

Workplace Conditions and its Influence on the Employees: The Case of East-Central Africa Division of the SDA Church.

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Abstract

Health is fundamental to human wellbeing and work is an integral part of one's life. Wrongful manipulation of the work environment introduces hazards that make the environment unsafe and can threaten health and wellbeing. The workplace must be conducive for the worker to perform his or her work to ensure safety, optimum health and productivity. It has been established that people are both affected by their work environment and experiences as a result of wrong working policy regulating the work environment.

The study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods to critically analyze the conditions prevailing at the workplace of the East-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its impact on the health and wellbeing of the employees.

About 74% of the respondent indicated that they work in a flexible working environment, which encourages and enhances health. The organization has working policy favorable to employee health and wellbeing. The study found that 75% of the employees are very happy at their current workplace environment and would like to continue working there, while 5.7% said they are not happy and would not like to continue working in their current workplace and 19.3% remained undecided. The study will help create the needed necessary awareness in the organization that could enhance employees' health and wellbeing at the workplace.

Key Words: Workplace, Conditions, Health, Wellbeing,

1. Introduction

The changing nature of work, with its organization, increased workload, technical development, insecure employment, the cultural, physical and psychological environment etc. can contribute to deteriorating health among employees. A workplace environment is not only the physical characteristics of a workspace, it also involves relationships between management and employees, and how the employees perform their jobs, engage their creativity, communication styles, the employee's attitudes, and the overall tone of a business (Emerson, 2007). Health is fundamental to human wellbeing and work is an integral part of one's life. Research (Donaldson & Weiss, 1998), has shown that work is of primary importance, both socially and personally, for individuals throughout the world. Work does not only contribute to one's economic wellbeing but also establishes patterns of social interaction, imposes a schedule on people's lives, and provides them with structure, a sense of identity, and self-esteem (Donaldson & Weiss, 1998).

On the other hand, people fall sick, decrease their work performance and motivation, become more dissatisfied, or change work due to conditions prevailing in their work environment. The manner in which work is organized such as pace and intensity, degree of control over the work process, sense of justice, work security, nature of work, etc. can be detrimental to the health of workers. Research (Kivimäki, et al., 2004), has documented that health adverse effects of low self esteem at work are not restricted to contractual unfairness but may extend to less specific experiences of relational injustice at work. These factors do not only have consequential effect on employees but also greatly affect the companies as well as society. The aim of this research is to explore the workplace conditions of the East-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with its headquarters in Kenya and to analyze the impact of these conditions on the health and wellbeing of the employees.

Wrongful manipulation of the work environment introduces hazards that make the environment unsafe and hinder the productivity rate of the worker. The workplace must be conducive for the worker to perform his or her work to ensure productivity. It has been established that people are both affected by their work environment and experiences relating to a range of injustice in their work places (Van der Doef, Maes, 1999). Occupational stress or work-related stress worldwide is undoubtedly a major cause of mental illness in recent times (Nako, 2010). In Canada, 28% of workers reported that they find most days at work either quite or extremely stressful

(Bergman et al., 2009). Also in the United Kingdom, (Office for National Statistics et al., 2010) estimates an annual incidence rate of 7.6% for work-related stress, depression or anxiety among workers.

