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Delivering value through people risk management

In recent years, the field of employee wellness services has exploded, coinciding with a global move toward healthier living, and a realisation within the business community that the old adage of a happy employee being a productive employee does indeed hold true. In order to enhance productivity, to focus on staff retention, to attract talent or simply to provide support and care, organisations have deployed a wide variety of programmes aimed at enhancing staff wellbeing. The emergence of Employee Wellness Programmes as the base upon which to build more specialized employee services is perhaps one of the least publicized aspects of employee wellbeing.

Introduced in the 1960s in the United States as programmes designed to tackle substance abuse issues and the post-traumatic stress induced by the Vietnam war, employee assistance services have evolved dramatically to encompass not only the management of behavioural risk (associated with the social, psychological, financial and organisational aspects of employees) but also to mitigate these risks; and in their most comprehensive form, to promote health and wellness amongst employees and their families.

Evolving within this space, ICAS Southern Africa has been providing Employee Wellness Programmes throughout Southern Africa for nearly 10 years. With global backing by the AXA-ICAS group, the company is able to draw on international best practice while providing programmes that are truly indigenous through its 100% South African operation. ICAS is able to provide the best of both worlds to its client base which consists of more than 300 client organisations across all sectors of the economy.

Innovation and quality remain the cornerstones of all ICAS programmes. As the 'Google' of the local employee wellness field, ICAS' employees are often early adopters of new approaches. They base many of their interventions on trends identified through constant research conducted by the ICAS Business Intelligence Division.

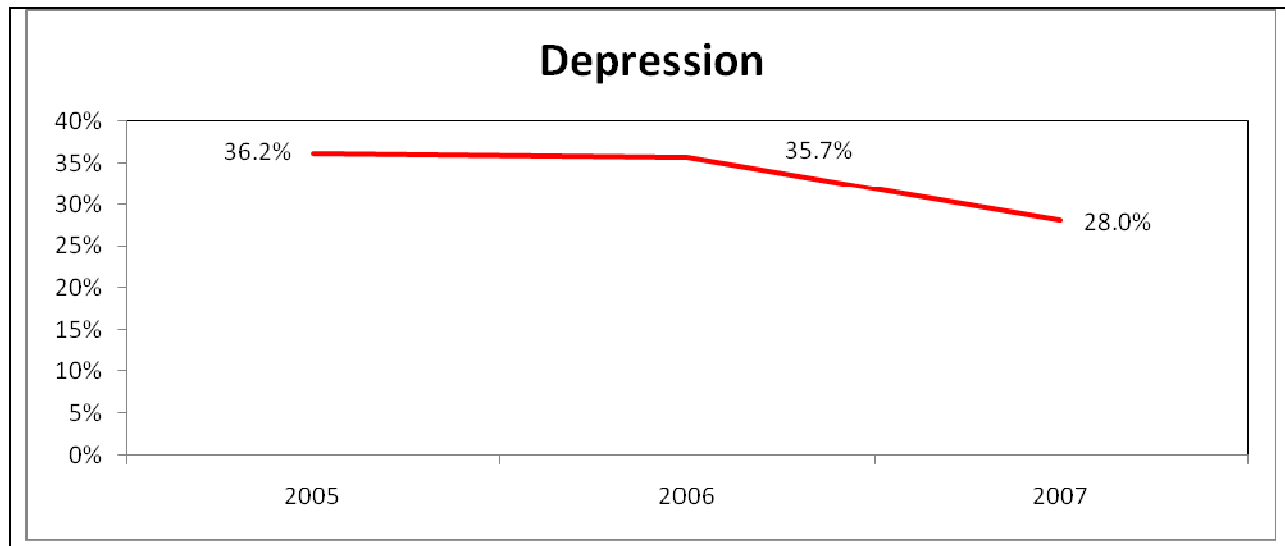
Recent research by this Division into the efficacy of the programmes delivered by the organisation has revealed some startling insights into the nature and efficacy of Employee Wellness Programmes (EWP). In a review conducted across users of ICAS' services between the years 2005 to 2007, a difference on a significant scale emerged between the programmes of long standing clients and those of clients who had relatively new programmes in place, in terms of their effectiveness in mitigating organisational risk.



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The study, incorporating more than 100 000 EWP users distributed across 172 client organisations, showed that in a number of areas, longer established programmes deliver highly significant results. Firstly, the utilisation rate of the EWP was significantly higher within the client groups that had an EWP in place for 3 years or longer, whereas in the client organisations with EWPs in place for less than three years, engagement among employees was much lower. This suggests that a significant period of time is required for a support programme to establish a foothold in organisations and to gain the trust and acceptance of employees.

