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Analysis and Comparison of Stress among Males and Females in BPOs in NCR, India

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Abstract: The study of literature exposed that research gaps exist in evaluating the effectiveness of existing employee assistance programs to create a stress free work environment in general; and with special reference to its applications in BPOs in particular. However, a lot of work has been published in stress management among employees area, but still the big gap exists between research on the role of gender in stress outcomes and its impact on the performance of BPO sector. It is observed that none of the existing research work has given cost-effective employees assistance strategies for the stress management of employees of (each gender) for Indian BPO sector. This constitutes a research gap and so has been the motivation of finding research work further on this topic. The present research paper has offered a 'Gender based stress management programs / employee's assistance programs'. This paper is an attempt to compare and analyse the difference in stressors, effect of stress on each gender, perception of each gender about effectiveness of EAP's / stress management programs provided by their management. In view of these factors, the present study is mainly focused on development of the concept of 'cost – effective gender based stress management programs'.

Keywords: Business processing outsourcing, Work environment, Stress management, Employees assistance programs, Role of gender.

I. Introduction

In today's competitive world, stress has become a very commonly used word by everyone. Though it is invisible, but every individual and organization is suffering from some amount of stress. Stress is the origin of 80 % of all modern diseases. (Health and Safety Executive Report 2015) reveals that in the UK, the total number of cases of work related stress, depression or anxiety in yr 2014 - 15 was 440,000 cases, a prevalence rate of 1380 per 100,000 workers and the total number of working days lost due to this condition in yr 2014 - 15 was 9.9 million days. This equated to an average of 23 days lost per case. If such developed country is unable to escape from this evil, then India cannot fight with this iniquity, without new interventions in stress management programs / employee assistance programs. *Occupational stress*¹ has also become a major concern for employers; because it causes harm to employee's health and ultimately employee's performance at work. The occurrence rate of psychological disorders due to strain in India is reported to be 58.2 per thousand population (Reddy; Chandrasekhar 1998). Frequency of psychological disorders has been increased. In 1990, neurological and mental disorders accounted for 10% of the total patients of all injuries and disease which rose to 12% in 2000 and it is projected that the load of these disorders will rise to 15 percent by 2020. According to the most definitions of stress, it is caused by physical or psychological stimulus (Stressors²) and the response of an individual to such unfavorable conditions. Today's Business environment can be termed as *The Environment of Stress*.

However, companies want to improve employee productivity, but how often do they examine their own management practices as a means of attaining it? (Lipman, 2013). Some theories regarding stress are presently settled and accepted; others are still being debated and researched.

II. Literature Survey

(Selye 1960) defines the stress as a force which can be either physical or Psychological. It is a pressure applied to the human system. Various approaches to stress emphasize the transaction between the affective and cognitive aspects of the individual and their environment. (Kahn 1964) was the one who proposed the concept of *organizational role stresses*. They define stress as environmental characteristics which affect people adversely. (Pestonjee 1992) has attempted to present the nature and consequences of the stress phenomenon. He has

¹ Occupational stress is stress involving work. It occurs when employees have demands and responsibility at work with which they are not able to cope, due to variety of reasons.

² Stressors are the stimulants or factors responsible to generate stress in an individual.

identified three important sectors of the life in which stress generally originates. These are (a) Intra -psychic sector, (b) the social sector, and (c) job and the organization. (Gianakos2000; Gianakos2002) wrote that social gender may affect the workplace stress. Due to increased number of women in the BPO Industry, some researchers have started to take their research subject on Females to study the field of work stress.(BPO Employee – Satisfaction Survey 2007) disclose that, all is not well on the BPO front. Indian BPO employees are suffering from a variety of health related issues, right from anxiety attacks to sleep related disorders.(Keng-yu 2010; Yu-chi2010)had done a research on Taiwanese bank employees. They found that the masculine characteristics exhibited the less stress level as compared to the feminine characteristics. (Bekker et al.2001) reveals that basic reason and a decisive factor for the subsistence of gender differences, concerning stress manifestation, is the subsistence of differences between how the workplace encounter the two genders, the stress stimulus and their experience to different stimulus types. (Melissa2012) has done a survey based analysis of workers on a diverse group and abridged the old notion about Female workers in the expression of emotions at work and investigated that women express anger less and happier than men in the workplace. (Sudhashree et al.2004) described that everything is not in a good situation in the BPO industry. (Stamatios et al.2003) found that role of management in a firm is one of the aspects that affect the stress related to work among employees.(Asplund et al. 2006) illustrated that reduction in the environmental violence; increased job satisfaction and management of moral stress are directly dependent on the variables such as suspension and reflection, education and perfect leadership.

