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Effects of Wellness Programs on Job Satisfaction, Stress and Absenteeism between Two Groups of Employees (Attended and Not Attended)

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Abstract

This paper presents significant relationships between employees who have attended wellness program and those who have not attended wellness program with employees' job satisfaction, stress and absenteeism. This study was conducted at a major telecommunication company in Malaysia. 125 employees of the company were selected as respondents of this study by using simple random sampling. In addition, 63 of these respondents had attended the wellness programs whereas the other 62 had not attended the programs provided by the company. A survey questionnaire was used for data collection. The research hypotheses were tested using T-test. The findings revealed that higher job satisfaction were found in the respondents who have attended wellness program than the respondents who have not attended wellness program. The findings also showed that lower employees' perceived stress was found among the respondents who have attended wellness program than those who have not attended wellness program; and lower employees' absenteeism was found in the respondents who have attended wellness program than the respondents who have not attended wellness program. As a conclusion, corporate wellness program is important in promoting employees to be concerned about their health status, possibility of having sickness, and tailored treatment for their health. The challenge now is to inculcate this activity as a culture within the employees so that they would have a positive perception towards wellness programs.

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1. Introduction

In the field of human resources, wellness programs help companies contain health expenditures among their employees. A century ago, one of the first worksite-based recreation and fitness programs were formed in Pullman Company in 1879. However, the growth of worksite recreation and fitness programs slower down for several decades until the National Employee Services and Recreation Association (NESRA) was formed in 1941 and spearheaded greater interest in employees' health. Currently, over half of all midsize and large American companies offer at least one type of corporate health promotion activity with a growing number of smaller employers catching on (Chenoweth, 1998). The contributions of corporate health promotions have been recognized by many companies in global market. Yet, result of this study need to be justified due to various differences between developed countries and developing countries.

Some researchers have been attempting studies on how wellness program could play its key role. For example, according to Johnson & Johnson studies (Janice, 1997), they indicated positive opportunity costs, business-unit-wide of health promotion programs. From his study, positive effects on wellness program were found on regular exercise participation, fitness levels, patients' medical cost, employee satisfaction, smokers' quit rates and on an indirect measure of productivity. Besides that, Connors (Janice, 1997) also found that some companies have also enjoyed intangible benefits such as improved employee morale, health and productivity, employee attraction and retention, and improved image for corporations.

The aims of this study were to identify the significant difference between employees who have attended wellness program and those who have not attended wellness program with employees' job satisfaction, stress and absenteeism.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Importance of Wellness Programs

Wellness program is seen as a way to stop the bleeding in health care costs (Top Insurance News, 2010). Actually implement employee wellness program create a win-win situation between employer and employees. Employer win with reduce tangible cost in the area of healthcare, disability, absenteeism, and worker's compensation. Whereby, employees are benefited by learning how to lead a healthy lifestyle and how to be safe on job (Bates, 2006, cited in Wellness Proposal, 2006). "Twenty-five percent of what you spend on health care every year is something we can change through wellness; the tools, the programs, that is what's going to affect your bottom line," said Dr Terry Fouts, senior vice president for Great-West Healthcare (Top Insurance News, 2010). This means wellness program can assist a company to enjoy lower costs and greater financial savings, by retaining the better employees without affecting human resource which has been seen as fundamental issue of a company.

Besides increasing employees' morale and retaining key people, wellness program results in fewer injuries, less human error and harmonious work environment. Moreover, when employees know that their company is concerned about their health and wellness, indirectly can increase their loyalty and satisfaction. Additionally, according to John Bates (Wellness Proposal, 2006) employee wellness program can result in economic saving in four areas: reduction in demand for medical services; reduction in

employee absenteeism; reduction in on-the-job injuries and worker's compensation costs; and reduction in disability costs.

2.2. *Effects of Wellness Programs*

A fit employee population can be created with best fit implementation of wellness program. By implementing such program, it gives employees a feeling of being more than a usual resource of organization. This program also shows employees that the organization acknowledges that both employer and employee share some responsibility towards employee's health. Organization's concern on wellness program reminds employee that their health is the utmost importance to the development of the organization. According to Health Canada, corporate wellness programs can reduce the impact of stress, increase workplace safety, reduce employee's absenteeism, increase energy and greatly improve overall employee satisfaction (Club Fit Corp, 2007). Therefore, most organizations expected the participation of employees in wellness program would return with great benefits in the workplace like low perceived stress problems, high job satisfaction and low absenteeism.

3. Research Methodology

A quantitative descriptive survey research was chosen for this study. The population consists of all executive employees in the chosen telecommunication company. There are approximately 1000 employees from different units of organization. 125 respondents were selected as a sample of this study using simple random sampling method. In this study, self-administered questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. Basically, the items in the questionnaire were derived and adapted from the literature review. These questions were categorized into Section A, B and C. Section A was designed to obtain the information regarding the demographic characteristic of the respondents like age, gender, race, marital status, and job position. Meanwhile, Section B consists of statements on employees' response to the wellness programs that had been carried out in their company. Section C contains statements on the employee's stress, job satisfaction and absenteeism. A five-point rating scale ranged from Strongly Disagree with the value of one to Strongly Agree with the value of five was used in Section B and C.

