

THRIVING MINDS, THRIVING BUSINESSES



Bombay Chamber
of Commerce & Industry



A Strategic
Approach to
Mental Health at
Workplace

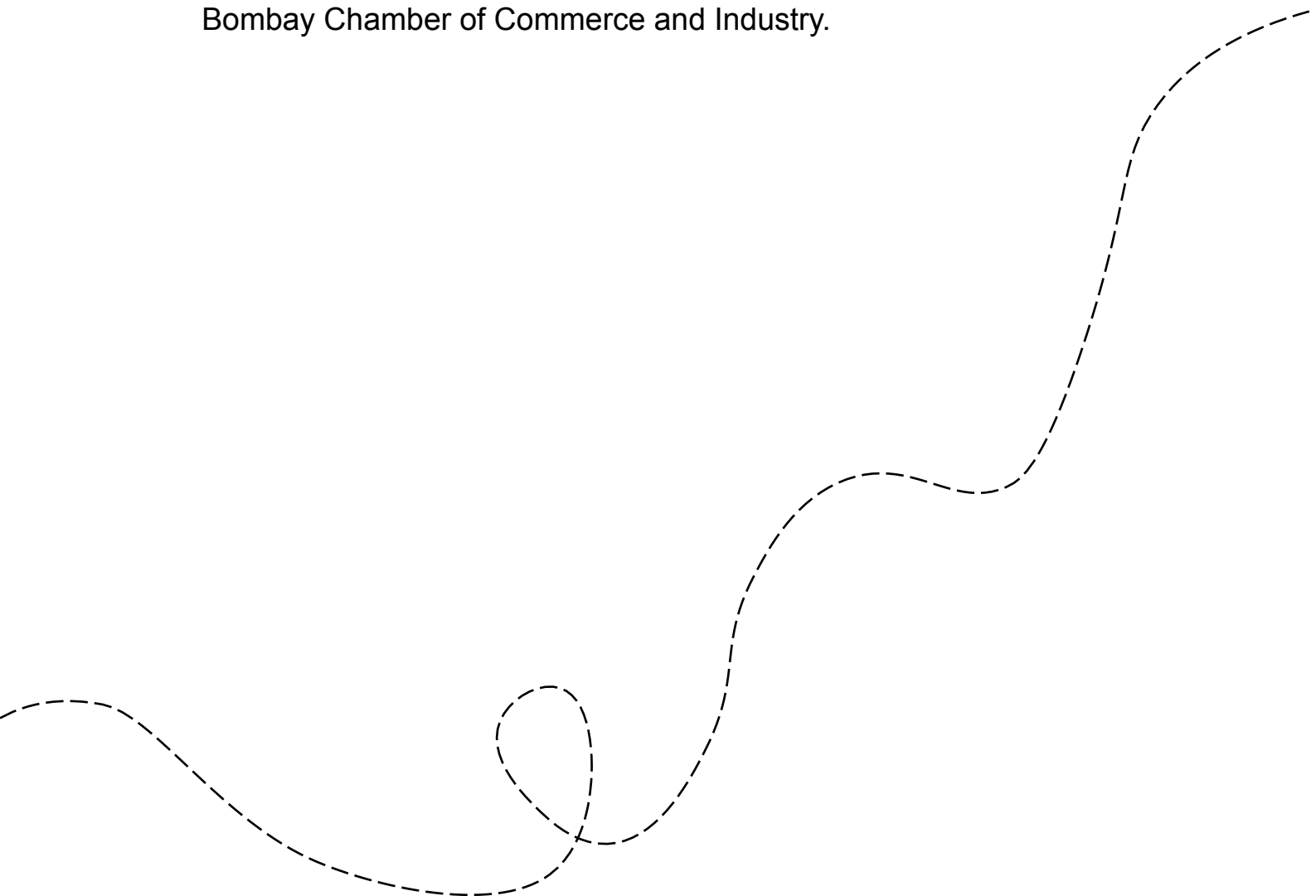
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INTRODUCTION

As defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health encompasses our cognitive, emotional, and social capabilities. Mental health disorders, influenced by genetic, environmental, and social factors, can significantly impair an individual's quality of life. Anxiety and depression, prevalent worldwide, rank among the top 10 global causes of health loss.

The perception of mental health varies significantly between developed and developing countries. In developed nations, while mental health awareness has increased, there remains a stigma associated with seeking help. This can lead to delayed treatment and worsened conditions. In developing countries, the situation is often more challenging due to limited resources, lack of awareness, and cultural barriers. Despite reports suggesting a higher prevalence of mental health issues in developed countries, the stigma associated with mental illnesses can prevent individuals in developing countries from seeking necessary support.

