

60% Of Cos Have No Strategy On Staff Health, Some Take Lead To Promote Work-Life Balance

Burnout rate spikes as India Inc battles stress

Namrata Singh & Shubham Mukherjee | TNN

Mumbai: Growing incidence of lifestyle diseases, acidity and related gastrointestinal disorders at an early age among the working population is a clear pointer towards higher stress levels at the workplace, resulting in little or no "me-time" for the employee. Fatigue and stress to meet stretched targets at the workplace is being documented for a while now but the intensity has gone up several notches lately.

The result is burnout and it is increasing both in terms of quantum and intensity. Some human resource professionals believe it has gone up three times over the last two to three years. Dr P S Murthy, a consultant psychiatrist at Manipal Hospital in Bangalore, who has been practicing in the field for around 25 years, has seen a significant rise in the number of people affected by work-related stress and burnout.

He has seen people increasingly showing symptoms of general anxiety disorder, depression and insomnia, largely among those who are married and above 25 years of age. "Out of the total number of people who visit us daily, more than 50% are afflicted by work related stress. This was not the case 5 years back," says Murthy.

Ronesh Puri, head honcho of Executive Access, an executive search firm, agrees that burnout cases have gone up manifold over the last couple of years, especially in the senior management. "The expectations from CEOs have multiplied over the last few years. Stakeholders are watching them closely, putting more pressure on the overworked corporate bosses. The complexities of jobs and the magnitude of their work have also seen an upward trajectory putting added pressures on them."

He likens the job to riding a tiger. "Once you have been a tiger, you don't want another job". And to hold on to the high stakes game, you have to dramatically improve your pace, which results in longer hours at work and long travel schedules. Higher stress, it seems has become a by-product of a flat

in India are not doing enough to contain the burnout syndrome. A Towers Watson study reveals that 59% of companies in India do not have an articulated health and productivity strategy. "I don't see over-arching plans by companies on this front. Our advice is prevention is better than cure. There is a cost involved if companies measure their returns on investment in terms of productivity, absenteeism from work and health premiums," says Andrew Heard, MD, Asia Pacific Benefits, Towers Watson.

So, executives are themselves waking up to the prob-

lem at hand. Recruitment firms say several candidates, in a bid to protect their work-life balance, are rejecting offers from organizations which operate more than five days a week. Besides, they are also looking at offers which require less travel and more opportunities for vacation and sabbaticals.

charity organizations. "A holistic approach has helped us maintain a flat medical insurance claims percentage over the last three years," says Anuranjita Kumar, country human resources officer, Citi India.

Organizations have accepted that stress is now a part of life and the only way this can be eased is through flexi-timing, work-from-home policies and counselling. "We try and reduce the impact of stress that employees face through sporting activities in multiple cities once a year, where employees and their families participate and bond," says Naina

TAKING TIME OFF 24X7 WORKPLACE

> **HDFC Bank** is part of stepathlon, an initiative that encourages participants to walk at least 10,000 steps a day. The number of employees participating in the event has nearly doubled this year



> **69% of employees** of BofA ML are also participating in a stepathlon event

> At **HUL**, managers are trained regularly to recognise indicators of stress in themselves and colleagues. Besides, the head office has facilities for yoga, meditation and a gym, apart from a number of clubs where employees pursue hobbies like music and dance



> **Schneider Electric** has a "cool sites" global initiative — every site has to qualify each year on health, safety, fun activity, engagement and recognition and concierge services. "Last year, three of our sites got qualified as a cool site. This year, we have taken the number up to 11," said Shalini Sarin, country partner, VP HR & CSR, Schneider Electric India



> **Rothschild** encourages people to take vacations so that they get time away from work and restrict the number of days of carry-over of leave to create the right incentives

> **Citi India** organizes annual fitness challenges for its employees



Panse, head, employee engagement, at HDFC Bank.

Typically, investment banking is an area where burnout is among the highest. Kaku Nakhate, president and country head, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, says there's a huge focus in the firm on wellness and engagement, with employees participating in 'stepathlon' events.

Sanjay Bhandarkar, MD, global financial advisory, Rothschild is positive he hasn't noticed any cases of burnout here. The organization culture, he says, is focused on ensuring that colleagues have a work-life balance. So people are encouraged to take vacations and are given time away from work to restrict the number of days of carry-

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