



## TACKLING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

CASE STUDY:

# RELIANCE INDUSTRIES WISH PROGRAM

**AROGYA**  
WORLD

**AROGYA WORLD'S  
HEALTHY WORKPLACES**

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## BACKGROUND

Mental illness imposes an enormous disease burden on societies. Depression and anxiety disorders affect more than 600 million people around the world, and have a devastating toll – they can make even everyday tasks seem insurmountable (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health/brief/mental-health>) – The World Bank (2016). According to One Mind Institute, mental illness affects 1 in 4 people and is the #1 cause of adult disability worldwide. The cost of lost productivity in the workplace due to depression and anxiety is very high – over 1 trillion dollars a year.

The problem may be even worse in developing countries like India, compounded by stigma and lack of adequate healthcare professionals and facilities. A 2016 National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences study showed that 13.7% of the population in India is mentally ill.

Because of the efforts of the World Bank, WHO and other organizations, the world is beginning to recognize the enormous toll of mental health, and has included it in the Sustainable Development Goals targets. This gives us at Arogya World, hope that our generation is indeed serious about leaving the world a better place.

## WHY WORKPLACES?

Mental health disorders have a substantial impact not only on the health of individuals and communities, but they also pose an economic challenge to companies in terms of lost productivity and a diminished workforce. A strong inverse relationship exists between employee job satisfaction and measures of mental health such as stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression (Faragher (2005). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/oem.2002.006734>). Research in the U.S. has consistently shown that the indirect costs from mental health issues to the employer is approximately three times greater than the related direct costs of absenteeism and medical care -- combined. In India, where the medical costs of treating mental health disorders for employers is typically lower than in the U.S., the ratio of indirect costs to direct costs of mental health issues may be even higher. Indirect costs can be attributed to diminished work performance. The ensuing loss in productivity from affected employees' inability to work at their full capacity – an effect known as “presenteeism” is substantial. So significant are the human capital and financial costs of mental health issues, that employers worldwide have consistently identified stress as one of the top 3 issues influencing their health and wellness programs ([bucksurveys.com](http://bucksurveys.com))

India is a young country. Two-thirds of the billion plus people

are less than 35 years old. India's population pyramid is expected to bulge across the 15-64 age bracket increasing the working age population from 761 million to 869 million in 2011-2020. [FICCI, EY, 2014].

Currently, in the age group of 18-35, the third leading cause of death is suicide, four out of ten professionals suffer from depression or anxiety and over 50% are under 30. ASSOCHAM's corporate employees' survey in 2015 revealed that 42.5% of the corporate employees in India are suffering from depression or general anxiety disorder. The rate of anxiety and depression has increased by 45-50% in the last eight years.

Workplaces, where so many working Indians spend so much of their day, offer an attractive platform to educate busy professionals, and help improve their physical and emotional wellbeing. It has been shown that treating anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions is an affordable and cost effective way to promote wellbeing and prosperity. Employee assistance programmes help organisations build effective strategies and interventions for personal and workplace support, along with providing confidential counselling services.

As part of its Healthy Workplace program, designed to leverage workplaces for NCD prevention, Arogya World ([www.arogyaworld.org](http://www.arogyaworld.org)) seeks to understand and evaluate an organization's efforts in reducing stress and NCD risk factors in its employee population. Work-life balance was identified as a necessary criterion that would mark a company as “healthy”, in a multi-stakeholder consultation the global health non-profit held in Feb 2012, in Bangalore. Arogya World has, since then, included work-life balance yardsticks routinely in all its site-visits and formal Healthy Workplace Assessments to date (about 100 companies, spanning 2.5 million employees). In 2016, the non-profit initiated a Platinum Healthy Workplace award, through which it analyses quantitative employee health data submitted by companies and works with them to calculate the business benefits from investing in employee health. Mental health program metrics are also examined during Platinum scoring.

Building a culture of health and reducing the burden of mental health disorders through workplace mental health programs are based upon a number of best practices, including:

- Performing risk assessments using culturally validated tools to gauge depression, anxiety, and perceived life satisfaction in their workforce.
- Investigating job-related stress and dissatisfaction, addressing root causes, then implementing and evaluating stress reduction interventions.

- Evaluating mental health program impact through the use of presenteeism scales, and other key measures for the company, such as employee engagement surveys and employee turnover rates.

Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), a Fortune 500 company, is India's largest private sector corporation, and businesses in hydrocarbon exploration and production, petroleum refining and marketing, petrochemicals, retail and telecommunications. It is the largest polyester yarn and fibre producer in the world. The conglomerate became one of Arogya World's Healthy Workplaces and reached the top of the Platinum level in 2016. We have chosen Reliance's work-life balance program called **WISH (Work-life Improvement for Safety & Health)** as one of our case studies in this series, recognizing the company for tackling mental health head-on, for using medical experts and objective measurements and validated tools effectively, and for deploying the program throughout its large workforce.

