

THE EFFECT OF PARTICIPATING IN RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES ON STRESS MANAGEMENT

Dr. Vibha Jain*
Ms. Mansi Anand**

ABSTRACT

“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” - a famous saying which means that long and continuous hours of work in a monotonous environment can lead to severe harmful impacts on mental and physical health. It seems like businesses today have started to take this saying seriously, as implied from a number of employee recreational events increasingly being organized by companies. These events organized under the tag of ‘Workplace Recreation’ include competitions and contests, meditation sessions, sports tournaments, corporate parties/picnics and much more. The major objective being not only prevention of employee burnout but also sparking creativity and innovation among employees that comes from a relaxed mind. However, these activities come at a cost as Companies spend huge amounts of money for organizing such events. Hence companies also do a cost benefit analysis in terms of expenditure incurred and employee well-being that enables them to better handle the job stress that comes along with the modern-day work structures. The objective of this study is to examine the different aspects of recreational events but from the perspective of an employee. It intends to check whether these events are as impactful in enabling employees to cope up with the stress caused by various factors. The analysis which has been carried out using graphical representation and statistical techniques recognizes the need for activities which help the employees to escape monotony and provides support to the positive impact of recreational programs currently happening at workplaces. Employees seem to be inclined towards the opinion that recreational programs are positively affecting their work by helping them bond with their colleagues, enabling greater interaction and sparking creativity, eventually leading them to cope with stress caused due to work-related and personal factors.

Keywords: Employee Recreation, Workplace Recreation, Job Stress, Burnout, Work Experience, Employee Motivation.

Introduction

With the advent of the 21st century, one major change that has taken Multi-national Companies (MNCs) by storm is the stress that they place upon human resources in their organizations. Be it organizational behavior, executive compensation, the emergence of the gig economy and hybrid work structures – different aspects of human resource management are getting evolved into separate domains. The traditional communication and motivation models practiced in organizations are being questioned and updated continuously. They hold utmost significance in the concurrent world looking at modern-day work structures which are loaded with stress amplified by external special circumstances such as a pandemic. One way to manage job-induced stress is to break the monotonous work life by adding some recreation to it termed as ‘Workplace Recreation’. These recreational activities comprise of a wide range of activities for the betterment of the mental and physical health of employees and also provide entertainment to them which helps them to cope with the job stress. These programs include several events ranging from celebration of festivals/birthdays to organization of contests or sports tournaments. Such events gain more importance in the wake of pandemic where there has been a gigantic paradigm shift in work structures that has hugely impacted the physical and mental well-being of employees.

* Associate Professor, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India.
** Assistant Professor, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India.

Recreation is one of the most innate needs of humans which is physiological - something a person is born with. Since the days of yore, humans have been involved in music, dance, art, games and various other activities to get rid of monotony of life. The absence of such activities in life can drive one to become irritated and less productive. Looking at this, modern-day organizations are becoming more welcoming towards introduction of workplace recreation to prevent fatigue in their employees making them more productive. Hence, these types of activities can be witnessed majorly in organizations where human capital comprise a relatively younger workforce. Another factor that can be cited as the reason behind emergence of such events in multi-national companies and even startups is the changing expectations of employees – Millennials aspire that other than a well-paying job they should also have work-life balance, growth opportunities at workplace, enhanced employee engagement and participation. For acquiring and retaining talented personnel, companies need to enhance the non-monetary rewards as well. The complex nature of managerial jobs in today's world requires analytical skills which require managers to be more creative and spontaneous. Employers need to step up their game of training the employees by engaging them in activities where they can hone their skills to keep up with the dynamic job requirements.

Apart from disrupting the tedium of work-life, these events are also known to enhance the motivation levels of employees. They act as catalysts that can make employees comfortable in their workspace, raising the opportunity cost if they decide to switch their jobs. The comfort factor also develops from the interaction that takes place among employees belonging to different departments and hierarchy of management. This can help diverse workforce to bond during such activities. Hence, the employee develops loyalty towards the employers leading to reduced employee turnover. Employees also benefit from such activities as they provide a change for them from their daily routine making them happier in the process and rejuvenated enough to put in more effort at their workplace. This also improves the physical health of employees by providing some physical activity in today's desk-job culture where one of the major reasons behind employee burnout is hours of seated work in front of screens. The study aims to explore the employee perspective toward such activities in detail.