2. The East-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

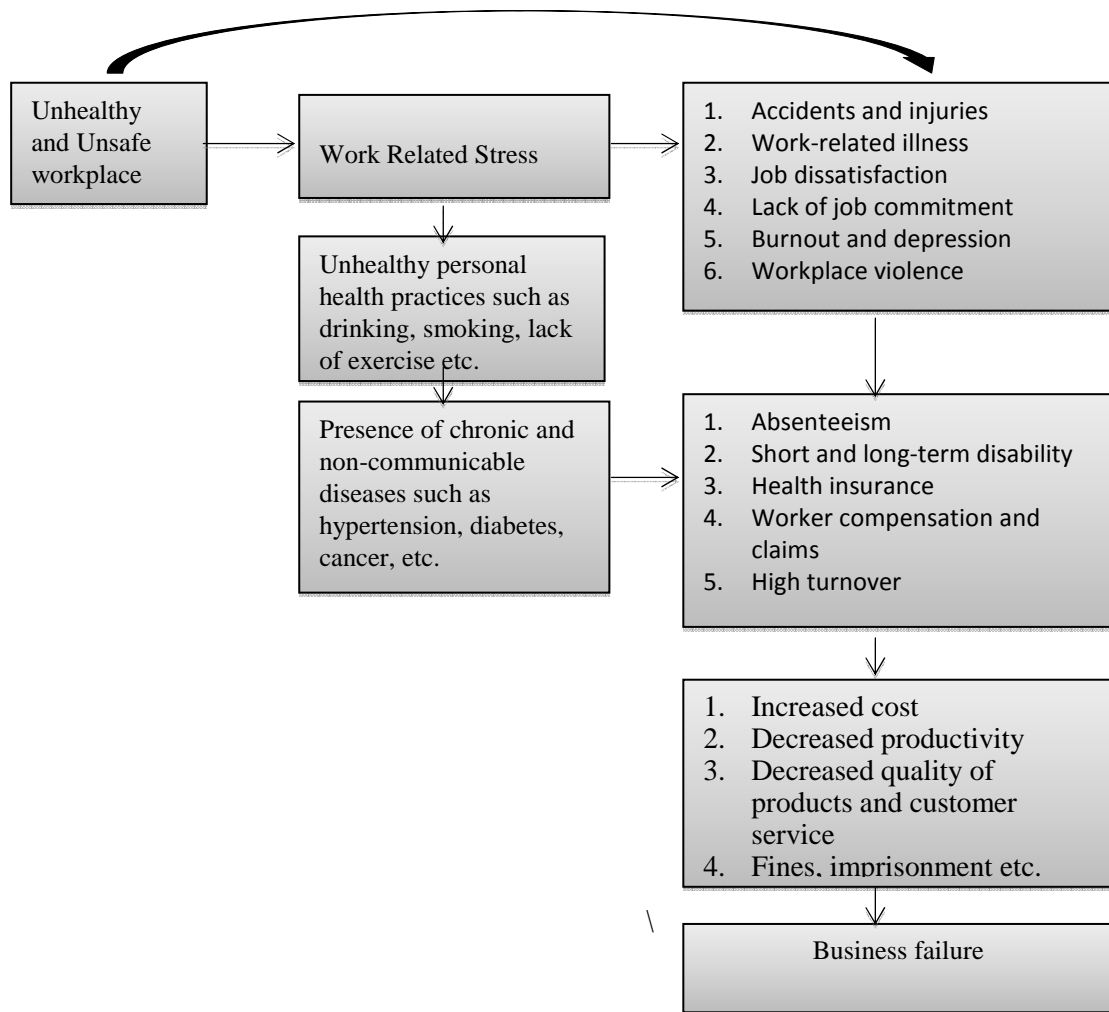
The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) has a total active employees of about Five Thousand, Seven Hundred and Forty Four (5,744) working in various positions and a church membership of about three million (Trim, 2013). The ECD territory covers ten countries and has its headquarters in Kenya. The workers at the church's headquarters are about Ninety-Nine (99) who work extremely hard to meet the demands of all the ten countries. Among many other things, workers travel extensively, write reports, plan and execute programs, attend several meetings etc. How are the workers of the ECD able to perceive, desire, recall, plan and carry out their roles, routines, tasks and sub-tasks for their self-maintenance, productivity, leisure and rest in response to the demands of their work load in their internal and/or external environment? How does occupational performance impact on their health and wellbeing of the workers at ECD?

