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Abstract

This study investigated the contribution of social wellness programs to the performance of operations staff in three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County. Using a mixed methods approach, data were collected from 364 respondents through structured questionnaires and interviews with head chefs and restaurant managers. Quantitative findings revealed that 171 respondents (47.0 percent) reported access to social activities, 134 (36.8 percent) had mental health support, and only 17 (4.7 percent) indicated no wellness initiatives. Access frequency was largely irregular, with 176 respondents (48.4 percent) reporting occasional availability, while only 38 (10.4 percent) experienced continuous access. Gender and age cross tabulations demonstrated disparities, with females reporting higher consistent access (17.1 percent always) compared to males (6.6 percent always) and younger employees showing more frequent participation. Perceived effectiveness was strongly positive, with stress reduction rated at $M = 1.62$, emotional support at $M = 1.77$, and ability to handle workplace challenges at $M = 1.78$. Qualitative evidence confirmed improvements in teamwork, morale, and communication. Guided by Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands Resources Theory, the study establishes that wellness programs act as essential organizational resources that enhance emotional resilience and performance. The study recommends institutionalizing structured, inclusive, and consistently implemented social wellness programs to strengthen staff well-being and improve service delivery outcomes in the hospitality sector.

Keywords: *Social Wellness Programs, Employee Performance, Hospitality Industry, Operations Staff, Workplace Well-Being, Three to Five Star Hotels, Social Exchange Theory, Stress Reduction, Employee Engagement*

1.1 Background to the Study

The global hospitality sector continues to recognise employee well being as a foundation for service excellence, particularly as hotels rely heavily on coordinated interpersonal interactions among staff (WTTC, 2023). Social wellness programs have gained prominence because they strengthen workplace relationships, enhance communication, and promote cohesive teamwork that directly influences service outcomes (Richemond & Needham, 2020). International hospitality brands increasingly implement structured social initiatives such as team building, peer support circles, and social engagement platforms to improve employee morale and reduce performance related stress (Statista, 2024).

Operational staff are central to hotel success because their work requires sustained collaboration, shared decision processes, and continuous interaction across departments (Sánchez Rodríguez et al., 2022). Social wellness is particularly significant for these employees because strong relational support reduces emotional strain and enhances motivation during demanding service routines (Ghani et al., 2022). Research further shows that when employees experience positive social connections at work, they demonstrate higher task consistency and improved responsiveness in guest facing environments (UNWTO, 2023).

Across Africa, hotels have increasingly adopted social wellness strategies as part of their efforts to improve workforce stability and service quality (African Hotel Market Report, 2023). These strategies include informal staff gatherings, recognition events, and collaborative training activities that foster a sense of belonging and reduce interpersonal conflicts (ILO, 2021). Evidence indicates that such programs contribute to higher staff engagement by reinforcing mutual support and team cohesion within service units (Knight Frank, 2023).

In Kenya, the hospitality sector remains a key contributor to urban economic growth and employment, with Nairobi City County hosting the largest concentration of three to five star hotels (KNBS, 2023). Operational staff in these hotels often encounter stress arising from long working hours, service pressure, and the need for real time coordination, making social wellness programs increasingly relevant to performance outcomes (Wanjohi et al., 2022). Empirical findings show that Kenyan organisations that invest in social oriented wellness initiatives observe improved morale, stronger team relationships, and reduced workplace tensions that hinder service delivery (Ganu, Ahmed and Kazimoto, 2017).

This study therefore examines how social wellness programs contribute to the performance of operational staff in three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County, focusing on relational support and workplace cohesion as strategic levers for improved service outcomes (Abebe & Assemie, 2023). Literature affirms that structured social wellness interventions can elevate staff collaboration by strengthening trust and interpersonal communication within service teams (Moshi, 2010). By situating social wellness within contemporary hospitality performance demands, the study positions relational well being as a pivotal foundation for operational excellence (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2016).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Operational staff in three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County work in environments that demand constant interpersonal coordination, teamwork, and guest interaction, yet many hotels continue to underinvest in structured social wellness programs that can strengthen these relationships. Existing research in hospitality largely emphasizes workload pressure, emotional

strain, and physical fatigue among service employees, but gives limited attention to the relational challenges that arise when social support systems are weak or fragmented (Kim and Jang, 2022). Studies also show that workplace recognition and supportive interactions enhance employee commitment, but they often overlook how the absence of deliberate social wellness initiatives contributes to strained teamwork, communication breakdowns, and feelings of isolation among hotel staff (Jawaad et al., 2019). These gaps suggest that the relational dimension of wellness remains insufficiently examined despite its central importance in service oriented work environments.

