

# **THE WORKPLACE: AN IDEAL PRIORITY SETTING FOR HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The workplace has been established as one of the priority settings for health promotion and disease prevention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The workplace directly influences the physical, mental, economic and social wellbeing of workers and in turn the health of their families, communities and the society. This paper therefore is of the opinion that the workplace is an ideal priority setting for health promotion because of the approaches, benefits, and the fact that a healthy qualified and motivated workforce future success in a globalizing market place can be achieved with a healthy, qualified and motivated workplace. This paper explains the concepts of the workplace, health promotion and disease prevention approaches and benefits. Conclusion and recommendation were made to enhance the use of health promotion in the workplace because better health produces better people and better performance.*

**Keywords:** Workplace, Health Promotion, Health Promotion, Disease Prevention, Priority Setting.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A workplace is the location where you are employed and where you go to work every day and the workplace is located in a variety of settings including offices, manufacturing facilities or factories, stores, farms, out of doors, and in any location where work is performed (Humanresources.about.com). Promoting good health and preventing disease focus on making people stay healthy. While health promotion engages and empower people to adopt healthy behaviours and make behavioural changes that reduces the risk of developing chronic diseases especially those associated with sedentary lifestyle and other morbidities. And we have several theories and models supporting the practice of health promotion and disease prevention especially in the workplace. These theories and models such as the ecological, the health belief, relapse prevention, stages of model change, social cognitive and reasoned action are used in programme planning to understand and explain health behaviour and guide the identification of strategies for health promotion and disease prevention programmes.

Any definition of a healthy workplace must encompass the World Health Organization (WHO) definition of health, as a state of complete health, physical, mentally and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Health promotion has been defined as the process of enabling people to increase control over their health and its determinants and thereby improving their health (World Health Organization, 2005). While workplace health promotion has been defined as the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve their health and well-being and offers an ideal setting and infrastructure to support the promotion of health of a large audience like the workplace.

Regrettably, the concept that the workplace is an important arena for health campaigns and as well as basic occupational health and safety programme is not yet widely accepted. Meanwhile, the health of workers is also affected by non-work related factors. Workplace places emphasis on improving the work organization and working environment, increasing workers participation in shaping the working environment and encouraging personal skills and professional development. It suggest tools for maintaining a National healthy workplace initiative such as award system, as an incentive for participating and creation of health workplace network. And to be successful, workplace health promotion has to involve the participation of employees, management and the stakeholders. While some health promotion activities in the workplace tend to focus on a single illness or risk factors (for instance, prevention of cardiovascular diseases). There is growing appreciation that there are multiple determinants of workers health. In addition to person focused intervention, workplace health promotion initiatives have moved towards a more comprehensive approach which acknowledges the combined influence of personal environment, organizational community and society factors on employees well-being. A health promoting workplace recognises that a healthy workplace is essential and integrates polices, systems and practices conducive to health at all levels of the organization rather than a series of projects, workplace health promotion should be an ongoing process for improving work and health.

Effective health promotion assists employers to adopt appropriate administrative procedures and workers to use safe working practices and occupational health enable them to implement it as a part of their occupational health practice.

Experience in workplace health promotion has shown that competition and award are valuable in engaging enterprises in occupational health and safety activities.

The benefits of a healthy workplace reach beyond the individual workers and can also influence the health of families, communities and yield social and economic benefits. A healthy workplace reduces sick leave and turnover and increases productivity and participation. Workplace health promotion means more than simply meeting the legal requirements on health and safety, it also means employers activity helping their staff improve their own general health and well-being. Within this process it is essential to involve employees and to take into account their needs and views on how to organize work and the workplace. By making workers feel better and healthier, workplace health promotion leads to many positive consequences like reduced turnover and absenteeism, enhanced motivation, improved productivity as well as improving the employer's image as a positive and caring organization.

Work place health programmes are a coordinated and comprehensive se of health promotion and protection strategies implemented at the workplace that includes programme policies, benefits, environmental support and links to the surrounding communities designed to encourage the health and safety of all employees. It is therefore vital for all overall workplace health programmes to contain a

combination of individual and organizational strategies and intervention to influence health. The purpose of this study was to look at the workplace as an ideal priority setting where health promotion can be carried out.

## **WORKPLACE HEALTH PROMOTION**

The following are the aspect of workplace health promotion;

- Participation of employees in the process of improving work organization.
- Mental health promotion, that is offering courses for managers on how to deal with stress and tension within their team and providing anonymous psychological consultancy for all employees.
- Exercise and physical activities, such as offering sports courses, promoting an active and health culture at work.
- Health monitoring through check ups for blood pressure and cholesterol levels and others.
- Raising the topic of healthy eating at work, giving information on nutrition as well as offering healthy canteen food or facilities for employers to prepare their own food.