Our hope is that we can inspire other companies in India and around the world to learn and adapt from this case study, and invest more to help their employees lead healthy lives.

## HOW WISH WAS STARTED

The World Health Organization's reports highlighted the huge impact of mental health in India. RIL had also observed mental health concerns springing up through their regular employee medical check ups. By 2011, RIL had established a very successful health and safety program called CASHe (Change Agents for Safety, Health & Environment), and had developed the tenets of a "participatory approach" for deployment of health programs within the company. CASHe was the stimulus and gave RIL medical leaders the confidence to follow the same steps - sensitization of top management or "apex" leaders on the issue, getting their buy-in for the need for mental health programs in addition to employee physical health efforts, then cascading to deeper layers of management. A renowned medical expert was called in to visit all sites and conduct sensitization talks and workshops with management and the general employee population. RIL first implemented a pilot at one manufacturing site (Jamnagar in 2011), developed training modules in-house, and then rolled out the program to their 8 other manufacturing sites. Later on they went broader into office locations (from 2014) as well as deeper into the communities



around their manufacturing sites, and extended the program to family members of employees. They also developed program indicators and a robust monitoring model.

### RIL's approach for WISH:

- Developing internal resources at two levels -
  1. *Missionaries*
  2. *Occupational Health professionals*
- Emphasizing sensitization along with interventions
- Developing basket of training modules- in house, for different target groups
- Using indicators and metrics for continuous improvement

*"A cohesive approach for management of mental health issues is the need of the hour in current scenario." – Dr. Nikunj Desai*

## OBJECTIVES OF WISH

- Create a culture of health and vitality that empowers employees and their families to enhance their well-being
- Develop missionaries for the program
- Make employees aware about work-life balance
- Train doctors in counseling and treatment
- Provide counseling by psychologist for identified group
- Awareness & sensitization for family members

## KEY ELEMENTS OF THE WISH PROGRAM

The WISH program is not integrated with Reliance Industries' well-known employee health programs - it is a stand-alone program, with its own objectives, charter, implementation model and metrics. And has a unique approach leveraging both sensitization and interventions.

1. The WISH program relies heavily on top medical experts and trained mental health professionals, who travel across the RIL sites, giving formal advice and counseling to employees who need help, and conducting awareness workshops on a number of important topics. 12 in-house doctors and 3 external experts (1 psychiatrist, 1 wellness coach and 1 psychologist) manage and implement the WISH program across the company.
2. The company determines which employees need help by using validated questionnaires such as Depression, Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS 21) [[http://www.psytoolkit.org/survey-library/depression-anxiety-stress-dass.html#\\_introduction](http://www.psytoolkit.org/survey-library/depression-anxiety-stress-dass.html#_introduction)] during regular employee medical check ups. The company encourages the high-risk employees to see a psychologist/ psychiatrist, and all employees to attend some of the specialized talks and awareness programs. Further follow up and consultation is with company physicians.
3. With the help of experts in the field of psychology, RIL has developed a basket of sensitization talks and modules. These are regularly offered at all sites. The company reports that general sessions on work-life balance are well attended at manufacturing sites: 100% employees and their family members participate in the program. The sessions cover the following:

### ***Modules for General sensitization:***

1. **Work life balance** - Stress Management (1.5 days)
2. **Know your emotions** (half day)

### ***Specialized Modules:***

1. Secret of confidence (3/4th day) {Mandatory}

2. Magic of empathy (1/4th day) {Mandatory}
3. Work life balance for Career woman (half day)
4. How to manage your stressed spouse (half day)
5. Principles of effective parenting (2.5 hours)
6. Teacher student communication (3 hours)
7. Channelize your exam tension [10th, 12th students] (2 hours)
8. Communication skills for paramedics (2 hours)
9. Changing times, changing careers [Career guidance for students & parents] (2hours)
10. Open forum on stress management (2 hours)
11. Crisis management: Escape from Agra [Case study on Shivaji Maharaja] (3 hours)
12. Dandi March [Case study in communication & leadership] (3 hours)
13. Vivekananda & Ramakrishna [Mentor-Mentee relationship] (3 hours)
14. Group counseling for High stress group (2 hours)
15. Bollywood & Mental Health – Stress management
16. Short films with different themes
17. Team building & emotional health
18. Shivaji - The CEO
19. From Me to We



## WHAT ARE THE ISSUES EMPLOYEES MOST CARE ABOUT?

RIL has found that employees are most anxious about work (eg time management), and family issues (eg stress around children’s exam time for parents). Work-life balance is more critical for career women - they have to get skilled at juggling pressures at work and at home.

## TACKLING STIGMA HEAD ON

The company deserves kudos for recognizing the stigma around mental health and addressing it by systematically making use of missionaries as ambassadors for the program and leveraging the many sensitizations talks and workshops to make employees become familiar with mental health topics, and making mental health less taboo.

