

WORK STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG BPO EMPLOYEES – A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Dr. N.O. Aarif, Assistant Professor, PG Department of Commerce, The New College (Autonomous), Chennai.

Abstract – The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) is considered as one of the most fast growing areas in the field of Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) industry. The IT-enabled Outsourcing service uses the information technology in processing and the distribution of various services. The Stress may be defined as the feeling that when one is overloaded with a lot of work, he is worried or tensed and is tightly wound up. The Stress in simple terms may be defined as the physical response of the mind and body to various types of events that usually gives one the feeling that of being upset or being threatened and because of which the ones balance usually in some way or the other way. The Study titled, “Work Stress Management – A Study amongst the BPO employees with special reference to Chennai City” is an attempt to analyse the perception of employees on work stress and also examine important stress coping strategies which are basically adopted by the various employees in Business Processing outsourcing.

Keywords: Perception, Work Stress Management, Stress Coping Strategies.

I. Introduction:

Stress is usually considered as a result of person's reactions to a particular or set of events. In a modern days world a person's life is usually filled with loads of irritation, frustrations etc due to the constant pressure of deadlines in their work concerned. In the recent time period the stress has become a common phenomenon that is usually considered as a way of leading the life. The major reason for illness is due to stress and stress has lead to death in certain case.

One of the fastest growing and developing industrial segments currently is **Business Process Outsourcing (BPO)**. According to research study carried out by bpoindia.org, Business Process Outsourcing is the strategy that promotes in a very unique way of either by putting a relatively new technology or by applying the existing technology in order to improve the process.

II. Need for the Study:

In spite of a number of research works being carried out in the field of the effect of Stress in general, the studies concentrating specifically on the impact and perception in particular to the BPO sector is in scanty. The basic crux of most of the research studies carried out are found out to be either Sector – Specific or else region-specific of which most of them majorly concentrated only on the mere consequences or various coping strategies of occupational stress. It is actually because of the above reasons there arose a need for an all-inclusive and a holistic study on the

occupational stress in BPO sectors covering the major causes, its effects and also the different coping strategies which have not yet been attempted by earlier researchers. Besides all these reasons, there have not been any major studies on the occupational stress that exist in the BPO sector pertaining to the Chennai city is being carried out in the present field.

III. Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyse the perception of employees in BPO about stress.
2. To identify dominant physical strain experienced due to the work stress amongst the BPO employees.
3. To examine the important coping strategies that is adopted by BPO employees to cope with stress.
4. To evaluate the levels of Job satisfaction amongst the BPO employees.

IV. Scope of the study:

The BPO companies are mostly pushing their employees to operate under extreme pressure. They often encounter unprecedented levels of stress in their every day's walk of life. The BPO employees are often made to compete amongst themselves for their basic survival due to existence of a very stiff competition. Even though there are around hundreds of BPO companies that are operating in Chennai city, this study is in particular restricted to the top 5 worlds' most renowned and the registered BPO services providers that are highly rated by reputed organizations like the NASSCOM.

V. Limitations of the Study:

- This study has ignored the unregistered, medium and the small scale BPO services providers as they usually involve in the secondary level contracts.
- The study is restricted only to Chennai city.
- The applications of the present study cannot just be substantiated to other BPO companies that are operating in the different states and different other places.

VI. Review of Literature:

Sameera, Shakir Shaik and Firoz C. (2016)¹ in their research study titled, "A Study on Stress Management among the BPO Employees in Chennai City", have analyzed the reasons for the existence of stress amongst most of the employees and also to evaluate the

levels of stress amongst the employees. One of the key findings of the study showed that majority of the employees in the BPO sectors mostly experience severe stress. The researchers also exhibited that most of the employees in the BPO sector try their level best in order to find out solutions in order to relieve themselves from adverse effect of stress. The study further suggested that there is an urgent need in order to decentralize the work. The researchers concluded that the friendly environment should be created for the employees so that they can tackle stress in the organization.

Sonal Bhargava (2014)², in the research study titled “**Stress problem in BPO sector**” has found out that the prolonged working hours in shift basis of odd hours can very much seriously affect both the physical as well as the mental well being of the employees. The study revealed that the depression is the major common problems faced by the BPO employees. The study suggested that some suggestions like organizing of seminars and workshops, and then providing proper counseling and training to the employees, arranging of small trips, creating tie-ups with various health clubs etc. can for sure help the employees to overcome adverse effects of stress encountered in the work place.

