

Work Stressors

In addressing the issue of workers' health and wellness, attention is more often than not focused on the physical well-being of the individual. Most discussions and conversations tend to focus on non-communicable diseases, such as hypotension and diabetes. These two diseases are now commonplace within the society. In recent times, musculoskeletal disorders have begun to feature as a health and wellness issue that is impacting on the productivity of workers. The concern about this, added to the issue of obesity, have widened the discussion on health and wellness issues that warrant greater attention.

Prior to the entry of COVID-19, there also existed the issue of psychological disorders. Though these were of concern, they were not often addressed in much the same way as was the case for non-communicable diseases and musculoskeletal disorders. Non-communicable diseases and musculoskeletal disorders have now been identified as prolonged workplace stressors, which can have immediate impact on worker productivity, performance and well-being.

It would seem that much has been taken for granted when it comes to paying attention to addressing psychological stressors in the workplace. Workers who sense that they are under pressure, might find that they are ignored or dismissed, and moreover, chastised and placed in the category of a complainer. This type of response generally comes when an employee raises concerns regarding the heavy workload, increase responsibilities, pressure to meet deadlines and cries out against a seemingly uncooperative and uncaring management. All this is capped by the fact that in some cases, employees are of the opinion that they are subject to harassment in different forms. It may be fair to say, that there are these who consider themselves as victims of bullying and sexual harassment.

Employees who are not emotionally strong, are pressured where they face unreasonable demands made by the employer, where there are not embraced in the organizational culture, encounter interpersonal relationship problems, find themselves overlooked for promotional opportunities, faced with not being recognized and are excluded from participating in the decision-making process. These and other factors along with poor workplace communication can be intimidating to the individual.

It is quite possible that these factors constitute the catalyst for anxiety, frustration and stress. Though not supported by scientific evidence, it is felt that personal humiliation and acts of discriminatory behaviour could also contribute to the stress which is generated. These in turn can serve to impact on the individual's outlook, thinking, and attitude. Such demoralization can have a deliberating effect.

There is merit in the argument that prior to COVID-19, the psychological scars were ever present. In the now COVID-19 environment, there is more than likely to be an intensification of the

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workplace stressors which will impact workers. As the job market contracts, and the uncertainty of maintaining employment, those who are employed will go to work with the constant fear of having to learn that their services are no longer required.

The loss of a job will in most cases drive pain in the hearts of those who have family responsibilities and other financial obligations. The thought of losing property, possessions and/or investments could be psychologically devastating. To add insult to injury, some workers who now find themselves in the unemployed group, are challenged to receive outstanding payments, such as salary or wages in lieu of notice, vacation pay, severance payments, and other benefits and entitlements.

The situation for most part becomes every drier when it is considered that finding employment in the current climate is an ongoing nightmare. The act of discrimination in employment becomes a reality, as there is the tendency to recruit and employ younger persons.

Coming out of the COVID-19 experience, there are life stressors which are severely challenging workers in balancing their work and personal lives. Chief amongst these is that of the financial challenge. This is extremely problematic, to the point that it can potentially impact on the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of persons. The difficulty which presents itself is that of finding an appropriate solution. It is in this situation that the benefits of an Employee Assistance Programme can be derived. It is known that the Employee Assistance Programme is designed to help employees better manage their personal situation, provides confidential support, resources and referrals.

Employers who have the programme in place, would do well to ensure that workers are offered needed support, prior to displacing them whether by lay off or retrenchment, or moving to reduce working hours, introducing flexible work time, zero contract hours or home working.

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