III. Role of the Gender

(Luts et al.2010) have stated that as legislation, attitudes and norms are growing over a period of time, gender differences in the place of work are always changing. (Chaplin2008) found that differences in the responses of women and men to stress are not limited to neurological evidences only. (Shelley & Taylor 2011)have revealed in a research on stress responses for 30 years and recognized that women respond differently to stressful situations. Compared to males, females' physical aggression and fear- related behaviors are less intense. (Taylor et al.2000) described that responses in stress outcomes are basically dissimilar in each gender, which can be often characterized as *tend and befriend* among women whereas *fight or flight* among men. (Fozia&Khalid2013) bring into notice that Males often develop stress due to their career, whereas Females often encounter stress due to their interpersonal relationship. (Burke 2003) instigate that in big organizations, data suggests that glass ceiling, gender bias do exist, though the workplace is often symbolized as gender neutral place.

IV. Research Objectives

To examine the shortcomings of existing employee assistance/ stress management programs in the BPOs and recommend a few *Cost – effective gender based stress management programs/ strategies* which BPOs may adopt to reduce their employee's stress level.

Methodology

Sample Selection and Data Description

The research design of the study is descriptive to a large extent and exploratory to some extent. *Survey method* was employed to collect the data with the help of a structured questionnaire..The study has been conducted on the basis of a sample of 500 respondents being confined only to the eight BPOs, two from NOIDA, two from DELHI, two from GURGAON and two from FARIDABAD. The total sample size is presented in the Table No. 1 (Refer Appendix1).The data were collected by administering the questionnaire with the participating respondents.To conduct this study, a total of 600 questionnaires were distributed among the employees working in the BPOs in the NCR. But after the completion of the survey, only 555 employees gave their responses, and in total 250 Males respondents and 250 Female respondents were chosen for the present study. Therefore, in total only 500 questionnaires are included in this study. So the total response rate was 83.3 %.Types of questions in the questionnaire are (a) Five – point Likert Scale (b) Open and Closed ended. (*Perceived stress scale 1995*), (*Camman et al. 1979*), (*Rizzo 1972*), (*Karasek1979*) and (*Mearns et al. 2003*) are the base of questionnaire for this study.

Hypotheses of the Study

1.Null Hypothesis H₀: There is no significant difference in work related and general life stresses among male and female employees in BPOs.

Alternative Hypothesis H_A: There is a significant difference in work related and general life stresses among male and female employees in BPOs.

2.Null Hypothesis H₀: There is no significant difference in perception of effective employee assistance programs among males and female employees in BPOs.

Alternative Hypothesis H_A: There is a significant difference in the perception of effective employee assistance programs among males and female employees in BPOs.

Statistical Tools

a) Chi-square test and Mann- Whitney test have been used to investigate the difference in respondents' point of views on stresses in BPOs for each gender.

b) Correlations were used to measure the level of relationship between different variables in the data.

V. Results and Discussion

Hypothesis Testing

In total two hypotheses have been framed to test the objectives designed for the study. The concluding results of the hypotheses, analysis show that the chi-square test fails to reach significance at the .05 level for the first hypothesis which reveals that there is a substantial difference between the work and life stressors among males and female employees in the BPOs. The data show no support for hypothesis 1 which states that there is no significant difference in the work related and general life stresses among males and females BPOs employees, therefore first hypothesis has been rejected. Assumption for the second hypothesis was that there is no difference in the perception of effective employee assistant programs among males and female employees in BPOs. But when statistical significance was checked by using the Chi square test, it shows that this hypothesis has also not been accepted. Summary table shows the results (refer appendix 2).

Result of Mann Whitney Test

Stress Factors

It is observed from the results of Mann Whitney test (refer appendix 3) that women have ranked personal insecurity as number one stress factor. Rank two is held by gender biases. Next stress factor is harassment in form of kinds and behavior; rank four is held by maternity phase. Fifth rank is given to odd timings of working shifts. On the basis of these ranks and factors, an interesting inference was drawn. 90 % of women in comparison to 10 % men have given responded highly for *gender biases* (Mean Rank = 337.8) as their one of the considerable stress factors. 90.9 % women (in comparison to 9.9 % men) gave the second highest score to the *personal insecurity* (Mean Rank = 341.4). 92.4 % women in comparison to 7.6 % men have been highly scored for *odd timings of working shifts* (Mean Rank = 328.5). In the study, 52 % of women (in comparison to 0 % men) have been ranked *Maternity Phases* as considerable stress, which depicts that despite a common assumption of equalitarian households, *Gender Does Matter*. 69.9 % of women in comparison to 30.1 % men have been reported to show high score for *a hectic office transport facility*. The factual scenario of the transportation facility in the BPO industry is not unblemished. 73 % of women in compared to 27 % men have been responding more for the stress factor *Glass Ceiling*.