Table 1. Results of reliability and validity tests

Measure	Items	Factor Loading	KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained	Cronbach Alpha
Wellness Program	5	0.631 to 0.897	0.799	45.279, p=.000	3.758	75.166	0.895
Stress	4	0.646 to 0.868	0.744	43.845, p=.000	2.631	65.781	0.816
Job Satisfaction	3	0.461 to 0.943	0.624	11.796, p=.008	1.768	58.919	0.648
Absenteeism	3	0.850 to 0.954	0.769	77.450, p=.000	2.704	90.129	0.945

Table 1 presents the results of reliability and validity tests. Reliability and validity tests were conducted to ensure that the survey questions were clearly phrased and would be easily answerable by members of the sample without ambiguous, unclear or misleading questions. The KMO score for each

variable was more than 0.6. These variables were significant in Bartlett’s test of sphericity. All variables had Eigenvalues larger than 1. The items for each variable had factor loadings of 0.4 and above, indicating that it met the acceptable standard of validity analysis (Coakes and Steed, 2002). According to Nunally and Bernstein (1994), the result of reliability analysis showed that the value of Cronbach alpha met the acceptable standard of reliability analysis (between 0.648 and 0.945).

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Characteristics

This study comprised of 125 respondents. Majority of them are between 22 to 27 years old (56%). The smallest representative age group is between 40 to 45 years old which constituted 3.2%. The company has more male respondents (62.4%) compared to female (37.6%) and majority of them are Chinese (81.6%). 71.8% of the respondents are not yet married.

4.2. Different perception on effects between respondents who have or have not attended wellness program

The results in Table 2 showed that employees who have attended wellness program have higher satisfaction on wellness program and job satisfaction, lower perceived stress and absenteeism than those who have not attended wellness program. T-test results ($t=2.614$, $p=0.010$) indicated that there was a significant difference between employees who have attended wellness program and those who have not attended wellness program with employee’s job satisfaction. Thus, the H1 was accepted. According to the findings, higher job satisfaction were found in the respondents who have attended wellness program (mean= 3.7672) than the respondents who have not attended wellness program (mean= 3.5269).

Table 2. T-test results

Effects on employees	Participant attended wellness program or not?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-test for Equality of Means		
					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Job Satisfaction	Attended	63	3.7672	.42601	2.614	123	.010
	Not attended	62	3.5269	.58998			
Stress Level	Attended	63	2.1865	.36469	2.020	123	.046
	Not attended	62	2.3508	.53074			
Perceived Absenteeism	Attended	63	1.7249	.53057	2.001	123	.048
	Not attended	62	2.0054	.97602			

H1: There is a significant difference between employees who have attended wellness program and those who have not attended wellness program with employees’ job satisfaction.

Some of the wellness program like anti-smoking campaign, anti-drug campaign, weight management and stress management could assist employees in improving their behavior and attitude. As cited in Janice

(1997), a research done by Shinew and Crossley (1998) has found that improved morale and attitude of employee are likely to improve overall job satisfaction. Meanwhile, the validated importance of wellness program on job satisfaction had led to replication of further studies by other researcher. The Perrier Survey of Fitness found that those with a strong commitment to exercise would feel less tired, more relaxed, more self-confident and more productive (Spark People, 2011). This survey shows that company which is organizing wellness program could influence employee's overall job satisfaction and performance. This is because when employees have better impression towards the employer who is concerned about their health, they may feel valued and being an important member of the organization, and thus lead to a better job satisfaction.

H2: There is a significant difference between employees who have attended wellness program and those who have not attended wellness program with employees' perceived stress.

The T-test results ($t= 2.02$, $p=0.046$) showed that the H2 was accepted as well. Therefore, there was a significant difference between employees who have attended wellness program and those who have not attended wellness program with employees' perceived stress. Lower employees' perceived stress were found among the respondents who have attended wellness program (mean= 2.1865) than those who have not attended wellness program (mean= 2.3508). According to Gibson (2006), a research indicated that exercise can protect individuals by enhancing the state of resistance to any stimulus, so that the individual is less susceptible to the effects of perceived stress. Some wellness program offered various kind of exercises according to employee's preference, like gym session, yoga session, or aerobic session. The outcome of Gibson's research had indicated the important of wellness program in reducing perceived stress.

H3: There is a significant difference between employees who have attended wellness program and those who have not attended wellness program with employees' absenteeism.

It was clearly showed in Table 2 that there was a significant difference between employee who have attended wellness program and those who have not attended wellness program with employees' absenteeism ($t= 2.001$, $p= 0.048$). Therefore, H3 was accepted. Lower employees' absenteeism were found in the respondents who have attended wellness program (mean= 1.7249) than the respondents who have not attended wellness program (mean= 2.0054). According to John Bates (Wellness Proposal, 2006), employee wellness program can result in economic saving by reduction in employee absenteeism. Meanwhile, Johnson and Johnson reduced their organization absenteeism rate by 15 % within two years after introducing wellness program in their organization (Dr Peter's Principle Reveal, 2006). This result was further supported by a study which has been done in Motorola, Penang, whereas overall absenteeism rate was reduced by 12% after a series of wellness program being carried out within six months (ASP, 2005).

5. Conclusion

Wellness program was found to be influential to employee's job satisfaction, stress and absenteeism in this study. Wellness programs have positive impact not only toward employee's wellbeing but organization wellbeing as well. Most of the literatures being referred were conducted in the context of foreign developed countries. Furthermore, those researches were conducted in a longer timeframe and complicatedly combined various aspects under one study. Somehow, this research has been localized and

simplified into a main objective as mentioned earlier. Hopefully, the finding of this study would very much contribute to the existing literature reviews for future researchers.

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