Ramanathan S. and Sugumar D. (2013)³ in their research study titled “**work related stressor: An Empirical study with reference to employees working in knowledge process outsourcing in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India**” have actually demonstrated that, it is not just important verily to identify the stress problems and to deal with along them but also to promote the healthy work cycle and to reduce the harmful aspects of the work. The Data were obtained from amongst 250 employees. The research study actually revealed that, it is basically the middle age group employees who were registered with very high levels of stress compared to the aged employees. The research study concluded that there is a need for further research in order to explore the major process of the behaviour changes amongst the employees.

Devina sengupta (2013)⁴ has published in the Economic Times, under the Corporate trends titled “**Psychiatrists report sudden rise in cases of depression among IT workers, Nasscom says all is well**” has actually highlighted that in the last six months, more IT executives are basically coming up with major problems like acute depressions, insecurity, low in confidence level, dejections, aversions to the social life and with panic. The research study actually pointed out that the employees more or less buckle under the work pressure and they really require proper counselling in order to overcome their levels of stress. It also

revealed that the employees' lack of meaningful relationship that prevails outside the work place would also result to aggravate their stress problem.

Alireza Bolhari, Ali Rezaeian, Jafar Bolhari and Sona Bairamzadeh (2012)⁵ in their research study captioned “**Occupational stress level among Information Technology Professionals in Iran**” have tried to measure occupational stress prevalent amongst professionals and along with it to study the actual relationship that exist between the occupational stress levels of the IT professionals and their gender, age, work experience and the stress management courses. The Data were actually collected from amongst 236 IT professionals. The results of the study revealed that about 70% of the respondents were actually suffering from a very stressful occupation. The study also envisaged that there is a need to conduct various stress reduction programs amongst the IT professionals. The research study concluded that the actual relationships existing between the stress levels and gender of professionals, the work experience and the stress management courses carried out were approved through the path analysis.

VII. Research Methodology:

The study was carried out by circulating a well structured questionnaire to 610 employees working in the top 5 BPO companies which are operating in the Chennai City. The Simple Random sampling technique was basically adopted in order to select the desired no. of respondents. Out of the 610 respondents only 557 respondents have provided all the details after filling it. However the balance 17 questionnaires were rejected because of inadequate data. Hence the total sample size which is chosen for the present study is 540.

VIII. Analysis and Interpretation:

CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

The Confirmatory factor analysis were performed for the factor structures like Work stress, the Coping strategies and the Job satisfaction level by using the Analysis of moment structure (AMOS 16.1) in order to verify the factor structures of the variables. The results of Confirmatory factor analysis thus carried out for the above said factors are displayed in the below table.

Factors	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	ECVI	χ^2 d.f
Work stress	0.918	0.909	0.089	0.091	4.021
Coping strategies	0.921	0.912	0.086	0.101	3.512
Job satisfaction	0.917	0.911	0.087	0.096	3.234

Objective1: To study the perception of BPO employees on the different sources of work stress.

H_0 : Sources of work stress does not differ significantly with average level

One sample t-test for Role Overload

Statements	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
I have to do work in this job	4.49	0.566	31.155**	<.001
Owing to excessive workload I have to manage with sufficient number of employees and resources	4.17	1.138	20.008**	<.001
I have not dispose off my work hurriedly owing to moderate work load	3.95	1.153	17.181**	<.001
Being too busy with official work I am able to devote Sufficient time to my domestic and personal problems	2.48	1.026	9.834**	<.001
I have to do such work as ought to be done by others	4.07	0.750	25.298**	<.001
I am able to carry out my assignments to my satisfaction on account of excessive work load and lack of time	2.36	1.084	17.301**	<.001

