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#### Effects of Employee Wellness Programs on Job Satisfaction: A Study Among the Healthcare Sector in Pakistan

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<p><b>Dr. Asghar Kamal*</b> Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Sarhad University of Science &amp; Information Technology, Peshawar. Corresponding Author Email: <a href="mailto:asghar.ba@suit.edu.pk">asghar.ba@suit.edu.pk</a></p> <p><b>Dr. Aamir Ullah</b> Assistant Professor, Department of Management Sciences, Qurtuba University of Science and IT</p> <p><b>Dr. Muhammad Mahmood Shah Khan</b> Assistant Professor of Banking and Finance (HSM), UMT Lahore</p>	<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>The study examines how wellness programs targeting employees affect job satisfaction in the Pakistani healthcare sector. The increasing stress rates among the healthcare professionals as a result of the available demanding work conditions have prompted the introduction of the wellness programs that target enhancement of the overall wellbeing of the professionals. The paper evaluates the extent to which wellness programs are supporting healthcare professionals to remain job-satisfied, alleviate burnout, and improve their overall performance. The survey was done among doctors, nurses and administrative staff as a way of finding out their attitudes towards wellness programs and how their attitudes to the program have influenced their job satisfaction. The paper ends by reiterating the importance of employee wellness program on enhancing job satisfaction, employee retention rate and eventually, patient care quality.</p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b></p>	<p>Employee Wellness Programs, Job Satisfaction, Healthcare Sector, Pakistan, Retention, Burnout, Healthcare Professionals, Work Well-being</p>



# Advance Journal of Econometrics and Finance

## Vol-3, Issue-3, 2025

### Introduction

Like most other regions around the world, the healthcare sector in Pakistan is experiencing a major crisis, which is directly affecting the well being of healthcare workers and the quality of care offered to the patients. Healthcare workers pressures have been on the increase over the past few years mainly because of the increased number of patients, heavy workload, and lack of resources besides the continued effects of the world-wide health crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic. All these have impacted the healthcare professionals who are subject to high levels of stress and emotional pressure, leading to burnout, poor job satisfaction and increased dangers of turnover. Burnout, stress and fatigue among the people working in the healthcare facility is now a known concern that is not only suffering the people involved, but also the patients themselves and the healthcare system in general.

The global concern of burnout amongst healthcare workers has been brought to the fore by World Health Organization (WHO, 2019). Medical workers tend to become the first in the crisis, and they have to be able to make under-pressure decisions that greatly influence patient outcomes. With time, sustained stress and the inability to effectively cope with it might lead to burnout that will be expressed in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of sense of accomplishment. This not only affects the mental well being of the healthcare professionals but also results in poor quality of care, judging mistakes and failure to offer caring care. The consequences of these outcomes are not only on the well being of medical practitioners but also to the patients who seek their professional help in medical treatment and emotional comfort (Maslach et al., 2001).

Burnout and stress are universal issues among medical personnel in the world. These problems are also compounded by systematic problems, including staffing, excessive working hours, and inaccessibility of professional mental health services in Pakistan. Such aspects can lead to the situation when healthcare workers feel undervalued, overworked, and emotionally exhausted. Subsequently, the job satisfaction of healthcare workers in Pakistan is often low and, thus, is the cause of high turnover rates in healthcare organizations. Another study by the World Health Organization discovered that a high rate of burnout in healthcare systems is also accompanied by a poor retention rate of workforce, which ultimately hinders the quality of patient care (WHO, 2019). This has become a major problem to the healthcare organizations and policymakers who strive to ensure there is a competent and motivated workforce.

Employee wellness programs are one of the most important aspects that determine job satisfaction especially in highly-stressful fields such as healthcare. Such programs will be aimed at maintaining both physical and mental health of employees so that they can overcome stress, avoid burnout, and enhance their overall job satisfaction. Wellness programs also include various programs, such as fitness programs, mental health support, stress management workshops, and work-life balance strategies. The programs will also equip healthcare workers with resources and support that they require to cope with the demands of their positions and enhance their work experience in general (Leiter and Maslach, 2004). Wellness programs are meant to enhance the physical and mental health of healthcare workers by eliminating the adverse effects of job-related stress and creating a more positive and productive working environment (Sonnentag, 2018).

