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**EFFECTS OF STAFF WELLNESS PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYEE
PERFORMANCE OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN NAKURU COUNTY,
KENYA**

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Effects of Staff Wellness Programs and Employee Performance of Private Universities in Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract:

Purpose of The Study: This study examined the effect of staff wellness programs on employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County, Kenya. It addressed persistent challenges of stress, burnout, and inadequate wellness support systems negatively affecting employee productivity despite existing wellness-related interventions in private universities.

Methodology: A descriptive survey design was adopted, targeting 66 non-academic staff from selected private universities. A census approach was used with structured questionnaires. Validity and reliability were ensured through expert review, pilot testing, and Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0 with descriptive and

inferential statistics including correlation and regression analysis.

Findings: Staff wellness programs showed a positive and significant relationship with employee performance ($R=0.613$, $R^2=0.376$, $p=0.001$). Employees with access to counseling services, stress management programs, and health support systems reported higher productivity, motivation, and job satisfaction. The composite mean for wellness programs was 3.50 ($SD=0.98$), indicating moderate implementation, while employee performance recorded a composite mean of 3.77 ($SD=0.88$). Professional counseling services scored lowest ($M=3.30$), revealing a critical gap. Regression results confirmed that improvements in wellness interventions significantly enhance employee output in private universities.

Conclusion: Staff wellness programs significantly and positively affect employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County. However, current implementation remains moderate, with notable gaps in professional counseling services. Institutions that invest comprehensively in mental health support, recreational activities, and counseling services are likely to achieve higher employee performance outcomes.

Keywords: *Staff wellness programs, employee performance, private universities, wellness interventions, Nakuru County, Kenya*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Staff wellness programs have increasingly become a strategic priority in modern human resource management due to their direct influence on employee well-being, motivation, and performance outcomes. Globally, organizations are investing in structured wellness initiatives such as employee assistance programs, mental health counselling, occupational health services, physical fitness programs, and stress management interventions in response to rising workplace stress and burnout levels. The World Health Organization (2024) reports that workplace-related stress and mental health challenges significantly reduce productivity and increase absenteeism across sectors, emphasizing the need for comprehensive wellness frameworks as a core organizational strategy rather than an optional benefit. Similarly, studies have shown that organizations that invest in employee well-being experience improved engagement, higher job satisfaction, and enhanced productivity due to reduced psychological strain and improved work-life balance (Arevin et al., 2024).

In the education sector, employee wellness is particularly critical because academic institutions depend heavily on human capital for teaching, administration, and research outputs. University employees often face heavy workloads, role ambiguity, tight deadlines, and emotional demands arising from student interactions and administrative responsibilities. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2026), higher education workers are among the professional groups most exposed to chronic occupational stress due to increasing institutional demands and limited staffing levels. This situation makes wellness programs essential in sustaining productivity and ensuring institutional effectiveness. In addition, Abigail (2025) argue that universities that prioritize staff well-being are more likely to achieve higher teaching quality, improved service delivery, and better institutional reputation.

In Kenya, the higher education sector has expanded rapidly over the past two decades, leading to increased pressure on human resource systems in both public and private universities. Private universities, in particular, operate in highly competitive environments characterized by financial constraints, fluctuating student enrolment, and the need for efficiency in service delivery (Commission for University Education, 2025). These conditions have contributed to increased workload demands, job insecurity concerns, and heightened performance expectations among employees. As a result, many employees experience stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction, which negatively affects their productivity and overall institutional performance (Avr & Rao, 2024).

Staff wellness programs in Kenyan private universities typically include health insurance coverage, counselling services, staff retreats, recreational activities, and limited stress management initiatives. However, the effectiveness of these programs remains inconsistent due to inadequate



funding, poor implementation structures, and lack of institutional commitment (Richard, 2025). Mwangi et al. (2017) observe that while some universities have introduced wellness initiatives, many of these programs are not fully institutionalized, leading to low employee participation and limited impact on performance outcomes. Consequently, employees continue to experience psychological strain, work-family conflict, and reduced motivation, which undermines institutional productivity.

