

# Mental Health And Work-Life Balance:

## How County Assemblies Can Create Supportive And Mentally Healthy Work Environment For Legislators And Staff

SOCATT (K) hosted a training workshop for the County Assembly Service of Nakuru on team Building and Mental Health



By Leah Ileri

**W**ork to live, or live to work? Working hard, getting the job done, and having a fulfilled life at home, can we really have it all? In a globalized world where business never stops and nearly all our business tools enable constant communication, where do we draw the line between work and leisure? Stress levels are on the rise around the world. People are so focused on meeting their professional career goals that they may forget the importance of balancing work with real life. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is important since the effect can be so wide-reaching, good or bad. Allowing work to encroach on every aspect of your life may seem tempting, but those short-term gains come at a high cost to your mental health. The demanding nature of legislative work in the County Assemblies comes with its own unique challenges that can contribute to mental health issues.

Factors like high-pressure decision-making, long hours, constant public scrutiny, and the adversarial nature of politics may lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout among employees.

Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It involves the individual's ability to manage stress, relate to others, make decisions, and cope with the challenges of life. Mental health is a dynamic state that can change over time and is influenced by various factors, including biological, genetic, psychological, and environmental factors. Key components of mental health include:

**a) Emotional well-being**

The ability to understand and manage one's emotions, including a range of feelings such as happiness, sadness, anger, and stress

**b) Psychological well-being**

Cognitive functions and thought processes contribute to psychological well-being. This

includes the ability to think clearly, solve problems, and make decisions

**c) Social Well-being**

Healthy relationships and positive social interactions are essential for mental health. Social support from friends, family, and communities can contribute to emotional resilience

**d) Behavioral Well-being**

Healthy behaviors and coping mechanisms, as well as the ability to adapt to changes and challenges, are important aspects of mental health

**e) Functional Well-being**

The capacity to carry out daily activities, fulfill roles and responsibilities, and maintain a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Mental health is a dynamic concept, and individuals may experience fluctuations in their mental well-being over time. Mental Health is influenced by a combination of

factors.

#### • **Biological Factors**

Genetics, brain chemistry, and neurological factors can play a role in mental health

#### • **Psychological Factors**

Personality traits, coping skills, and individual resilience contribute to mental well-being

#### • **Social and Environmental Factors**

Relationships, family dynamics, cultural influences, socioeconomic status, and life events can impact mental health

#### • **Access to resources and Support**

Availability of mental health care, social support systems, and community resources can affect an individual's mental health. Maintaining good mental health is an ongoing process that involves self-awareness, self-care, and seeking support when needed. It is also important for societies to foster environments that reduce stigma, promote mental health education, and ensure accessible and effective mental health services for those who require them. Mental health is a significant and increasingly recognized aspect of well-being in today's world. Several factors contribute to the prominence of mental health in contemporary workplaces. These include

#### **1. Awareness and education**

There is growing awareness and understanding of mental health issues. Education campaigns and increased public discourse have helped reduce stigma and encourage seeking help

#### **2. Technological Advancement**

Technology has facilitated access to information and mental health resources. Mobile apps, online platforms, and teletherapy services have made mental health support more accessible

#### **3. Workplace Stress**

Modern work environments often involve high levels of stress, competition, and long working hours. This can contribute to mental health challenges such as burnout, anxiety, and depression

#### **4. Social Media Impact**

Social media can both positively and negatively impact mental health. On one hand, it provides a platform for support and connection, but on the other hand, it can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, comparison, and cyberbullying

#### **5. Global Events and Uncertainty**

Global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainties, and geopolitical tensions, have heightened stress levels and contributed to mental health challenges on a global scale

#### **6. Social Isolation and Loneliness**

Despite increased connectivity through technology, some individuals experience social isolation and loneliness, which can negatively impact mental health

#### **7. Pressure to Succeed**

Societal expectations and the pressure to succeed in various aspects of life, including career, relationships, and personal achievements, can contribute to stress and mental health issues

#### **8. Climate change and Environmental Concerns**

Concerns about climate change and environmental issues can contribute to eco-anxiety and feelings of helplessness, impacting mental well-being

#### **9. Trauma and Adverse Experience**

Exposure to trauma, whether through personal experiences or witnessing global events, can have profound effects on mental health

#### **10. Changing Social Norms**

Evolving societal norms and expectations may contribute to shifts in mental health dynamics. Factors such as changing family structures, gender roles, and cultural expectations can influence mental well-being

#### **11. Access to Mental Health Services**

While awareness has increased, challenges in accessing mental health services persist. Disparities in access to care, affordability, and stigma can hinder individuals from seeking the help they need

#### **12. Lifestyle Factors**

Poor lifestyle choices, such as lack of exercise, unhealthy diets, and inadequate sleep, can contribute to mental health issues

Given the complex interplay of these factors, it's essential for individuals, communities, and societies to prioritize mental health and work collaboratively to create supportive environments and accessible resources for those in need. This includes promoting open conversations, reducing stigma, and advocating for policies that support mental well-being

On the other hand, work-life balance refers to the equilibrium individuals strive to achieve between their professional

responsibilities (work) and their personal lives (life). It involves managing time and energy effectively to meet both work-related and personal goals, reducing stress, and enhancing overall well-being. Achieving a healthy work-life balance is essential for maintaining physical and mental health, fostering positive relationships, and preventing burnout.

