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Abstract

Organizations implement employee counselling programs to assist workers address work and personal issues and challenges that may negatively affect their productivity. Early identification and management of issues facing employees will benefit both the employees and employers. Employee Counselling Programs enable employees to balance their work and personal values, and that the company will benefit from rejuvenated employees. The study aimed to analyze the impact of employee assistance interventions on productivity of workers in state corporations in Kenya by focusing on Kenya Ports Authority (KPA). The study precisely sought to ascertain the degree to which employee counselling programs affects productivity of workers at Kenya Ports Authority. The study was guided by the social exchange theory. The study adopted descriptive research design and targeted 450 employees of Kenya Ports Authority. The researcher used stratified and purposive sampling design to select 135 subjects for the study. The study undertook a pilot investigation to establish the reliability and validity of data collection instruments. The data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The analyzed data was presented using percentages and frequency tables from which the researcher was able to draw conclusions and make recommendations. The study established that counselling programmes for the employees had the highest effect at 65.4%. The study found that employees who utilized the employee counselling programmes positively affected their performance through reduced anxiety and stress, improved working morale, improved punctuality and reduced absenteeism. The study recommends for the enhancement of employee counselling programmes and provision of financial literacy services as they play a critical role in enhancing the performance of employees. Specifically, counselling needs to focus on helping employees deal with workplace conflicts, as well as manage chronic illnesses and HIV. In general, counselling and support services should focus on improving employees' wellness.

Keywords: *Employee counseling programs, employee performance, state corporations, Kenya.*

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1.0 Introduction

Employee Counselling Programs (ECP) provide a wide range of opportunities for employee development. Organizations using these programs often approach employee interaction and development from a holistic perspective. ECPs can help Human Resource (HR) managers to use different motivation approaches and influences to enhance employee performance. Evidence reveals that there is a correlation between lost productivity in organizations and employee issues (Hargrave, Hiatt, Alexander, & Shaffer, 2008). For instance, employees working with reduced physical and mental functioning or the ability to handle routine activities and responsibilities record reduced performance. Being away from work to handle personal matters could contribute up to 20% of lost organizational productivity (Hargrave et al., 2008). Employees can use ECPs to access professional assistance. ECPs provide a platform where employees can communicate and share personal issues with experts in their journey to solve work-related and personal challenges. ECPs can help employees to develop appropriate coping mechanisms to manage work-related stress and improve resilience to handle pressure in the workplace. Employees using ECPs may not take time off to solve personal issues or recover from mental and physical conditions caused by personal issues (Hargrave *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, ECPs enables employees to develop high energy and concentration levels needed to improve the performance of employees in the workplace.

According to Allday (2013), ECPs are integral in improving the performance and productivity of medium and large companies. In his analysis of the Australian ECP industry, Allday (2013) established that at least 80% of top firms in the country are already using an ECP system. The penetration of ECP in the United States corporations is also high. Mercer (2008) established that leading US employers provide ECP-related benefits to employees and their families. The U.S Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) found out that more than 70 percent of workers in states and local governments can access ECP services and that there is a 40% penetration of ECP services in the private sector. While the 40% rate is much lower than market expectation, it is important to recognize that 90% of employers in the US are small and medium-sized enterprises. These employers have less than 50 workers and might not prioritize EAP services. Additionally, a 2008 national benefit assessment established that 52% small employers (less than 100 employees) provided ECP services. ECP services was high in large and medium firms, 89% and 76% respectively (Society for Human Resources Management, 2008).

Many employees experience increasing pressure to perform at the highest level. The pressure to meet organizational objectives illustrate the need for employers to adopt ECP services to help employees cope with the demand to work at the highest level (Jacobs, Hellman, Wuest, & Markowitz, 2013). Therefore, the conflict between scarce organizational resources and the increasing demand for employees to achieve at the maximum levels is the source of employees' problems. Further, employees experience challenges in work-life balance, which eventually result in personal and family issues (Agovino, 2020). Employee counselling programs can help address such problems by improving work-life balance and at the same time supporting employees to improve their performance. The primary purpose of Employee counselling programs is to provide all-round support to employees. These programs help employees to identify their problems, suggest early interventions for employees with different types of problems such as absenteeism and declining performance (Daniels, Teems, & Carroll, 2005). The field of employee assistance