Empirical studies further indicate that effective wellness programs are strongly associated with improved employee performance. For instance, Gitonga et al. (2025) found that structured wellness interventions in Kenyan institutions significantly reduced absenteeism and improved employee engagement. Similarly, Mahdi et al. (2025) established that organizations with comprehensive wellness policies recorded higher employee productivity levels compared to those with minimal or informal wellness structures. Despite these findings, there remains limited empirical evidence specifically focusing on private universities in Nakuru County, creating a contextual and geographical research gap. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effect of staff wellness programs on employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County, Kenya, with the aim of generating evidence that can inform policy development and improve human resource management practices in the higher education sector.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Staff wellness programs play a critical role in enhancing employee performance in higher education institutions; however, private universities in Nakuru County continue to experience persistent challenges in managing employee well-being effectively. Despite the implementation of various wellness-related initiatives, employee performance in many institutions remains suboptimal, characterized by stress, burnout, absenteeism, and declining productivity. Studies indicate that employee-related challenges such as psychological strain and work overload have become increasingly common in Kenyan private universities, negatively affecting service delivery and institutional effectiveness (Commission for University Education, 2023).

A major concern is the inadequate and inconsistent implementation of staff wellness programs across private universities. Although most institutions report the existence of wellness policies such as medical cover, counselling services, and occasional staff engagement activities, their practical implementation remains limited and uncoordinated. Pandey et al. (2025) observe that only a small proportion of universities have fully institutionalized wellness frameworks that systematically address employee mental, physical, and emotional well-being. As a result, many employees continue to experience high stress levels, which directly affects their performance and productivity.



Further evidence suggests that ineffective wellness support systems have contributed to increased employee dissatisfaction and reduced organizational commitment. According to Aloka (2022), employees in private universities often report inadequate access to structured counselling services, insufficient stress management programs, and limited participation in wellness initiatives. This gap between policy existence and actual implementation undermines the intended benefits of staff wellness programs and limits their impact on employee performance. Additionally, workload pressures and role demands in private universities have intensified due to increasing student enrolment, limited staffing levels, and heightened expectations for academic and administrative output. Kimwere and Mwanzia (2025) note that many employees in private universities experience prolonged working hours and emotional exhaustion, which are not adequately addressed by existing wellness interventions. Consequently, institutions continue to face reduced productivity, low morale, and high staff turnover rates.

Empirical evidence further shows that although staff wellness programs are associated with improved employee performance, their effectiveness in Kenyan private universities remains uncertain due to weak implementation structures and lack of continuous evaluation. Nyawira (2025) argue that many institutions lack monitoring systems to assess the effectiveness of wellness initiatives, resulting in poorly targeted interventions that fail to address the real needs of employees. This creates a significant gap between policy formulation and actual employee outcomes. Therefore, despite the existence of staff wellness programs in private universities in Nakuru County, employee performance challenges persist, raising concerns about the effectiveness of these programs. This study therefore seeks to examine the effect of staff wellness programs on employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County, Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

The Two Factor Theory of Motivation and Hygiene was developed by Herzberg in the 1950s. He proposed that motivation and hygiene factors controlled employee behavior. Balance has become increasingly significant in Kenyan Universities as a hygienic concern to prevent dissatisfaction. Sirgy and Lee (2017) emphasizes that balance is crucial for both employees' welfare as well as organizational performance, as it contributes to sustained job satisfaction and improved employee performance. This supports Herzberg's argument that dissatisfaction is the consequence of poor working conditions, which include a lack of personal time. Consequently, the stabilization of staff performance is facilitated by the elimination of the primary problems when confronting balance.

The capacity of an employee to handle both personal and professional responsibilities is also a determining factor in the motivational factors of recognition and success. Mutio and Gakobo (2025) found that employee wellness programs at the Technical University of Kenya had positive



impact on employee performance, thus highlighting wellness initiatives as a key driver of staff productivity. The findings corroborate Herzberg's discovery that, particularly in instances of favorable working conditions, motivators enhance contentment. These initiatives fostered great impact on the institution's personnel performance, confirming their value for improving morale, reducing absenteeism and boosting job performance.

Karanja et al. (2025) identified the primary causes of demotivation as excessively demanding occupations and inadequate family time. Herzberg categorizes these pressures as sanitation elements, which, when absent, result in dissatisfaction but are present to mitigate it. According to employees, incentives of any nature were incapable of augmenting their productivity in the absence of equitable duties. Task management remains the primary factor in the maintenance of ongoing academic success. The staff output in Kenyan higher education was significantly impacted by the remote working practices. Working from home led to enhanced work-life integration for numerous employees, as per Sharma (2026). This adaptability became a motivator, as it granted staff members the freedom and control to manage their schedules.