Literature Review

Caroline Muthoni (Mbaabu, 2013) in her research submitted to the School of Business at Kenyatta University states that workplace recreation activities by an organization to improve employees' social and physical well-being are very essential. She surveyed to establish how mental health programs influence the well-being and performance of employees of the Commission for University Education (CUE). The survey was structured in a manner to elicit information as to the participation level in recreational activities provided by the organisation and if not, then the reasons thereof. The survey concluded that the high participation (67%) was for an improvement in their health as well as to gain constant support from the senior management. As to reasons for lack of participation despite it being compulsory, the findings were: 32% of the people reported lack of time, 17% said financial cost was too high, and another 20% stated lack of interest in such activities. Inadequate facilities, other priorities, no childcare support were some of the other reasons. Her research recommended the management to explore the reasons for the lack of participation and partake in corrective actions thereof.

Mokaya and Gitari's (2012), conducted research in Kenya Utalii College. They have explored more of a social angle trying to find out whether recreational activities help the employees to fulfil their social needs. The study revealed that staff parties act as a platform for socialising helping employees to receive recognition/feedback on their performance. Also, team bonding, and commitment among employees are boosted during activities like parties, aerobics and other team-building exercises, enhancing employee well-being.

Varatharaj and Vasantha (2012) in their research study talk about the work-life balance of working women engaged in the service industry who are based in Chennai. The aim was to look at the work-life balance which is defined as maintaining an equilibrium between personal and professional life. It shed light on employers recognising the need of maintaining balance and recommended counselling sessions related to family welfare programs.

Dr. Barkha Gupta (2019) conducted a research study on an IT company based in NOIDA. The study interestingly observed that the employee participation, though having the support of the management and facilities being available, was low. It was surprisingly found that only 2% of the employees demanded such activities. The lack of participation despite having established a strong positive correlation between recreational activities and employee well-being and efficiency was attributed to lack of time, high financial costs and inadequate childcare facilities. The study gave suggestions to address the concerns of the employee for better participation.

Objectives

The main aim of the study is to analyze the effectiveness of employee recreational activities on stress management. The specific areas which are to be studied to achieve the main objective are as follows:

- To determine factors causing stress in the workforce
- To analyze the existing workplace recreational events
- To measure the satisfaction level of existing recreational facilities on various parameters.
- To identify the changes in the pattern of such activities in the wake of the pandemic

Methodology

Research Design for this study involves the use of a descriptive analysis approach as the study progresses by collecting information from the target sample and systematically describing the perception of employees towards their stress levels and the role of recreational events in handling that stress and various other parameters. The target population of the study is the working professionals who have been selected on a random basis.

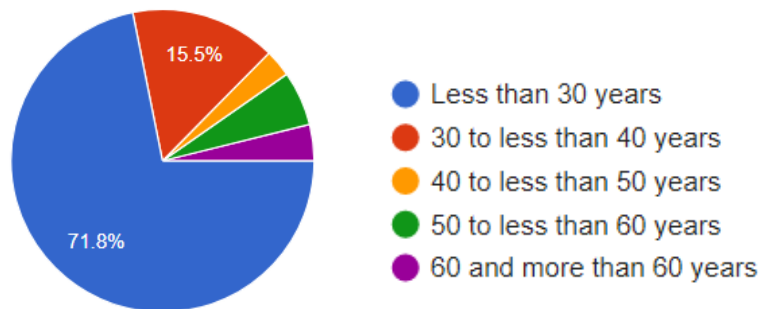
The prime methodology used here is the collection of primary data through questionnaires. The questionnaire has been divided into four parts:

- Demographic Analysis
- Stress Analysis
- Company Programs
- Satisfaction Analysis

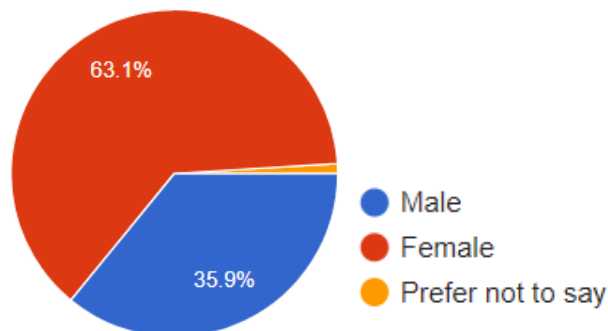
Appropriate statistical techniques have been used for providing descriptive analysis using graphic representation. The parameters which affect employee satisfaction related to workplaces are identified by using Factor Analysis through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data Analysis