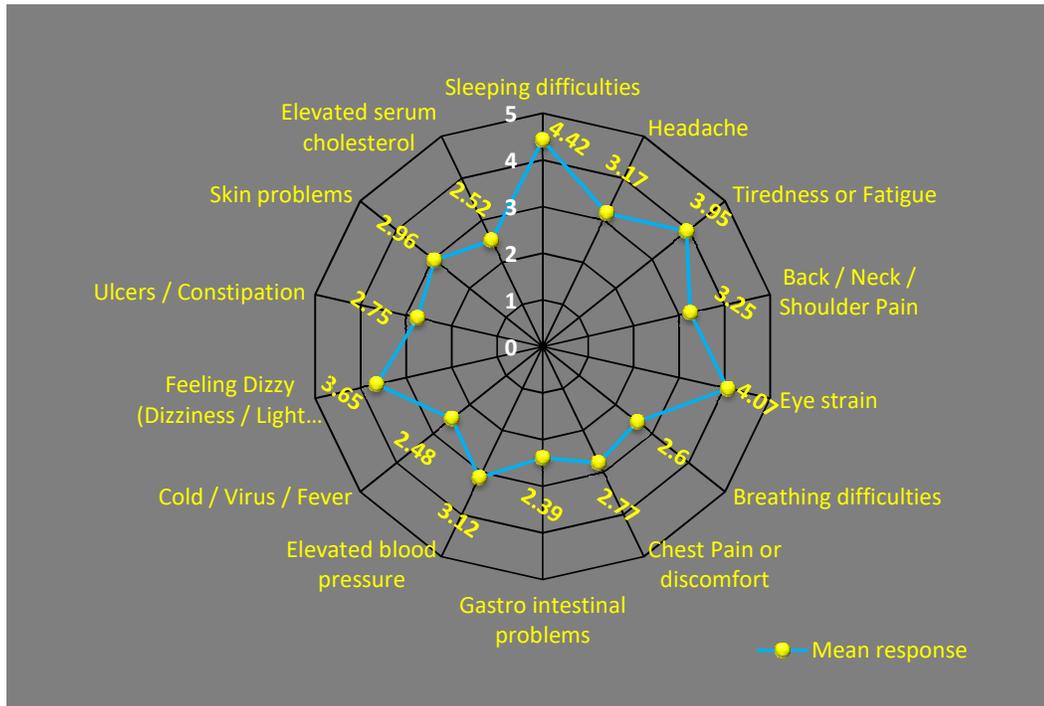
Objective 2: To identify the dominant physical strain manifested due to work stress among BPO employees.

H₀: Level of Physical symptoms due to stress do not differ significantly with average level

One sample t-test for Physical symptoms

Symptoms	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Sleeping difficulties	4.42	1.449	13.875**	<.001
Headache	3.17	1.064	3.987**	<.001
Tiredness or Fatigue	3.95	1.561	10.562**	<.001
Back / Neck / Shoulder Pain	3.25	1.288	5.872**	<.001
Eye strain	4.07	1.074	13.033**	<.001
Breathing difficulties	2.60	1.576	6.716**	<.001
Chest Pain or discomfort	2.77	1.572	6.009**	<.001
Gastro intestinal problems	2.39	1.153	10.754**	<.001
Elevated blood pressure	3.12	1.026	3.229**	<.001
Cold / Virus / Fever	2.48	1.138	9.762**	<.001
Feeling Dizzy (Dizziness / Light headiness)	3.65	1.066	8.296**	<.001
Ulcers / Constipation	2.75	1.086	7.913**	<.001
Skin problems	2.96	0.963	0.109	.617
Elevated serum cholesterol	2.52	1.018	8.278**	<.001

Radar diagram showing the mean responses provided by the BPO employees towards physical symptoms due to stress.



Objective 3: To examine the significant stress coping strategies adopted by the BPO employees.

H_0 : Stress Coping strategies do not differ significantly with average level

One sample t-test for coping strategies

Statements	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
In weekend, I spend time doing the things I enjoy most	3.14	1.545	4.425**	<.001
I engage in meditation	3.17	1.140	6.611**	<.001
I appraise the situation objectively and take direct action to deal	3.72	1.969	17.212**	.001

with it				
I always try to stay physically fit with exercise	2.76	1.674	7.142**	<.001
I practice deep breathing exercise a few minutes several times every day	2.30	1.487	12.438**	<.001
I delegate some of the responsibilities to others when it becomes necessary	3.30	1.905	8.512**	<.001
I consider the stressful situation as an Inevitable part of life and deal with it in an easy manner	2.38	1.756	10.046**	<.001
I am careful about my diet.(E.g. eating regularly, moderately and with good nutrition in mind)	2.47	1.795	3.883**	<.001
I spend a lot of my free time for creative pastimes like music and hobbies	3.26	1.941	8.801**	<.001
I practice yoga regularly	1.88	1.382	15.535**	<.001
I look for advice and information from superiors	3.15	1.951	5.204**	<.001
I accept the situation because I cannot change it or avoid it	2.82	1.945	14.025**	<.001
I get the sleep I need	3.74	1.840	13.180**	.002
I avoid being with people in general	2.49	1.781	19.637**	<.001
I become absorbed in a rewarding or creative activity outside work	3.28	1.162	7.682**	<.001
I talk to friends and colleagues about my Worries to release the emotional distress	4.38	1.077	16.899**	<.001
I avoid eating or drinking things I know are Unhealthy	3.40	1.121	6.514**	<.001
I relax and turn off at home	3.56	1.007	8.058**	<.001
I spend time with supportive family and friends	3.55	1.971	6.303**	<.001
I get regular physical checkups	2.85	1.805	4.802**	<.001
I work for longer hours	3.67	2.117	3.597**	<.001
I express irritability to self	2.27	1.479	12.044**	<.001
I blame myself for the present situation and feel guilty and depressed	3.12	1.522	5.101**	<.001

Objective 4: To analyse the level of Job satisfaction among BPO employees.