## SCALING UP

Reliance Industries has relied heavily on its participatory model for scale-up. RIL management, site and business leaders, medical doctors and missionaries are all involved and indeed accountable for successful deployment throughout the company. About 1000 people attend the general sessions at most sites, and about 30-40 attend the skits etc. put up by site missionaries.

4. The WISH program also uses missionaries – 360 plus employees that socialize mental health issues among the 20,000 employees across the manufacturing sites. These missionaries help to reduce stigma by conducting skits and encouraging their fellow employees to confront mental health issues and seek help if needed. Attrition is low – a missionary is lost when someone retires or leaves the job.
5. In townships, the WISH program is extended to family members, teachers and school children with special workshops offered during the all-important exam time, when school kids and their parents go through extra anxiety.

### We can attribute the scaling up success to RIL’s methodology:

- Identification of leaders from all locations
- Special workshops by renowned faculty across sites
- Developing missionaries at all locations - more than 360 missionaries
- Introduction of stress questionnaire (DASS 21) during regular medical check-up. Identification of high risk groups
- Special programs on de-addiction, parenting, and for spouses and school teachers
- Regular follow up and consultation by company physician

*“Project WISH (Work Life Improvement for Safety & Health) has initiated recognition of mental health issues at RIL workplaces and a committed response from employees and family members across locations.” – Dr. R. Rajesh*

## METRICS

The company has developed a robust monitoring model for this program. It tracks the number of attendees at each sensitization talk or workshop, and importantly DASS score improvement over time. At each site the program metrics are collected at monthly meetings by site leadership, then data gets rolled up and reported to company management. Program indicators include:

- 1. Spread of the program**
  - a. The number of sensitization sessions conducted
  - b. No. of employees/family members and teachers who attended
- 2. Utilization by High Risk employees (Moderate to Severe DASS score)**
  - a. No. of counseling sessions attended
  - b. How many complied with the Intervention
  - c. Self referrals
  - d. DASS score improvement
- 3. Whether awareness program are offered for targeted groups**
  - a. For people with Hypertension
  - b. For people with Diabetes
  - c. Eg for those undergoing de-addiction (alcohol, tobacco)
- 4. No. of prescription for Psychiatric drugs by Reliance Doctors**
- 5. Monitoring missionaries**
  - a. Whether there are optimum number of missionaries at each site
  - b. Number of meetings conducted at each site
  - c. How many missionaries attended each meeting participated actively

## PROGRAM COSTS

RIL estimates that it spent INR 45 lakhs or about USD 70,000 on this program in 2015-2016. The cost of incentives was INR 5 lakhs (<USD 8000).

### IMPACT

The company brought the overall company wide DASS score down from 8.5 to 6.6 over the course of 3 years of implementation of the WISH program, thus showing encouraging improvement.

## SUCCESS FACTORS

In addition to the key elements of the program design and the company's use of both medical interventions and extensive sensitization, there are a number of other elements that we believe are responsible for the success of the WISH program:

- Reliance Industries management's decision to count the time of employees attending the WISH sessions as

*“ Project WISH, through its peer group missionaries, is an example of employees’ focused involvement in workplace mental health initiatives” – Dr. Suvarna Moti*

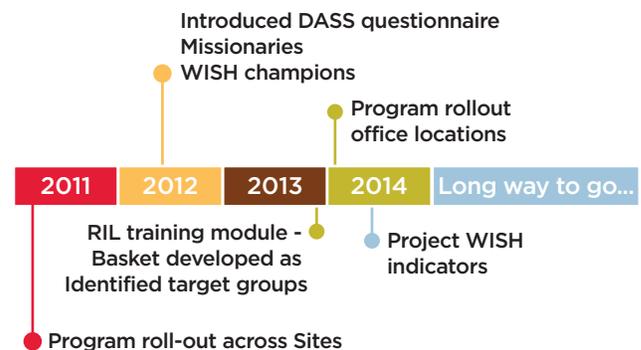
work time, is a big reason for the program's success. Employees are not expected to take care of their mental health issues on their own time or volunteer to promote the program. The company gives them the freedom to participate fully on company time.

- Management has been supportive in other ways as well. They agreed to the company wide roll-out, approved the WISH program budget and the use of incentives such as Good Health Awards, certificates, gift vouchers, trophies, etc.
- Metrics – The company places a lot of emphasis on metrics for all its health programs including this one. Improvement of DASS score was used to evaluate how effective the program was in addressing mental health in the company. Even though the DASS questionnaire is now being phased out after 3-4 years of continuous use, it will be replaced by another validated tool.
- Confidentiality is another important factor. An employee's mental health status is not shared with the manager except if there is a need for intervention.

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

RIL has followed a systematic well thought through roll out of the WISH program throughout the company. Every year or two they have added a new feature of the program, finding ways to continually improve. Their objective use of validated questionnaires for assessing progress helps them continuously improve their program.

### Journey Towards Wish Program Implementation



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To learn more about our programs, goals and impact visit our website, [www.arogyaworld.org](http://www.arogyaworld.org).