Mental health, a fundamental aspect of overall well-being, is increasingly recognized as a global health priority. Despite its significance, it often takes a secondary position to physical health, reflecting a societal bias. This disparity is particularly evident in developing countries like India, where mental health issues are frequently stigmatized and undertreated.

THE CORNERSTONES OF WELL-BEING

Mental and Emotional Health Defined

Comparing the existing mental health definition to the current sociocultural landscape and crafting a progressive statement



The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community.” With an additional focus on having a largely positive set of emotions and functioning.

More diverse sets of definitions across different platforms insist on having a more inclusive and forward definition that is considerate of the wide range of human emotions. One such definition, proposed by Silvana Galderisi, Andreas Heinz, Marianne Kastrup, Julian Beezhold, and Norman Sartorius in their paper titled “Toward a new definition of mental health,” states that:

Mental health is a dynamic state of internal equilibrium which enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with the universal values of society. Basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and harmonious relationships between body and mind represent important components of mental health which contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium.¹

Some of the traditionally accepted definitions also include the definition by the American Psychological Association that characterizes mental health as ‘a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life.’²

¹ Galderisi, S., Heinz, A., Kastrup, M., Beezhold, J., & Sartorius, N. (2015). Toward a new definition of mental health. *World Psychiatry*, 14(2), 231–233. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20231>

² APA Dictionary of Psychology. (n.d.). <https://dictionary.apa.org/mental-health>

Mental health is not limited to an individual's psychological soundness; it is an overarching term that encompasses a wide range of psychological, emotional, and social aspects such as:

Emotional Health

Emotional health refers to a comprehensive framework of mental competencies that are essential for a person's overall well being. It encompasses the capacity to comprehend internal psychological states and establish meaningful interpersonal connections, thereby facilitating adaptive responses to environmental challenges and leading a wholesome life.

This framework comprises four fundamental facets: emotional regulation, self-awareness, empathy, and resilience. Emotional regulation manifests as the capacity to maintain cognitive control during periods of heightened emotional arousal, enabling deliberate response patterns rather than impulsive reactions. Self-awareness involves metacognitive processes that facilitate the recognition and understanding of one's emotional states and behavioral patterns. Empathy encompasses the ability to perceive and comprehend others' emotional experiences accurately, fostering interpersonal understanding and effective social interaction. Resilience represents the psychological capacity to maintain functionality and recover equilibrium following adverse experiences or significant stressors.

Psychological Health

Psychological health is not defined by the absence of symptoms or diagnosis of mental illnesses; it is defined by the subsistence of balanced emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social wellness. When an individual faces turbulence in their psychological state, they may face the inability to perform their obligated activities, managing their emotions, controlling their behaviors, interacting with others, and other challenges like handling the stresses of daily life.³

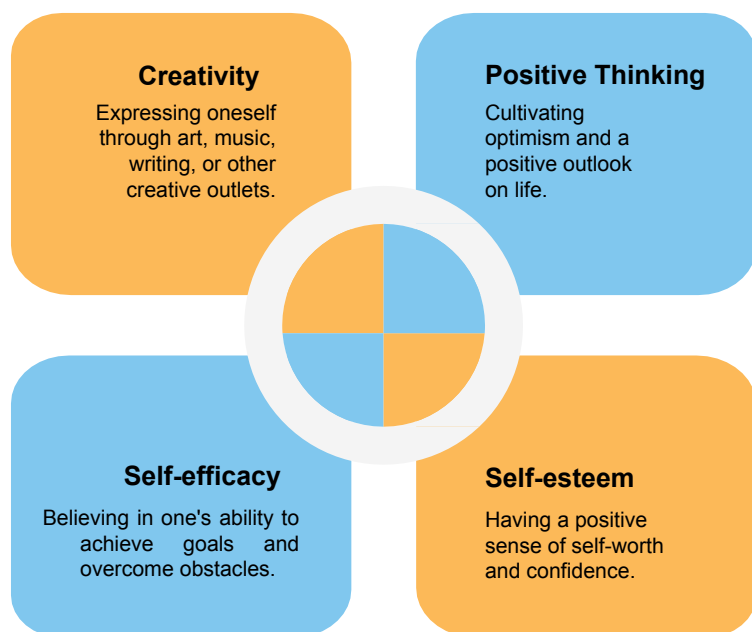
Simply put, psychological health refers to the ability of any individual to think, feel, and behave effectively to navigate through work, home, and in society. Psychological health can be affected by genetics, social and environmental factors, and the workplace.