The limited focus on social wellness means that critical issues such as poor colleague cooperation, inadequate team cohesion, and weak interpersonal support systems are seldom addressed in hotel management practices. Scholars acknowledge that positive social relationships significantly influence employee performance, yet little empirical evidence explains how the lack of structured social engagement activities, mentorship opportunities, or sense of belonging affects the daily performance of operational staff in fast paced hotel settings (Richemond & Needham, 2020). This gap is concerning because hotels depend heavily on well coordinated teams to deliver high quality guest experiences, and disruptions in team relationships can directly undermine service consistency and customer satisfaction.

In Nairobi City County, the pressure on operational staff is amplified by demanding guest expectations, irregular work schedules, and constant coordination across departments, making social support a critical buffer. Nonetheless, many hotels continue to prioritise physical wellness and general policy compliance while overlooking relational challenges that impede effective teamwork and collective service delivery (Wanjohi et al., 2022). Without evidence based understanding of how inadequate social wellness structures contribute to reduced morale, miscommunication, and diminished service quality, hotel managers risk underestimating the performance implications of weak relational support within their teams.

This study therefore addresses this gap by examining how insufficient social wellness programs affect the performance of operational staff in three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County. By centering on relational support, workplace belonging, and team cohesion, the study seeks to generate practical knowledge that guides managers in designing wellness interventions that strengthen employee relationships and elevate service performance in the hospitality sector.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how social wellness programs influence the performance of operational staff in three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County. The study aimed to generate evidence that guides the design of relational support initiatives that strengthen teamwork and improve service performance.

2.0 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Social Exchange Theory, which was advanced by Homans (1958) and later expanded by Blau (1964) and Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005). The theory posits that relationships within organizations are built through ongoing exchanges of socio emotional or material benefits that foster trust, cooperation, and reciprocity among individuals. Social Exchange Theory argues that when employees perceive supportive actions from their organization, they tend to return this support through positive attitudes, stronger commitment, and improved work behavior (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano et al., 2017). In workplace contexts, the theory asserts that

beneficial exchanges such as respect, recognition, social inclusion, and interpersonal support generate a reciprocal cycle that enhances performance and reduces withdrawal behaviors (Homans, 1958; Emerson, 1976).

The theory is anchored on several assumptions. First, individuals make decisions based on perceived rewards and costs of social interactions, seeking relationships that offer greater benefits than disadvantages (Blau, 1964). Second, people are motivated to reciprocate supportive treatment because reciprocity builds trust and sustained relational stability (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Third, employees evaluate fairness in exchanges and adjust their commitment depending on whether they believe the organization values their well being and contribution (Molm, 2010). These assumptions highlight the central role of interpersonal support and mutual respect in shaping workplace behavior and performance.

Social Exchange Theory offers several strengths relevant to organizational analysis. It provides a clear explanation of how supportive relational environments influence motivation, cooperation, and job performance through reciprocal processes (Cropanzano et al., 2017). It also integrates emotional, behavioral, and social components of work, making it suitable for understanding teamwork driven sectors such as hospitality (Blau, 1964). Additionally, its strong empirical foundation allows researchers to link perceived organizational support with loyalty, satisfaction, and improved service delivery (Eisenberger et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the theory has noted limitations. It assumes that individuals always behave rationally in evaluating costs and benefits, which may overlook altruistic or culturally driven motives (Molm, 2010). It also provides limited guidance on how to measure subjective perceptions of reciprocity and fairness within complex workplaces (Saks, 2022).