continues to address complex employee problems related to health and behavior to improve life-work balance. According to Mugari, Mtapuri, and Rangongo (2014), Employee counselling programs offer a wide range of support to workers to help address performance issues. Employers can also provide Employee counselling programs for different reasons, which may include emotional support for employees, making the workplace productive, and improving the well-being of employees.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Employers have established that healthy employees are a source of a competitive advantage and improved performance (Holmes, 2010). For example, well-designed wellness programs could help organizations boost the morale of employees, reduce stress, improve teamwork, and enhance productivity. Equally, Employee counselling programs could guide employees make healthy and smart choices that can lessen healthcare costs, diminish absenteeism, and increase vitality (Atieno, 2019). Despite the Employee counselling programs in place, issues such as substance abuse/dependence, absenteeism, work related accidents, and increased medical costs, among others, remain common among state corporation employees (Munywoki, 2019). Such issues contribute to reduced job performance and adversely affect the psychological health of state corporation employees. This situation and behaviors give rise to questions as to whether employee assistance programs have addressed the intended purpose especially in improving performance of employees among state corporation employees. Previous studies in this field are yet to specifically explore association between Employee counselling programs and employee performance, particularly workers in State Corporations in Kenya. This study aimed to ascertain the impact of Employee counselling programs on the productivity of workers in KPA.

1.2 Justification and Significance of the Study

Vision 2030 is Kenya's transformative agenda aimed at transforming the nation into a middle-class economy by 2030. Some of the objectives of this vision include industrializing the economy, improving the quality of life, provision of clean water, and environmental protection. Kenyatta's government (2013-2022) introduced the Big Four agenda meant to implement policies and projects to accelerate the growth of the economy towards the realization of Vision 2030. If implemented, the Big Four agenda would provide the base for improved economic performance and improved lives among Kenyans. To realize the goals of vision 2030, it is necessary that employees in the public sector step up their performance. As such, taking care of the welfare and needs of these employees is important to ensure that they can offer their best services that will eventually contribute to the economic growth of the country.

Today, state corporations need to enhance their operations and employee assistance programs to ensure that workers understand the importance of social-economic policies and legislations that impact their lives. In view of the above, the researcher sought to study how state corporations can adopt employee assistance programs to improve performance which will immensely contribute to the overall realization of the Kenyan Vision 2030. This study was specifically carried out in Kenya Ports Authority. If many more employees benefit from these support programs, they will be socially empowered, the success in this will be evidence of improvement of the nation's social and economic pillar as spelled out in the Big four agenda and vision 2030 projects.

The study is important because it provides information outlining employee counselling programs for state corporation employees and effects on their performance. The study provides useful information to the government of Kenya which can be used to form policies for governing and regulating employee counselling programs for state corporations. Additionally, this research provides the foundation on which secondary materials on the role of ECPs can be drawn for use by researchers and academicians. The study also provides guidelines for future studies on ECPs in the academic world, for HR practitioners, KPA and other state corporations.

1.3 Research Objective

The objective of the study was to determine the impact of counselling programs on the productivity of employees at Kenya Ports Authority.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on social exchange theory and stakeholder theory.

2.1.1 Social Exchange Theory

The social exchange theory states that employees' behaviors correlate with their interaction or treatment they receive from employers. The main aspect in this theory is reciprocity (Greenberg & Scott, 1996). This means that positive exchange between employees and employers could help create a desirable working relationship and could elicit positive reactions such as improved trust and high satisfaction levels. In the long-run, positive exchange could contribute to improved employee performance and organizational productivity. Social exchange theory could help managers and employees to create and sustain relationships that maximize rewards and performance. The fundamental idea of this theory is that relationships at workplaces should be beneficial and add value. In general, employees and employers should strive to create and sustain positive relationships. Social exchange theory is useful in predicting employees' behaviors to promote desirable organizational culture and behavior. According to Greenberg and Scott (1996), employers should apply concepts of social exchange theory to treat employees fairly to encourage them reciprocate positive behaviors. In other words, treating employees with respect encourages them to promote organizational citizenship, which in turn contributes to improved productivity. However, some authors have criticized social exchange theory. For example, Miller (2005) argued that the theory lessens human relation because it majorly focuses on rational processes to meet organizational economic needs. On the other hand, Miller (2005) established that the theory prioritizes openness because it advances organizational openness and freedom.