Psychological health, encompassing emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social well-being, is a critical component of overall health. It is influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. Genetic predispositions, childhood experiences, interpersonal relationships, and societal determinants such as racism, sexism, and classism can significantly impact psychological health.⁴

³ Galderisi et al. (2015)

⁴ Psychological Health: Definition, Examples, & How to Improve It. (n.d.). The Berkeley Well-Being Institute.

Some of the widely acclaimed ways to maintain one's psychological health are:



Social Health

Social well-being can be attributed as a sub-factor of a person's overall psychological health. Social health is assessed on the basis of how well an individual can cope with the social obligations of their community to communicate, form healthy, meaningful relationships, and become a part of their community. Maintaining sound social health is an integral part of human lives, as we thrive in communities and groups with similar values and goals.



Cognitive Health

Cognitive health is another crucial component of our psychological health. It refers to how well our brain functions, including our ability to think, reason, remember, concentrate, make decisions, and complete tasks. Our cognitive health is essential to carry out our daily tasks, necessary to sustain a wholesome life. The most important facets of our cognitive health include:

Attention: Focusing on tasks and filtering out distractions.

Memory: Remembering information and experiences.

Problem-solving: Identifying problems, considering solutions, and making decisions.

Learning and Creativity: Acquiring new knowledge and skills, and thinking creatively.

All of these components are interlinked and influence each other in a substantial amount of ways, determining the holistic wellness of an individual. The balance of these components is pivotal in curating a life of quality and fulfilment.



WORKPLACE WELLNESS: MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

The Indian scenario: causes of mental health issues at the workplace and challenges that employees can face

The Indian workplace has witnessed significant change over the past few decades. There has been a note-worthy shift from a predominantly agrarian economy to securing a place as a salient player in major industries like technology and manufacturing, along with the service industry. This remarkable journey from an agrarian economy to a global industrial powerhouse is a testament to its resilience and innovation. Key drivers of this transformation include economic liberalization, technological advancements, and a thriving startup ecosystem. As India continues to evolve and adapt to global trends, its industrial progress holds immense promise for its future.⁵

This advancement necessitated a larger workforce and a more demanding work environment to drive industrial and national progress. This shift has led to significant changes in the nature of work, the expectations of employees, and the challenges faced by the workforce. With the new millennium, the workers face a new and transformed work environment molded by the growing demands of consumers and industry trends. Within this work environment, workers can be exposed to strenuous workloads and unpleasant working conditions, which affect their well-being and in turn their productivity.

⁵ Pati, Kailash. (2024). The Journey of India from Agriculture Dominance Economy to an Industrially Advanced Nation. 10. 72-81.

Understanding the Factors Impacting Workplace Mental Health

Some of the prevalent contemporary challenges facing the Indian workforce include job insecurity, long working hours, workplace discrimination, and a lack of work-life balance.

The Fading Line Between Work and Life

Landing at 48th place, India finds itself positioned outside the top half of the surveyed countries. Long working hours, a culture of presenteeism, and limited access to flexible work arrangements are often cited as challenges to achieving work-life balance in India.⁶ The lack of a work-life balance can lead to poor occupational health in employees. However, with the increasing demands of work, combined with family obligations and pressure to participate in societal institutions and compete in the proverbial “rat race”, Indian workers face the challenge of managing everything all at once. This tends to end in emotions of inadequacy, worry, anxiety, and guilt, which can be physically and mentally exhausting.

The Pitfalls of Long Working Hours

Long working hours can induce burnout, stress, mental health problems, and a decline in productivity. According to a MediBuddy and CII poll, over 62% of Indian workers experience burnout, which is three times the worldwide average. According to research by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the average Indian works 46.7 hours a week, making it one of the countries with the longest workweeks in the world. The ILO reports that 51% of Indian workers typically put in more than 49 hours per week, second only to Bhutan, where 61% of workers do so, reported Business Standard.⁷

Swami, from Dr S S Tantia Medical College, found a 13% increased risk of heart attack and a 33% increased risk of stroke among those working over 55 hours per week compared to those working 35-40 hours.⁸