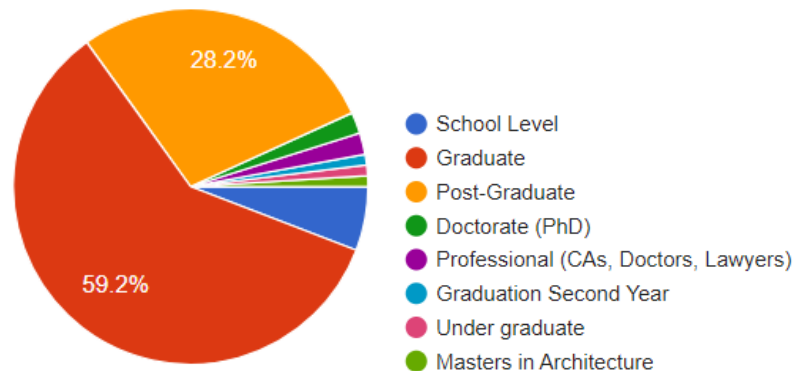
- **Demographic Analysis**



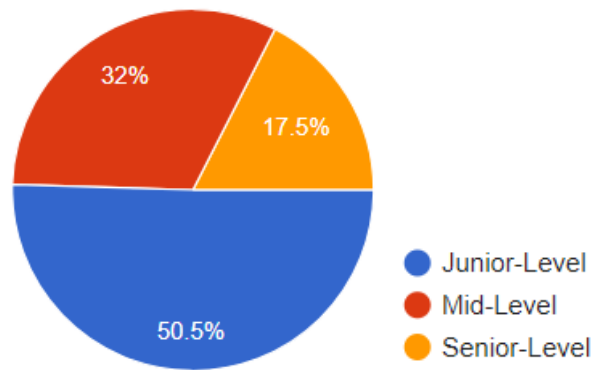
(A) Age



(b) Gender



(C) Educational Qualification



(d) Level of Management at which Respondent is Currently Working

Fig 1. Demographic Analysis

Demographic analysis of the sample collection has been presented in Fig 1. Out of 103 responses, the majority of the respondents (71.8%) belong to 'less than 30 years, and are female (63.1%). 59.2% of the respondents are graduates, and 28.2% of them are post-graduates. 50.5% work at the junior level of management. Looking at these numbers, it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents belong to a younger age group.

• **Stress Analysis**

For analyzing the level of stress among employees before and after the pandemic, the respondents were asked to identify the timeline where their stress levels have been higher based on different factors that cause stress. 103 respondents were asked to select the timeline (out of three) when their stress level related to the seven parameters have been higher. The options for the timeline provided are mentioned in the table below.

Table 1. Timelines Related to Factors Causing Stress

Stress Factor/Timeline	Higher in Pre-Covid Times	Higher during/Post Covid Times	Stress Level has Stayed the Same	Total
Health Issues	15	49	39	103
Financial Issues	9	36	58	103
Overworking	15	42	46	103
Household Responsibilities	12	38	53	103
Unavailability of Domestic Help	16	41	46	103
Fear of getting infected	13	61	29	103
Stress related to Career Growth	11	39	53	103
Total	91 (12.62%)	306 (42.44%)	324 (44.93%)	721

As Table 1 depicts, for the majority of the respondents, either the stress levels have increased during/post covid times (42.44%) or they have stayed the same (44.93%). This indicates for the majority of people, factors that cause stress have existed even before the pandemic. So, there was always a need for stress management programs at workplaces which has escalated because of the pandemic. Out of a total of 103 respondents, 63.1% of the respondents feel that their mental health has been severely affected during the pandemic. However, 82.5% of the 103 respondents also feel that their stress levels have been under manageable limits. It implies that there is a perception that the pandemic has increased the stress levels of employees but most of them have been able to cope with it which shows that stress due to the pandemic is not as high as it is perceived. Respondents were also asked about the activities which act as stress-buster for them in general, so that we can understand the preference of respondents regarding their choice of activities. They were asked to provide their top three preferences out of eight options of activities provided to them. The majority of the respondents (24.27%) selected Art (Music/Dancing/Painting) as their first preference. Exercising (Running, Walking, Gymming) was selected as their second preference (32%) as well as third preference (19.41%) by the majority of the respondents.



