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WELLNESS PRACTICES' CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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WELLNESS PRACTICES' CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Abstract

Despite being emphasized as one of the main pillars of global sustainable development, social sustainability has been vastly neglected in research, and its importance has been undervalued. This paper aims to highlight the important role that wellness practices play in enhancing social sustainability by uplifting individuals and progressing communities. In turn, social sustainability strengthens the circular economy, resulting in global sustainable development. The paper also raises questions about future sustainable communities, quality of life, and wellness programs, which open up new avenues for future research and implications.

Keywords

Social Sustainability, Wellness, Development, Circular Economy, Practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) has launched a pioneering platform for sustainable development in 2015, with the goal of facilitating global sustainability, eradicating poverty, addressing environmental concerns, and serving as a blueprint for peace and prosperity (Ahmadi et al. 2021; Farooq et al. 2020; Hens and Stoyanov 2014; Taghvaei et al. 2022). The United Nations' (UN) 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include global goals such as good health and well-being, gender equality, and partnership (United Nations, 2015). Nevertheless, many studies (Blanco and Ram 2019; Nodehi et al. 2021; Shirazi et al. 2020; Treimikien and Kaerauskas 2020; Taghvaei et al. 2017a, b, c; Taghvaei et al. 2021a, b, c; Tremblay et al. 2020; Umar et al. 2020) argue that globalization is beneficial.

Despite the fact that companies have shifted their focus in the last decade from purely economic dimensions to embracing social and environmental aspects (Camilleri, 2020; Font & Lynes, 2018; Rameshwar et al., 2020) while aspiring to engage in socially sustainable practices (Mette Andersen & Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Venkatesh Mani et al., 2016), the majority of business sustainability efforts are still focused on economic dimensions (Ahi and Searcy, 2015; Mani and Gunasakren, 2018). Unlike the economic and environmental pillars, social sustainability has qualitative dimensions that make academic research difficult to quantify (Stanikien & Stankevicius, 2018). As a result, social sustainability continues to be an emerging research area that encompasses human health, safety, social capital, social equity, and comfort, necessitating increased attention from researchers (Popovic and Kraslawski, 2015).

This paper uses the existing literature as a primary source to shed lights on the importance of social sustainability as a main pillar of the global sustainable development. Three wellness practices were chosen prudently to serve the goal of our research; which is highlighting the fundamental role social sustainability plays in global sustainable development; especially that this pillar was immensely overlooked in research, and its importance was devalued. Therefore, our paper tends to answer the following questions throughout the sections below:

- 1) What are wellness dimensions and practices?
- 2) What role do wellness programs play in social sustainability on both individuals and community levels?
- 3) How can we empower the world's circular economy?
- 4) How does social sustainability contribute to the global sustainable development?

As a result, a conceptual framework model (Fig. 3), was developed. The model reveals the relationship between wellness programs and social sustainability, and therefore reflects how social sustainability; on its turn; empowers the circular economy (Fig. 2) leading to a global sustainable development represented evidently by three main strong pillars: 1) social, 2) environmental, and 3) economic. It also opens the doors wide for future studies discussed further in the last section.

2. LITERATURE LANDSCAPE

2.1 Sustainable Development

The Brundtland Report, our Common Future, was the first to define sustainable development as development that meets present needs without jeopardizing future generations' ability to meet their own (WCED, 1987, p. 40). Sustainable development is a long-term phenomenon with a broader scope. As a result, newer paradigms, procedures, and policies are needed to affect the necessary social, economic, and environmental changes (Koberg and Longoni, 2019 Govindan et al., 2020). Growing awareness of sustainability and corporate social responsibility, in addition to the financial, legal, and other aspects of cleaner production in the business, has increased the importance of human resources in most organizations.

Initiatives and efforts to create responsible workplaces, protect human rights, protect the environment, and have a strong sense of corporate accountability towards the development of social communities could legitimize an organization's claim to sustainability (Gallego-Ivarez et al., 2015). This means that organizations must work hard to incorporate social sustainability into the core of their corporate structure and all aspects of their operations (Carter et al., 2019). While finance is widely regarded as "the lifeblood of business" (Renwick

et al., 2008), human resources are increasingly regarded as "the soul of business," especially in the context of the environment (Jabbour & Santos, 2008a).

2.2 Social Sustainability

Social sustainability, according to Khan I (2020), is a community-enhancing condition and a process for achieving it, whereas Missimer et al. (2017) define it as the preservation of the social system in which people are not constrained by structural barriers, health influences, competence, impartiality, or meaning-making.

