Mental Health Policy Brief

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Access to Mental Health Services in Tech Companies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Continuous digitization has a significant impact on how work is carried out in today's terms. Thus, it's crucial to investigate whether utilizing digital technologies at work causes more stress, anxiety, depression, isolation, and burnout. One of the topics with the lowest emphasis in the workplace is mental health. However, it is a crucial topic that, if ignored, may have an impact on people's performance and general health. In a survey done by AppDynamics, the report indicated that more than 85% of employees working in tech industries felt an enormous burden at work.

BACKGROUND

Technology has become ubiquitous in most jobs, and it has a major impact on professional relationships and work organizations. Numerous significant work stressors have been found as a result of generations of intensive studies into the precise characteristics of employment that cause stress and strain illnesses. The business environment is recognized for its high levels of stress, which include odd hours, irregular days, and strict deadlines.

The technological sector is expanding tremendously, and lucrative openings are constantly sprouting up all over the place. As a result, the technology sector is typically younger than its comparable counterparts, and most of its members have little prior exposure to such a rigorous sector. This, along with the "excessive hours" culture prevalent in the industry, is causing several burnouts and a poor work-life balance.

SCOPE OF PROBLEM

Many companies offer benefits like catered meals and on-site indoor games to entice their workers to work for a longer duration. The expectations they make on employees, however, strains them and pushes them to their limits, are the negative side of this. Companies promise their employees that they'll have flexible work hours but, in some cases, they just overwork their employees and ask to complete a given task before the end of the day. Consequently, their mental health suffers. In the IT industry, difficulties with isolation, anxiety, stress, depression, and physical health issues like sleep deprivation are not unusual (Pilsl, 2022).
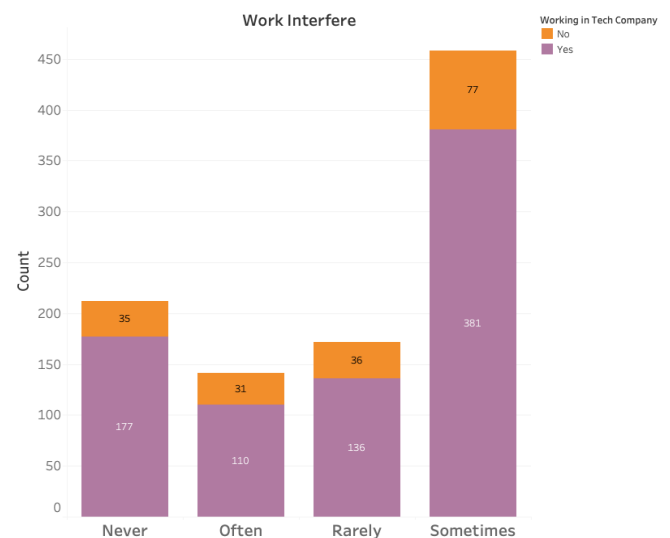
MENTAL STATE OF TECH INDUSTRY

Figure 1: Interference in work due to Mental Health in Tech and Non-tech Companies

Figure 1 clearly depicts that the employees working in the tech industry are more prone to be distracted due to their mental illness as compared to those working in non-tech organizations. These interferences can result in unhealthy habits and may also decrease employee's efficiency and concentration while they are working. These people are distracted for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they are caught in an endless cycle of commitments with no true respite, which causes aggravation and irritation. Many of them struggle to concentrate owing to disorders like attention deficit disorder, which cause them to have shorter attention spans. Multitasking is another important factor as performing various tasks at the same time may cause the person to get distracted especially mentally (Bhardwaj, 2022).