Fig. 2: Satisfaction Level of Employees Related to Various Job Parameters

Respondents were also asked to rate certain parameters related to their job. The responses of the same are depicted in Fig 2. It can be implied that satisfaction level related to stress management has reduced in the wake of the pandemic which can be attributed to the role of the pandemic which has caused the stress level of employees to increase. The low rating of Work-Life Balance also points towards the intrusion of work hours into the personal time of the employee. This indicates the need for stress management activities at the workplace which can be used to prevent fatigue and boredom and can boost creative spirits. Also, the rating of 'training and development' and 'communication across hierarchy (vertical)' is also not very high. So, the scope of improvement can also be identified for companies that can take this into consideration while designing the framework for such activities in the future. Teamwork is another high-rated parameter that points toward the usefulness of workplace recreation in harboring cordial relations at the workplace.

Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix

Job Parameters	Component	
	1	2
Communication across Departments (Horizontal)	0.817	0.296
Communication across Hierarchy (Vertical)	0.809	0.271
Employee Participation	0.807	0.169
Training & Development	0.801	0.154
Teamwork	0.656	0.412
Stress Management (In Pre-Covid Times)	0.064	0.848
Stress Management (During/Post-Covid Times)	0.316	0.699
Work-Life Balance	0.434	0.676

Factor Analysis

In Table 2, principal component analysis has been performed using SPSS Software. This analysis is used to club these eight parameters in two major factors – known as Component 1 & Component 2.

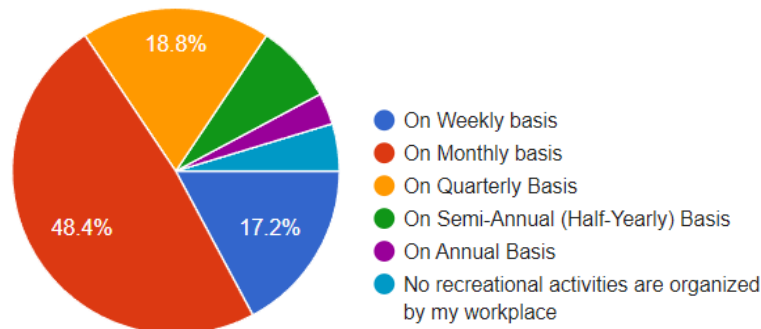
- Component 1 has been defined as Organizational Characteristics
- Component 2 has been defined as Individual Employee Traits

As it is evident from Table 2, a high correlation can be witnessed between the first five parameters & Component 1 – Organizational Characteristics as these five parameters are organization-specific. But the last three parameters being personal to employees show a low correlation with Component 1 but a high correlation with Component 2 – Individual Employee Traits. Hence, there is a low correlation between the last three parameters and the Component 1. The job parameters which affect the satisfaction level of employees with respect to their current jobs are identified as two major factors namely - Organizational Characteristics and Individual Employee Traits where employee sheds a lot of emphasis on Organizational Characteristics. This observation can be used by workplace management taking these important factors into consideration while planning for recreational programs in the future.

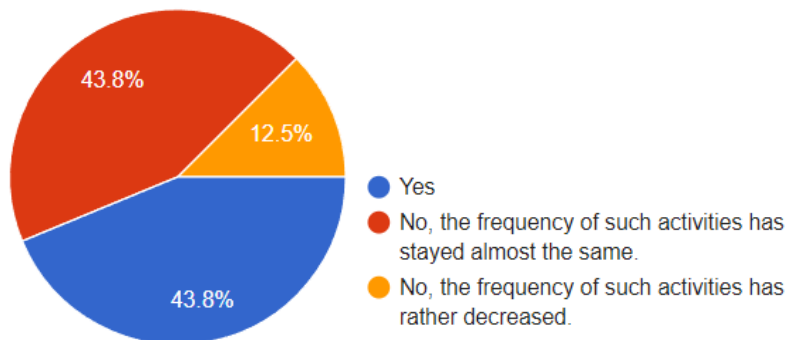
After section 2 – Stress Analysis of the questionnaire, a filter question was added. The next two sections of the questionnaire – Section 3 & 4 were filled by only those respondents who answered this question in the affirmative. Respondents were asked about the existence of workplace recreational events at their workplace. 62.1% of the respondents (64) mentioned that their workplace does organize such events to whom the next two sections of the questionnaire were available whereas 37.9% of the respondents (39) answered that no such activities are organized at their companies. Hence, the rest of the analysis is based upon the responses of these 64 respondents.