The relevance of Social Exchange Theory to this study is significant because social wellness programs represent organizational actions that strengthen interpersonal support, communication, and team cohesion. When hotels invest in activities that build social connection and belonging, employees perceive these initiatives as positive exchanges and respond through stronger teamwork, improved morale, and higher service performance (Richemond & Needham, 2020). Operational staff rely heavily on cooperation during service routines, and supportive social environments reduce tension, improve trust, and enhance collective problem solving (Sánchez Rodríguez et al., 2022). Therefore, Social Exchange Theory provides an appropriate foundation for explaining how social wellness programs influence the performance of operational staff in three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed methods design that began with a qualitative phase followed by a quantitative phase, allowing the researcher to generate contextual insights and then test them across a larger population (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The qualitative phase involved semi structured interviews with purposively selected head chefs and restaurant managers who provided detailed accounts of how social wellness programs were implemented, accessed, and experienced within their hotel operations. These narratives were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to identify recurring patterns related to teamwork, social support, communication, and relational cohesion. The emerging themes informed the development of a structured questionnaire that captured the availability, utilisation, and perceived contribution of social wellness programs to operational staff performance.

The quantitative phase employed a stratified sampling approach to ensure fair representation of operational staff across three star, four star, and five star hotels in Nairobi City County (Ozturk & Kavlak, 2019). A sample of 364 respondents was determined using Kothari's finite population formula, and data were collected using a Google Forms questionnaire designed with Likert scale and closed ended items. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 26 to generate descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores that highlighted patterns in social wellness program access and their perceived effect on performance. Reliability was ensured through Cronbach Alpha testing which confirmed strong internal consistency, while validity was supported through expert review and integration of qualitative insights during instrument development.

Ethical approval was obtained from Kenyatta University and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, ensuring adherence to principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants were informed of the study purpose and their right to withdraw at any stage. Data triangulation across qualitative and quantitative strands improved the credibility and dependability of the findings, while the sequential approach strengthened the practical relevance of the results for hotel management and human resource policy. Through this integrated methodology, the study provided an empirically grounded understanding of how social wellness programs influence the performance of operational staff in the hospitality sector.

4.0 Findings

The study sought to examine the extent to which social wellness programs are available in three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County and to assess how these initiatives influence the performance of operations staff. Social wellness programs, which encompass team building activities, social gatherings, counseling services, and peer support systems, play a vital role in strengthening cohesion, enhancing interpersonal communication, and promoting emotional stability among employees. In hospitality settings where teamwork, guest interaction, and sustained emotional resilience are essential, well structured social wellness initiatives can meaningfully enhance job satisfaction, collaborative efficiency, and service consistency.

Table 1: Social Wellness Programs Currently Available in the Hotels

Social Program	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Mental wellness screenings	33	9.1
None	17	4.7
Other (e.g., mentorship, outreach)	9	2.5
Social activities (team lunches, holiday parties, happy hours, etc.)	171	47.0
Support for mental health (e.g., counselling services)	134	36.8
Total	364	100.0

This section presents quantitative findings from the staff survey supported by qualitative insights from head chefs and restaurant managers. Together, these data sources offer a comprehensive understanding of how social wellness initiatives are structured, experienced, and linked to employee performance across Nairobi's star rated hotels. The quantitative results showed that many hotels have integrated social wellness activities intended to promote connection, trust, and emotional support among operations staff. As shown in Table 1, 171 respondents representing 47.0

percent affirmed that their hotels regularly organize social activities such as team lunches, holiday gatherings, and informal staff events. These activities serve as important platforms for strengthening team cohesion and enabling staff to build supportive relationships.

Support for mental health emerged as another key component, with 134 respondents representing 36.8 percent reporting access to counseling services within their hotels. A smaller proportion, 33 respondents or 9.1 percent, indicated availability of mental wellness screenings, while 9 respondents or 2.5 percent noted other forms of social support such as mentorship or participation in community related initiatives. Only 17 respondents representing 4.7 percent stated that their establishments lacked any form of social wellness provision. These findings indicate that social wellness programming is widely embedded in hotel operations, with the majority of establishments implementing at least one structured initiative aimed at promoting employee well being.

The results underscore a growing recognition within the hospitality sector that positive social relations and emotional stability are foundational to effective teamwork, communication, and service delivery. This is consistent with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which argues that when organizations invest in the social and emotional well being of their employees, staff reciprocate through stronger engagement, greater loyalty, and improved work performance. The presence of deliberate social connection points fosters trust, reduces stress, and cultivates a shared sense of belonging—elements that are critical for sustaining morale in fast paced hotel environments.