Workplace issues are interrelated and it is misleading to study any one-workplace environment without reference to the others. It is with this backdrop that the researcher analyzed the conditions that exist at the work place of the East-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church based in Kenya and how it impacts on the health and wellbeing of the employees. It is the aim of this research to assess causes that influence the output of workers in the physical, social and psychological environment of ECD. More specifically it investigates the role of the workplace environment and how it impacts on the employees identity to their organization and it investigates how the physical environment can be aligned to help shape the company's organizational culture to improve employees' health and wellbeing. This research will improve the future performance of the system and the workplace condition thereby creating a favorable environment for health and wellbeing at ECD. The promotion and improvement of the health and wellbeing of the staff of the Seventh-day Adventists has been a long-term objective of the church. The policy of the church is intended to ensuring that its working staff of over 232,168 worldwide is supported with excellent work environment to enable optimum health and wellbeing at work. The study surveyed the working environment and its impact on the health and wellbeing of the East-Central Division of the church, which takes care of ten countries within the region with workforce of 5744 (Trim, 2013). Against this background, the study answers the following questions:

- What is the influence of workplace environment of ECD the health and wellbeing of its employees?
- What are the determinants of good workplace environment practices within the work environment of the organization?

3. Theoretical Framework

The quality of any workplace environment may determine the level of the employee's motivation, performance and productivity. This study is built around the framework of the World Health Organization framework of healthy workplace environment. The World Health Organization (Burton, 2010) asserts that private enterprises are into business to maximize profit. Also, non-profit organizations and institutions are into business to be successful at achieving their missions. The workplace of any organization will require employees to be in their rightful mind in order to achieve their goals. It is therefore very important to ensure that workers are mentally and physically healthy for businesses to achieve their goals and missions. Figure 1, below summarizes the evidence for the organizations to ensure proper workplace environment.



Source: World Health Organization (2010)

Figure 1: Framework for Organizations to Ensure Healthy Working Environment

4. Methodology

The study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods to critically analyze the environmental conditions prevailing at the workplace of the East-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its impact on the health and wellbeing of the employees. A well-structured questionnaire was sent to a total of 99 employees of the organization, out of which 88 properly filled questionnaires were retrieved. These respondents comprised of top-level management, middle class workers, and lower level employees. The 88 properly filled questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS software version 20. Data was also collected using in-depth interviews with top management and lower level employees. The in-depth interview with the top management was conducted in order to collect information regarding the quality and quantity of services provided and the problems faced. Questions were asked to deduce the compatibility of the information provided by the top management and the expectations of the lower level employees. The in-depth interview with the top management of the organization was also to evaluate and examine the attitudes and behaviors of the leaders of the organization. An in-depth interview was also carried out with the lower level employees whose evaluations and views regarding the working environment could be important. A covert observation was also done to assess interaction and relationship among employees. Secondary data was obtained by delving into the comprehensive working policy manual of the organization.

5. Understanding Health and Wellbeing at the Work Environment

Research on psychosocial working conditions and employee health and wellbeing has been increasing (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). A solid body of evidence shows that the nature of an employee's psychosocial working conditions can have a tremendous effect on his or her wellbeing and performance (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Greine, 1996; Keita & Sauter, 1992; Murphy, Hurrell, Sauter, & Keita, 1995; Sauter & Murphy, 1995).

The approaches to addressing health and wellbeing at work could be seen from a physical and psychological perspective. The physical perspective considers the physical health of workers such as their physical illnesses and diseases (Hassan E. et al, 2009). The psychological perspective approach considers the mental and emotional wellbeing of the worker (Danna and Griffin, 1999). Stress at work can negatively affect mental health of workers through depression. Stress can also impact the physical health of workers by decreasing their alertness, which may lead to injuries. The deterioration of workers' health may be caused by work and non-work-related factors (Hassan E. et al, 2009). Illnesses, diseases or injuries contracted outside work may have an impact not only on the individual but also on his or her working life by impeding their productivity or physical ability to carry out the job.

It is often difficult to establish a direct association between a given exposure related to the work environment and its impact on health, except in the cases of injuries or accidents where this association tends to be direct and instantaneous. However, if the illness is work related, it could have a far-reaching implication for the organization taking into account insurance claim and other consequences the organization may face. Many working conditions make the workplace hazardous to workers' health and wellbeing. Globally, mental disorders are leading causes of disability. In some developed countries, about 40% of disability can be attributed to mental disorders (Baumann A. & Muijen M. 2010). Ferrier (1999) asserts that a review of workplace closure studies found that nearly all workers reported both physical and psychological adverse effects on them during both anticipation of redundancy and actual termination phases. Inappropriate work settings can lead to chronic musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and subsequently to long-term sickness (Briand et al., 2008; Bültman et al., 2009). Furthermore, thousands of workers are affected by work-related chronic diseases due to exposure to dangerous biological and chemical health hazards.