Analysis of Existing Workplace Recreational Events

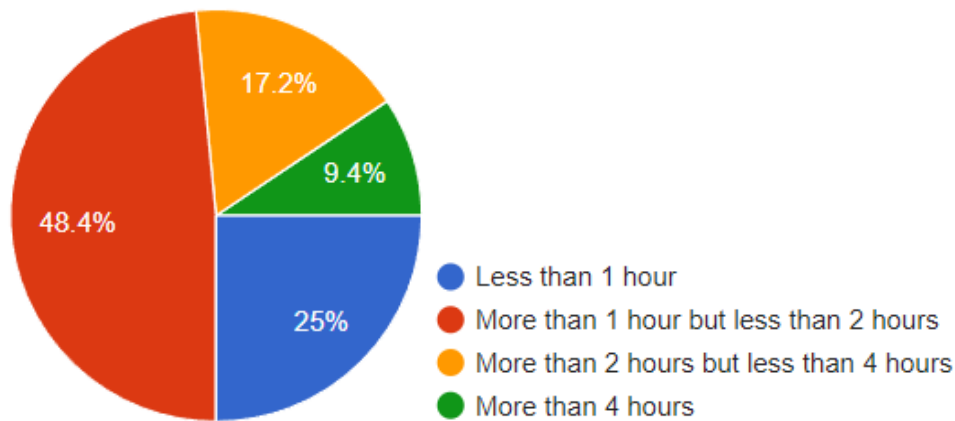
To carry on with the fourth objective, the analysis regarding the existing recreational events with respect to frequency, mode, involvement and types of such activities has been undertaken.