The present study clearly shows that factors responsible for stress generation are significantly comparable for males and females. Women consider stressors such as maternity phase, multi-tasking in their lives, glass-ceiling, stereotyped culture, personal insecurity, etc. as a barricade for their career growth in the BPO, s whereas men have ranked *gender inclusivity* as a most significant stress factor. Rank two is held by *role overload*. Next highly ranked stress factor is *role ambiguity*; fourth rank is frequent *traveling/ long traveling time*. Finally rank five was grabbed by *discontented career growth*. On the basis of these ranks and factors, interesting inferences were drawn. 79% of men have scored high for Gender inclusivity (Mean Rank = 328.5) in comparison to 21% of women. 77.6% of males (in comparison to 22.4 % of women) have ranked high percentages in responses for role overload (Mean Rank = 305.4). In comparison to 34.2 % women, 65.8 % men scored high for *role ambiguity* (Mean Rank = 302.1) .

Therefore, from the above analysis, significant differences among stresses for each gender can be easily observed therefore, decision makers may utilize this information while framing employees' welfare policies.

Employee Welfare Program

Results (refer appendix 4) on the bases of the responses of the respondents' scores regarding the effectiveness of existing EAPs /stress management programs reveals that men have given a high score to EAPs which is more inclined towards career aspects, whereas, women have shown high scores for both career and personal security as well. It was found (12.2 %) in the organization want to employ mentoring programs, by which they can learn about time- management skills and can get other counseling related to their situation of life and office. On the other hand (88 %) of the women in comparison to men (12 %) employees in the organization, agreed upon on the arrangement of safe and comfortable office transport. Results have also exposed that (61.6 %) women employees in comparison to (38.4%) male employees says that they would definitely appreciate provision of crèches. In comparison to women employees, (86.4 %) of male employees think that the opening of BPO's forum for employees networking is one of the programs, which they need in contrast, women scored less (13.6 %) for this aspect.

During the study, it was found that (79.3%) male employee in comparison to women (20.7%) of BPOs want to implement management involvement program. Apart from this, male respondents (79.5%) male respondents responded in a high percentage for *Sabbatical Leaves*. Also, 52.8 % males' employees (in comparison to 47.2 % females) have been responded high for *career counseling sessions*.

Management should develop a new vision to design the different rejuvenating activities for their employees which should be gender based. Despite the fact that organizations are practicing various stress management techniques, gender based organizational variables should also be considered while framing these welfare policies and other plan for the organization.

Results of Correlation Matrix

The correlation matrix was used to get first hand information about the interrelationship between the variables.

Stress Factors: Gender differences

For Female Employees

1. The correlation matrix depicts significant positive correlation between following stress factors among female employees.
 - Societal norms and family pressure ($r = 0.955$)
 - Harassment in terms of unkind words and Odd timings ($r = 0.897$)
 - Personal insecurity and hectic office transport ($r = 0.868$)
 - Anxious customers and multitasking roles ($r = 0.848$)
2. The correlation matrix shows weak positive relation between the following stress factors among female employees.
 - Lesser time flexibility and multitasking roles ($r = 0.082$)
 - Glass – ceiling and maternity phase ($r = 0.014$)

For Male Employees

1. Significant positive correlation
 - Discontented career growth and gender inclusivity ($r = 0.929$)
 - Role ambiguity and monotonous work ($r = 0.642$)
2. Weak positive relation
 - Role ambiguity and bureaucratic administration ($r = 0.056$)
 - 24 *7 work culture and frequent traveling ($r = 0.082$)

Employees Assistance Programs: Gender Differences

For Female Employees

1. Strong positive correlation
 - Enforcement of antidiscrimination law and work from home ($r = 0.948$)
 - Arrangement of safe transport and enforcement of anti discrimination law ($r = 0.911$)
 - Workshop on work-life balance and team building activities ($r = 0.867$)
 - Program on career conseling and workshop on work – life balance($r = 0.751$)
2. Weak positive correlation
 - Workshop on work life balance and opening of BPO Forum ($r = 0.056$)
 - Arrangement of safe transportation and team building activities ($r = 0.073$)
 - Opening of crèches and training for building leaders ($r = 0.022$)