Poor psychosocial working conditions such as low pay; no benefits; no opportunities for advancement; no control over work schedule or work tasks; high job insecurity; no input in major decisions; excessive demands and stress; no organizational support for family demands and responsibilities; a group of coworkers who despise you; and the cruelest boss. It should be easy to imagine that working under these conditions for long periods of time would threaten almost anyone's health and wellbeing. In contrast, a job that provides the following working conditions will enhance psychological and overall wellbeing of the individual. Satisfied salary; comprehensive benefits; optimal control over your schedule and work; high job security; input into all major decisions; great opportunities for career advancement; organizational support for family demands and responsibilities; a group of coworkers who respect and admire you; and the kindest and effective boss (Arriaga & Oskamp, 1998).

6. Results and its Implication for ECD Physical Environment

The working policy of the East-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church stipulates that, "The Church rejects any system or philosophy which discriminates against anyone on the basis of race, color, tribe, or gender at the workplace" (Working Policy, 2012).

Table 1: Satisfaction with Current Work Environment and its Effect on Long-term Health Problem.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	74	84.1
No	14	15.9
Total	88	100

This is validated by the primary data collected from the employees where 74% stated that they work in a flexible environment, which encourages and enhances health. More so, 80% (Table 2) of the employees indicated that the organization provides safe and healthy environment for work. In the cultural environment, 71% generally agreed that they feel accepted in the current workplace environment and 27.3% said the workplace environment is very favorable to them.

Furthermore, 60% and 54% specified that working in their current environment increases their self-esteem and decreases their stress level as well as other sick-related illness respectively.

Table 2: The Organization Providing Safe and Healthy Environment for Work

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	80	90.9
No	8	9.1
Total	88	100

The in-depth interview with the lower level employees revealed that 30% thinks the organization does not take care of their psychological needs. The reason given is that their monthly income does not meet their overall need. According to this category of the employees, it is psychologically worrying that their daily needs are not met even though they are working but keeps worrying over adequate food, clothing, and other needs. Also, 81.8% of the employee generally agreed that their office environment in terms of lighting, space, odor, chairs, ventilation, and noise is favorable to them. The workplace environment is the most serious factor in keeping the employee satisfied in today's employment. It has been shown that physical features that relate to employee psychological wellbeing and satisfaction in general are proper lighting, adequate ventilation, acoustic and minimal noise environment (Humphries, 2005).

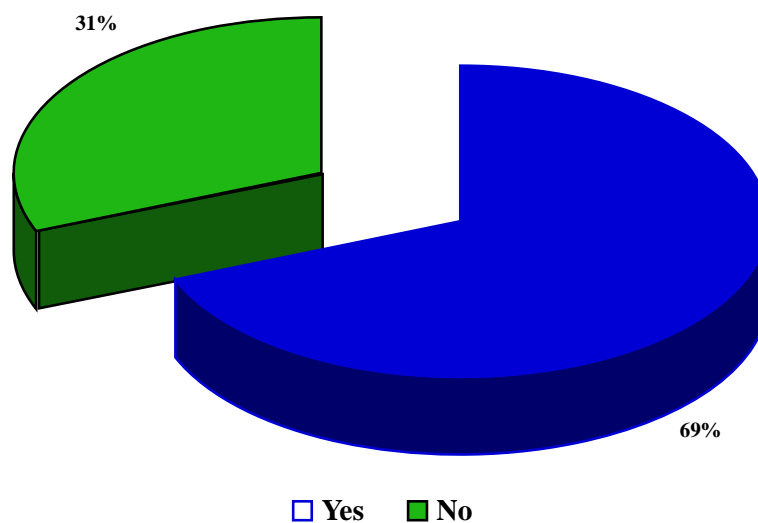


Figure 2: Current Workplace has Contributed in Improving Health and Wellbeing of Employee.

About 64.8% (Table 1) of the employees affirmed that they feel satisfied with the current workplace environment and they believe that it will help them reduce long-term health problems while 69% (Table 2) believe that their current workplace environment can improve their health and wellbeing.