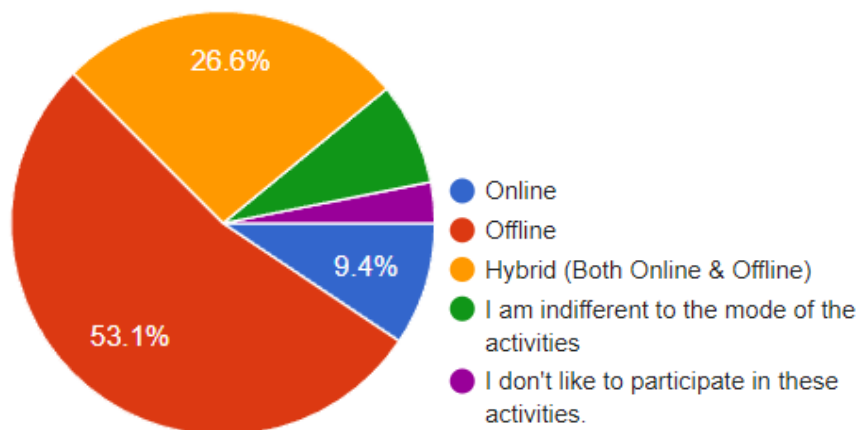
(a) Frequency



(b) Change in Frequency during Pandemic



(c) Preference Regarding Frequency



(d) Preference Regarding Mode

Fig 3. Frequency of Recreational Programs

- Frequency:** Out of 64 responses, 48.4% of the respondents have said that their workplace organizes such recreational events on a monthly basis. 18.8% of the respondents said that such events are organized at their workplace on a quarterly basis. [Fig 1 (a)]. When asked about the change in frequency of such recreational events in the wake of the pandemic, the results are quite divided. 43.8% of the responses conveyed that such events have increased in number during pandemic and 43.8% of the responses conveyed that the number has rather stayed the same. [Fig 1 (b)]. Talking about the preferences regarding frequency, the majority of respondents (48.4%) said that they would like to devote more than 1 but less than 2 hours to such recreational events on average during a month [Fig 1 (c)].
- Mode:** Most of the activities were organized in an offline mode according to 81.25% of the respondents before the pandemic but during/post the pandemic 48.43% of the respondents said that such events were organized in the online mode, 15.625% mentioned events being organized in an offline mode and 35.93% said that they are organized in a hybrid mode. The majority of the respondents (53.1%) feel that offline mode is more comfortable. [Fig 1 (d)]
- Involvement:** The majority of the respondents (40.6%) reflected those inputs and suggestions of employees are taken before as well as after organizing such events so that they can be designed in a manner that is more suitable to employee needs. Also, these inputs are witnessed in execution according to 45.3% of the respondents who feel that their suggestions are incorporated by the workplace management and corrective action on the basis of their inputs is visible.

Table 3: Types of Activities Organized According to Different time Periods

Types of Recreational Events/Timeline	Pre-Covid times	Post-covid times	Both (a) & (b)	Not Organized by my Workplace	Total
Indoor Games & Contests	22	11	18	13	64
Sports Tournaments	27	11	9	17	64
Physical Activity Sessions (Yoga, Weight Loss Programs, Marathon, etc.)	17	9	21	17	64
Meditation/Spiritual Sessions	8	18	22	16	64
Consultancy Sessions	7	16	23	18	64
Corporate Picnics/Trips	32	4	13	15	64
Volunteer Programs (Charity, Community Work, Social Work)	18	9	22	15	64
Birthday/Festival Celebration	17	12	28	7	64
Others	9	11	22	22	64
Total	157 (27.25%)	101 (17.53%)	178 (30.91%)	140 (24.31%)	576

- Types:** Table 3 presents the data relating to various types of recreational events organized by workplaces during the pre and during/post-pandemic times. As the table depicts, indoor activities including contests and competitions, birthdays/festival celebrations were being organized during both the timelines but a fall can be witnessed in outdoor activities like sports tournaments or corporate trips/picnics. A little increase is also visible in the number of physical and mental health-related programs which can be attributed to rising consciousness regarding health due to the pandemic.

Satisfaction Analysis

Employees were asked to rate existing recreational events on the basis of ten parameters to know the satisfaction levels of employees related to them.