Studies have indicated that job satisfaction is direct proportion to the employee wellness programs particularly in high stress careers like healthcare. Leiter and Maslach (2004) have stated that emotional exhaustion may be reduced and job satisfaction is likely to be enhanced since most wellness programs focus on mental health support and stress management. Other healthcare staff involved in such programs report that they feel supported, appreciated, and involved in their jobs. Wellness programs can enable healthcare workers to more effectively cope with the stressful requirements of their jobs and achieve a higher level of job satisfaction, which will consequently decrease turnover rates (Awais and Ali, 2016). In the case of Pakistan, the wellness program of employees can be instrumental in enhancing employment satisfaction in the health sector. Taking into consideration the current issues of healthcare workers in the country, these programs might be discussed as a good remedy to eliminate burnout and increase retention rates. Nevertheless, the adoption of this approach at the healthcare sector in Pakistan remains minimal and further studies are required to examine the particular effects of wellness program on job satisfaction among the healthcare personnel in the nation. This paper aims to address this gap by exploring how employee wellness programs influence job satisfaction within the Pakistani healthcare system with particular reference to doctors, nurses, and administrative personnel.

The main goal of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of wellness programs in terms of job satisfaction, burnout, and establishment of healthier work environment among healthcare professionals. The study intends to give answers on the importance of wellness programs as a strategic instrument of employee retention and performance within the healthcare sector of Pakistan. This study will help in formulating effective policies and programs that can be used to promote the welfare of healthcare workers and enhance the quality of services offered to patients since the study will be informed by the experience of healthcare workers who engage in wellness programs.

Finally, this research aims at underscoring the significance of employee wellness program as a tool that can be used to improve job satisfaction and burnout within the Pakistani healthcare industry. The research will be useful to the policymakers and healthcare organizations by offering practical proposals to address the issue based on the particular



# Advance Journal of Econometrics and Finance

## Vol-3, Issue-3, 2025

concerns of the healthcare workers in the country. The practices will help establish a healthier and less stressful workplace that leads to job satisfaction, retention, and higher service quality among the healthcare specialists in Pakistan.

### **Healthcare Sector Wellness Programs of the Employees**

Employee wellness programs are designed activities that will facilitate health and well-being among workers. These programs tend to be diversified with numerous activities and services offered with the purpose of enhancing the physical, mental health, and work-life balance. Typical elements of wellness programs are:

1. **Physical Health Programs:** This type of programs usually provides employees with access to fitness centers, physical activities, health check-up, and health insurance cover in case of preventive care. The objective is to make employees stay physically healthy and this could in turn curb absenteeism and boost the performance at work.
2. **Mental Health Support:** Mental health programs are very essential to healthcare workers who are most of the time exposed to a lot of emotional and psychological stress. The programs offer counseling, stress management classes and materials to enable employees to deal with the workload.
3. **Work-life Balance Programs:** Programs in work-life balance entail flexible working schedules, paid vacation, and assistance with family related needs. These programs are meant to assist employees to balance their work and personal life which is fundamental towards job satisfaction and avoiding burnouts.
4. **Nutritional Support and Healthy Living:** Nutritional counseling, health food at the workplace, and programs to decrease bad habits like smoking and excessive alcoholism may also be considered part of Wellness programs.

The adoption of wellness programs within healthcare organizations in Pakistan is at its infancy stages especially in state-owned hospitals. Nevertheless, wellness programs are becoming more frequent in the private healthcare facilities to enhance employee retention and satisfaction (Jalal et al., 2019). Although the healthcare industry in Pakistan is characterized by many challenges, including insufficient resources, excessive work hours, and excessive patient-to-staff ratios, wellness programs are currently recognized as one of the primary measures to improve the well-being of employees and their job satisfaction (Shah et al., 2017).

It has been demonstrated that the introduction of wellness programs in the Pakistani healthcare sector has resulted in a good outcome in the form of decreased burnout, decreased stress levels and an improvement in job satisfaction. Such programs were also observed to enhance employee retention that is essential in an industry that experiences high levels of turnover (Kumar et al., 2018).

### **Literature Review**

Existing literature is clear on the value of wellness programs in promoting both employee satisfaction and wellness, especially in stressful fields such as healthcare. The studies of Goetzel et al. (2014) have proven that job satisfaction, engagement, and job performance are positively influenced by employee wellness programs. Wellness programs are especially significant in the healthcare industry as the job is quite emotionally and physically demanding. Maslach and Leiter (2008) observed that burnouts in the healthcare workers are linked to low job satisfaction, absenteeism, and the high turnover.