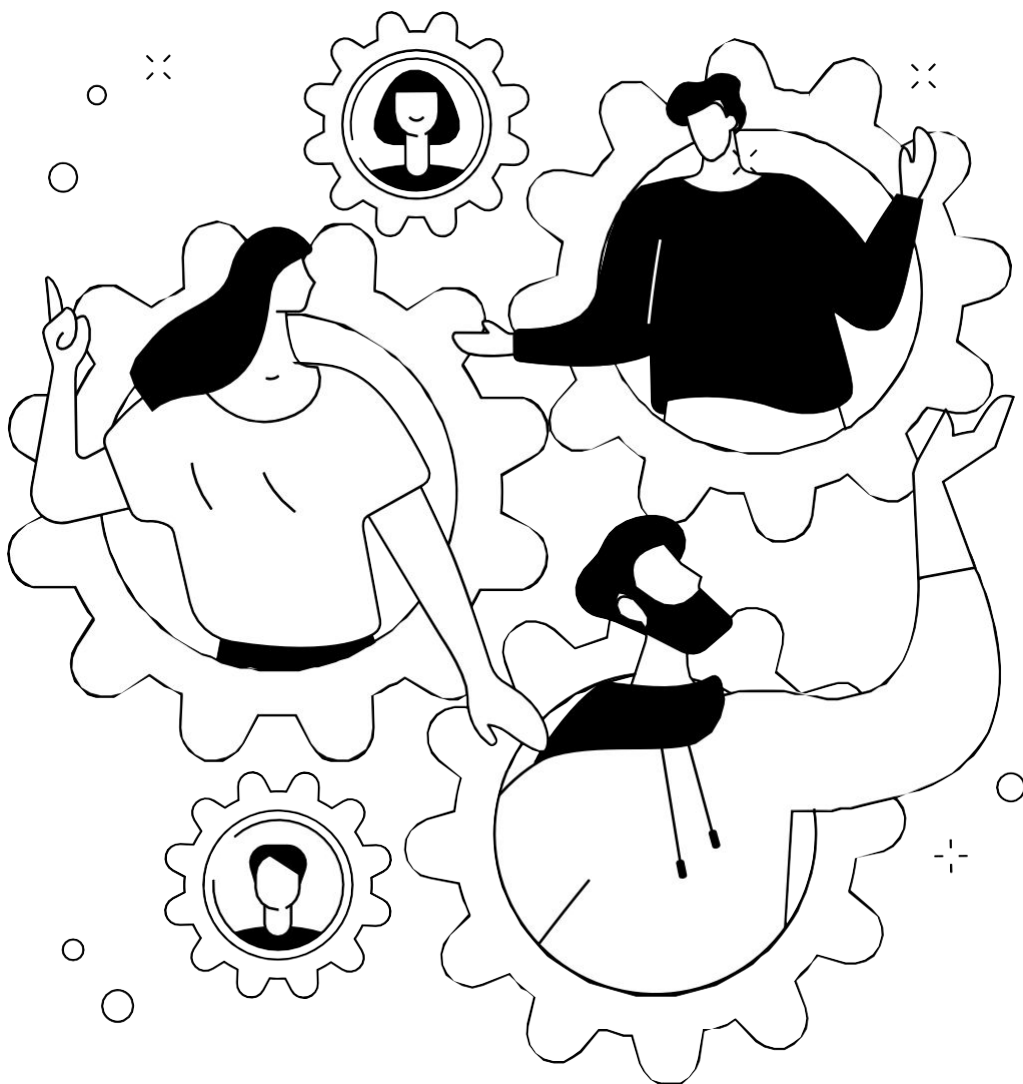
⁶ People Matters - Interstitial Site — People Matters. (n.d.). People Matters.
<https://www.peoplesmatters.in/news/life-at-work/new-zealand-tops-work-life-balance-india-lags-at-48th-remote-study-42056>

⁷ Long working hours: a growing problem for India. (2024, October 7). British Safety Council India.
<https://www.britsafe.in/safety-management-news/2024/long-working-hours-a-growing-problem-for-india>

⁸ Long working hours: a growing problem for India. (2024, October 7). British Safety Council India.
<https://www.britsafe.in/safety-management-news/2024/long-working-hours-a-growing-problem-for-india>

Organizational Culture, Leadership and Workplace relationships

Organizational culture, leadership, and workplace relationships are greatly conducive towards employees's mental health and emotional well-being. A strong leadership that promotes a healthy work-life balance, respect, and good work ethic by example inspires the organisation to follow the same. This fosters a work culture that is safe and welcoming and nurtures talent and loyalty. Another benefit of having an upstanding work culture is that employees are able to form healthy workplace relationships. Which is known to boost productivity, morale, and overall work product.



THE IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES

How mental health and emotional well-being affect job performance, productivity, and overall job satisfaction.

As of 2023, more than 3 billion people are part of the workforce worldwide. Among which, 15% of working-age adults live with a mental disorder. The workplace, a significant part of many people's lives, is markedly affected by mental health. The impact on workplace productivity is substantial, with absenteeism, reduced efficiency, and decreased job satisfaction being common consequences.