Because it is concerned with the current and future well-being and flourishing of societies, social sustainability is a cornerstone of sustainable development (Khan, 2016; Vallance et al., 2011). Despite its importance, it has traditionally been ignored in sustainability research (Chick, 2011; Fuad-Luke, 2009; Joyce A. et al., 2016; Zink, 2014). For many years, the literature on social sustainability was hampered by a lack of conceptual clarity (Becker et al., 1999; El Ebrashi, 2013). Researchers were discouraged from tackling social sustainability because it is inherently complex, dealing with social values that are difficult to quantify and difficult to separate from their context (Bebbington, 2019).

2.3 Well-being and Wellness

While no single definition of wellbeing exists (Cooper and Leiter, 2017), it is generally defined as a person's level of satisfaction with various aspects of their life as a result of the interaction of their resources (both material and cultural) and their circumstances (Reeve et al., 2016, p. 7). The World Health Organization defines "wellbeing" as having physical, mental, social, material, and civic dimensions (Cahill, 2015).

Wellbeing is defined as "a sense of fulfillment with one's life," which is best achieved by aligning behaviors, personal goals, and values (Diener and Suh, 1997, p. 16) - and thus a combination of feeling good and performing well (Harrison et al., 2016, p. 10). Well-being can also be defined as an internal set of experiential characteristics (Sointu, 2005; Dodge et al., 2012). Thus, well-being can be defined broadly as all aspects of a person's life and experience, as well as an overall subjective assessment of life quality (Cahill, 2015, p. 96).

Wellness, on the other hand, is a deliberate, conscious process that requires a person to become aware of and make choices for a more satisfying lifestyle (Oohnson, 1986; Swarbrick, 1997). The process of developing and adapting behavioral patterns that lead to improved health in the wellness dimensions and increased life satisfaction is referred to as wellness (Oohnson, 1986). A wellness lifestyle incorporates a variety of healthy habits, including adequate sleep and rest, productivity, exercise, participation in meaningful activities, nutrition, productivity, social contact, and supportive relationships (Swarbrick, 1997).

2.4 Wellness Dimensions and Programs

Philosophers such as Rawls (1971), Sen (1985, 2009), and Nussbaum (2000) have advocated for a multidimensional view of wellness, drawing on an Aristotelian tradition. However, researchers argue that focusing on a single indicator of well-being leads to a skewed perspective and ignores important sources of individual heterogeneity. Other studies (Hutchins and Sutherland, 2008; V Mani, Agrawal, and Sharma, 2015) looked at different aspects and concluded that social sustainability measures are essential for achieving sustainable development goals.

As a result, the concept of wellness encourages a person's internal motivation and active participation. As a result, rather than focusing on problems and issues, wellness promotes a positive attitude. Today's government health policies rely on wellness scales to assess indicators of positive mental health. Wellness is viewed as a measurable, interior state possessed by an individual who can reflect on and self-report their levels of each attribute (McLeod, 2017, p. 5).

According to UCDAVIS (2017), the wellness model is a holistic model that identifies eight interconnected dimensions of wellness. In the list below, UCDAVIS (2017) briefly explains these dimensions (Fig. 1):

- 1) Emotional wellness refers to a person's feelings and how they react and cope with those feelings.
- 2) Environmental wellness focuses on the physical environment in which we live.

- 3) Financial wellness considers an individual's financial situation and how money is spent.
- 4) Intellectual wellness refers to a person's mindset, with an open mind to new ideas, knowledge, and experiences.
- 5) Occupational wellness refers to a person's professional development.
- 6) Physical wellness relates to how well a person cares for their body.
- 7) Social wellness refers mostly to social networks and social roles.
- 8) Spiritual wellness refers to the development of a set of meaningful values that are applied constructively in a person's life.