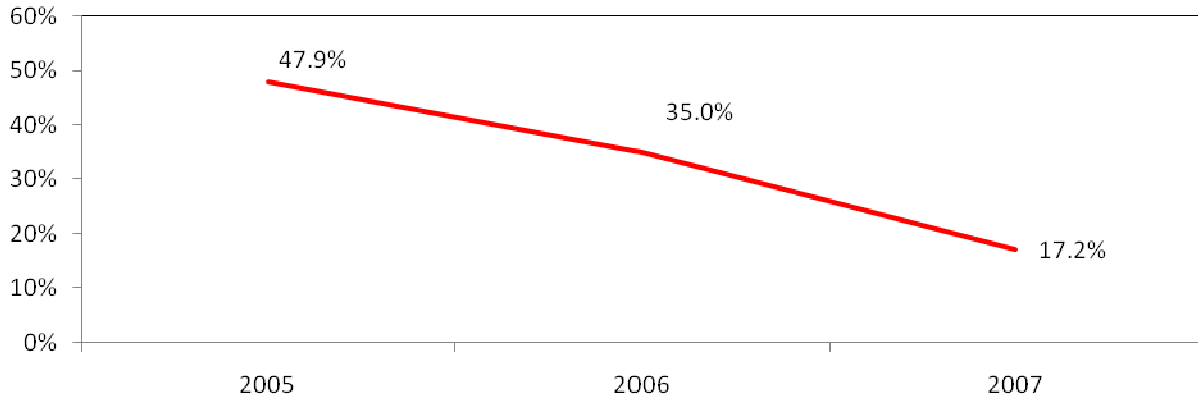
A measurement of performance impact of the programmes on various problems and issues was also made in the study. It was found that in the client group that had had an ICAS EWP in place for more than 3 years, an average 48.3% improvement was shown between 2005 and 2007 where significant performance issues were present as a result of personal difficulties. In practice this translates into an improved ability to retain staff within these client organizations, because the risk of poor productivity (and possibly dismissal) as a result of the social or psychological difficulties experienced by staff was significantly mitigated through the presence of the EWP. The severity of the impact on employee performance of a variety of problems and issues was significantly reduced, as illustrated in the examples below:



