environment. In addition to the regular workplace issues like any other organization it should be also seen in the light of campus related peculiar issues like student unrest due to banning student think tank centres inside the campus; financial hardships, ban on student entry in the campus on Valentines' day; suicides in the campus;



corruption etc. These issues are found to affect the normal day to day functioning and the mental health of the campus.

The campus environment of college and university faculties also encounters many changes due to frequent amendments in the regulations by the governing bodies. Even in the western universities the fast changing nature of the work environment is of the major focus. Leisyte and Dee (2012) studied academic work in a changing institutional environment. They have revealed four trends in European and US research universities viz., a shift away from the “integrated scholar” model toward structurally differentiated academic roles; influence of the priorities of external funding agencies leading the faculty to use diverse strategies to preserve their autonomy and address externally-defined research agendas; in Europe, the quantification of research outputs becoming a common trend whereas in the United States, publish-or-perish logics defining the academic hierarchy of disciplines and institutions; and finally faculty identity being increasingly shaped by the institutional context such as the norms of academic capitalism, especially in the United States.

Based on the data given in the Figure 1 displays the graphical representation of word frequency. The larger the word in the visual the more frequency it has in the table Word clouds enable us to identify trends and patterns that would otherwise be very complex in the traditional tabular format.

Discussion

If we compare the results of the present study with that of Stansfeld and Candy (2006)'s meta-analysis low Job strain, high decision latitude, high social support, low psychological

demands, effort-reward balance, and low job insecurity would found to predict workplace mental health.

If we are to focus on the improvement of mental health at the workplace the National Mental Health Survey of India, 2015-16, recommends in its 12th recommendation that mental health in work places and educational institutions using life skills techniques can aim at health promotion, early detection as well as awareness programmes on mental health (for common mental disorders like depression, anxiety, stress reduction, alcohol and tobacco, use, etc.,) and should be promoted at all levels; development of programme implementation guidelines, mechanisms and resources are critical requirements.

Mental Health Foundation, UK has provided modules for managing mental health in the workplace. It highlights that 70 million working days are lost each year due to the mental health problems at the workplace. Some of the causes it describes range from the most commonly experienced symptoms of stress and anxiety to more complex mental health conditions, such as depression, bipolar disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder. It further lists down the repercussions for employers such as increased staff turnover, sickness absence due to debilitating depression, burnout and exhaustion, decreased motivation and lost productivity.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that thought financial compensation may play a vital role in workplace moreover happiness, as generally believed, psychological peace, freedom of expression, equality and motivation also play role in maintaining workplace mental health, academic campuses are unique in many ways



in different cultures and like other industries they are also subjected to the impact by many micro, macro political and economic environments. However, it is the duty of behavioural researchers to analyse and provide solutions for the better workplace.

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