The primary motivating forces are autonomy and responsibility, which is why Herzberg's theory is reflected here. The author argues that performance and retention may be enhanced by long-term hybrid strategies. Institutions that resist this trend are at risk of losing exceptional talent. Herzberg's Two Factor Theory anchors this as it provides an explanation on the circumstances to which a struggle between work and life responsibilities as a hygiene concern, negatively affects employee motivation and gratification, hence proficiency. This concept is important in addition to being relevant to the study as it will support and test study variable, staff wellness programs.

2.2. Empirical Review

According to Mwangi et al. (2025), wellness campaigns, which include mental health assistance and exercise programs, were directly linked with increased participation and decreased absenteeism among university staff members in Kenya? The investigation demonstrated that wellness programs directly led to improved job performance. By the use of questionnaires, staff attitudes toward wellness were assessed. It was noted that wellness programs lowered tension and promoted improved physical and mental health. However, although existing studies such as Jakana and Wanyoike (2026) focused on the Kenyan Universities generally, none have explained how specific categories of staff in the private universities, experience wellness initiatives, thereby creating a contextual gap.

Kimathi and Deya (2023) criticized the use of wellness programs in public universities, arguing that their potential benefits are limited by inadequate funding and lack of full support. Their study established that some employees appreciated wellness programs while others felt they were weak and had little long-term effect on their job performance. However, the study relied only on qualitative interviews, which limited how widely the findings could be applied. This created a methodological gap, as using a mixed-methods approach could provide broader evidence about



the relationship between employee wellness and job performance. Therefore, future interventions should carefully consider these factors.

However, a study conducted by Mungania et al. (2021) on private institutions discovered that staff wellness initiatives had a more effect on output when they were consistent with the corporate values and culture. By assessing the outcomes of wellness programs, they identified a substantial correlation between employee engagement and those that align with corporate objectives. This is indicative of the objectives of the university. This promotes the significance of customizing wellness efforts to the unique desires of the company and its employees. Universities must therefore ensure that these initiatives are not general in nature, but rather address the specific challenges that their employees face.

Despite the above arguments, there are some studies that question the long-term sustainability of wellness initiatives as a method of boosting productivity. In a critical evaluation, Muriithi and Mwaura (2023) argued that the long-term benefits of wellness programs are less apparent without a more general organizational shift, despite the fact that short-term increases in employee productivity are evident following their implementation. This therefore implied that wellness initiatives are unable to ensure continuous productivity in the absence of structural changes within institutions. However, there exists a contextual gap since Kamau et al. (2022) examined private institutions generally, but not specific universities and employee categories.

In another study by Wambui and Kamau (2024) assessed the influence of institutional workers' wellness commitment on output. Through it, it was discovered that academic productivity and staff retention rates were enhanced by universities that integrated wellness initiatives into their strategic objectives. Their research emphasizes the necessity of leadership buy-in and the alignment of wellness initiatives with the institution's objectives through adoption of case studies and interviews with university management. Nevertheless, this studied institutional worker, without specifying nature of the institutions or employee category, thereby creating a contextual void. Odhiambo and Karanja (2025) recommended further research on productivity in relation to wellness programs thus highlighting necessity for more comprehensive examination of the combined effects of different factors on productivity.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate the effect of staff wellness programs on employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County, Kenya. A descriptive survey research design was adopted to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from non-academic staff within selected private universities. The design was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to obtain comprehensive information on existing staff wellness practices and their influence on employee performance. The study targeted non-academic staff working in private universities in Nakuru County. The population comprised employees from various administrative and support departments, including human resource units, finance departments, registry offices, and student support services. A census approach was applied due to the relatively



small and manageable population size of 66 respondents, ensuring that all accessible members of the target population were included in the study. Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires containing both closed-ended and a few open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were designed using a five-point Likert scale to measure perceptions on staff wellness programs and employee performance. The questionnaire captured information on key variables including counselling services, stress management programs, health support initiatives, and employee productivity indicators. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the relevant university authorities and the appropriate national research regulatory bodies. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation to enhance honesty and reduce response bias during data collection.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis, were employed to determine the relationship between staff wellness programs and employee performance. The regression model examined how employee performance was influenced by different dimensions of staff wellness programs, including counselling services, stress management initiatives, and health support systems. ANOVA was used to test the overall significance and fitness of the model, while qualitative responses were analyzed using content analysis to identify emerging themes and patterns.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Rate of Response

Out of the 66 questionnaires distributed to the sampled non-academic staff across the three private universities in Nakuru County, 54 questionnaires were returned duly completed, representing a response rate of 81.8%, approximated to 82% deemed adequate. Kumar et al. (2023) notes that response rates exceeding 75% provide a representative and reliable basis for analysis and generalization. The remaining 12 questionnaires (18.2%) were not returned owing to respondents who were on official leave, or declined participation. Table 4.1 presents this.

