

CHALLENGES OF WOMEN WORKING IN BPO

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, business process outsourcing offers retail, insurance, mortgage, banking and finance, health, telecommunications, technology, tourism and hospitality. Many UK and US based companies are coming to India in the current situation. BPO has grown at significant rates.

Business process outsourcing helps companies make a lot of profit by reaching the service market and improving business activities. Business Process Outsourcing is a tool that helps customers survive the competition by increasing customers' satisfaction by retaining their customers.

Technology and infrastructure improvements have made it easy. India's economy has continued to grow since the establishment of BPO companies. In recent years, India has shown great improvements in communication, electricity and software development.

BPO gets significance due to:

- Factor cost benefit.
- Economic measurement.
- Business risk reduction.
- Highest qualification.
- Application improvement.

Customer supports services provided by BPO in India, technical support services, telemarketing services and insurance process. Call Center Outsourcing is an important event in all business sectors around the world. BPO services are progressing from outsourcing. Outsourcing BPO to India creates jobs. India is now the leading software and services IT industry. India has great, humanistic resources, powerful and enthusiastic qualities. BPO is a big employer of service.

A case-control study in New Delhi found that BPO employees were more stressed (58.3% vs. 19.3%); more depressed (62.9% vs. 4.6%); and more anxious (33.9% vs. 1.4%) as compared with non-BPO workers. Another study in Delhi too revealed a very high level of stress (66%) among them.

Higher levels of stress of more than 65% have also been reported by researchers from call centers in other metropolitan cities. Anxiety levels were also found to be higher (45%) among them.

Various studies have reported a wide range of physical ailments among call center workers. Backache, shoulder pain, digestive problems, overweight, headache due to eye strain and dryness of eyes were some of the commonly reported ailments. According to a study in Mumbai, 70.4% females and 55.6% males were found to be suffering from headache almost every day.

Women-centered studies like the one conducted by Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) reported high blood pressure (60%) accompanied by sleep disorders (60%), menstrual-related problems (50%), respiratory illness (45%), and digestive problems (50%) to be the major health-related problems among women **Health issues of woman**

- Irregular periods
- Menopause
- Polycystic Ovary syndrome
- Miscarriage
- Pregnancy
- Fat around the middle fibroid
- No periods
- Heavy period

- Osteoporosis
- Thrush Vaginal infection
- Infertility
- Painful periods
- Weight control

Challenges of women working in BPO

Various surveys and research conducted amongst the call centre employees have shown that depression is the most common problem faced by BPO employees. Frequent headaches, feeling of fatigue, sleeping disorders and frustration have become regular problems for them. The basic profile of the BPO employees is trouble-shooting, sales or revenue collection. All of these are done through tele calling. Talking to foreigners in a fake foreign accent, solving other people's problems, facing and handling the anger and abuse of the clients become a routine for these juvenile population. The youth is facing the brunt of the thoughtless campaign of many employers who are just trying to encash the flourishing BPO scenario. With no particular qualification required for call centre jobs (except fluency in English and good communication and convincing skills) BPO jobs provide a quick gateway to good pay packages.

Many youngsters are quitting their education right after the 12th standard for these jobs. This step can block and kill their long term (future) career prospects. Also, at the very young age they get lot of money in hand and they are unaware of the rational utilization of that money. Also, working in overnight shifts does not get accepted easily in the traditional Indian culture and the youth are resistance from the seniors in the society.

Due to the increasing gap between the supply and demand of the talent for BPO's and the already saturated talent market, the companies are luring and attracting youngsters with attractive pay packages and other benefits as soon as they get out of college. But the youngsters have to face the realities of the industry as they fail to cope up with the stress and responsibilities of their work life.

It is clearly a case of hyper-growth with an immediate fall-down as soon as the reality strikes. With no time for personal life, the erratic schedules and monotonous work of business process outsourcing also disturbs the family life of the employees adding to their frustrations. This will definitely lead to loose family ties and other unhealthy behavior.