The dataset used for analysis is from a survey carried out pre-Covid 19 pandemic. Throughout the IT industry, attitudes regarding mental health and the prevalence of mental health issues are measured in the survey. Thousands of people suffering from mental health illnesses were interviewed to find different geographic regions having different rates of mental illness and different views on mental health. The analysis also seeks to identify the factors that are most strongly associated with mental illness or certain attitudes about mental health in the workplace. Figure 1 clearly shows that respondents suffering from mental illness are aged between 25-35 are in majority.
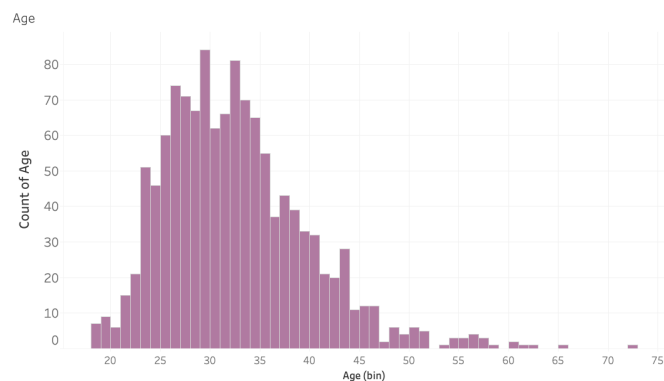

Figure 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

According to numerous research conducted by the Mental Health Foundation, 38% of employees would be concerned regarding their future chances of job stability if they opened out about a mental health issue. Another 17% are concerned about being criticized by their coworkers. They also found that a quarter of the companies have no protocols to help the workers who are suffering from mental issues (Symmons, 2019). Hence, the companies need to spread more awareness regarding mental health among their employees.
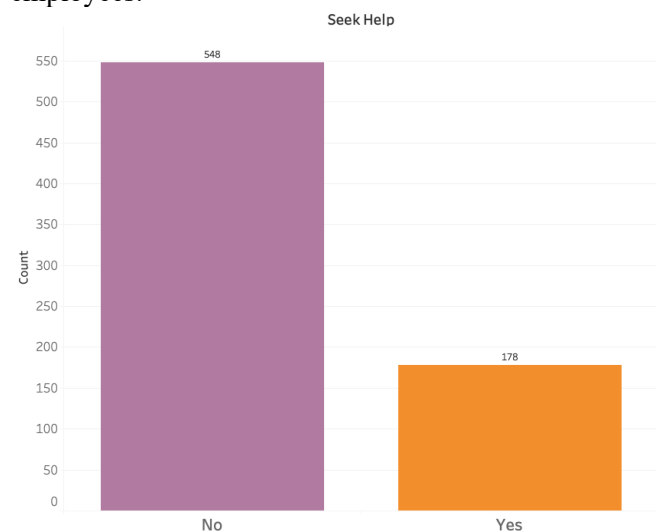

Figure 3: Resources provided by Tech Companies to learn more about mental health

The lack of understanding about the mental health programs offered by many IT businesses, as demonstrated in figure 3, prevents many employees from knowing about the options available and preventing them from receiving mental care, as seen in figure 4. Moreover, even though employees who know about the mental health resources provided by their company, they don't tend to seek help regarding their mental health condition because they are afraid of facing discrimination from their coworkers and even supervisors. Importantly, even if the person never tells their employer that they suffer from a mental illness, their boss and/or supervisors still cannot discriminate against them if they merely think that they have a disability ("Companies generally cannot question you about your mental health", n.d.).
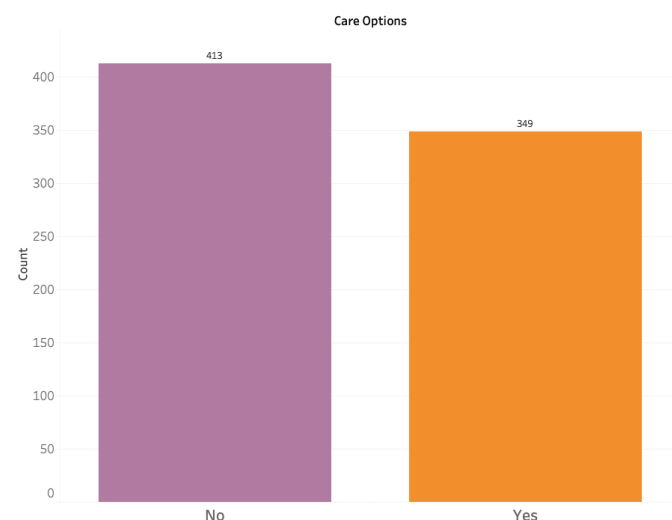

