

Assurance to Insurance, Cos Go all Out to Connect with Shop-Floor Workers

HUL, Tata Steel, TaMo, Vedanta, Hyundai and Hero among cos trying to help staff deal with Covid-induced stress

Rica Bhattacharyya & Lijee Phillip

Mumbai: Rising uncertainty in the job market, anxiety of catching Covid-19 infection, and a fear of being socially ostracised are causing significant mental and emotional stress among blue collar workers, prompting manufacturing companies to introduce a bunch of measures to take care of their wellbeing.

From signing up mental health counsellors and ensuring regular connect with leadership teams to rolling out Covid-19 insurance coverage, introducing special leaves, and organising a host of activities such as yoga, meditation, coffee connect sessions, and games, the country's leading manufacturers including the likes of Hindustan Unilever, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Vedanta, Hyundai Motor and Hero MotoCorp are taking several initiatives to deal with the psychological impact of the pandemic on the shop floor personnel.

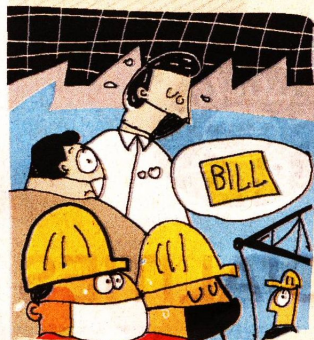
Hindustan Unilever, the country's largest consumer goods maker, has extended Covid-19 insurance coverage to all its employees across factories and distribution centres.

"For all our factory employees (11,000 shop floor workers) as well as 30,000 employees in our outer core — that is, people who are not our direct employees — we are offering Covid insurance," said Anuradha Razdan, executive director - HR, at HUL.

The company has started awareness-generating initiatives and weekly connect of the shop floor members with leadership teams, she said. "Someone from the leadership team is doing regular connect with the shop-floor employe-

STRESS BUSTER

WHAT'S LEADING TO SHOP FLOOR STRESS?



FEAR OF JOB LOSS, PAY CUT: For most factory workers it is an issue of day-to-day survival

Many have large families with single earning member

FEAR OF CATCHING COVID & INABILITY TO PAY HOSPITAL BILLS

Many are contract workers who live away from families and are concerned about families back home

WHAT ARE COMPANIES DOING TO DISPEL STRESS?

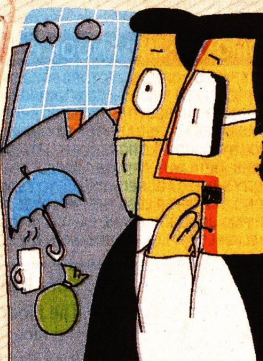
Mental health counsellors & doctors on call for workers and family

INSURANCE BENEFITS, INCLUDING COVID COVERAGE

Special Covid recovery leaves with full pay

Organising well-being activities such as virtual yoga, meditation, coffee connect sessions and games

REGULAR CONNECT WITH LEADERSHIP TEAM



es on the phone, talking to them or their families."

The company is also working at the community level. "One of the biggest issues was how do these people come to work without the fear of social boycott — the fear that the person who is going out to work may bring back the infection from outside," Razdan said. "We not only focused on generating awareness among the employees but are also building awareness and advocacy among the communities where they live."

SURVIVAL FIRST

HR experts say mental health issues faced by blue-collar employees are very different. For those working on the shop floor, the issue is more about day-to-day survival

HR heads and experts said mental health issues faced by shop-floor workers are different from those of the white-collar staff. For those working on the shop floor, the issue is more about day-to-day survival.

Archana Bisht, director at counselling and wellness services firm 1to1help.net, said, "The stress level of shop floor workers is totally different... Many have large families with just a sole bread earner... Fear of losing jobs, uncertainty about their own fate when they hear news of job losses, (and) fear

that how will they pay their hospital bills are getting under the skin of the blue-collar workforce."

Also, many of the contract workers live away from their home and families, which is further adding to stress, she said.

Suresh Tripathi, vice president-human resources at Tata Steel, said the company has increased communication with people in addition to virtual counselling. The steel major also has programmes on yoga and pranayama, regular health check-ups and a mental health helpline.

Diversified miner Vedanta has round-the-clock counselling on physical and mental health. "We also have wellness programmes such as yoga and meditation as well as regular shop floor engagements and town halls with the leadership teams," said Madhu Srivastava, group CHRO of Vedanta.

Auto major Tata Motors has introduced a 17-day special leave to blue-collar workers in case of testing Covid-19 positive and if a worker comes into contact with a positive case, they receive a 14 days special quarantine leave. It has launched a confidential counselling service and a 24x7 doctor help line. The company also hosts Facebook Live sessions led by plant heads, HR heads, and union leaders, where psychologists, counsellors, dieticians, and nutritionists interact with employees and their dependents.

Carmaker Hyundai Motor India has rolled out new health packages and introduced tele-counselling. "We engage our employees through offbeat activities and games on our digital platforms to help break the work monotony," said head of people strategy & business support Stephen Sudhakar J.