2.1.2 Stakeholder Theory

A study done by Freeman (2010) proposes that the stakeholder theory emerged in an organizational context which explained that a company cannot be self-sufficient and has to depend on its relationships with both the internal and external surrounding. According to Freeman, stakeholders are groups that affect existence of a company or groups that are affected by a company or an organization existence. Freeman goes further to argue that an organization has a relationship with these stakeholders. Carroll and Buchholtz (2015) defined stakeholders as individuals or groups of

people within which a corporation operates or interacts with and have vested interests or a stake, for instance, customers, suppliers and the local community. A study by Mainardes, Alves, and Raposo, (2012) shows that the concept of stakeholder management is given a priority to enable an organization to consider, recognize and analyze the characteristics of specific people and groups who are influenced or influence organizational behavior and culture. The management of stakeholders involves three factors which are; identifying the stakeholders, recognizing their needs, interests and ensure construction of strong relationships with them. There is also need of forming a perspective to setting and ensuring attainment of the organizational objectives.

According to Carroll and Buchholtz (2015) stakeholders identify their expectations, internalize the effect and experience in relating with the organization, evaluate the results on how they benefit and apply this concept to reinforce or weaken the ties with a company or the organization. Therefore, an organization should strategically position itself by taking into account of the internal and the external publics, the resources they intend to use, the human resource and what the stakeholders expect so as to be influenced (Allday, 2013). One of the core contributions of this theory is its impact on the administration and strategic improvement of organizations in terms of management decisions, the organizations objectives and the strategies used to implement these decisions (Mainardes, Alves, & Raposo, 2012). The stakeholders' theory will be used in this study to explain how organizations and firms use employee assistance programs in order to impact on the performance of employees. This theory was suited for this study since employees are integral stakeholders whose well-being impacts on the performance of an institution.

2.2 Empirical Review

Employees' health could influence job performance positively. In their study, Chien-Hung, Chen, and Chen (2017) established that employee wellness could influence job satisfaction and job performance positively. Chien-Hung *et al.* (2017) used a questionnaire survey method to investigate how wellness influences job performance and satisfaction among Taiwanese employees. The study established a clear correlation between employee wellness and improved performance. There is a connection between employee protection and corporate competitiveness. For instance, Fernandez-Muniz, Montes-Peon, and Vázquez-Ordas (2009) investigated the association between occupational safety programs and the performance of companies. The study concluded that safety management programs could positively influence employee' performance, competitiveness, and organizational productivity.

Employee absenteeism has a considerable impact on the performance of employees. Aldana and Pronk (2001) established that low health status and the failure to participate in health programs could elevate employee absenteeism. Therefore, employers should consider the impact of health promotion programs when dealing with employee absenteeism. Reduction of employee absenteeism could increase the performance and productivity of firms. Organizations should organize workplace counselling activities for employees with declining performance. Ekpang (2015) established that workplace programs could help address personal problems and improve employees performance. Similarly, Chan (2011) concluded that workplace counselling is effective in improving employees' well-being. Interventions that alleviate or help address personal issues

such as stress, depression, and burnout are recommended (Chan, 2011). Additionally, McLeod and McLeod (2001) concluded that workplace counselling is useful for employees exhibiting a wide variety of problems, and that counselling is effective in different organizational contexts.

In their recent study, Ng'eno, Bula and Minja (2020) wanted to establish the impact of employee counselling programs on the productivity of workers in Kenya's commercial banks. The research by Ng'eno *et al.* (2020) targeted more than 30,000 employee across 43 Kenyan banks. The study established a connection between counselling programs and employee performance in banks. While Ng'eno *et al.* (2020) focused on the Kenyan commercial banks, this study addressed the contextual gaps by focusing how counselling interventions influence the performance of workers in state corporation in Kenya. By focusing on Mumias Sugar Limited Company, Tuvulla and Byaruhanga (2017) used a descriptive design and borrowed concepts from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Tuvulla and Byaruhanga (2017) targeted more than 240 employees of Mumias Sugar Company, including top and middle level managers. The sample size used in the study was 74 participants, and concluded that counselling programs at work considerably improve the productivity of workers affected by personal issues. This study addressed the contextual gaps by focusing on how counselling programs could affect the performance of employees of KPA.

