
International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR)

ISSN: 2393-8870

www.ijarm.com

Review Article

A Study on the effects and ways to deal with alcoholism at the workplace

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Keywords

Alcoholism,
Workplace Policies,
Alcohol Consumption,
Work Performance,
Dealing with Alcoholism

Abstract

With the rapid increase of alcohol consumption in developing countries like India, especially at workplace, alcoholism is a major problem to be dealt with. The work performance of employees is affected by heavy drinking in number of ways. If an employee is suffering from some alcohol problems, it can create a hostile working environment and damage a company's good name. The drinkers are responsible for health care costs, the cause for lower profits and five times more likely to file a worker's compensation plan. This article highlights the problem of alcoholism at workplace and its effects on work performance of employees in a number of ways. Factors contributing to employee's alcohol consumption are also discussed. And further this paper also focuses on the ways to deal with alcoholism at workplace.

Introduction

Alcohol consumption has been steadily increasing in developing countries like India and decreasing in developed countries since the 1980s. Indian industry has recently begun to recognize the problems related to alcohol and some programs have been instituted to help excessive drinkers, although most of the work force still does not have access to these. A study shows that 20% of absenteeism and 40% of accidents at workplace are related to alcohol, annual loss due to alcohol was estimated to be Rs/- 70000 to 80000 million.

The pattern of drinking to intoxication is more prevalent in developing countries indicating higher levels of risk due to drinking. About 10% to 15% alcohol users develop alcohol dependence and become alcoholics. Anybody can become an alcoholic- whatever the age, education, intelligence or socio-economic status is. Over the time when an alcoholic person becomes dependent on alcohol he/she increases the quantity or frequency and continues drinking even though alcohol causes problem to his health, work life, family or social relationships.

Dealing with alcoholism at the workplace is a major problem to be dealt with. Heavy drinking affects work performance in a number of ways. When compared to their sober

counterparts, drinkers are more frequently absent, are less efficient, have more accidents at work and also show maladjustment with other workers which leads to overall decreased performance. A study by Senthilnathan et.al (1984) demonstrated maladjustment among alcohol dependent workers when compared to non-drinkers. Further, drinkers are responsible for health care costs, the cause for lower profits and five times more likely to file a worker's compensation plan. An employee with an alcohol problem can create a hostile working environment and damage a company's good name.

Factors Contributing to Employee's Alcohol Consumption:-

In this modern age drinking is considered as a vital part of the parties, conferences and other events organized in corporate sector or in other organizations. Drinking is generally associated with workplace culture and acceptance of drinking, boredom at work and availability of alcohol. Stressors at home and at work can also contribute to the extent to which alcohol is consumed. Few of these are:-

1.Dirty and noisy work environment:- If the environment at work is noisy, dirty, uncomfortable and neglected then the

employee can feel exertion and easily gets depressed. This can lead him to be motivated towards the alcohol consumption for stress relief.

2.Unreasonable deadlines and performance targets:- If employees are given unreasonable, arbitrary deadlines and higher performance targets then it can cause stress among employees. They drive up costs, lower morale and create anxiety and frustration among employees. Such employees can be motivated towards alcohol consumption.

3.Bullying, Harassment or victimization in the workplace:- Sometimes bullying at workplace in which by using some aggressive or abusive language or by behaving in an aggressive or unreasonable behavior the coworker is mentally harassed which can negatively impact or destroy him/her. Workplace bullies can be managers, coworkers, subordinates and even clients. This include- Ridiculing, undermining, screaming and yelling at the target. Nitpicking and paying attention to unimportant details. Threatening the target job, reputation or work status, creating unrealistic deadlines, duties and work demands. This leads to stress and frustration among employees.

4.Alcohol Availability:- The work settings where alcohol is physically or socially available may promote alcohol among employees during breaks and work-related events. These days often offering alcohol in official parties or gatherings is a must. The employees are thus tempted towards alcohol consumption.

5.Workplace Alienation or Lack of Participation in decision making:- If work demands are too high, employees are feeling boredom at workplace, they are not given opportunity to participate in decision making and interpersonal conflicts with supervisors and workers can work as stressors for the employees. Alcohol consumption is often associated with these stressors. Work place culture, work-family conflict, Low Salary and incentives etc. also can work as stressors and lead an employee towards alcohol consumption.

Dealing with alcoholism in the work place:- The first step for employers is to formulate an accurate policy to deal with alcohol problems in employees. For this the management can seek advice from a specialist. After understanding the exact problems in the organizations a draft for workplace alcohol policy should be developed and then it should be circulated among all the employees of the organization for the feedback of the employees. Some employees may accept it while some may reject the policy. Now all the feedback must be put together and considered by organizing a meeting. The policy should be redrafted as appropriate and submitted for final approval. Clearly, a workplace alcohol policy should be a written document which applies to all workers at the workplace. It should be developed by management and workers or their representatives working together. This should

be a team work. To be effective it needs to have the total commitment of management. The aim of any workplace policy should be prevention, education, counseling and rehabilitation and it should be part of an organization's overall occupational health and safety strategy. The policy should be well publicized within the workplace and provide for a suitable information and education program for all staff. Employees' assistance or counseling services can be used to deal with alcoholism in the workplace. Because not only work environment becomes hostile, the family of the employee also suffers due to this alcoholic problem. These employer-sponsored services are designed to assist employees and their families with managing work and life's daily challenges. These services includes counseling and necessary medical or psychiatric services which helps the employees to tackle with daily life issues, to perform effectively at job, identifying and resolving workplace challenges before they result in high medical and disability costs and promote a healthy lifestyle. Organizations can establish in-house counseling services or refer employees to external counseling services provided by either private consultants or community based organizations and all the information of employee should be kept confidential during counseling sessions. Time to time evaluation of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) must be done to ensure that it is meeting the need of the organization. It should provide all reports to the company indicating the performance of employees. The reports should also include any work related OHS (Occupational Health and Safety) matter which may be increasing the risk of alcohol consumption by employees. Workplace testing of employees can be done only when there are existing legislative provisions or when workplace parties are in agreement that making testing available may be appropriate in certain circumstances.

Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that Alcohol consumption plays a part in and around work both as a perceived antidote to the pressures of the modern workplace and as a way to socialize or network with clients and colleagues. Over the time when an alcoholic person becomes dependent on the alcohol he/she increases the quantity and frequency and continues drinking even though alcohol causes problem to his health, work life, family or social relationships. An employee with an alcohol problem can create a hostile working environment and damage company's good name. It can reduce the productivity of an organization causing increased sickness absence from work, the inability to work and premature deaths among economically active people. Dealing with alcoholism at workplace is a major problem to deal with. After understanding the exact problems in the organization suitable workplace alcohol policies should be developed together. The management and the workers or their representatives can contribute to the prevention, education, counseling and rehabilitation of the employees under influence. Employee Assistance Programs can be used to assist employees and their

families with managing work and life's daily challenges. Last but not the least an alcohol policy must specify the scope of everyone's responsibility to contribute to the management of the problem. It should also specify the grounds for transfer, demotion or dismissal for breaches of the policy and number of warnings should be given to staff regarding indiscipline in the organization.

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