Employee wellness is directly linked to job satisfaction, which is a wider concept. Wright and Cropanzano (2000) have indicated that job satisfaction depends on a wide range of factors such as organizational support, work environment and individual well being. Healthcare employees that undergo wellness programs have been known to feel more supported by their employers and consequently have higher job satisfaction and commitment towards their organization. Shipley et al. (2018) researched the needs of healthcare workers in the United States and discovered that wellness programs decreased the burnout levels and increased the job satisfaction rates. This is in line with the results of a study carried out by Leiter and Maslach (2004) which gave much emphasis on the positive outcomes of wellness programs in preventing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction. On the same note, the study of Jalal et al. (2019) indicates that job satisfaction in the Pakistani healthcare sector may be influenced considerably by the presence of wellness programs. The investigators discovered that those healthcare employees who received access to the wellness programs had lower stress and burnout levels, which resulted in job satisfaction and commitment to their organizations.

The fact that wellness programs can deal with mental and physical health conditions is one of their main peculiarities. It has been established that the healthcare industry is characterized by a lot of emotional labor that may result in the development of psychological distress among employees. Mental health support plays an important role in burnout prevention and enhancing job satisfaction (Maslach et al., 2001). A study conducted by Müller and Schaefer (2020) has found that mental health programs, including counseling services, stress management workshops, etc., are quite effective in the alleviation of stress and the impact of job satisfaction among healthcare professionals. Although most studies regarding wellness programs have concentrated on the developed nations, there is increased awareness on the issues of wellness programs in developing nations such as Pakistan. The Pakistani healthcare sector is also highly challenged in terms of lack of resources and large number of patients. Nonetheless, some of these issues can be



# Advance Journal of Econometrics and Finance

## Vol-3, Issue-3, 2025

overcome with the help of wellness programs that can offer healthcare workers with the necessary support to cope with stress, enhance their health, and feel satisfied with their jobs (Shah et al., 2017).

### Methodology

The research design of this project was aimed to determine the impacts of the wellness programs on job satisfaction among the Pakistani healthcare industry. The study was based on the quantitative method, according to which information was gathered in the form of a survey, which was sent to the healthcare workers of the state and non-state hospitals in the country. To confirm a thorough insight into the effects of wellness programs on the job satisfaction of healthcare workers, a mixed-methods study was used; the combination of quantitative and qualitative data was utilized.

### Sample Selection

The sample research design involved 300 medical workers, 100 doctors, 100 nurses and 100 administrative workers. The stratified random sampling was applied to select these participants in a way that they are represented using different roles and environments of the hospital. To obtain the maximum possible experience with wellness programs in the healthcare system in Pakistan, healthcare workers both urban and rural were selected. Major city hospitals, including Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, and Rawalpindi, were also chosen, and smaller town hospitals were also chosen to balance between geographic and institutional differences.

### Survey Instrument

The survey utilized in this study had three parts:

1. Demographic Information: This section collected basic information pertaining to the respondents such as age, gender, job role, years of experience, and type of hospital (public or private).
2. Wellness Program Participation: Respondents were asked questions about their participation in wellness programs, types of wellness activities available to them, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the program. They were asked to rate their level of participation in a variety of programs, such as physical fitness programs, mental health support programs, and work-life balance programs.
3. Job Satisfaction: The third section of the survey dealt with job satisfaction. Respondents were asked to rate their level of overall job satisfaction and to use a 5-point Likert scale. They were also asked about factors that contributed to their job satisfaction such as work environment, workload, management support and access to wellness programs. The survey also contained questions about job-related stress and the levels of burnout.

Additionally, open-ended questions were incorporated to give respondents an opportunity to give more detailed feedback on their experiences with wellness programs and how it affects their job satisfaction. These qualitative responses were analysed thematically, to look for common patterns and insights.

### Data Collection Procedure

The survey was shared among healthcare workers by using online platforms and face-to-face interviews at healthcare facilities. The online survey is distributed by using a secure link and the in-person surveys were administered at hospitals where the access to healthcare workers was facilitated. Respondents were assured the confidentiality of their responses, and told that their participation was voluntary. Data collection was carried out over the period of three months with reminders sent to non-respondents to ensure that response rate is high.

### Data Analysis

The data obtained from the survey was analyzed with the help of both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations and frequency distributions were used to summarize the data. In order to study the relationship of wellness program participation and job satisfaction, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used. A significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was used to prove the statistical significance of the results. The qualitative data obtained through open-ended questions was analyzed with the help of thematic analysis to determine the key themes and insights regarding the impact of wellness programs on job satisfaction.