The mental health milieu in India is in a developmental stage. There is a disparity in the perception of mental health and availability of treatment between developed and developing countries. This disproportion is owed to a lack of awareness and consequent research. However, reports suggest that developed countries have a higher rate of mental health issues compared to developing or poorer countries. This could be attributed to the stigma associated with mental illnesses that can hold back citizens from developing countries to seek mental health assistance. The burden of CMDs is under-recognized in developing countries, where there is a lack of awareness and stigma surrounding mental health issues.

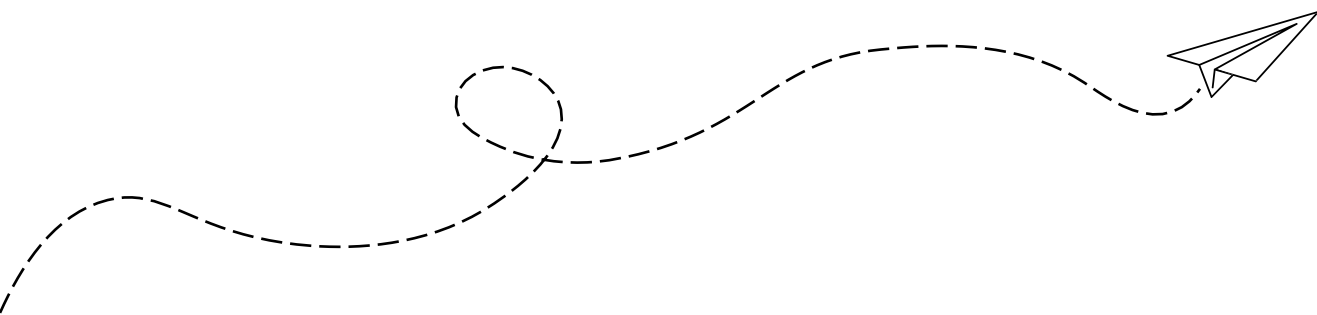
In India, individuals with mental health disorders face several challenges in the workplace. **The stigma surrounding mental illness can lead to discrimination, prejudice, and a hostile work environment.** This can hinder career advancement, job retention, and overall well-being. Additionally, limited access to mental health services and a lack of understanding among employers can further exacerbate these challenges.

THE IMPACT ON ORGANISATIONS

The costs of poor mental health to the organisation and other consequences of deteriorating mental health and emotional well-being.

According to a report by the WHO, the economic loss due to mental health conditions between 2012 and 2030 is estimated at USD 1.03 trillion.⁹ Mental illnesses contribute to occupational disability as much as physical ailments and are responsible for loss of or decrease in productivity.

Mental health problems in the working population (15–64 years of age) are growing public health concerns. Recent evidence indicates that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including mental health problems such as stress, depression, and anxiety among working populations are directly linked to reduced work performance and increased absenteeism (1). Studies also show that investment in such interventions is cost-saving (2).¹⁰



⁹ World Health Organization: WHO. (2019, May 17). Mental health. <https://www.who.int/india/health-topics/mental-health#:~:text=WHO%20estimates%20that%20the%20burden,estimated%20at%20USD%201.03%20trillion.>

¹⁰ Pandya, A., Khanal, N., & Upadhyaya, M. (2022). Workplace Mental Health Interventions in India: A Rapid Systematic Scoping Review. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.800880>

Case Study:

Prioritising Employee Wellbeing Through Sterlite's Santulan Mental Health Program

In recent years, the importance of employee well-being, particularly mental health, has moved from being a peripheral HR initiative to a central business imperative. Sterlite Power and Serentica Renewables have recognized this critical need through the development and implementation of the Santulan Mental Health Program. This program, built on the foundation of support, empathy, and inclusivity, serves as an employee assistance platform dedicated to fostering a listening culture within the workplace. By offering resources like e-counseling, specific support for expecting mothers, and access to over 200 psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors, Santulan prioritises the mental well-being of employees—a priority that has proven benefits not just for individuals but also for the organisation as a whole.

The Role of Mental Health in the Workplace

In today's fast-paced and increasingly demanding work environment, mental health has emerged as a crucial factor that impacts productivity, employee engagement, and workplace morale. When employees face mental health challenges, whether due to personal or professional reasons, it can lead to decreased focus, absenteeism, and even burnout. These issues do not just affect individual employees; they ripple through the entire organization, impacting team dynamics, communication, and ultimately, organizational performance. Recognizing mental health as a business imperative allows companies like Sterlite Power and Serentica Renewables to proactively address these challenges, fostering a more resilient and engaged workforce.