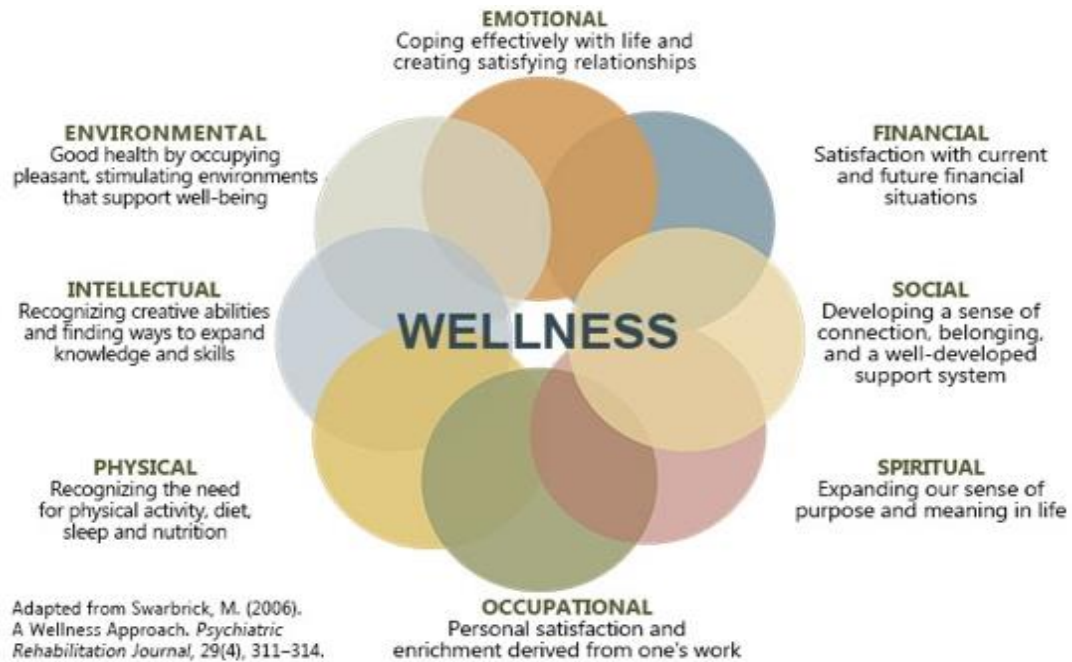


Fig.1: Wellness Dimensions

Leiter and Wahlen (1996), on the other hand, contend that wellness programs include a variety of activities to address the individual's finances, substance abuse, working-class, health issues, career issues, and job expectations, all of which contribute to stress that must be managed in order to retain talent within the organization (Leiter and Wahlen, 1996). The support provided by the organization for introducing and implementing such programs has a significant impact on the wellness culture. According to Renaud et al. (2008), these include mental wellness, energy, resilience, and job satisfaction, which help reduce stress and depression. Other characteristics of social sustainability practices include health and safety, equity, wages, discrimination, equal opportunity, employability, safety, and quality of life for both employees and society (Mette Andersen & Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Klassen & Vereecke, 2012a).

3. DISCUSSION

Despite the noticeable number of scholars highlighting social sustainability as a main pillar of sustainable development, no evident research has been produced to reveal the significant role of espousing wellness practices to enhance social sustainability. The following sections will unveil the impact of adopting wellness practices; by individuals and communities; on the global sustainable development elucidated through our conceptual model (Figure 3).

3.1 Wellness Programs Enhance Social Sustainability through Individuals and Communities

Wellness programs have a crucial impact on the society. Below, we will be discussing three examples of wellness practices and the effect they have on both individuals and communities: 1) Mindfulness, 2) Nature Exposure, and 3) Social Cohesion. It is key to mention here that the examples stated in the coming section were chosen to serve the purpose of this paper; however, it is important to add that as societies keep developing, prospering, and aiming for higher standards, new wellness practices will arise and most probably part of the currently existing ones would adapt to the new changes. Those include but are not limited to stress reduction, weight loss, health screening, nutrition education, exercise programs, meditation, social events, mentoring programs, personal-resilience, training, and many others.

3.1.1 Mindfulness

Individual functioning and societal prosperity are heavily influenced by mental health (Diener & Chan, 2011). Mental health is viewed as a positive state that allows individuals and populations to thrive and succeed (Clarke et al., 2011). Happiness, positive functioning, subjective well-being, and self-realization are thought to be components. Mental well-being is a difficult concept to grasp, and social scientists who have attempted to comprehend it have presented its various dimensions (Hardy, 2015; Whitehead et al., 2018).

Furthermore, mindfulness has been linked to better mental health in a variety of areas, including anxiety, depression, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Teper et al., 2013). They are also important in the workplace because they provide numerous benefits such as better problem solving, better decision making, increased creativity, healthier interpersonal relationships, and communication proficiency (Weare, 2014). Many researchers have presented evidence in support of mindfulness as a social care tool. Researchers are encouraging social and health care professionals to pay more attention to mindfulness by incorporating mindfulness interventions into their practices (Botta, et al., 2015).