Qualitative insights from restaurant managers reinforced these quantitative patterns. Managers highlighted that structured social activities, including staff retreats, collaborative celebrations, and recognition events, significantly improved motivation and strengthened cross departmental communication. They also emphasized that access to counseling and open communication channels was particularly valuable during high pressure periods such as peak tourism seasons, when emotional strain and interpersonal tensions are more likely to emerge.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that social wellness programs are both prevalent and influential within Nairobi's three to five star hotels. These initiatives support stronger interpersonal relationships, enhance emotional resilience, and nurture a cooperative work climate, all of which contribute meaningfully to job satisfaction and operational performance in the hospitality sector.

4.1 Analysis of Frequency of Use of Social Wellness Programs

As shown in Table 2, respondents indicated varying levels of access to social wellness programs across the surveyed hotels. A substantial number, 176 respondents representing 48.4 percent, reported that these programs were available only occasionally. Another 84 respondents or 23.1 percent stated that social wellness initiatives were often available, while 63 respondents representing 17.3 percent indicated that they were sometimes accessible. Only 38 respondents or 10.4 percent reported consistent availability, and 3 respondents representing 0.8 percent noted that such programs were not applicable in their hotels. These results are summarised in Table 2, which presents the frequency of use of existing social wellness programs.

Table 2: Frequency of Use of Social Wellness Programs

Frequency of Use	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Always	38	10.4
Often	84	23.1
Sometimes	63	17.3
Occasionally	176	48.4
Not applicable (no social wellness programs)	3	0.8
Total	364	100.0

The findings suggest that although most hotels provide some form of social wellness support, implementation remains inconsistent and is often not formally embedded in organizational practice. The fact that nearly half of the respondents experience these programs only occasionally indicates that many hotels lack structured scheduling, dedicated planning, or policy backed frameworks to guide regular delivery. The relatively low proportion reporting continuous availability reinforces the perception that wellness initiatives are viewed as supplementary rather than essential components of employee support systems.

This irregularity may limit the potential benefits of social wellness initiatives, especially in hospitality settings where teamwork, communication, and emotional resilience are crucial for effective service delivery. Qualitative feedback from head chefs and restaurant managers supported this interpretation, noting that social gatherings, counseling support, and team engagement activities were often initiated on an ad hoc basis, influenced by budget availability or management interest rather than long term planning. Managers acknowledged that this inconsistency reduced the cumulative impact of these programs on staff morale and departmental cooperation.

These findings are consistent with Berry et al. (2020), who argue that the value of wellness programs depends not only on their presence but also on their frequency, predictability, and integration into daily organizational routines. In hotel environments marked by fast paced operations and high emotional demands, regularly scheduled social wellness initiatives can strengthen interpersonal trust, enhance communication, and reduce burnout. Conversely, sporadic or irregular programming diminishes their motivational and psychological impact, limiting their potential to improve team cohesion and overall performance.

Overall, the results highlight the need for hotels to institutionalize social wellness initiatives through structured calendars, consistent budgeting, and inclusive planning mechanisms. Such steps would ensure that the benefits of these programs are sustained over time and equitably experienced by operational staff across three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County.

The interviews with head chefs and restaurant managers reinforced the survey results by revealing that social wellness programs, while present in many hotels, were not consistently structured. Several managers explained that activities such as team-building, outdoor bonding sessions, and occasional social events were organized, but these were conducted on an irregular basis and often depended on available budgets or seasonal demands. One manager from a four-star establishment observed, *“They are there, but only once in a while. Sometimes we organize games or team outings, but it is not regular”* (Participant 6, 4-star hotel).

Others emphasized that while such activities were highly valued, their ad hoc nature limited their overall impact. A manager from a five-star facility stated, “*The team-building and bonding activities are very helpful in reducing stress and bringing people together, but they are not frequent enough to make a lasting difference*” (Participant 9, 5-star hotel). Similarly, one head chef highlighted the positive effect of counseling and emotional support initiatives, noting, “*Sometimes we get counselors or trainers coming in to teach us how to handle pressure and work better with colleagues. But again, this happens occasionally and not as a structured program*” (Participant 8, 4-star hotel).