The Santulan program is designed to provide accessible, comprehensive mental health support, making it easy for employees to seek assistance when needed. This accessibility reduces stigma and encourages a culture where mental health is openly discussed and supported, thus normalizing help-seeking behaviors. By promoting such a culture, Sterlite Power and Serentica Renewables not only support individual employees but also cultivate a workplace environment where everyone feels valued and understood.

Key Components of the Santulan Mental Health Program

The Santulan program offers multiple avenues for mental health support to meet the diverse needs of the workforce:

E-Counseling Services: The availability of e-counseling ensures that employees have convenient, private access to mental health support. This digital approach acknowledges the realities of a modern, flexible workforce, offering employees the opportunity to seek help remotely, which is particularly valuable for those who may not be comfortable with face-to-face counseling.

Specialized Support for Expecting Mothers: Recognizing the unique challenges faced by expecting mothers, Santulan includes specialized counseling services tailored to address the emotional, psychological, and physical stressors associated with pregnancy. This specialized care demonstrates a commitment to supporting employees during critical life stages, ultimately contributing to higher levels of trust and loyalty among employees.

Access to a Broad Network of Professionals: Santulan's network of over 200 mental health professionals—including psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors—ensures that employees receive high-quality care from experts with varied backgrounds and specializations. This variety not only enhances the range of support available but also accommodates the diverse mental health needs of a large workforce.

Why Employee Well-being is a Business Imperative

Investing in mental health programs like Santulan yields significant returns for organizations, making it far more than an HR activity. First and foremost, prioritizing mental well-being leads to greater productivity. Employees who feel supported and have access to resources that address their mental health needs are more likely to be engaged and motivated at work. Engagement, in turn, has a direct impact on output, creativity, and the quality of work produced.

Moreover, a strong focus on mental health contributes to lower turnover rates. When employees feel valued and supported, they are less likely to leave the organization, reducing the costs associated with recruitment, onboarding, and training of new hires. High employee retention also preserves institutional knowledge and strengthens team cohesion, further boosting productivity and organizational stability.

A commitment to mental well-being also enhances a company's reputation, both internally and externally. In an era where talent acquisition is highly competitive, potential employees are drawn to organizations known for their supportive cultures. Programs like Santulan serve as a differentiator, positioning Sterlite Power and Serentica Renewables as employers of choice. Furthermore, this commitment to well-being aligns with corporate social responsibility initiatives, demonstrating that the organization values people as its greatest asset.

The Santulan Mental Health Program at Sterlite Power and Serentica Renewables illustrates how organizations can prioritize mental well-being as an essential aspect of their overall business strategy. By fostering a supportive environment through services like e-counseling, specialized support for expecting mothers, and access to a wide network of professionals, Santulan creates a workplace where employees feel heard, valued, and empowered. This approach not only enhances individual well-being but also drives productivity, engagement, and loyalty across the organization. As companies navigate the evolving challenges of today's work landscape, mental health programs like Santulan provide a model for how prioritising employee well-being can lead to lasting success and a more resilient, committed workforce.

INDUSTRY TITANS:

Spearheading The Mental Health Transformation

While Sterlite Group continues to inspire and take inspiration from other entities, I reflect on some of the programs that have stood out in terms of their effectiveness and employee benefit. These include:

1. Tata Steel's "Wellness for Life" Initiative

Tata Steel, a pioneer in employee-centric policies, has introduced the **"Wellness for Life"** portal, reflecting its commitment to holistic employee well-being. By integrating wellness into its organizational ethos, Tata Steel fosters an environment where employees thrive both personally and professionally.

Overview

The **"Wellness for Life"** portal represents the first phase of Tata Steel's wellness journey, offering two dedicated applications: **WELLSPRING** and **The Wellness Corner**. Accessible through the portal, these apps empower employees to assess, monitor, and enhance their physical and mental health.¹¹

¹¹ <https://www.hrkatha.com/news/tata-steel-prioritises-employee-wellness-with-its-comprehensive-portal/>