3.1.2 Nature exposure

Because cities are expected to house more than 70% of the world's population by 2050 (United Nations, 2018), people will have fewer opportunities to interact with nature as the world becomes more urbanized (Parra-Saldivar et al., 2020). The loss of urban green spaces may exacerbate air pollution, traffic noise, and physical inactivity, negatively impacting residents' physical and mental health (Klomp maker et al., 2019; Lachowycz and Jones, 2011; Wolch et al., 2014).

A plethora of recent research has demonstrated the critical role that nature plays in our mental health and well-being (refer to reviews by Bratman et al., 2019; Capaldi et al., 2014, 2015; Pritchard et al., 2019). A wealth of consistent evidence supports the importance of the natural environment in maintaining and improving our mental health and well-being (see reviews Bratman et al., 2019; Capaldi et al., 2014; Capaldi et al., 2015, Howell & Passmore, 2013; Pritchard et al., 2019). (Baxter & Pelletier, 2019; Hurly & Walker, 2019).

According to some studies, visiting green spaces has a calming effect on mental health (Lachowycz and Jones, 2013; Ojala et al., 2019), and exposure to green space reduces mental stress and elicits positive emotions (Ulrich et al., 1991), while the attention restoration theory (ART) states that exposure to vegetation diverts people's attention while simultaneously reducing cognitive fatigue (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). Further research (McEwan et al., 2020) revealed how easily these interactions with everyday urban nature improved mental wellbeing.

3.1.3 Social cohesion

As per Maslow (1968), the need for love and belonging ranks third after physiological and safety needs, making it an important step on the path to self-actualization. Baumeister and Leary (1995), among the most-cited authors for the

concept of belonging, compile a large body of empirical findings and conclude that humans are deeply and inextricably motivated by a desire to belong, that is, a strong desire to form and sustain long-term interpersonal attachments (p. 522). According to the literature, belonging; the subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences; is a fundamental human need that almost all people seek to satisfy (Maslow, 1954, 1968; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Deci and Ryan, 2000; Leary and Kelly, 2009; Allen et al., 2021).

According to the preceding, promoting social cohesion is critical for improved quality of life (e.g., a high degree of social interaction, community participation, and strong place attachment). As a result, since 2020, the sense of belonging has become an increasingly popular topic of discussion for HR and business leaders. Indeed, according to the Deloitte (2020) Global Human Capital Trends survey, 79% of organizations believe it is critical to their success. Spiritual leaders today promote employee self-efficacy and a willingness to constantly learn and develop themselves (Bayighomog & Arasli, 2019), as well as an organizational culture in which team members feel accepted and understood (Ali et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2019).

3.2 Social Sustainability Empowers Circular Economy to Ensure a Global Sustainable Development

Cleaner production (Hens et al., 2018), sustainability (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017), and social responsibility are arguably the Circular Economy's underlying premise (Esken et al., 2018). However, there is a growing need and interest in balancing this with the sustainability and social responsibility imperatives embodied in the cleaner production and circular economy agendas, with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 serving as an example (United Nations, 2015).

Nonetheless, the economy, poverty, and social status were steadily improved to improve quality of life and well-being, which is where environmental concerns began to emerge (Cirella et al. 2020; Nasrollahi et al. 2020). In this context, social-centered sustainability acknowledges the social pillar as the heart of sustainable development (Fullman et al. 2017; Waage et al. 2015). Such powerful interconnections create a stark contrast between the traditional view of sustainable development as primarily driven by economic growth and the contemporary concept of sustainability and its potential pillars (Arushanyan et al. 2017; Costanza et al. 2016; Griggs et al. 2014).

Subsequently, organizations benefit greatly from a social sustainability focus in terms of improved business image and long-term business performance (Mani et al., 2020). As a result, social sustainability practices must be prioritized, particularly in developing countries where issues such as poor infrastructure, insufficient distribution networks, unregulated child labor, slavery, corruption, bribery, unpaid labor, and gender inequality persist (Morais and Silvestre, 2018). (2018) (Mani and Gunasekaran).



Fig.2: The Circular Economy

3.3 Conceptual Framework Model

Considering the above, we propose the following conceptual model (Fig. 3). This model illustrates the important role that certain wellness practices: 1) mindfulness, 2) nature exposure, and 3) social cohesion play in enhancing social sustainability through elevating individuals and evolving communities. Such practices are adopted based on a firm foundation represented by the eight dimensions of wellness (Emotional, Environmental, Financial, Intellectual, Occupational, Physical, Social, Spiritual) (Fig. 1).