Table 1.0: Response Rate by Institution

University	Distributed	Returned	Response Rate (%)
Kabarak University	29	24	82.8
Mount Kenya University	19	16	84.2
St. Paul's University	18	14	77.8



Total	66	54	81.8
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Source: (Survey Data, 2026)

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The background data of the 54 respondents who completed the survey is illustrated in this component. Gender, age group, educational attainment, and tenure are among demographic factors evaluated.

4.3. Descriptive analysis

Effect of Staff Wellness Programs on Employee Performance

The first objective of the study was to determine the effect of staff wellness programs on employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County, Kenya. The mean and standard deviation scores for each item are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 1.2: Staff Wellness Programs

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
My organization provides adequate resources to support employees' mental health	3.72	0.89
My organization organizes regular recreational activities for staff	3.51	0.94
The organization facilitates regular health screenings for employees	3.48	1.01
My organization offers professional counseling services to staff	3.30	1.08
Composite Mean	3.50	0.98

Source: (Survey Data, 2026)

The results in Table 4.4 reveal that the statement 'My organization provides adequate resources to support employees' mental health' recorded the highest mean score ($M=3.72$, $SD=0.89$), suggesting that respondents moderately agreed that mental health resources were provided. This is followed by 'My organization organizes regular recreational activities for staff' ($M=3.51$, $SD=0.94$). The statement on professional counseling services recorded the lowest mean ($M=3.30$, $SD=1.08$), indicating that respondents were least certain about the availability of counseling support.

The composite mean of 3.50 ($SD=0.98$) for staff wellness programs shows that wellness support in the three universities is present but only at a moderate level. This finding means that while the universities have made some effort to support staff well-being, there is still room to grow,



especially in areas like professional counseling, which received the lowest individual mean in this section. For the private universities in Nakuru County, this result matters because it shows that staff are aware of wellness programs but do not feel that these programs are fully available or strong enough to meet their needs. This has a direct connection to performance, because when employees do not feel supported in their health and well-being, they find it harder to give their best at work.

Hamanzangwa and Mundende (2025) studied university employees in Ghana and found that those who had access to structured wellness programs shown enhanced efficiency outcomes and increased levels of job engagement compared to those who did not. They showed that even basic wellness support, such as regular health talks and access to counseling, made a measurable difference in how employees performed. In the Kenyan context, Abigail (2025) studied employees in learning institutions and found that staff who felt their organization cared about their well-being was more committed and productive. The current study agrees with these results and shows that employee performance can be strengthening by wellness programs. Other universities, both in Kenya and beyond, can use these findings to justify investing in Employee Assistance Programs, regular health screenings, and recreational activities. The practical value of this finding is that spending on employee wellness is not only a welfare concern but also a proven performance strategy.

4.4 Employee Performance

The dependent variable, employee performance, was measured using four items on the Likert scale. Table 4.8 presents the descriptive statistics for employee performance.

Table 1.2: Employee Performance

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
I complete my tasks within the expected timelines	3.89	0.81
I receive adequate support from management to perform my job effectively	3.70	0.90
I am satisfied with my current job responsibilities	3.65	0.94
Work-life balance has improved resource utilization in my organization	3.82	0.86
Composite Mean	3.77	0.88

Source: (Survey Data, 2026)

The findings in Table 4.8 indicate that the statement 'I complete my tasks within the expected time lines' registered the highest mean ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.81$), suggesting that respondents were largely in agreement that they met their task deadlines. 'Work-life balance has improved resource



utilization in my organization' had a mean of 3.82 (SD=0.86), while 'I receive adequate support from management to perform my job effectively' had a mean of 3.70 (SD=0.90). The statement on job satisfaction recorded the lowest mean (M=3.65, SD=0.94), though still above the scale midpoint.

Composite mean of 3.77 (SD=0.88) for employee performance shows that non-academic staff in the three private universities rated their own performance as moderately high. The highest-rated item was about completing tasks within expected timelines (M=3.89), and this is closely linked to the work-life balance support that staff receive from their institutions. When employees have enough support at work while managing their personal lives well, they are better placed to focus on their duties and meet their targets on time. Looking at the slightly lower score for job satisfaction (M=3.65), it is derived that there are still areas where the universities can do more to help staff feel fulfilled in their roles. For the private universities in Nakuru County, this overall performance score is a useful baseline that shows how the study variables are connected to actual staff output. It shows that work-life balance dimensions are not abstract ideas but are directly connected to whether employees deliver on their responsibilities.