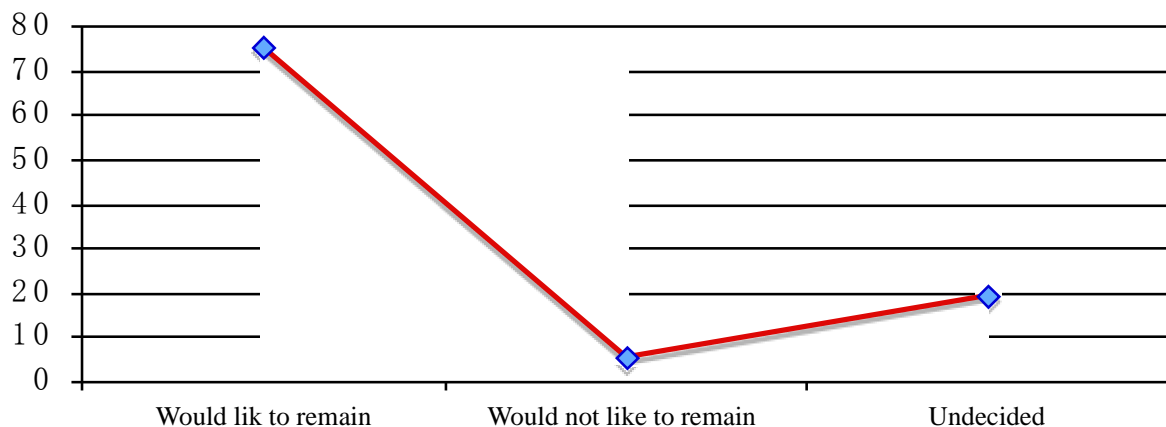


Figure 3: Happy at Current Workplace and would like to Remain as an Employee.

Lastly, 75% of the employees are very happy at their current workplace environment and would like to continue working there, while 5.7% said they are not happy and would not like to continue working in their current workplace and 19.3% remained undecided Figure 3.

7. Discussion

The workplace environment is a crucial part of the organizations success. Organizations that understand the role of emotions will significantly improve their ability to explain and predict their employee's behavior. The findings revealed that the work environment of the ECD has a positive influence on health and wellbeing of its employees.

A good company will develop its employees and one method of doing this is to encourage and develop employee's emotions by paying attention to the physical, social and cultural environment. According to Schutz a modern work environments require good communication skills, creative thinking, the ability to work in a team, and the ability to adapt to change, and to work with people from diverse cultures (Schutz, 2012).

The cultural environment is something that cannot actually be seen, except through its physical indicators in the workplace. The employees feel accepted in their work environment and think the environment is favorable for work. This feeling will enhance self-esteem and psychological wellbeing. There are over eleven nationals working together at ECD and the multinational nature of the workers could result into cultural clashes at the workplace.

The determinants of good work environment practices within the organization can be attributed to the positive organizational working policies. More so, there is a positive working relationship among employees, which has created a sound work environment that encourages health and wellbeing. Even though, about 8% of the employees are not happy and would not like to continue working in their current work environment. This is largely due to inadequate month salary. It should be noted that the organization has a generous work policy that covers medical expenses, 75% educational expenses of employee and their children, leave allowance and other policies that may cushion employees.

The psychological environment includes a person's awareness of their manners; attitudes, dispositions, motivations, and feeling that are often communicated in a particular setting. This is often referred to as external or internal press and can even be thought of as extrinsic and intrinsic environment (Ekvall, 1999). The psychological environment also includes the influence of individuals on the particular work environment (De Young, 2013). This may include influencing and encouraging environmental behavioral. Coercive power can be exercised toward employees at the workplace on the basis of the individual's personal or cultural characteristics. Associated with this is a negative feeling, which may include anxiety, guilt, anger, fear, depression, helplessness, or despair and are usually accompanied by lowered levels of relatedness, sense of incompetence, low self-esteem, and self-direction (German, 1984 & Gitterman, 1991). A prolonged subjection under this condition together with ineffective coping and personal vulnerability, can lead to physiological, emotional, or social dysfunction. Generally, the relationship between top management and lower level employee is favorable.