For Male Employees

1. Strong positive correlation
 - Provision of LTC and Sabbatical leaves ($r = 0.913$)
 - Recreational excursion activities and opening of BPO forum ($r = 0.862$)
2. Weak positive correlation
 - Mentoring programs and arrangement of safe transport ($r = 0.078$)
 - Fun games/ activities at the office and sabbatical leaves ($r = 0.049$)
 -

VI. Recommendations

Developing Cost- Effective Gender Based Employees Assistance Programs

In this paper, an attempt has been made to make some necessary recommendations for the effective implementation of gender based stress management strategies under cost-effective employee's assistance programs for the BPO's employees. As stressors for men and women and their impact on each gender are not same, therefore same stress management programs cannot be lucrative for each gender. Consequently, if management is spending gigantic amount on such programs, its effectiveness must be ensured in terms of providing benefits to each gender.

Based on findings in present study, it is recommended that the respective management may provide some different and some common EAPs / stress management programs to the males and female employees to make these programs more cost-effective and beneficial.. Apart from the existing EAPs, some of the suggested gender based EAPs are as follows:

For Female Employees

- Promotion of policies on gender sensitivity
- Special provision for women employees to provide them equal opportunities as a compensation of the time period loss due to maternity phase.

- Formation of (action oriented) small committee for antidiscrimination legislation
- Workshop to increase emotional quotient
- Workshop on child care / child psychology
- Programs on time management
- Senior leadership engagement programs
- Multiple communication channels
- Eradication of the root cause: gender discrimination
- Up - to - the minute secure transportation system
- Network forums (separately for each gender)
- Training and counseling on women's rights
- Women cell
- Choice based recreational activities
- Provision of more family friendly policies for women employees
- Jobs / role rotation to overcome the work isolation
- Especial (gender based) assistance programs
- Programs on social awareness .

For Male Employees

- Provision of paid paternity leaves (at least two weeks)
- Alcohol / smoking abuse program
- Shift rotation
- Focused development programs for associates and team leaders
- Promote workers participation in management
- Mentoring programs on managing the right attitude
- Initiate programs to involve more number of males participants for promoting awareness about gender sensitization
- More monetary benefits in form of promotions
- Incorporating (part time) higher education's programs
- Counseling session to set clarity about expectation from jobs and how to increase contentment
- Sessions on management of role overloading and role ambiguity
- Training / awareness session on employment laws / taxes
- Mentoring sessions on career's objectives and job growth
- Sponsorship
- Session on guidelines for financial planning
- Brown bag sessions
- Corporate discounts
- Personal loans

Though Indian society has given a bit more liberty to the males, but even they are also under stress due to increased competitive environment which has been forced employees to work for long hours. Due to technological advancement, economic and social standard requirement, males do not stress management programs.

VII. Conclusion

In the experience of workplace stress - a demographic characteristics *GENDER* plays an important role. Though both male and female employees are managing the challenges of stresses, both at the office and home, but a woman has to fulfill professional and traditional expectation and her stamina, energy, and time is limited. As Stress factors, effect of stress on males and female employees are significantly comparable therefore, this concept can be utilized for development of policies using cost effective gender based stress management programs. Management may provide a few stress management techniques which are especially designed for each gender. The study has concluded that since, there is difference in stressors, impact of stresses on each gender and preferences by each gender on effectiveness of stress management programs provided by their organization, it has become the responsibility of the top management to consider the requirement of each gender and implement *cost-effective gender based stress management EAP's* instead of common stress management programs for both the genders. BPOs must implement these new interventions so that the ideals of the BPOs and deeds of its agents are congruent to ensure a consistent flow of vivacious and motivated manpower in the future.

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Appendix 1

Table 1 Total Sample Size

City	Name of the BPO	Sample
Gurgaon	IBM Daksh	100
	Genpact	100
Noida	EXL	100
	CSC	100
Delhi	Wipro Limited BPO	50
	Snap Deal	50
Faridabad	HCL BPO	50
	DAMCO Solutions	50

Source: Sample size of the Present Study

Appendix 2

S.no	Hypothesis	P values for Statements	Accept /Reject	Statistical Tools Used
1.	Null Hypothesis H0: There is no significant difference in work related and general life stressors among male and female employees in BPOs.	P value is less than ($\alpha = 0.05$) for (23) out of (25) statements used to analyze stress factors aspect in the questionnaire.	Reject	-Chi-Square Test to analyze association between variables among males and females.
	Alternative Hypothesis HA: There is significant difference in work related and general life stressors among male and female employees in BPOs.		Accept	-Mann Whitney U Test to find out mean ranking of variables for each gender.
2.	Null Hypothesis H0: There is no significant difference in perception of effective employee assistant programs among male and female employees in BPOs.	P value is less than ($\alpha = 0.05$) for (23) out of (24) statements used to analyze effectiveness of EAPs aspect in the questionnaire	Reject	-Chi-Square Test to analyze association between variables among male and female.
	Alternative Hypothesis HA: There is significant difference in the perception of effective employee assistant programs among male and female employees in BPOs		Accept	-Mann Whitney U Test to find out mean ranking of variables for each gender.