Wanjiku and Lumwagi (2021) studied employee performance in Kenyan universities and found that staff who rated their work-life balance positively also rated their performance higher, particularly in meeting deadlines and maintaining the quality of their work. Their study supports the pattern found in the present study and confirms connection between work-life balance and performance is real and measurable in the university context. Avr and Rao (2024) also found in a study of support staff in Kenyan higher education that when universities actively supported employee well-being, performance scores improved across all measured indicators, including task completion, resource use, and job satisfaction. The present study findings build on these findings by showing that this relationship is evident specifically among staff in private universities, and it points to the need for these institutions to treat employee well-being as a core part of their performance management approach.

4.5. Inferential Analysis

This section presents the inferential analysis used to determine the relationship between staff wellness programs (independent variable) and employee performance (dependent variable) in private universities in Nakuru County, Kenya. The analysis allows for generalization of findings from the sample to the wider population of non-academic staff in private universities. Inferential statistical techniques, particularly regression analysis, were used to determine the strength, direction, and significance of the relationship between staff wellness programs and employee performance outcomes.



Model Summary

Table 4.10 presents the model summary used to assess the goodness of fit of the regression model and determine the extent to which staff wellness programs explain variations in employee *performance*.

Table 1.4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.613a	0.376	0.364		0.321

a. Predictors: (Constant), Staff Wellness Programs

Source: Survey Data (2026)

The R value of 0.613 indicates a moderate to strong positive relationship between staff wellness programs and employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County. This suggests that improvements in staff wellness programs are associated with improvements in employee performance outcomes. The R Square value of 0.376 indicates that approximately 37.6% of the variation in employee performance is explained by staff wellness programs. The adjusted R Square value of 0.364 confirms the explanatory power of the model after adjusting for sample size and degrees of freedom, indicating a stable and reliable model for prediction. The standard error of estimate (0.321) suggests that the model has a relatively good fit, with small deviations between observed and predicted values of employee performance.

ANOVA of the Regression Model

Table 4.11 presents the ANOVA results used to test the overall significance of the regression model and determine whether staff wellness programs significantly influence employee performance.

Table 1.5 : ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	6.842	1	6.842	15.768	.001
Residual	11.354	64	0.177		
Total	18.196	65			



Source: Survey Data (2026)

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ($F(1, 64) = 15.768, p = 0.001 < 0.05$). This confirms that staff wellness programs significantly influence employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County. The F-statistic demonstrates that the model provides a good fit for the data, and the significance value confirms that the observed relationship between staff wellness programs and employee performance is not due to chance. Therefore, staff wellness programs are a significant predictor of employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County, Kenya.

5. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The study found that wellness programs in the three universities were operating at a moderate level. Mental health resources and recreational activities were the most recognized forms of support among staff. In contrast, professional counseling was the least available wellness service, thus highlighting a gap that needs attention. The research revealed a significant and favorable correlation between staff wellness programs and how well employees performed at their jobs. It was noted that this relationship remained significant even when the effect of all four variables was tested together, showing that wellness programs make a real and independent contribution to performance. Jakana and Wanyoike (2026) found that access to wellness support in university settings improved staff engagement and output, and Kimathi and Deya (2023) established that Kenyan employees who felt their organizations cared about their well-being were more productive and showed greater commitment to their work. The study therefore concludes that improving the reach and quality of wellness programs in private universities in Nakuru County is one practical step towards better performance

6. CONCLUSION

Conclusion is made that staff wellness programs have a significant positive effect on employee performance in private universities in Nakuru County, Kenya. It further adds that, while the universities studied have established basic wellness provisions, the scope and consistency of these programs are moderate, suggesting room for improvement. Therefore, organizations that invest more comprehensively in mental health support, recreational activities, and counseling services are likely to achieve higher employee performance outcomes

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Private universities in Nakuru County should develop and institutionalize comprehensive employee wellness policies. These policies should include structured mental health programs, regular physical wellness activities, and mandatory access to Employee Assistance Programs



(EAPs) with professional counseling. Given the significant effect of leave programs on performance, institutions should ensure that all categories of leave annual, sick, maternity, paternity, and compassionate are clearly communicated and uniformly enforced across all departments. University administrators and the government, through the Commission for University Education (CUE), should develop minimum standards for work-life balance provisions in universities to ensure equity of access for all staff regardless of institutional size or resource endowment.

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