The physical environment is an aspect of the work environment that has a direct effect on workers and delicately changes interpersonal interactions and thus has consequences on health and wellbeing and productivity at the workplace. The fact still remains that in many parts of the world, hazards in this area threaten the lives of workers on a daily basis (Burton, 2010). It is interesting to note that 75% of the employees are very happy at their current workplace environment and would like to continue working in their current environment. It is only 5.7% who said they are not happy and would not like to continue working in their current workplace and 19.3% remained undecided.

The organization has policies that enhance the employee's health and wellbeing. The nutritional policy for the workplace includes the use of 'hearth-friendly' foods such as a vegetarian diet, low-fat diet. It also provides a dedicated eating area that is clean and comfortable, which encourages workers not to eat at their desk. Fresh, potable and filtered water is also provided at the workplace. To encourage physical activity, the organization has provided a physical activity program, which is always available for the employees. Included in the physical activity program is gymnasium for all to use, which has sauna, hot bath, treadmill machine, and other body building equipment. There is also a policy on comprehensive health evaluation, which every employee is entitled to and it is fully paid for by the organization. The frequency of the comprehensive health check is as follows:

1. Up to 30 years once every six years.
2. 31 to 40 years once every three years
3. 41 to 60 years once every two years
4. 61 and above years once every year

At the time of the employee's appointment, the frequency of these evaluations may be adjusted to meet specific health needs and situations. Also, about 75% of both employee's medical bill and educational bill of children are covered by the organization. The organization encourages healthy behavior at the workplace. Smoking, the uses of alcoholic drink and narcotic drugs are not permitted at the workplace. Frequent seminars and other activities designed to improve awareness of health and wellbeing such as smoking, diabetes, cancer, mental health, heart disease, alcohol abuse and drug abuse and sleep pattern are held at the work place. These measures taken by the organization in the interest of the employee is significant enough to create awareness towards the health and wellbeing of its employee.

Health promotion and wellness of the employee at the workplace is very crucial. This will not only result in the health improvements of the employee but will also have tremendous impact on economic return outcomes. With health care expenditures rising, it is important that employees take increasing interest in workplace-based disease prevention and health promotion as a means of improving health while lowering costs. Baicker, Cutler, Song (2010) study revealed that medical costs fall about \$3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs, and absentee day costs fall by about \$2.73 for every dollar spent. This average return on investment suggests that the wider adoption of such programs could prove beneficial for budgets and productivity as well as health outcomes. Workplace-based wellness programs, which could impact prevention, would motivate employee and also boost their psychological wellbeing. The ECD organization has realized that healthier workers might be more productive and miss fewer days of work. These benefits may accrue at least partially to the employer, even if the primary benefits accrue to the employee. Several well-publicized case studies have suggested a positive return to employer investment in prevention. For every dollar invested in a health a wellness program, the employer saves more than the dollar spent. Also, (Baicker, Cutler, Song, 2010) cited (Bly, Richardson, 1986, Fries et al, 1994, Leigh et al, 1992) stated that several studies have shown significant health care savings from wellness program at the workplace.

8. Conclusion

The influence of workplace condition on the health and wellbeing of the employees is positive. Employers who invest in their employees' health demonstrate that they care for and value their staff. Encouraging employees to plan and take part in health-related activities at work encourages social interaction and the development of a positive work community, which will impact positively on health and wellbeing and help the employer achieve a happy, motivated workforce that's more likely to stay and perform well.

The physical and the office environment are favorable for work even though not all employees assert that the physical work environment is favorable for them. The workspace, odor, lighting, noise etc. are favorable and encourages health and wellbeing. The determinants that have made the work environment desirable for employees are the acceptable organizational working policies, the improved and affable relationships among employees and top management.

The cultural environment is such that it has enabled employees relate positively with each other and they feel accepted. There is a strong relationship that exists between top and lower level management. Generally, there is job satisfaction and employee organizational commitment. A large part of an employee's life is spent at work; employers can and should play an important part in helping their workers achieve a good quality of life. The workplace can also be a useful arena to encourage people to improve their health.

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