All these problems have triggered the problems of attrition and retention for the problems of attrition and retention for the BPO industry itself. If not taken care of, these problems can lead to hazardous health and other implication for the youth of India.

' Rasheeda Bhagat (Jan 27, 2006) demonstrated that people work in BPOs, even young Indian women with successful careers opting not to get married or delaying marriage are all values that are being questioned in this sector. There are enough examples of people who don't get married or have multiple partners through their adult life.'

' Research by Bupa found that 40% of people worried about their job security had experienced higher stress levels at work and almost a quarter were working longer hours to ward off the risk of losing their job. Women were significantly more stressed than men and are feeling more pressured at work. The economic downturn is likely to have an effect on levels of stress as job security becomes more of an issue.

' Bpaiai.org outlines the fact of Gynaecologist Ms. AnitaSoni, who works with Hiranandani Hospital in Power, where the area is surrounded with call centers that "I would say the number of women who are sexually active without being married is much higher now than it was 10 years ago. But this phenomenon is not peculiar to the call centre industry, although the graveyard shift, the newfound freedom and easy money may contribute to the trend," she says.

' Syeda Farida (June 01, 2006) reports that the study undertaken by the world Health Organization (WHO) estimates that seven per cent of women in developing countries smoke (compared to 48 per cent of men). And Asia seems to be the virgin market for tobacco manufacturers, who are pushing in low tar' and milder though equally harmful cigarettes and the familiar independence, weight control and managing stress themes.

Problems of Working Women in BPO

- ' Thehindubusinessline.com study reports significantly prove that BPO service centers do not lay emphasis on women" s health and fitness issues, since many women employees in BPO/Call centres and many of young women employed in BPOs/call centres tend to be underweight and anemic, even as they are more concerned about restricting their food intake."
- ' MallikaJayasheelam reported in the newspapers that the youth of today are remarkably different from the youth of yesterday. Over 50 per cent American women of marriageable age are today single, and this spurt to 50 per cent happened over a remarkably short period of time. Therefore I call it the age of discontinuity. It is a dramatic departure from the post."
- ' SudhaUmashanker states that most of the women working in the BPOs/Call centers are intensely postponing their marriages due to private affairs with others and are not interested in getting married.
- ' Syeda Farida (Jun 01, 2006) explains a case of Twenty-six-year-old Swetha working for a BPO who is always found in pubs on weekend, nurturing a drink in one hand, a cigarette in the other. She happily asserts "I love to smoke when I drink. And I smoke on a weekend though."
- ' Syeda Farida (Jun 01, 2006) brings out a case of Madhavi, assistant manager with a leading bank, who also confesses to be a „smoke with drink' person. "I smoke 3-4 cigarettes in a week. Two years ago, it used to be 3-4 packs," she says.
- ' The world Health Organization (WHO) estimates that seven per cent of women in developing countries smoke (compared to 48 per cent of men). And Asia seems to be the virgin market for tobacco manufacturers, who are pushing in „low tar' and milder though equally harm-full cigarettes and the familiar independence, weight control and managing stress themes.
- ' Syeda Faria (Jun 01, 2006) While the „Milds' or „Navy cuts" might send the „with it' signals, nicotine impacts women more drastically. Interestingly, women are capable of quitting the habit with as much ease as they get hooked to it.
- ' Bageshree.S (Sep 13, 2006) exhibits that the women from BPOs/Call centre have shown an amazing amount of ignorance about sexuality among them. "Irregular menstrual cycles, infertility and unconsummated marriages (some for as long as 10 to 15 years), says Dr.Padmini, are common complaints from people in these BPO/IT sectors. She has also noticed among them what she calls "sexual anorexia".
- ' Paromita pain (Oct 06, 2006) Pointed out that BOSS here refers to Burn-out Stress Syndrome, whose symptoms include chronic fatigue, insomnia leading to chronic gynaecological problems in women and sleep disorders often seen in BPOs/Call centre employees.
- ' A case study on psychological and physical stress undergone by married working women – Bhuvaneshwari concludes that stress can be well managed through institutional support..
- ' Women empowerment in the BPO sector in Bangalore – Damini Singhal &Nidhi Maheshwari Gender bias still prevails in the society as women are sometimes not considered for higher management posts in the work places.
- ' Dr.Patil Amol & Ashok Kumar (August 2017). Women are suppressed and are discriminated both at work places and at home. They are not able to give quality time to their family and hence face hurdles to maintain a balance between work life and family.
- ' Dr. Kousar Jahan Ara , (May 2013)Women find it difficult to balance between paid work and family and also face high stress due to work overload and other issues.
- ' Dr. SA Sameera & Mr.Shakir Shaik - State that women employees are not considered for higher posts in management and a woman" s career development is largely influenced by other' s opinion.
- ' Arvinder Kaur & Shivani Gupta(Apr-Jun 2012) Women are a huge part of the BPO industry but they face several challenges like safety and security issues at workplaces and these issues need to be addressed very sensitively . Vemuri Swathi & M Sudhir Reddy (July 2016) – State that working women are generally involved in many tasks like balancing between the family and work life which is a reason for stress and reduced performance.