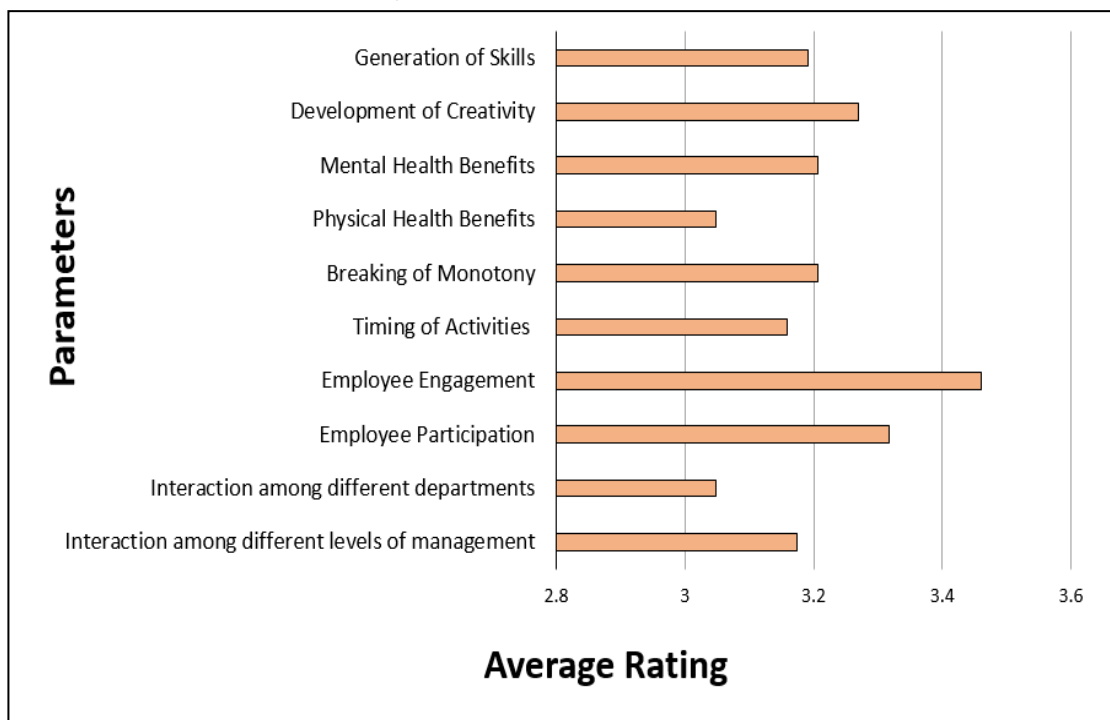


Fig. 4: Average Rating of each Parameter of the Existing Recreational Programs

As Fig 4 depicts, employee engagement and employee participation are the highest-rated parameters. This shows that the recreational events have been impactful in generating employee engagement and the workforce is made to feel more involved if they participate in such activities. Physical health benefits and interaction among different departments are coming out to be the lowest-rated parameters. This can be attributed to the fact such activities are not being organized often and their low frequency can be one factor behind their low impact in providing physical health benefits. And if the nature of the activities is indoor or online, then it leaves lesser scope for physical health benefits. Interaction among different departments can also be checked if the design of recreation is such that it involves people from different departments.



Fig. 5: Overall Satisfaction Level Associated with Employee Recreational Programs

Respondents were also asked to rate the overall satisfaction level with the activities which is mentioned in Fig 5. The majority of the respondents, that is, 24 out of 64 (36.9%) respondents have given 3 overall rating to employee recreational events. 50.8% of respondents have provided a rating of more than 3 (4 or 5), whereas about 12.3% have provided less than 3 rating (1 or 2). It can be implied that more than half of the respondents view employee recreational programs as being useful for them in terms of being a stress-reliever as compared to those who do not view them as useful.

Table 4: Employee Responses to Favorable Statements regarding Existing Recreational Events

Stress Factor/Timeline	1.Totally Disagree	2.Slightly Disagree	3.Neutral	4.Slightly Agree	5.Totally Agree	Total
Recreational Activities enhanced my motivation level at workplace.	7	10	15	16	16	64
I have generated a sense of belongingness regarding my workplace because of these activities.	8	8	14	19	15	64
These activities have helped me to bond with my colleagues.	2	7	19	17	19	64
I have been able to handle work stress because of recreational programs organized by my workplace.	6	11	15	16	16	64
These activities have helped me to become more creative.	6	8	19	9	22	64
I have been able to perform better at my job after being part of such programs.	6	12	15	11	20	64
Total	35 (9.12%)	56 (14.58%)	97 (25.26%)	88 (22.92%)	108 (28.12%)	384

Table 5: Employee Responses to Unfavorable statements regarding Existing Recreational Events

Stress Factor/Timeline	1.Totally Disagree	2.Slightly Disagree	3.Neutral	4.Slightly Agree	5.Totally Agree	Total
I don't find these recreational activities much useful.	24	17	13	6	4	64
I would rather spend my time in doing my job rather than being a part of such activities.	23	19	11	6	5	64
These activities consume all the break time and leave me with less time for leisure.	19	14	16	9	6	64
I don't like to participate as recreational activities feel like a burden.	22	16	13	9	4	64
These activities can lead to conflicts amongst employees.	17	19	18	5	5	64
My company should rather spend their resources on their core business than on spending on such activities.	27	17	13	3	4	64
Total	132 (34.37%)	102 (26.56%)	84 (21.87%)	38 (9.9%)	28 (7.3%)	384

To have some deep insight into the preferences of employees regarding recreational events, they were asked to rate their agreeableness to the statements mentioned in Table 4 & Table 5. More than 50% of the respondents agree with the favorable statements in Table 4. Similarly, more than 60% disagree with the unfavorable statements in Table 5 again depicting a positive attitude towards the recreational events. Reactions of employees to both favorable and unfavorable statements confirm that there is a positive impact of recreational events being organized by the workplaces. It can be implied more than half of the respondents find these activities useful and impactful.

As the employees are satisfied, 53.1% of the total 64 respondents mentioned that they wanted their workplaces to organize more such recreational events.