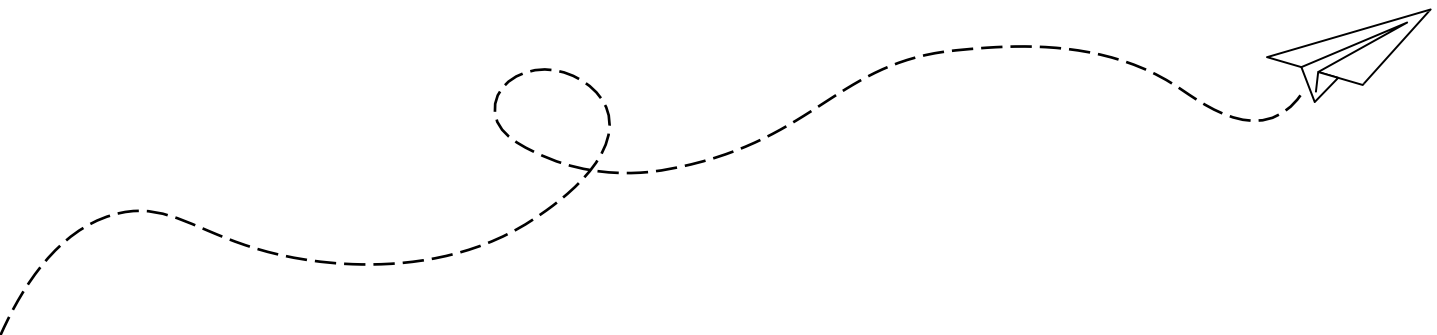
Key Features

1. The Wellness Corner: A comprehensive wellness platform offering:
 - Daily activity tracking.
 - Personalized coaching programs.
 - Access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).
 - Mental health therapies and guided meditations.
2. WELLSPRING: Tata Steel's proprietary wellness app promotes a culture of health and well-being through user-friendly tools for tracking and enhancing wellness.

Impact on Employee Well-being

By integrating technology and wellness, Tata Steel ensures that its employees have access to tools for better work-life balance and improved health outcomes. Personalized programs and mental health resources promote a supportive environment, addressing individual needs holistically.

Tata Steel's "Wellness for Life" initiative underscores its recognition of employee well-being as a cornerstone of collective success. By championing wellness through innovative platforms, Tata Steel not only enriches employee lives but also reinforces its legacy as a people-first organization. This approach sets a benchmark in fostering a thriving workplace culture.



2. Vedanta Aluminium's Umang Program

Vedanta Aluminium, India's largest aluminium producer, launched **Umang**, an Employee Wellness & Lifestyle Program, on World Happiness Day. Developed in partnership with MantraCare, a leading health technology company, the initiative is designed to enhance the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of employees and their families.¹²

Program Features

Umang is a holistic, year-round wellness program that offers a wide range of services accessible through an interactive app. The program includes:

- Online psychological counseling.
- Physiotherapy and weight management services.
- Guided yoga and meditation sessions.
- De-addiction support and personalized wellness coaching.

This initiative reflects Vedanta Aluminium's belief that employee happiness is fundamental to fostering a cohesive and high-performance workplace culture. By addressing diverse aspects of wellness, the program supports employees in maintaining a healthy work-life balance and improving overall morale.

Implementation and Goals

The program leverages Vedanta Aluminium's existing infrastructure, such as gyms, sports complexes, and recreational facilities, to promote physical fitness while introducing structured mental health and lifestyle services. Employees and their families are encouraged to engage with the platform to address health concerns, improve fitness, and enhance their overall quality of life.

¹² On World Happiness Day, Vedanta Aluminium launches 'Employee Wellness and Lifestyle Program' | Vedanta Aluminium Business | India's largest aluminium producer. (n.d.). Vedanta Aluminium Limited.
<https://vedantaaluminium.com/media/press-releases/list/on-world-happiness-day-vedanta-aluminium-launches-employee-wellness-and-lifestyle-program/>

The Umang program underscores the importance of prioritizing employee happiness as a key driver of organizational success. It represents a significant step towards fostering a supportive and fulfilling workplace environment, where employees and their families can thrive both personally and professionally.

This program demonstrates Vedanta Aluminium's commitment to employee well-being, setting a benchmark for corporate wellness initiatives. By providing holistic health solutions, Vedanta Aluminium ensures its workforce is empowered to thrive both personally and professionally.

3. Wipro's MITR Program – Transforming Workplace Mental Health

Wipro's MITR program, launched in 2004, exemplifies a pioneering approach to workplace mental health in India. Named after the Hindi word for "friend," MITR provides employees with accessible emotional wellness support, blending a personal and professional touch. The program complements Wipro's Workplace NCD initiative, "Fit for Life," addressing stress-induced issues like gastrointestinal disorders and introducing interventions like stress management and sleep hygiene programs.

How It Works:

MITR integrates trained volunteer counselors with Employee Assistance Program (EAP) professionals to offer a tiered support system. Each year, 10-15 empathetic, emotionally intelligent employees are rigorously selected and trained as MITR counselors. These volunteers provide face-to-face counseling at workplace sites, addressing 40% of cases directly, while complex issues are escalated to EAP professionals. Confidentiality, a cornerstone of the program, ensures employees feel secure seeking help.