A similar study done by Migwe, Gachunga, and Iravo (2017) aimed to ascertain the connection between employee counselling programs and the performance of Kenyan youth development officers. In their study, Migwe *et al.* (2017) used a descriptive survey and targeted more than "195 youth development officers in 12 counties." The researchers used a sample size of 105 youths and collected primary data using questionnaires and obtained secondary data from magazines, books, scholarly articles, and journals. Migwe *et al.* (2017) established a connection between counseling and some aspects of performance. Therefore, the researchers concluded that employee counseling services is important in affecting the performance of youth development officers. This study aimed at addressing contextual gaps by investigating on how counseling programs affected employees of all ages in KPA.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is a diagrammatical representation that shows the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between employee counselling and performance of employees

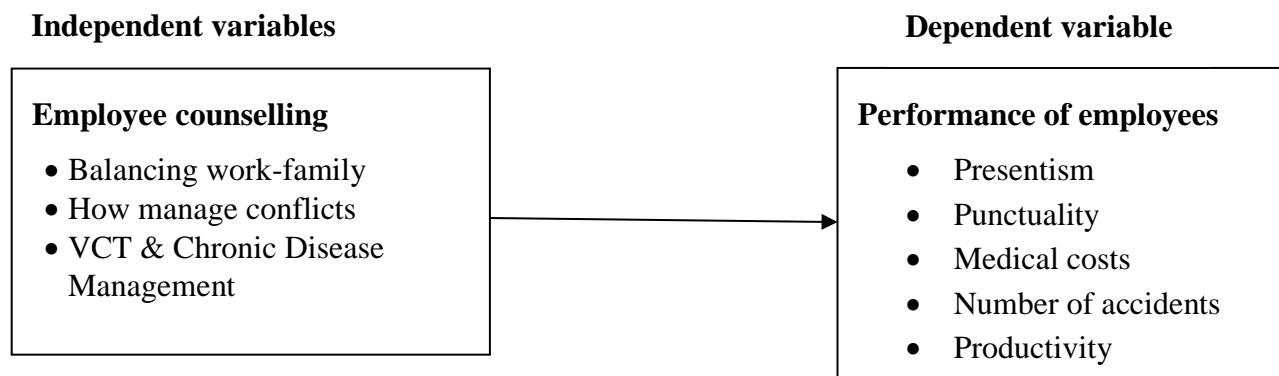


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

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3.0 Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design to provide a detailed approach whether ECPs could influence organizational performance and productivity. This research design systematically gathers data that describes prevailing occurrences by querying the respondent experiences, views, and beliefs that cannot be directly observed (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The target population was 450 employees of Kenya Ports Authority based in Mombasa (KPA, 2022). The target population comprised of different categories of staff from seven (7) departments including Human Resources, Administration, Medical Services, Employee Relations, Financial Accounting, Corporate Affairs, and Insurance Branch. The choice of the particular departments owed to their familiarity with the subject of the study. Stratified sampling approach was used to select the participants. The sampling technique allowed the researcher to categorize or classify employees based on their characteristics to come up with a proportional sample representing an entire organization. The study used a sample size of 135 respondents, representing 30% of the population. Precisely, the study used disproportionate stratified random sampling design to determine the sample size from each stratum. Besides, purposive sampling design was employed to obtain respondents from the seven strata. A purposive sampling enables a researcher to use required cases that provide sufficient data relative to a study's objectives (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The ECP coordinators and HR managers were also sampled. The coordinators and managers were anticipated to play an essential role in implementing employee training programs and initiatives related to ECPs.

4.0 Study Findings

The study findings are presented in sections.

4.1 Response Rate

The targeted population included the Kenya Ports Authority employees. Of the 135 sampled participants, 104 completed the questionnaire. This translated to 77% response rate, hence, adequate to proceed with data analysis. The findings revealed that most KPA employees (59%) were males while 41% were females. The majority of the workers (69.2%) aged between 26 and 45 years. Most of the employees at the corporation (62.5%) are in marriage while 23.1% are single. Majority of the employees (33.7%) have first degrees while 26% have Diploma. Majority of the workers are experienced, with 38.5% having more than 10 years of work experience. Importantly, 71.2% of employee assistance programs influenced performance positively to a larger extent

4.2 Descriptive analysis

The descriptive analysis of counselling and the performance of employees are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Counselling and Performance of Employees