4.2 Analysis of Gender-Based Comparison of Frequency of Access to Social Wellness Programs

Gender based cross tabulation revealed notable differences in how male and female operations staff accessed social wellness initiatives. Among male respondents, 95 individuals representing 52.0 percent reported that social wellness programs were available only occasionally, compared to 79 females representing 43.7 percent. In contrast, 31 female respondents or 17.1 percent indicated that such programs were always available, compared to only 12 males or 6.6 percent. These results suggest that male employees experience more irregular or ad hoc wellness engagement, whereas female employees are more likely to report consistent access to structured and routinely scheduled initiatives. Such patterns may reflect differences in departmental scheduling, managerial communication, or the prioritisation of wellness activities across gender lines.

Table 3: Gender-Based Comparison of Frequency of Access to Social Wellness Programs

Gender	Always	Not Applicable	Occasionally	Often	Sometimes	Total (n)
Female	31	0	79	44	27	181
% within Gender	17.1%	0.0%	43.7%	24.3%	14.9%	100.0%
Male	12	4	95	40	32	183
% within Gender	6.6%	2.2%	52.0%	21.9%	17.3%	100.0%
Total (n)	43	4	174	84	59	364
% of Total	11.8%	1.1%	47.8%	23.1%	16.2%	100.0%

The results in Table 3 further illustrate these disparities. For often availability, 44 females representing 24.3 percent and 40 males representing 21.9 percent reported regular access. Occasional access remained the most common category for both groups, but the proportion was markedly higher among males. Similarly, sometimes was reported by 27 females representing 14.9 percent and 32 males representing 17.3 percent. Only four males representing 2.2 percent stated that social wellness programs were not applicable in their workplaces, while no females selected this option. These patterns indicate that while both groups participate in social wellness activities, the frequency and predictability of access differ across genders.

The findings suggest that gendered experiences influence the visibility, scheduling, and communication of wellness activities in hotel settings. Female employees appear to benefit more from formally organised activities, potentially because they are more frequently included in HR driven engagement efforts or because their departmental structures facilitate access to scheduled social programs. Male employees, on the other hand, seem to encounter more irregular or informal opportunities, which may reflect communication gaps or differentiated operational routines. These

disparities point to variability in program access rather than an outright gap, yet the implications for perceived fairness and inclusion are significant.

From a policy and management standpoint, the findings highlight the need for hotels to ensure equitable access to wellness initiatives across all employee categories. Regular needs assessments, inclusive scheduling, and clear communication channels can help guarantee that both male and female staff benefit from structured social wellness programming. This interpretation aligns with Social Exchange Theory, which asserts that employees' perceptions of organizational support influence their level of engagement and reciprocity (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). If perceptions of unequal access persist, employees may feel less supported, potentially weakening the positive effects that wellness programs are intended to generate.

Overall, the results underscore the importance of designing social wellness programs that are consistently implemented, broadly communicated, and sensitive to the differing schedules and roles of male and female operational staff in Nairobi's three to five star hotels.

4.3: Evaluation of Age Group Comparison of Frequency of Access to Social Wellness Programs

Age based comparisons revealed important differences in how frequently employees accessed social wellness programs across the participating hotels. Among respondents aged 18 to 25 years, 48 individuals representing 68.6 percent reported occasional access, indicating that younger staff predominantly experience informal or irregular social initiatives. In contrast, employees aged 26 to 35 years reported comparatively higher levels of structured and consistent access, with 33 respondents representing 12.7 percent indicating that social wellness programs were always available. This pattern suggests that younger employees tend to be exposed to ad hoc team bonding activities, whereas slightly older staff appear better integrated into regularly scheduled and formalized wellness frameworks.

Table 4: Age Group Comparison of Frequency of Access to Social Wellness Programs

Age Bracket	Always	Not Applicable	Occasionally	Often	Sometimes	Total (n)
18–25 years	3	0	48	13	6	70
26–35 years	33	4	117	55	50	259
36–45 years	0	0	8	12	8	28
46 years and above	0	0	4	4	0	8
Total (n)	36	4	177	84	64	364
% of Total	9.9%	1.1%	48.6%	23.1%	17.6%	100.0%

The cross tabulation in Table 4 further highlights these generational differences. Among staff aged 26 to 35 years, 117 respondents representing 45.2 percent reported occasional access, while 55 respondents representing 21.2 percent and 50 respondents representing 19.3 percent reported often and sometimes respectively. For employees aged 36 to 45 years, access remained moderate, with responses distributed across often, sometimes, and occasionally, and none reporting always. Among staff aged 46 years and above, access was split evenly between occasional and often, though overall participation appeared limited due to small group size. These patterns indicate that as employees advance in age, participation in structured social activities becomes less frequent,

likely reflecting competing responsibilities, reduced interest, or lower inclusion in team based initiatives.