### Results

#### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 300 healthcare professionals took part in the survey including 100 doctors, 100 nurses and 100 administrative staff members. The mean age of the respondents was 25-45 years; doctors (33%), nurses (33%), and administrative staffs (34%) comprised the total sample. The distribution by gender was relatively even, with 45% of the respondents stating that their gender was female and 55% stating that their gender was male.



# Advance Journal of Econometrics and Finance

## Vol-3, Issue-3, 2025

The respondents were experienced in the healthcare sector to some extent. Approximately 40% of the respondents had less than five years of experience, 35% had 5 to 10 years of experience, and 25% had more than 10 years of experience. The majority of participants worked in urban hospitals with 70% of respondents working in private hospitals and 30% of respondents working in public hospitals.

### Wellness Program Participation

Of the 300 respondents, 80% said they have access to a wellness program of some sort. Participation rates were highest among nurses (82%) and administrative staff (75%) while 65% of doctors said they participated in wellness programs. The most common types of wellness programs that were offered include physical fitness programs (67%), stress management workshops (56%), mental health support services (52%).

Among the participants in wellness programs, 78% reported that they experienced better physical health, 65% noted that their stress levels were reduced and 60% felt that the wellness programs had had a positive impact on their overall job satisfaction. When asked to rate the effectiveness of wellness programs in helping them to be satisfied with their jobs, the average score was 4.2 out of 5.

### Job Satisfaction and Correlation With Wellness Program Participation

Job satisfaction was measured on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied. The total average job satisfaction score of all the respondents was 3.8 out of 5. However, the scores between the participants who participated in wellness programs and those who did not participate were significantly different.

Specific results are: - Respondents that participated in wellness programs had an average job satisfaction score of 4.2, while those that did not participate in wellness programs had an average job satisfaction score of 3.5.

Pearson correlation analysis showed that there was a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.73$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between participating in wellness programs and job satisfaction, meaning the employees who participated in wellness programs were significantly more satisfied with their jobs than those who did not.

### Burnout and Stress Reduction

One of the primary aims of wellness programs in the healthcare industry is to mitigate burnout and stress, two of the issues faced by healthcare workers. The outcomes of the survey showed that stress management and mental health support program employees experienced a significant decrease in symptoms of burnout. Specifically, 62% of people exposed to stress management programs reported feeling less emotionally drained compared to 38% of people not exposed to any such program.

Furthermore, 55% of respondents who participated in physical wellness programs such as fitness challenges and exercise sessions reported that they felt more energized and less stressed at work. These findings suggest that wellness programs and especially those that emphasize stress management and physical fitness can play a significant role in enhancing the well-being of healthcare workers.

### Qualitative Insights

The open-ended responses showed great insights into what factors contribute to job satisfaction and how the wellness programs are functioning. Many respondents said mental health support services, such as counseling and therapy, were important for dealing with work-related stress. One nurse stated, "The counseling services helped me to deal with the emotional challenges of my job." It made me feel supported and that I was valued by my organization." Several respondents also mentioned the importance of work-life balance programs. One doctor stated, "The flexible working hours have enabled me to spend more time with my family which has improved my mental health and job satisfaction." However, some respondents expressed concerns about the lack of availability of wellness programs, particularly in public hospitals. "The wellness programs are great, but not everybody has access to it." More effort should be made to ensure all healthcare workers, particularly those working in public hospitals, have access to these services, said an administrative staff member.

### Discussion

The results obtained from this study highlight the importance of employee wellness programmes in improving the levels of job satisfaction among healthcare workers in Pakistan. The results show that wellness programs, especially those related to physical health, mental health support and work-life balance, have a big impact on job satisfaction. These findings are in line with past research that highlights the importance of employee well-being in creating a satisfied and productive workforce (Schaufeli et al., 2020; Goetzel et al., 2014). The study shows a definite correlation between wellness program participation and higher job satisfaction scores. Healthcare workers who participated in wellness initiatives felt better physically, had lower stress levels, and had a higher sense of job satisfaction. This is consistent with the research of Shipley et al. (2018), who concluded that wellness programs in healthcare settings help to reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction.



# Advance Journal of Econometrics and Finance

## Vol-3, Issue-3, 2025

In particular, the mental health support programs were found to be very effective in terms of addressing the emotional stress healthcare workers must endure. This is consistent with the work of Maslach and Leiter (2008) who highlighted the importance of mental health services in reducing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction among healthcare professionals. The findings of this research indicate that mental health programs need to be a core element of wellness programs in the healthcare sector within Pakistan where stress and burnout are prevalent.