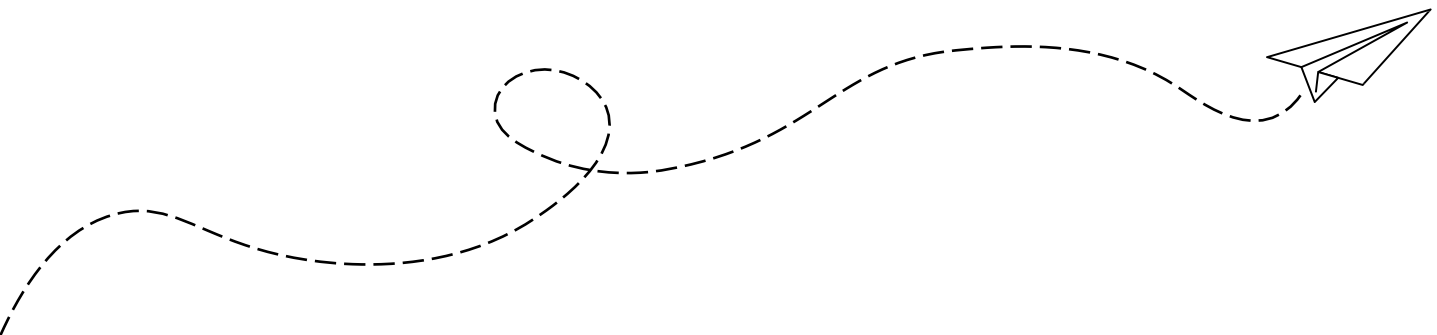
Impact:

MITR tackles stigma head-on through awareness campaigns, mailers, leadership advocacy, and social platforms like Yammer. Regular workshops and visible communication normalize mental health conversations. Key metrics such as gender balance in cases, utilization rates, and counselor attrition track the program's effectiveness. With over 500 annual cases, most requiring 3-4 sessions, MITR successfully resolves issues ranging from psychological stress to family discord.

Sustained Commitment:

Despite its voluntary nature, MITR demands significant time from counselors, with monthly meetings ensuring continuous skill development and case reviews. By prioritizing quality over scale, Wipro has embedded emotional wellness into its organizational culture.

Wipro's MITR program is a testament to proactive mental health management in the workplace, fostering a supportive environment where employees and their families can address challenges openly. As an industry leader, Wipro sets a benchmark for integrating emotional wellness with organizational goals, showcasing a sustainable model for holistic employee well-being.¹³



¹³ Singh, P. (2023, October 31). Wipro Chairman Rishad Premji talks about mental health on X heres what need to know. TechGig.
<https://content.techgig.com/technology/wipro-chairman-rishad-premji-talks-about-mental-health-on-x-heres-what-need-to-know/articleshow/104850390.cms>

CONCLUSION

Building a Mentally Healthy Workplace: The Way Forward

Mental health has intrinsic and instrumental value and is integral to our well-being. Despite its significance, mental health is not yet regarded with the same severity as physical ailments or diseases. Mental conditions can be attributed to a combination of genetic, environmental, and social factors. The most prevalent mental illnesses across all age groups and geographical areas are anxiety and depressive disorders, which are also among the top causes of poor health.

To address these issues, affirmative action policies are essential. These policies can promote mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and ensure equal opportunities for individuals with mental health disorders. By implementing workplace accommodations, providing mental health support services, and fostering a culture of inclusivity, organisations can create a more supportive environment for their employees.

Moreover, these measures ensure that the employees are able to perform their best, contribute to the comprehensive business success and are consistent with their productivity and growth trajectory.

Mental health and emotional well-being of employees is not a burden but an investment. When organizations provide the right resources and support to their employees, they are more likely to retain their employees. They are also able to attract top talent and set benchmarks that are instrumental in the company's success.

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ABOUT BOMBAY CHAMBER

The Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry is India's premier chamber of commerce and Industry located in Mumbai, which is the country's industrial, financial and commercial capital. Established in 1836, it is the oldest Chamber in the nation and has served trade and industry through 189 years of continuous service. It is registered under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013 (Section 25 of The Companies Act, 1956), a non-profit organisation.

Not only is the Chamber known for its longevity, but also for its impeccable lineage. The Chamber plays an important role in promoting the city and the region as a trade, commerce, and industry hub.

The Human Resource Management (HRM) Committee of the Bombay Chamber comprises HR experts from its member companies. As an initiative to serve its MSME members the HRM Committee has launched this booklet. We hope that you will benefit from this booklet.