Employees with harmonious work-life balance are more satisfied in their jobs, more productive at work and more fulfilled at home. But finding the balance can be very difficult especially in this digital age that has created new ways of working as technology has evolved to allow people to work from home.

#### **Key Components of work-life balance include**

##### **1. Time Management**

By prioritizing your tasks, breaking them down into manageable chunks, eliminating distractions, and practicing time blocking, you can make the most of your time and achieve both personal and professional satisfaction.

##### **2. Setting boundaries**

We all have demands – from work, our personal commitments, families, partners, or pets – that are outside our control, by setting boundaries you are clearly defining these parts of your life, how they interact, and how you will dedicate time and effort to them, setting boundaries requires self-awareness, communication skills and willingness to have uncomfortable conversation

##### **3. Flexible work arrangements**

This includes shift work, on-call work, compressed hours, extended breaks for personal reasons, job sharing etc. with flex-work, employees feel valued and supported and are more likely to be engaged, loyal, and motivated.

##### **4. Communication and Expectations**

Learn to initiate conversations with your superiors about feeling the need for a better work life balance.

##### **5. Self-Care**

Incorporating self-care routines into your daily life will make you more productive at work and happier during personal time. For instance, taking small periods of the day to relax and do nothing will help focus your mind on the task at hand. Never underestimate the power physical activities, incorporate regular exercise into your life even short period of physical

activity during work hours, can positively impact your mental and physical health.

#### 6. Quality family and personal time

While your job is important, it shouldn't be your entire life. You were an individual before taking that position and you should prioritize activities and hobbies that make you happy. If you do not firmly plan for personal time, you will never have time to do other things outside work. Create a calendar for romantic and family dates where you can spend quality time with your loved one without work-life conflict. Realize that no one at your company is going to love you or appreciate you the way your family does

#### 7. Goal setting

Set realistic and achievable goals both at work and in personal life to avoid feeling overwhelmed

#### 8. Technology boundaries

Technology can both help and hinder a work-life balance. While automating business processes can help reduce stress, screen time can harm your health and focus. Take breaks from digital devices during the day and disconnect from your phone after staring at a laptop all day. Even small period of digital detoxing particularly before bed will improve your sleep quality and ensure you feel healthier at work and at home.

#### 9. Professional Development

Personal development is key to improving your mental and physical well-being. Continuous learning and self-reflection will help you become better at your job and at managing your time. Allocating time for courses, workshops and other activities will help you up-skill and increase your work efficiency.

#### 10. Regular reflection

Periodically evaluate and adjust your priorities and strategies to maintain a healthy work-life balance as personal and professional circumstances evolve.

Achieving work-life balance is a dynamic process that may require regular assessment and adjustments. It is important for individuals to recognize and address signs of imbalance, communicate their needs, and seek support from employers, colleagues, and family members when necessary. Employers play a crucial role in fostering a supportive work environment that acknowledges the importance of work-life balance and implements policies and practices that promote employee well-being



## Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Supporting employees in mental health issues and promoting work-life balance is crucial for creating a healthy and productive work environment. Here are some strategies that Assemblies can adopt:

#### 1. Promote a Health Work Culture

- Foster a culture that values work-life balance and mental well-being
- Encourage open communication about mental health and create a stigma free environment

#### 2. Flexible work Arrangements

- Offer flexible work hours, remote work options, or compressed workweeks to accommodate employees' diverse needs
- Allow employees to have control over their schedules within reason

#### 3. Mental Health Awareness Programs

- Conduct training sessions to raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce the stigma
- Provide resources and information on mental health support services

#### 4. Employees Assistant Programs (EAPs)

- Offer EAPs that provide confidential counseling and support services for employees and their families
- Ensure that employees are aware and comfortable using these resources

#### 5. Clear expectations and communication

- Clearly define job roles, responsibilities, and expectations to reduce stress and anxiety
- Foster transparent communication to ensure employees feel Informed

#### 6. Workload management

- Encourage realistic goal-setting and workload distribution
- Monitor workloads to prevent burnout

and provide additional resources when necessary

#### 7. Promote Breaks and Downtime

- Encourage employees to take regular breaks to recharge during the workdays
- Discourage culture of working long hours without breaks

#### 8. Provide training for managers

- Train managers to recognize signs of stress and mental health issues
- Equip managers with skills to have supportive conversations with their team members

#### 9. Wellness programs

- Implement wellness programs that focus on physical and mental well-being such as fitness classes, mindfulness sessions or wellness challenges

#### 10. Flexible leave policies

- Provide generous and flexible leave policies that include mental health days
- Ensure that employees feel comfortable taking time off when needed

#### 11. Regular check-ins

- Conduct regular one-on-one check-ins between employees and their supervisors to discuss workload, challenges and well-being
- Create a supportive environment for employees to express their concerns

#### 12. Feedback Mechanisms

- Establish mechanisms for employees to provide feedback on their work environment including mental health support
- Act on feedback to continuously improve the workplace

It is critical to remember that every organization is unique, so it is important to tailor these strategies to fit the specific needs and culture of your workplace. Regularly, assess the effectiveness of these initiatives and make adjustments as needed

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