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Std. Dev
Counseling on my personal and work life improves my performance at work.	54.8	39.4	2.9	1.9	1.0	1.71	0.732
Counseling for depression and anxiety enables me to control my emotions and get better results.	47.1	29.8	21.2	1.9	0	1.69	0.789
Conflict resolution sessions and counseling boost my level of efficiency.	51	34.6	3.8	10.6	0	1.91	1.120
Education and awareness counselling programs helps employees produce more	58.7	33.7	2.8	4.8	0	1.36	0.484
Counselling on Management of Chronic Diseases helps employees perform better	42.3	45.2	6.7	5.8	0	1.84	0.875
Counseling accident and trauma survivors aids in their recovery and boosts their performance.	62.5	27.9	6.7	1.9	1.0	1.59	0.813

Research Data (2022)

The study aimed at establishing the effects of employee counselling on the performance of employees at Kenya Ports Authority. Majority of the participants (52.7%) indicated that counselling programs, especially on social life and family improve their work-related performance, however, to some extent. On the other hand, 43.7% of the participants seemed to agree that counselling activities could immensely enhance their work-related output. Some participants, 2.9% reported that they are yet experience how counselling programs could elevate their performance at work. Another 1.9% indicated that such program could improve their work output, but to a lesser extent. One respondent believed that employee counselling programs have no performance-related effect. Data analysis revealed a mean of 1.71 (those that agree) and a SD of 0.732, which helps to illustrate that most respondents agreed that counselling employees on social issues could enhance their work-related performance. These findings are similar to the study by Ekpang (2015) that established a considerable effect of employee counseling programs on work-related performance. Specifically, Ekpang (2015) concluded that there is a relation between social counselling programs affect productivity and could improve a firm's revenues.

The impact of employees' counselling programs on depression and anxiety was also examined. For example, Chan (2011) established that programs that help employees manage work-related

stress could improve their output. Data analysis revealed that 47.1% of the participants believed that counselling programs influenced how they handle work-related stress and depression to a larger extent. On the other hand, 29.8% of the respondents indicated that such programs could reduce stress and depression at work, but to a lesser extent. Notably, 21.2% of the participants were not aware of the connection between counselling programs, depression and anxiety, and work output. Only 1.9% of the responses indicated that the impact of employee counselling programs was minimal. In general, the participants averagely confirmed to a degree (1.69) that counselling programs could reduce work-related anxiety and depression and enhance employee performance. The SD of 0.789 also revealed that most respondents recognize the impact of counselling programs on anxiety and depression and their impact on performance. As indicated earlier, the findings were in line with Chan (2011), who established that employee counselling programs could enhance well-being and help employees deal with work-related stress, depression, and burnout; hence, could improve performance.

The relationship between employee training and counselling on managing conflicts and improved individual performance was analyzed. Based on data analysis, most of the participants (51%) revealed that such programs could improve individual employee performance to a greater extent. On the other hand, 34.6% of the participants believed that there is an impact, but to some degree. Of the participants, 10.6% revealed that there is a little impact, while 3.8% were not aware of the effect of such training and counselling programs on individual employee performance. The mean of 1.91 and a SD of 1.120 revealed that the majority of the participants believed that training and counselling programs on conflict management could improve the performance of individual employees, as well as a firm's productivity. The findings support the study by Chan (2011), which established that there is a considerable relationship between employee training and counselling and the capability of employees to handle workplace stress and burnout; ultimately improving individual employee output.

The relationship between education and awareness counselling programs and employee performance was analyzed. Data analysis revealed that 58.7% of the participants agreed that education and awareness programs could affect their performance to a larger degree. On the other hand, 33.7% believed that such programs have an impact, but to some extent. Of the participants, only 4.8% indicated that such programs are beneficial but to less extent, while 2.8% revealed that they were not aware of how education and awareness counselling could help employee improve performance. The mean of 1.36 and SD of 0.484 help to illustrate the uniformity of the responses. These findings confirmed or supported the study by Tuvulla & Byaruhanga (2017) that established that education and counselling programs in conflict management strategies could improve the performance of employees. Similarly, Migwe, Gachunga, & Iravo (2017) established firms that hire counselors could help employees develop wellbeing skills, as well as utilize their skills and talents to advance their careers.