Figure 4: Care options provided by their tech companies known by the respondents

WORK FROM OFFICE = MORE STRESS

Many aspects of office-based work, including the long travel there, the eight hours spent sitting at a desk in a sometimes unpleasant office setting, the depressing desk lunch and unhealthy snacks, and the frustrating commute home, all lead to mental health problems. According to a Cisco survey conducted in 2022, the majority of the twenty-eight thousand employees who participated felt that working remotely and in a hybrid, environment increased their overall health. The time saved because of not having to commute and having a more flexible schedule was a major factor in that improvement. The extra time allowed the respondents to spend more time with their friends and family as well as more time on self-care. According to the study, full-time employees who work in an office setting are the least pleased with their work-life balance, while hybrid employees are in the middle and entirely remote employees are the most satisfied

("Cisco Global Hybrid Work Study", 2022). As seen in figure 5, majority of workers suffering from mental illness worked in a non-remote environment as compared to those working remotely. In addition to this, employees in tech companies having mental issues are more than those in non-tech companies.
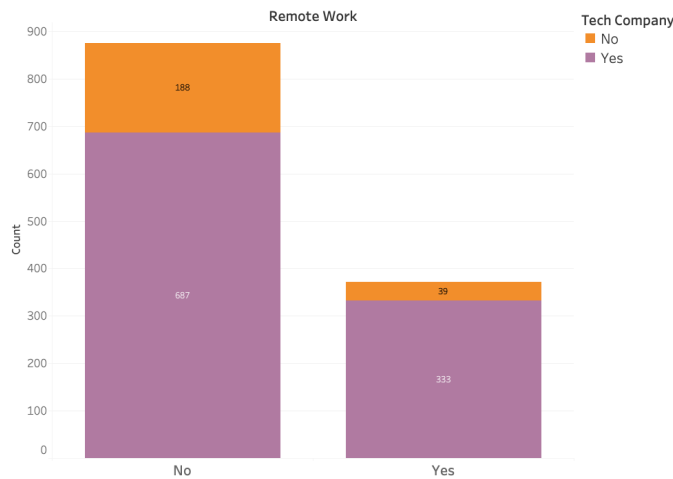

Figure 5: Respondents having mental health issues depending on remote work environment

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The initial and most important step is awareness. We don't typically have the crucial talks about mental health in the tech industry. This is an issue; these discussions ought to be supported rather than discouraged. Organizations may ensure that their staff feel at ease and heard by providing a secure environment for talking about mental health concerns.

In Californian companies, mental health issues are addressed seriously. They must provide appropriate adjustments for their workers who have mental health conditions, unless doing so would put an excessive burden on them. Intellectual learning difficulties, emotional disorders, and mental and psychological disorders or afflictions are all considered mental disabilities under California law. Workers in California are safeguarded against discrimination depending on recognized disability by law. This implies that even if the employer just has a vague suspicion that a worker has a mental condition rather than proof, they still cannot treat them differently. So, if the person has faced discrimination, they can file a complaint against their employer. Therefore, it will have an influence if more nations enact legislation like the California law because it will push tech companies to view mental health issues as major issue and take appropriate steps by helping the needy. Additionally, managing mental health concerns in the workplace won't be difficult without the added challenge of a non-sensitive employer ("Companies generally cannot question", (n.d.)).

Any organization's strategy should be built on mental health programs. One practical strategy for a company to assist mental health is to offer wellness perks. But they should keep in mind that providing substantial vacation days isn't enough; they also need to encourage their staff to take advantage of it. In addition, make sure that workers have free or discounted access to resources like counselling (Pilsl, 2022).

With the assistance of experts, IT companies should teach their supervisors and lower-level staff to recognize mental health issues. They should have the skills necessary to identify and provide resources to their coworkers and employees suffering from issues.

It's crucial to inquire about the help that staff members require. The company might conduct an anonymous poll to determine the top goals and mental health issues of its employees. This will do a lot to promote a culture of awareness and belonging. A healthy organization depends on its employees' mental well-being (Pilsl, 2022). Accordingly, companies can also allow their employees to work remotely as it may have a positive impact on their mental health.

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