Wellness practices elevate individuals through developing an open mindset, expanding the growth and knowledge of individuals, reducing the feelings of anxiety and depression, nurturing their willingness to learn and develop, fostering their sense of belonging, living longer, preventing a variety of ailments, in addition to raising adeptness in communication and many more. Similarly, such practices also evolve communities through raising public functioning, boosting collective care, competing on a global level, attracting talented and skilled workforce, increasing productivity, stimulating organizational culture, fostering social happiness in addition to satisfaction and many others. In turn, social sustainability empowers the circular economy (Fig. 2), leading to global sustainable development that is clearly represented by three strong pillars: 1) social, 2) environmental, and 3) economic.

4. LIMITATIONS

The focal limitation of this paper was the scarcity of prior research studies that were relevant to the topic. This emphasizes the need for additional research in the field of social sustainability as well as identifying new gaps in the prior literature which could relate to the substantial relationship between social sustainability and other wellness practices.

5. CONCLUSION

All in all, this paper emphasized the critical role that certain wellness practices play in enhancing social sustainability by uplifting individuals and progressing communities. This paper explains how social sustainability, in turn, empowers the circular economy (Fig. 2), leading to global sustainable development represented clearly by three strong pillars: 1) social, 2) environmental, and 3) economic. Three wellness practices were prudently chosen to serve the goal of our research, which is to highlight the fundamental role social sustainability plays in global sustainable development particularly; especially that this pillar has been vastly neglected in research, and its importance has been undervalued. As a result, a conceptual model was developed to emphasize and demonstrate these aspects. Such a model helps open doors for future studies to investigate other aspects that could link new or emerging wellness practices to the important role social sustainability plays in global sustainable development. This may include but is not limited to smoking cessation, social connectedness, weight loss education, exercise, nutrition, sleep, fitness challenges, health risk assessments, and screenings in addition to therapy.

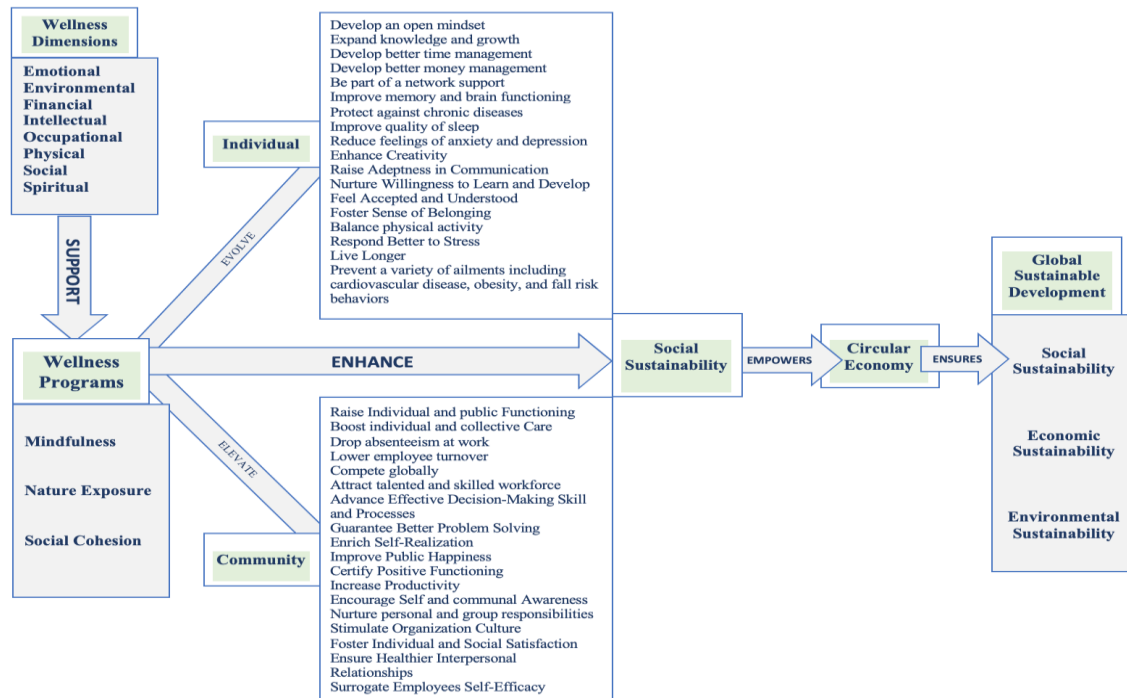


Fig.3: Conceptual Model

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