H_0 : Level of Job satisfaction do not differ significantly with average level

One sample t-test for Job satisfaction

Statements	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Overall, I am satisfied with my current job	3.10	1.607	3.925**	<.001
I am satisfied with the time to complete my work	3.51	1.138	13.875**	<.001
I am satisfied with the amount of work I have to do	3.16	1.630	5.177**	<.001
I am satisfied with the variation of work task	3.14	1.543	7.285**	<.001
I am satisfied with my working condition	3.17	1.493	8.296**	<.001
I am satisfied with my work times	3.23	1.391	10.562**	<.001
I am satisfied with my salary	2.73	1.629	10.485**	<.001
I am satisfied with my supervisor / superior	2.63	1.754	8.463**	<.001
I am satisfied with my colleagues	2.84	1.559	4.044**	<.001
I am satisfied with the briefings about my job	3.20	1.576	6.265**	<.001
My work is physically demanding	3.54	1.561	13.033**	<.001
My work is Mentally demanding	3.16	1.572	4.987**	<.001
I can determine how I do my work	3.26	1.101	6.509**	<.001
I can take part in decisions' concerning my work	2.77	1.288	6.494**	<.001
Education and training in my job improve my career perspectives	3.12	1.509	4.338**	<.001

IX. Findings of the Study:

- Respondents who are working for more than 10 hours per day are the one who are facing more stress as it leads to mental fatigue.
- The Respondents working in the night shifts are facing comparatively higher levels of stress as it affects their routines.
- Most of the employees in BPO are facing severe physical stress symptoms like Sleeping disorder, Tiredness, Mental Fatigue and Eye strain.
- The Respondents who are having Professional education adopt more coping strategies in order to reduce stress.

- The Employees working in the BPOs are having moderate level of Job satisfaction. The employees feel moderately satisfied with the time and completion of their work,
- Some of the employees are completely dissatisfied with factors like salary, the attitude of their superiors and their colleagues and in taking part in various decisions concerning their work.
- Main Reasons for Stress: Excessive Workload, Peer Pressure, Too much interference of superiors, Poor Working Conditions, Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, Frequent changes in Working Shifts, Monotonous Nature of Job and Poor Peer Relations.
- The Team leaders are the ones facing more stress as they have to get things done from their subordinates.
- Respondents having less than 5 years of experience are facing more stress than the experienced one.

X. SUGGESTIONS:

- The research study suggested that BPO employees should take care of their role overloads which are assigned to them as it would lead to high work stress.
- The Officials should avoid themselves interfering in the work carried out by the BPO employees.
- The BPO firm should conduct regular counseling programmes to their employees in order to coup-up with their job related stress.
- Organizations should ensure that the working environment must be conducive enough for their BPO employees. The employers should see to that the BPO employees are not provided with strenuous working condition.
- The employees should be advised to undertake regular meditation, visit to doctors for regular checkup, exercise in order to coup up with the stress in a better way.
- The employer should always provide sufficient working hours, training and reasonable quantity of work in order to ensure there is job satisfaction amongst the employees.
- Proper care must be taken in the matters relating to under-participation of employees.
- Employees should be given the required authority in order to allow them to carry out their obligations along with accountability.
- Proper welfare committees should be set up in order to act as a forum which redresses the grievances of the employees.

XI. CONCLUSION:

Over the years, rapid growths of the BPO sectors have resulted in remarkable changes in the lives of its young workforce. In BPO companies, Stress has become an inevitable and has resulted in the Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion of their employees. It is alarming that the number of employees absent from work due to stress and mental health conditions is in increasing trend. The Work place stress factor has become a major concern for the BPO employees as it affects their performances of their employees. Various studies have revealed that the stress is good as long as it does not affect their employee's performance. A stress free work place is a prerequisite for an employee in order to allow them to excel in their lives. Working in a stressful condition may more or less lead to a decrease in the employees' efficiency, a steep increase in absenteeism and turnover. The study clearly revealed that the work stress reduces the individual accomplishment levels of the employees. The success or failure of an organisation mainly depends upon its employees. BPO organisations should take sufficient care to reduce the stress level of employees. To overcome the workplace stress, organisations should come forward with best practices relating to work based stress. It should also conduct periodic review risk assessments. Dissemination of information about the stress-related illnesses at work will help the employees to overcome the issues.

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