In promoting health in the workplace specific health risk should also be addressed, alcohol and drug awareness, stress conditions like obesity, musco-skeletal disorders, cancer, arthritis, dental health and sexual health. According to Sanjiv and Preetha (2012), Health promotion is more relevant today than ever in addressing public health problems. The term “Health promotion” was carried in 1947 by Henry E. Sigerist, the great medical historian who defined the four major tasks of medicine as promotion of health prevention of illness, restoration of the sick and rehabilitation. According to his statement was promoted by providing labour conditions, education, means of rest and recreation requires coordinated efforts. These were reflected in the obtaining charter for health promotion. Healthy workplaces and healthy working environments translate to better health outcomes for the employee and better business outcomes for the organization (WHO, 2011).

## **APPROACHES TO WORKPLACE HEALTH PROMOTION**

Health promotion efforts can be directed toward priority health conditions involving a large population and promoting multiple interventions (Sanjiu and Preetha, 2012). This issue based approach will work best if complemented by setting based designs. The setting based designs can be implemented in schools, workplaces to address priority health problems. Setting based design also facilitates integration of health promotion actions into the social activities with consideration for existing local situations (WHO, 2008). The setting approach is built on the principles of community participation empowerment, and equity which replaces the over reliance on the individual and an approach to integrate action across risk factors. The healthy cities programme launched by WHO in 1986 was soon followed up by similar initiatives in smaller settings such as schools, villages, hospitals, offices (WHO, 2011).

Models provide a way of thinking about approaches that can be used when promoting health and each will have merits and demerits to be effective. In health promotion we need to use a variety of

approaches. We have medical approach, behavioural change, lifestyle approach, educational approach, empowerment approach and societal change approach.

### **Education Approach**

This is to enable people make informed choice about their health behaviour by providing the knowledge and information and helping them to develop the necessary skills that is giving information to people about the effects of smoking, helping explore their values, attributes and come to a decision. It does not try to persuade or motivate change in one direction and outcome is peoples voluntary choice, which may be different from the one preferred by health providers, it assumes that increase in knowledge will lead to change in attitude and behaviour. The aim is for them to understand the effects of smoking on health and then make a decision whether to smoke or not and act on the decision. The aspect of learning are;

- i. **Cognitive Aspect:** This is the provision of information about the causes and effect of health related behaviour through the provision of leaflets, pamphlet, booklets, visual display and one on one advice.
- ii. **Affective Aspect:** This is the provision of opportunities for workers to share and explore their attitude and feelings through one on one counselling and group discussion.
- iii. **Behavioural Aspect:** This is helping workers to develop decision making skills required for healthy living.

These various methods of health education are effective in improving knowledge; however knowledge is rarely translated into behaviour. These approaches help workers to understand the effects of smoking on health and then make a decision whether to smoke or not and act on the decision. This can be achieved through these activities;

- Giving information to workers or clients about the effects of smoking, HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality.
- Helping them explore their values and attributes and then make a decision.
- Helping them to stop smoking if they want to.

### **Empowerment Approach**

This is also known as client centred approach, it has to do with the values of empowerment. It helps people to identify their own concern and gain the skills and confidence necessary to act upon them. This is the only approach that uses a bottom up rather than top down approach. Health promotion plays the role of a facilitator rather than that of an expert. Clients are seen as equals and have the right to set their own agenda. In line with health promotion as defined in the Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986) enabling people to gain control over their lives may involve empowerment of both the individuals and the entire communities. For people to be empowered they must recognise the following;

- Understand their powerlessness
- Feel strongly enough about their situation to want to change it.
- Feel capable of changing the situation by having information, support and life skills.

Usually empowerment is a long arm process, difficult to conclude that changes are due to the intervention rather than some other factors and the results are hard to quantify compared with other approaches.

### **Medical Approach**

The aim of this approach is to reduce morbidity and premature mortality. You target a whole population or high risk group then you promote medical intervention that can prevent or reduce ill health. Medical approach is popular in these areas;

- Using scientific method, like epidemiology.
- Prevention and early detection of diseases is cheaper than treatment in other words prevention is better than cure.
- Top down approach, this is done by experts, it reinforces authority of health professional who are reviewed as having necessary knowledge in order to achieve results.