The connection between employee counselling on chronic disease management and VCT could enhance workplace performance was explored. Data analysis revealed majority of the responses 45.2% believed that such programs could enhance performance to some degree. On the other hand, 42.3% of the participants indicated that such programs could improve performance to a large

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extent. However, 6.7% were not aware of the impact of these programs, while 5.8% agreed that such programs could be beneficial to a lesser extent. The mean of 1.84 and a SD of 0.875 revealed that most participants recognized the importance of VCT and chronic disease management counselling. These findings were in line with the study by Ng'eno, Bula, & Minja, (2020) which established that counselling programs help employees overcome daily challenges that could affect their productivity; hence, result in improved productivity.

The connection between counselling trauma and accident victims and workplace performance was explored. Data analysis revealed most of the participants (62.5%) indicated – to a greater degree – that such counselling programs help affected employees improve their performance. On the other hand, 27.9% indicated that some programs are beneficial but to some extent. However, 1.9% indicated that the programs are beneficial to a little degree, while 6.7% were not aware of the importance of such counselling programs. The mean response of 1.59 and a SD of 0.813 indicate the uniformity of responses in regards to the importance of the counselling programs. These findings are in line with the study by Chan (2011) that established that counselling programs targeting employees could help to improve performance.

5.0 Summary of Findings

The study established that counselling employees on various issues is viewed positively among employees. For example, most employees (54.8%) strongly confirmed that counselling programs could improve their performance. At the same time, 39.4% of employees moderately agreed that counselling programs are beneficial. Additionally, 51% and 34.6% of the participants strongly and moderately agreed that workplace conflict management strategies could enhance the overall performance of employees. Employees also indicated that providing information and resources to enhance the management of chronic illnesses, as well as HIV could improve workplace performance. Hence, KPA needs to implement such programs to positively influence the performance of employees. Notably, most participants strongly indicated that counselling programs targeting victims of trauma and accident could positively influence their performance. Therefore, this study concludes that counselling employees experiencing trauma should be one of the priorities for public corporations to improve the performance of employees.

The management of Kenya Ports Authority also needs to introduce counselling programs on social life, which may focus on family and work. For example, more than 54.8% of participants indicated that social issues such as family relationships could affect their performance and productivity at work to a greater extent. Additionally, counselling programs focusing on managing depression and anxiety could assist employees to improve their productivity. For example, 76.9% of participants recognized the importance of counselling services on managing depression and anxieties in the workplace. Specifically, employees also recognized the importance of conflict management in enhancing individual performance. Most of the participants also recognized the importance of education and awareness programs in helping employees improve their performance. As well, other employees agreed that counselling programs on chronic and HIV management could improve the well-being of employees, helping them to perform better. Overall, there is a need to offer employee counselling services on diverse issues as a strategy to enhance work-related output.

6.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that corporations, such as KPA should introduce more programs focused on assisting employees to solve both personal, and work-related challenges. There is a need to improve the provision of counselling services, which may focus on drug and alcohol use, anxiety, and depression. Specifically, counselling needs to focus on helping employees deal with workplace conflicts, as well as manage chronic illnesses and HIV. In general, counselling and support services should focus on improving employees' wellness. Additionally, there is a need to provide counselling services for employees struggling with trauma and accident. Counselling employees on social issues, including family matters should be a priority to enable employees achieve high levels of engagement and stability. Social issues can affect concentration and energy levels. As noted earlier, KPA needs to offer counselling services on employees suffering from anxiety and depression. Such counselling activities help employees improve concentration levels, hence, translating to enhanced workplace performance. Unfortunately, some KPA staff members are unaware of the wellness programs' existence or their advantages. This implies that there is a need for KPA to introduce education programs focusing on awareness of and importance of wellness programs.

The study recommends that companies improve drug and substance abuse cessation programs because most employees agree that these initiatives positively impact their performance. Also, health and education fairs should be improved and held more frequently because they affect individual employees' performance. Besides, employers should improve the existing rehabilitation programs for staff members who seriously need rehab assistance. The study also suggests strengthening employer-initiated health education fairs and smoking cessation programs because they are essential for improving employee performance. It also increases reliability and decreases absenteeism. Besides, the study recommends policy changes that would determine how employee assistance programs should be viewed in public or private organizations. There is a need to employ preventative measures rather than curative ones, given the current high cost of healthcare in Kenya. As a result, it is advisable for businesses to seriously consider using employee support programs to control the spiraling expenses associated with employee health. Therefore, the government should contemplate implementing employee assistance programs under the Occupational Health and Safety rules and the Employment Law of 2007.

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