These findings point to nuanced generational dynamics in the design and communication of social wellness initiatives. Younger staff may be more engaged in spontaneous or socially oriented activities due to greater flexibility and higher enthusiasm for peer interaction. Employees in the 26 to 35 age bracket appear to be at the core of structured wellness programming, possibly because they occupy roles that align with departmental welfare activities or because managers perceive this cohort as key targets for retention and engagement. In contrast, employees aged 36 years and above demonstrate more sporadic participation, suggesting that wellness planning may not fully account for the preferences or schedules of mid career and senior staff.

This trend aligns with the principles of perceived organizational support, which emphasize that employees' assessment of access to organizational resources influences their morale, commitment, and identification with the workplace (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Where access is uneven across age groups, perceptions of fairness and inclusion may differ, potentially affecting participation and overall engagement. Ensuring that social wellness initiatives are tailored to the needs and availability of all age categories would strengthen cohesion and create more equitable opportunities for employees across the hotel workforce.

4.4 Evaluation of the Impact of Social Wellness Programs on Stress Reduction, Ability to Handle Workplace Challenges, and Emotional Support

Perceptions of the effectiveness of social wellness programs were strongly positive among operations staff across the surveyed hotels. As summarised in Table 5, 339 respondents representing 93.1 percent agreed that these programs helped reduce stress and enhanced their ability to manage workplace demands, while only 25 respondents representing 6.9 percent expressed neutrality or disagreement. The mean scores for all indicators fell below 2.00, indicating strong agreement on the value of social wellness initiatives for employee well being and performance. Stress reduction registered the strongest effect with a mean of 1.62, followed by improved capacity to handle workplace challenges with a mean of 1.78, and enhanced emotional support with a mean of 1.77. These findings underscore the perception that social wellness programs are essential mechanisms for promoting emotional balance and resilience in fast paced hotel environments.

Table 5: Impact of Social Wellness Programs on Stress Reduction, Ability to Handle Workplace Challenges, and Emotional Support

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
Level of agreement that social wellness helps reduce stress	364	1	5	1.62	1.026
Level of agreement that social wellness programs empower employees to handle workplace challenges	364	1	5	1.78	1.016
Level of agreement that social wellness programs in the organization provide employees with emotional support	364	1	5	1.77	1.053

As shown in Table 5, respondents consistently affirmed that social wellness programs contributed positively to their day to day work experiences. The low mean scores reflect a widespread belief that such programs strengthen interpersonal support, reduce stress, and improve employees' capacity to cope with demanding service routines. This pattern aligns with the Job Demands Resources perspective, which asserts that organizational resources such as social support and collaborative cohesion mitigate job strain and enhance motivation and performance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

Comparative analysis revealed meaningful gender based differences. Among female respondents, 110 individuals representing 61.0 percent strongly agreed that social wellness initiatives provide emotional support, compared to 92 males representing 50.3 percent. This suggests that female employees may attach greater value to relational and emotionally oriented wellness interventions, possibly reflecting differing communication preferences or broader comfort with supportive engagement mechanisms within workplace settings.

Age based patterns also emerged. Respondents aged 18 to 25 years were the most likely to strongly affirm the benefits of social wellness programs across all dimensions, with 68.6 percent indicating that the initiatives reduced stress, 55.7 percent reporting enhanced capability to handle workplace challenges, and 81.4 percent affirming improved emotional support. These results indicate that younger employees, who often navigate early career adjustments and higher role related uncertainty, find social wellness initiatives particularly beneficial. In contrast, mid career and older staff expressed moderate agreement, which may reflect greater adaptation to work demands, lower involvement in group based programs, or more established coping mechanisms.

Taken together, the results reinforce the central role of social wellness programs in supporting emotional well being, strengthening teamwork, and enhancing performance among operations staff in Nairobi's three to five star hotels. These initiatives provide structured avenues for connection, counseling, and shared experiences that help buffer the pressures of continuous guest interaction and demanding service expectations. The findings therefore highlight the importance of sustaining and diversifying social wellness interventions in ways that are age sensitive, gender responsive, and consistently implemented to maximize their contribution to employee well being and organizational performance.