' Sarangdevot, S S Yadav, Rajender Kumar Sharma, Rakesh Kumar (June 2012)- It was observed that women working in BPOs were subject to stress and the issues of safety.

The Evidences from Research Organizations / Survey

IDC and Dataquest magazine recently conducted a survey of 1,749 employees across 19 outsourcing companies to reveal some alarming truths.

' IDC and Dataquest magazine recently conducted a survey of 1,749 employees across 19 outsourcing companies, and they found that nearly 32 percent of employees complained of sleep disorders; 25 percent had digestive problems; and 20 percent suffered eyesight problems. What starts-off as sleep and digestive- disorders more often than not balloons into major problems such as Hypertension, Diabetes, and heart disease, according to a majority of doctors.

' A study by New Delhi-based „Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations' estimates that two years back, heart disease, strokes, and Diabetes (now diagnosed as a life-style disease) cost the country nearly \$9 billion in terms of lost productivity. The study expects the losses to grow to a staggering \$200 billion over the next decade in the absence of corrective action. And, the outsourcing industry is expected to be hit the hardest.

Responsibilities of BPO companies in reducing stress

It is the fact that work-life balance is needed to balance harmonious and holistic integration of work and family.

The Cognizant's family day celebrations bring parents, spouses and children to the workplace where employees spend quality time with their families within the office environs.

Financial Education and Wellness Consulting Solutions states that “work smart is the buzzword. Some companies even compel the employees to leave office at a particular time and weekends are made a compulsory holiday. Outings and adventure treks that encourage teambuilding efforts are encouraged”. And also involving them by engaging in one creative hobby is vital to achieve to balance.

Conclusion

Stress is a condition of physical or mental strain that goes along with related stressors. Stress is becoming an increasingly important factor in our working life. Each individual is exposed to a range of stressors both at work and in their personal life" s. In the working environment, certain occupation has higher stress level than others and individual employees will react to the situation in different ways. Pressure can also be a good thing leading to increased productivity. However, when this pressure becomes excessive, stress is caused.

The problems occur when the stress on an individual seem to be overwhelming or out of controls. That is, they perceive themselves as being unable to cope and not to possess the necessary skills to combat their stress. There are some situations that can cause us to be stressed. Once these are identified, we can take steps to modify either the situation or the way we view the situation.

Identifying unrelieved stress and being aware of its effect on ones lives is not sufficient for reducing its harmful effects. Just as there are many sources of stress, there are many possibilities for its management. However, all requires working towards change-changing the source of stress or changing one" s reaction to it to avoid anxiety or mental strain and focus towards work. Though fewer employees are suffering with low stress, they do not adopt proper coping strategies. So, the management should provide organization-wide stress avoidance and coping techniques that would help the employee to manage their stress.

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