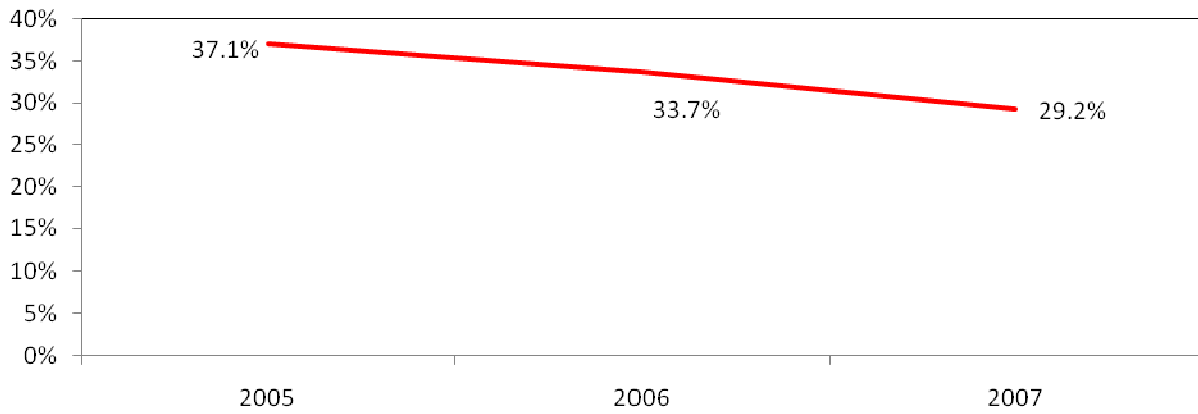


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Discrimination/Harrassment



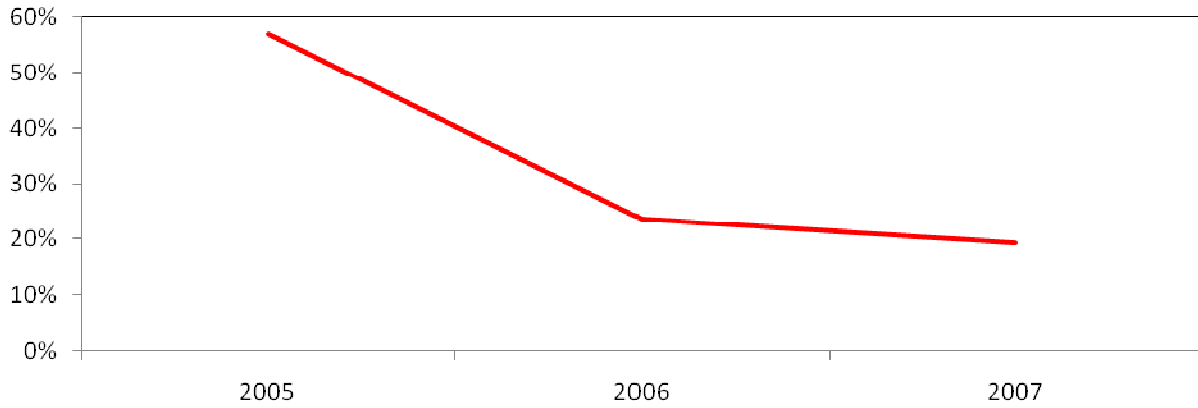
Trauma



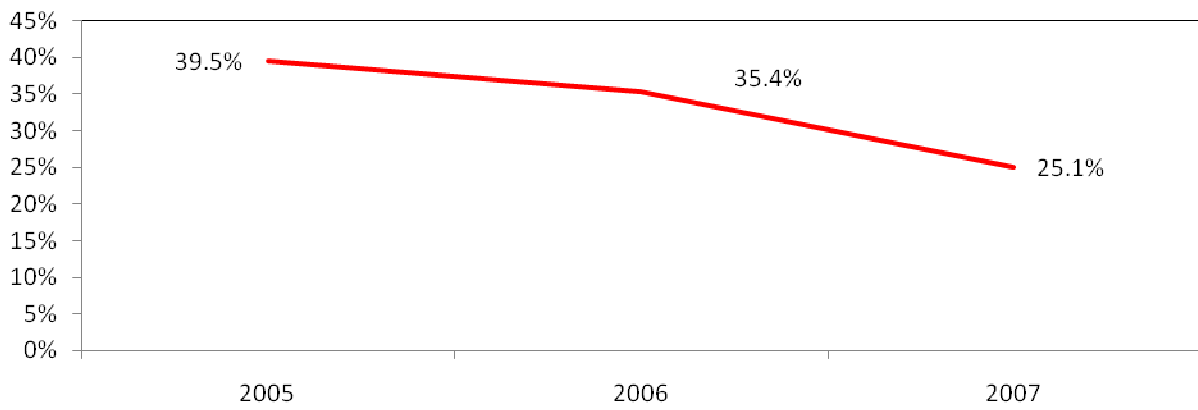


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Money Management

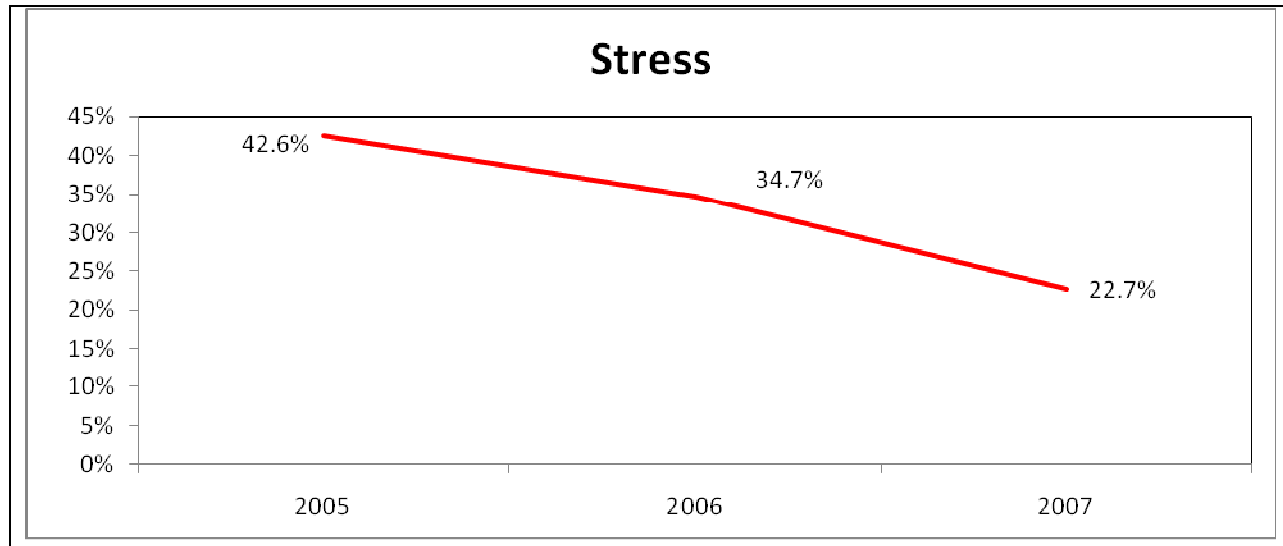


Organisational Issues





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Mitigating these risks not only adds to overall productivity improvement within an organisation, but eliminates the need to replace employees who receive assistance through their EWP at a stage early enough to have an immediate and lasting effect on their quality of work. It is clear that organizations can make a difference to their bottom line by mitigating people related risks through the cultivation of a sustained EWP service.

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