The Key Informant Interviews with head chefs and restaurant managers highlighted that while social wellness programs were present across most hotels, their scope and regularity varied widely. Respondents described activities such as team-building, bonding games, counseling services, and emotional resilience training, but emphasized that these were often offered sporadically rather than consistently.

Several managers noted that social activities played a critical role in improving cohesion and reducing stress among staff. For example, one manager explained, *"They are like outdoor activities. Some trailers will go for bonding where we play games"* (Participant 6, 5-star hotel). Such programs were perceived as helpful in building camaraderie and creating a more connected workforce.

Counseling and emotional resilience training were also cited as key components of social wellness support. A manager from a 4-star establishment stated, *"Okay as you know the job sometimes can*

have pressure, so sometimes we get counselling services and even leadership training. They outsource from outside people who come to teach us how to deal with customers, how to deal with stress, how to work together... yeah, so we get such support from the management once in a while" (Participant 8, 4-star hotel). This underscores management's recognition of the psychosocial pressures in hospitality and their attempts to support staff through professional interventions.

Even in cases where social wellness programs were less formalized, respondents acknowledged their positive impact on relationships and morale. As one manager put it, *"For example, the team-building activities I think the main aim is to help employees create that kind of environment where it's like a family, some sort of togetherness"* (Participant 9, 5-star hotel). Such activities were valued for fostering trust and reducing conflicts, even when organized irregularly.

Overall, the Key Informant Interviews revealed that social wellness programs are perceived as essential for stress management, teamwork, and morale. Nonetheless, their ad hoc delivery means that not all staff benefit equally. The restaurant managers and head chefs emphasized that more structured and consistent programming would help maximize the performance related benefits of these initiatives.

5.0 Discussion

The discussion of the findings shows that social wellness programs are widely present but unevenly institutionalised in three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County. Most respondents reported access to social activities and counseling support, confirming that hotel management increasingly recognises the role of relational well being in sustaining service quality (Richemond and Needham, 2020; WTTC, 2023; African Hotel Market Report, 2023). Social activities, mental health support, and occasional mentorship or outreach initiatives reflect global trends where hospitality firms use social wellness to strengthen cohesion and reduce work related strain (ILO, 2021; Knight Frank, 2023; Statista, 2024). These results support earlier arguments that hotels in emerging destinations are gradually aligning their human resource practices with international expectations on employee well being and engagement (Wanjohi et al., 2022; Ganu, Ahmed and Kazimoto, 2017; Abebe and Assemie, 2023).

Nonetheless, the analysis of frequency revealed that many programs are delivered only occasionally, with relatively few employees reporting continuous access. This pattern suggests that wellness initiatives are often treated as periodic events rather than embedded organisational routines, leaving their impact vulnerable to budget cycles, managerial preferences, and operational pressures (Berry et al., 2020; Kim and Jang, 2022; Sánchez Rodríguez et al., 2022). In hospitality environments characterised by irregular shifts, emotional labour, and sustained guest interaction, irregular provision of social support may be insufficient to counter stress and burnout (Ghani et al., 2022; UNWTO, 2023; Saah et al., 2021). From the Job Demands Resources perspective, consistent social support operates as a key resource that buffers high demands and enhances motivation, meaning that sporadic programming limits the protective function that such resources can provide (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Ariza Montes et al., 2019; Mefteh et al., 2022).

At the same time, the very strong positive ratings of program effectiveness indicate that when social wellness initiatives are available, employees experience clear benefits. High levels of agreement that these programs reduce stress, strengthen the ability to handle workplace challenges, and provide emotional support confirm that staff perceive tangible value in relational interventions (Berry et al., 2020; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Eisenberger et al., 2002). These perceptions are

consistent with Social Exchange Theory, which holds that employees respond to supportive organisational actions with higher engagement, loyalty, and effort (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2017). In this study, the strong endorsement of social wellness initiatives suggests that operational staff interpret these programs as genuine expressions of organisational care, and therefore reciprocate through improved performance and cooperative behaviour (Eisenberger et al., 2021; Ganu, Ahmed and Kazimoto, 2017; Moshi, 2010).