Medical approach has demerits, it is based on medical definition of health, it focuses on the absence of disease rather than promoting positive health and it removes health decisions from the people concern. The medical approach relies on having infrastructure capable of delivering, screening or an immunization programme. It has to do with primary prevention, that prevention of disease through immunization, or encouraging healthy life style, secondary prevention, that is preventing the progression of disease through screening and tertiary prevention, that is reducing further disability and suffering in those already ill through rehabilitation, patient education and palliative care. It encourages people to seek early detection and treatment of any disorders.

### **Behavioural Change Approach**

This is also known as lifestyle approach because it encourages the individual to adopt healthy behaviour which improves health. It sees health as the property of the individual, that is people can make real improvement to their health by choosing to change their lifestyles. It involves a change in an attitude followed by a change in behaviour and this can be done through these methods;

- Enlightenment campaign to persuade people to observe personal hygiene
- To drink wisely
- To adopt a healthy diet or eating habits
- To undertake regular exercise.

Change may only become apparent after a long period and that is difficult to determine if behaviour change was due to health promotion intervention. It uses persuasive education to prevent non-smokers from starting and smokers to stop smoking.

### **Societal Change Approach**

This is a kind of radical change approach, the aim is to change the society and not the behaviour of the individual and to produce physical and social environment. It is targeted towards groups and population. It needs the support of the public, therefore the public needs to be informed of the importance. Health promoter are involved in lobbying, policy planning, negotiating and implementation.

The outcome of this approach may include;

- Changes in laws and regulations, for example, banning smoking, food labelling, applying taxes and paying subsidies on certain types of food.
- Improvement in the profile of health issues on common agenda.

Maybe difficult to prove link with health promotion interventions because changes is usually a lengthy process.

**Benefits of Health Promotion in the Workplace**

According to WHO (2009), proper attention to workers health and safety has extensive benefits;

- Healthy workers are productive and raise healthy families, therefore health workforce is a key strategy for overcoming poverty.
- Safe workplace contributes to sustainable development which is the key to poverty reduction.
- The processes of protecting workers and environment for future generations have important common elements such as in pollution control and the reduction of exposure.
- Must pollution and environmental exposures that are hazardous to health arise from industrial processes that maybe influenced by occupational health and safety programme.
- Occupational safety and health can contribute to improving the employability of workers through workplace maintenance of a healthy and safe work environment, training and retraining, assessment of work demands, medical diagnosis, healthy screening and assessment function capacities.
- Environmental health is fundamental to public health, major disease like heart diseases, HIV/AIDS need workplace programme as part of disease control strategy.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Employee</b>
A well managed health and safety programme.	A safe and healthy work environment
A positive and caring image.	Enhanced self esteem
Improved staff morale	Reduced stress
Reduced Staff turnover	Improved morale
Reduced absenteeism	Increased job satisfaction
Reduced risk of fires and litigation.	Improved sense of well being

In promoting health at work, the employers and employees benefit alot. Having healthy and well motivated staff can reduce sickness, and absence from work, improve productivity and help to create a healthy and safe working environment. Workplace health promotion aspects are;

- Participation of employees in the process of improving work environment.
- Mental health promotion through offering of courses for managers on how to deal with stress and tension and providing anonymous psychological consultancy for all employees.
- Exercise and physical activity by offering sports courses, encouraging physical activities, promoting an active and healthy culture at work.

- Health monitoring through offering medical checks such as blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar level etc.
- Raising the topic of healthy eating at work, giving information on nutrition as well as healthy canteen food or facilities to prepare own food.
- Better health, better people and better performance. Promoting health at work through; alcohol and drug awareness, chronic illness, healthy eating, mental health and well-being, dental health, physical activities, healthy weight, sexual health, tobacco awareness, travel health, work positive.

Interventions available are health related programme that involves change or maintaining health behaviours, health related policies that are designed to protect or promote employees health and environmental support.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

At every stage in life, preventive health services hold the promise of improving lives, making them longer, healthier and more productive. Adults with multiple risk factors for diseases such as high blood pressure, smoking and sedentary habits are likely to be of a high cost for the employee in terms of health care due to absenteeism, disability and overall productivity. Therefore health promotion in the work place will help to improve the employee's physical strength, stamina and general well-being, it will improve their focus at work, it will also increase job satisfaction by fostering a positive outlook on life and better relationship amongst workers. The different approaches will therefore lead to reduction on employees health risk, it was recommended that health promotion in the workplace should be given a great attention or priority because of the positive benefits.

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