Hence, we can conclude the usefulness of recreational events organized at the workplace for the majority of the respondents.

Conclusion

The study has concluded that employees find recreational programs effective and the majority of them agree with their benefits including coping with stress management, generating team cohesiveness and enhancing motivational levels. The demographic analysis of the target yielded that they are majorly millennials working at starting level positions in their workplaces. Stress Levels of more than 85% of the respondents have either stayed the same or increased during/post-pandemic and the satisfaction level of employees relating to stress management has reduced which points towards the need for stress management programs at workplaces. It can be concluded that stress has been there even before the pandemic for the majority of the respondents and it even increased for a good chunk of them.

After analyzing the existing recreational activities, it has been observed, that in a majority of cases such activities are being conducted on a monthly basis. The preference of employees towards limited time commitment and offline mode of recreational events indicates that too much time commitment to such events is perceived by employees as an invasion of their private or leisure time. Similarly, offline mode of such events is more comfortable because when at home, employees don't want to get involved in such activities too much as this is the time which they can give to their household responsibilities.

The job parameters which affect the satisfaction level of employees with respect to their current jobs are identified as two major factors namely Organizational Characteristics and Individual Employee Traits where employee sheds a lot of emphasis on Organizational Characteristics. More than half of respondents agree with the usefulness of employee recreational programs as stressbusters at workplaces as depicted by their responses.

More than half of the respondents view employee recreational programs as being useful for them in terms of being a stress-reliever as compared to those who do not view them as much useful. Hence, companies should look forward to organizing more such programs at the workplace.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of the study is that the sample size is small and skewed towards younger age groups.

Due to the paucity of time, the study has been conducted by selecting a random sample. This type of study can be replicated in specific sectors/industries.

Recommendations

Employers and workplace management, should recognize the stress levels which are constantly present throughout the times. Special circumstances like pandemic add to it.

Input taking is not very high. Employers should be taking employee inputs into consideration while designing the framework of recreational programs as the workforce is diverse in nature and they are in need of different kinds of activities for relieving their stress. If it does not fit the needs of employees, such activities can add to the work stress.

One thing that came out during conversations with a few respondents was regarding the scheduling of such activities. Such programs should not eat into the leisure time of employees but they should be planned during the work hours only. It should not cut the employee's personal time.

Physical Health Benefits and Interaction among various departments are among the lowest-rated parameters. Hence, designing of future recreational programs can be more inter-departmental in nature. Also, they can be designed to include more physical activity-based programs which would essentially help the employees who have jobs that involve a lot of seating and screen time.

Recreational Programs executed in an online mode are not much preferred by employees. Hence, they should be carried out majorly through offline mode provided there is no risk of infection.

References

1. Dr. Barkha Gupta (2019). The Effect of Participating in Recreational Activities on Employee's Productivity, *IME Journal*, Vol.13 No.2, July-December 2019: Pg. 113-120
2. Caroline Muthoni Mbaabu (2013), Effect of Workplace Recreation on Employee Well-Being and Performance: A Case of the Commission for University Education (CUE)
3. Aloumedjo Zam, 2018, "A Comparative Study in Between the Management of a Professional Football Team and the Customs Administration of Cameroon", *American Scientific Research Journal for Engineering, Technology, and Sciences (ASRJETS)* ISSN (Print) 2313-4
4. Mokaya, S. and Gitari, J.W. (2012). "Effects of Workplace Recreation on Employee Performance: The Case of Kenya Utalii College", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, volume 2(3), pp 176-183.
5. V.Varatharaj; S.Vasantha (2012). Work Life Balances – A Source of Job Satisfaction – An Exploratory Study on The View of Women Employees in the Service Sector
6. Akmal, F. et al. and Ghazali, Z. (2012). Recreational Programme and Its Association with Job Performance. *Asian Social Science*, volume 8(13), pp-172-180
7. Agarwal AJ. (2016), article." How Having Fun Can Boost Employee Productivity
8. The Netherlands, 2018, article "Future of work 2030: A wake-up call for organisations, people and government"
9. Arnav Mehra (2020). Importance of Recreational Activities at Workplaces
10. Manjesh Chandrashekar (2016), Need for recreational activities for employees, especially in the startup sector.

