

Presentation 5- The impact of occupational therapists' fatigue at the organizational level

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Worker fatigue can impact the organization in several ways as it impacts an employee's job performance, team performance and dynamic, worker and patient safety, and also may result in economic consequences.

Worker fatigue negatively impacts job performance

Employees who lack sleep are often **less productive** than their well-rested coworkers and may have decreased cognitive abilities (Rosekind et al., 2010). These fatigued employees are often sleep-deprived and are also more likely to participate in **unethical and unprofessional behaviours** due to a decreased ability for self-control and to decreased ability regulate their emotions (Barnes, Schaubroeck, Huth & Gjumman, 2011; Christian & Ellis, 2011). As a result of these behaviours, employers may have to deal with employees who, for example, exaggerate their work hours or act in a hostile way towards clients or other coworkers. Participation in these unethical behaviours coupled with decreased productivity of these employees may negatively affect the organization financially..

Fatigued individuals may impact their team's dynamic and performance

Fatigued employees may be unreliable team members. Fatigued employees may also cause the **team's morale and mood to decrease**, and may lead to an increase in **conflict** between team members (Barnes, 2011). Additionally, the team's dynamic and performance may be impacted as tired employees with decreased motivation are likely to influence their team members to become less motivated (Barnes, 2011). For an organization, this is not an ideal workplace environment.

Worker fatigue impacts worker safety and safety within the organization

Research indicates that lack of sleep may lead to **increases in accidents or injuries**, including increased automobile accidents (Rosekind et al., 2010). An increase in **worker errors** is also seen when the workers are fatigued or who have worked long hours and are sleep deprived (Mu, Lohman, & Scheirton, 2006; Landrigan et al., 2004). Worker errors or accidents, as a result of fatigue, may **compromise patient safety**. These safety issues would in turn have a great impact on the organization as productivity or decreased human capital may be affected due to an accident or injury. Further, legal consequences may arise due to accidents, errors, or patient safety.

How to Combat Effects of Worker Fatigue & Resources

Both the employee and the organization can take steps to mitigate the effects of worker fatigue on the organization.

Strategies for employees include: taking allotted breaks and practicing good sleep hygiene.

Strategies for employers: establishing fatigue risk monitoring and management programs, developing and applying policies and procedures to encourage employees to take allotted breaks, role model an organizational culture where employee fatigue is recognized and non-stigmatized, design the physical work environment to reduce physiological stressors like noise and crowding, educate employees on fatigue self-management strategies (for example sleep

hygiene) and promote employees' adoption of fatigue reduction practices in the workplace (Lerman et al., 2012; Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2012; Christian & Ellis, 2011).

RESOURCES

For additional information about workplace fatigue, how it can be monitored, and changes that can be made to the workplace, the following resources may be helpful:

- Fatigue, Extended Work Hours, and Safety in the Workplace (Work Safe Alberta; Government of Alberta) <http://work.alberta.ca/ohs-quiz/index.html>
- Volume 5: Best Practices for the Assessment and Control of Psychological Hazards (Work Safe Alberta; Government of Alberta) <http://work.alberta.ca/documents/bp013-bestpractices-volume5.pdf>
- Fatigue Prevention in the Workplace http://www.vwa.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/9197/vwa_fatigue_handbook.pdf
- Alberta Employment Standards Code –(rovides guidelines on worker hours and breaks): <http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/E09.pdf>.

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