

Loneliness at Workplace

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Abstract

Loneliness is an unpleasant feeling that can creep in peoples' lives at any age. The problems of loneliness, desolation and isolation are prevalent at workplaces too. Although, personality characteristics are a reason for loneliness, organizational environment, and lack of support of superordinate and fellow workers are also some of the reasons for loneliness. Feelings of loneliness and isolation among employees can demoralize them and decrease efficiency and productivity, and are a threat to mental, social and physical health. Workplace loneliness needs to be addressed through proactive measures like creating awareness among employers and employees, education and creating a conducive work climate of mutual collaboration, cooperation and camaraderie.

Keywords: Loneliness; Workplace; Work Environment; Social Isolation.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a condition of human existence. Human beings are free; they are lonely at birth and they die lonely. The sense of loneliness constitutes the inner core, the central fiber of human existence but most of these individuals, under the influence of the society that labels loneliness as a pathological or a lower level of existence, tend to look at it negatively [1].

Sullivan [2] commented that loneliness is an intense, unpleasant experience which can happen to an

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individual at any point in the life cycle. Sullivan further stated, "Man is a gregarious animal with a need for contact with others. When this need is unfulfilled, it is expressed in loneliness. When action is taken to avoid or relive loneliness, there is enhancement of self esteem". Loneliness is theoretically defined as an emotional state in which an individual is aware of the feeling of being alone with the experience of a vague need for individuals. Loneliness has an unpleasant connotation. The lonely and isolated person will be threatened by the potential loss of personal boundaries. Loneliness is very different from solitude or aloneness. An individual can be physically alone and not experience the negative or unpleasant aspects of loneliness. Loneliness often occurs in the presence of others individuals. Hansson [3] revealed that person involved with a positive relationship tend to be less affected by everyday problems and to have a greater sense of control and independence.

Loneliness may lead to serious health-related consequences. A study carried out by Hawkey⁴ revealed that loneliness was tantamount to feeling unsafe, and lonely people see the world as a more threatening place. Lonely people expect more negative social interactions and remember more negative social information than non-lonely people found that social isolation was positively related to direct harassment at work and work-related harassment. A study by Kulla [5] found positive correlations between social isolation and manifestations of bullying such as verbal aggression, and rumors.

Workplace Loneliness

The workplace loneliness tends to focus almost exclusively on personal characteristics as the primary determinant of the experience, and largely ignores the workplace as a potential trigger of loneliness. Loneliness refers to subjective feelings of social

isolation or lack of connectedness [4]. It has been related to various clinically relevant problems and disorders [6]. Although personality, shyness and social competence do play a significant role in the development of loneliness [7], organizational factors such as social and emotional climate of organizations, support from supervisors and co-workers can be effective on feeling lonely as well [8]. In order to understand the antecedent of loneliness not only individual factors but also the social environment either causing or perpetuating loneliness should also be investigated [9].

Workplace loneliness was examined by Ozcelik [10] and after surveying a sample of 672 workers, concluded that loneliness at work has a "significant influence on employee work performance, both in direct tasks, as well as employee team member and team role effectiveness rated by both the employee's work unit members and supervisor". Admitting to being lonely only made things worse, because the knowledge of another's disaffection "provided stronger and more negative cues for the co-workers about the overall quality of their relationship with the employee". This makes them even lonelier.

Workplace loneliness should be addressed through educational programs geared toward curbing and ultimately eradicating loneliness. Curriculum in mental health nursing should include not only theory sessions of counseling but also the practical sessions of counseling and other psychological therapies. Practical training in counseling will equip nurses to address some of the issues of loneliness. Mass media can also be roped in by the administrators to increase awareness about loneliness at workplace. Creating a conducive work environment is important for maintaining mental health of employees, which in turn would result in more efficiency and productivity. Quality nursing care is an eminent need in the contemporary world and this can be rendered only if

nursing personnel are physically, mentally and socially healthy themselves and competent enough. It requires periodic evaluation of loneliness.

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