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Physical activity, sedentry behaviour and body composition: associations with workplace performance among call centre employees.

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Background: The demands of the corporate workplace have resulted in detrimental behaviour changes due to the competitive nature of large corporate companies, and the need for high output to reach expected target. Corporate employees who have office bound, sedentary jobs are at greatest risk, as the combination of increased sitting time with a lack of structured physical activity greatly increases the risk of obesity and associated diseases. Additionally, statistics from Occupational Care South Africa and Statistics South Africa show that South Africa has been plummeting R16-billion a year due to absenteeism. Wellness interventions could reduce this enormous figure.

Objectives: The objectives of this study were twofold: 1- To describe the associations between lifestyle factors: sedentary behaviour, physical activity, and body composition on sickness absenteeism; and 2 – To describe the associations between these same lifestyle factors and workplace performance.

Methods: Discovery Health conducted their annual wellness event with the attendance of 5223 employees from all departments. This study used data from the Discovery Health call-centre staff (n=1237) who were assessed via a self-reported lifestyle questionnaire. The data were collected includes physical activity (frequency and duration), sedentary behaviour (min/day), age (years), sex, BMI (weight/height^2 (kg/m^2)) and waist circumference (cm). Employee performance was assessed using two measures: Member Based Rating score (MBR), which provides an average score according to customer surveys; and First Call Resolution (FCR), which assesses the proportion of clients' queries that are successfully resolved during the first call. Sickness absenteeism was collected over a 12 month period.

Results: Sedentary time and female sex were significantly and positively associated with sickness absenteeism ($p<0.01$). When deconstructing sedentary time into TV time, computer time and meeting time; neither TV time nor meeting time were significantly associated with sickness absenteeism ($p=0.70$ and $p=0.90$, respectively). However, computer time was significantly and positively associated with sickness absenteeism ($\beta=0.01$, $p<0.01$). Exercise frequency, BMI and waist circumference had no significant impact on sickness absenteeism. FCR score demonstrates a positive and negative association with age and BMI respectively.

Conclusion: The major finding of the study was that a sedentary lifestyle had a significant association with sickness absenteeism amongst call centre employees, regardless of physical activity outside of the working environment. Additionally, body composition played a negative role in workplace performance as those who had an elevated BMI (specifically those who were obese) had poorer FCR scores. This gives an indication that body mass may have an impact on working abilities and efficiency.