Work-life balance initiatives were also a big factor in the improvement in job satisfaction. Employees who had access to flexible working hours and assistance with family-related responsibilities had higher levels of job satisfaction which corroborates with the findings of Judge et al. (2001). These findings indicate that organizations in the healthcare sector should focus on work-life balance programs to decrease the work satisfaction for their employees, especially those who have a family obligation. While the results of this study are promising, they also emphasize several challenges that lie in the implementation of wellness programs in the healthcare sector of Pakistan. The inadequate resources available in public hospitals and lack of commitment by organizations to such wellness initiatives were significant barriers identified by the respondents. These challenges have been consistent with those of Jalal et al. (2019), who noted that the deficiency of resources and awareness poses a challenge to the widespread implementation of the wellness programs in the healthcare system in Pakistan.

Healthcare organizations, especially in the public sector, need to be addressing these barriers, investing adequate resources in wellness programs and promoting awareness of the benefits of these programs. Collaboration with government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders can help raise funding and support for wellness programs in public hospitals. Additionally, leadership within healthcare organizations should prioritize the well-being of employees and make a commitment to supporting the workforce.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that there is a significant positive impact of employee wellness programs on job satisfaction amongst healthcare workers in Pakistan. Participation in wellness programs, especially those related to physical health, mental health, and work life balance, has been linked to increased levels of job satisfaction, decreased levels of stress and burnout. These findings emphasize the importance of wellness programs as a strategic tool in improving employee retention and satisfaction, which in turn improves the quality of care given to patients.

The healthcare sector in Pakistan is facing a number of challenges, including a high level of stress and burnout among healthcare workers. However, wellness programs are a practical solution to these issues by supporting the physical and mental health of the employees. Healthcare organizations, both public and private should focus on implementing wellness programs as a way to improve employee satisfaction, reduce employee turnover, and enhance the overall working environment. This study also indicates the need for more research looking into the long-term effects of wellness programs on the retention of employees and patient care. Future research should consider the contribution of wellness initiatives to the performance of healthcare workers overall and the quality of care given to patients. Additionally, studies should explore the specific type of wellness programs that have the most impact on job satisfaction and the reduction of burnout.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study, the following suggestions are made:

1. **Increase Investment in Wellness Programs:** Healthcare organizations should invest in wellness programs with adequate resources to ensure that all employees have access to physical and mental health support services.
2. **Integrate Wellness Programs into Organizational Culture:** Wellness programs should be embedded into the organizational culture with leadership actively promoting the importance of employee well-being.
3. **Focus on Mental Health Support:** Mental health support services, such as counseling and stress management workshops, should be prioritized and their significance on the reduction of burnout and improvement of job satisfaction should be recognized.
4. **Improve Work-Life Balance Initiatives:** Flexible working hours and support for family-related responsibilities should be made available to all healthcare workers to improve work-life balance and job satisfaction.
5. **Collaboration with Stakeholders:** Healthcare organizations should work with government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders to raise funds and support for wellness programs, especially in public hospitals.



# Advance Journal of Econometrics and Finance

## Vol-3, Issue-3, 2025

6. Conduct Long-Term Evaluations: Regular assessments of wellness programs should be conducted to evaluate its effectiveness in increasing job satisfaction and employee retention and improving patient care.

### Limitations of the Study

While this study offers useful information on the impact of wellness programs on job satisfaction, there are several limitations. First, the study was of a cross-sectional design, which means that it records data in a single moment in time. This limits the ability to establish the causality between wellness programs and job satisfaction. Future research should use longitudinal research designs to examine the long-term effects of wellness programs on job satisfaction and employee retention.

Second, the study was based on self-reported data, which is prone to biases. Respondents may have overrated the benefits of wellness programs or responded socially desirable. Future research could attempt to use objective measures such as performance evaluations or absenteeism data in addition to self-reported data.

Finally, the study was limited to healthcare workers in urban settings and the findings may not be generalizable to healthcare settings that are rural or remote. Future research should include healthcare workers from a wider range of geographic locations in an effort to get a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of wellness programs.

### Future Research Directions

Future research should examine the long-term effects of wellness programs on job satisfaction, employee retention and patient care of healthcare workers. Studies should also be conducted on the effectiveness of various types of wellness programs as well as how these programs can be adapted to suit the needs of healthcare professionals in different areas. Additionally, studies on the role of organizational culture in the success of wellness programs would be beneficial to help healthcare organizations create an environment that promotes employee well-being.

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