The gender based findings add an important dimension to this interpretation. Female employees were more likely to report that social wellness programs were always available and to strongly agree that these programs provide emotional support, suggesting greater inclusion in structured initiatives and perhaps stronger preference for relational engagement mechanisms (Berry et al., 2020; Molm, 2010; Eisenberger et al., 2002). Male staff, in contrast, reported higher levels of occasional access, indicating greater exposure to irregular or informal activities, which may reflect communication gaps or role related scheduling differences (Jawaad et al., 2019; Kim and Jang, 2022; Sánchez Rodríguez et al., 2022). These patterns raise questions about perceived fairness and equity, since Social Exchange Theory predicts that uneven access to support can shape how different groups evaluate organisational commitment and decide on their own levels of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Saks, 2022).

Age related differences further deepen this picture. Younger staff, particularly those aged 18 to 25 years, reported high levels of occasional participation and were the most likely to strongly affirm the stress reducing and emotionally supportive benefits of social wellness programs (Berry et al., 2020; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Saah et al., 2021). This suggests that early career employees rely heavily on social initiatives to navigate role adjustment, uncertainty, and performance pressure in demanding hotel settings (Ghani et al., 2022; Wanjohi et al., 2022; Ariza Montes et al., 2019). Employees aged 26 to 35 years appeared better integrated into structured programming, while staff aged 36 years and above showed more sporadic engagement, pointing to possible misalignment between wellness planning and the schedules or preferences of mid career and senior workers (Knight Frank, 2023; African Hotel Market Report, 2023; ILO, 2021). From a perceived organisational support perspective, these variations may translate into differing levels of attachment and identification with the organisation across age groups (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Eisenberger et al., 2021; Saks, 2022).

Taken together, the findings position social wellness programs as strategically important but operationally under optimised tools for supporting staff performance in Nairobi's three to five star hotels. The prevalence of activities and strong positive perceptions confirm that relational support is a credible lever for enhancing teamwork, morale, and service delivery (Richemond and Needham, 2020; WTTC, 2023; UNWTO, 2023). Nonetheless, inconsistent scheduling, gendered differences in access, and age related disparities indicate that many hotels have not fully institutionalised these programs within formal human resource and operations frameworks (Berry et al., 2020; Kim and Jang, 2022; Wanjohi et al., 2022). Aligning practice with the principles of Social Exchange Theory would require hotels to treat social wellness as a core organisational obligation rather than a discretionary extra, backed by structured calendars, dedicated budgets, and inclusive design that reaches all employee groups (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Abebe and Assemie, 2023). In a highly competitive hospitality market, such a shift would not only enhance employee well being but also reinforce operational resilience and service excellence across Nairobi City County (Knight Frank, 2023; African Hotel Market Report, 2023; Department of Public Service and Administration, 2016).

6.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that social wellness programs play a significant and positive role in enhancing the performance of operational staff in three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County. Although most hotels provide social activities, counseling services, and related initiatives, these programs are often delivered irregularly and lack formal institutionalization, limiting their full potential. Employees consistently affirmed that social wellness initiatives reduce stress, strengthen their ability to manage demanding service conditions, and provide essential emotional support. Gender and age variations revealed that access and perceived benefits are not evenly distributed, suggesting the need for more inclusive planning and communication. Guided by Social Exchange Theory, the findings affirm that when hotels invest consistently in relational well being, employees reciprocate with higher engagement, stronger teamwork, and improved service performance. Strengthening the structure, frequency, and inclusivity of social wellness programs would therefore enhance staff morale, foster cohesive work environments, and contribute meaningfully to service excellence in Nairobi's hospitality sector.

7.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that three to five star hotels in Nairobi City County institutionalize social wellness programs by adopting structured schedules, dedicated budgets, and clear implementation frameworks to ensure consistent delivery across all departments. Hotels should strengthen communication strategies so that wellness opportunities are clearly conveyed to both male and female employees and tailored to meet the distinct needs of different age groups. Management should also expand counseling support, team building activities, and peer engagement platforms to enhance emotional resilience and reduce workplace stress. Incorporating employee feedback through regular needs assessments would ensure that wellness initiatives remain relevant, equitable, and effective. By embedding social wellness into core human resource and operational policies, hotels can cultivate cohesive, motivated teams that contribute to stronger service performance and improved guest experiences.

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