Source: Summary of Statistical Outcomes of the Present Study

Appendix 3

RESULT OF MANN – WHITNEY U TEST TO FIND OUT MEAN RANKING OF VARIABLES FOR EACH GENDER

Ranks

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Worried and Anxious Customers	Male	250	182.43	45608.00
	Female	250	318.57	79642.00
	Total	500		
Frequent Travel and Long Traveling Hours	Male	250	281.15	70287.50
	Female	250	219.85	54962.50
	Total	500		
Monotonous Work	Male	250	291.79	72947.00
	Female	250	209.21	52303.00
	Total	500		
Multitasking Roles	Male	250	176.83	44207.50
	Female	250	324.17	81042.50
	Total	500		
Odd Timings of Working Shifts	Male	250	172.50	43125.50
	Female	250	328.50	82124.50
	Total	500		
Harassment in Form Of Behaviour and Unkind Words	Male	250	164.44	41109.00
	Female	250	336.56	84141.00
	Total	500		
Bureaucratic and Multinational Administrtion	Male	250	276.05	69012.00
	Female	250	224.95	56238.00
	Total	500		
Lesser Time Flexibility/Work From Home	Male	250	247.35	61838.50
	Female	250	253.65	63411.50
	Total	500		
24*7 Work Culture	Male	250	248.07	62018.50
	Female	250	252.93	63231.50
	Total	500		
Role Ambiguity	Male	250	302.01	75501.50
	Female	250	198.99	49748.50
	Total	500		
No Time For Personal Interest/Hobbies/Passions	Male	250	280.52	70131.00
	Female	250	220.48	55119.00
	Total	500		
Maternity Phase	Male	250	167.15	41787.00
	Female	250	333.85	83463.00
	Total	500		
Gender Biasness	Male	250	163.12	40780.50
	Female	250	337.88	84469.50
	Total	500		
Personal Insecurity	Male	250	159.58	39895.00
	Female	250	341.42	85355.00
	Total	500		
Glass-Ceiling	Male	250	191.23	47808.50
	Female	250	309.77	77441.50
	Total	500		
Discontented Career growth	Male	250	293.46	73364.00
	Female	250	207.54	51886.00
	Total	500		
Stereotyped Work Culture	Male	250	216.51	54127.00
	Female	250	284.49	71123.00

	Total	500		
Job Instability / Financial Insecurity	Male	250	341.42	85355.00
	Female	250	159.58	39895.00
	Total	500		
Hectic / Insecure Office Transport Service	Male	250	201.78	50444.00
	Female	250	299.22	74806.00
	Total	500		
Gender Inclusivity	Male	250	328.50	82124.50
	Female	250	172.50	43125.50
	Total	500		
Electronically Monitored work	Male	250	284.00	71000.00
	Female	250	217.00	54250.00
	Total	500		
Reversal of Body Clock	Male	250	206.67	51667.00
	Female	250	294.33	73583.00
	Total	500		
Role Overload	Male	250	305.40	76350.00
	Female	250	195.60	48900.00
	Total	500		
Societal Norms	Male	250	186.65	46661.50
	Female	250	314.35	78588.50
	Total	500		
Family Pressure	Male	250	176.34	44085.50
	Female	250	324.66	81164.50
	Total	500		

Source: SPSS Outcome

Appendix 4

RESULT OF MANN – WHITNEY U TEST TO FIND OUT MEAN RANKING OF VARIABLES FOR EACH GENDER

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	Total	500		
Role Ambiguity	Male	250	302.01	75501.50
	Female	250	198.99	49748.50
	Total	500		
No Time For Personal Interest/Hobbies/Passions	Male	250	280.52	70131.00
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	Total	500		
Personal Insecurity	Male	250	159.58	39895.00
	Female	250	341.42	85355.00
	Total	500		
Glass-Ceiling	Male	250	191.23	47808.50
	Female	250	309.77	77441.50
	Total	500		
Discontented Career growth	Male	250	293.46	73364.00
	Female	250	207.54	51886.00
	Total	500		
Stereotyped Work Culture	Male	250	216.51	54127.00
	Female	250	284.49	71123.00

	Total	500		
Job Instability / Financial Insecurity	Male	250	341.42	85355.00
	Female	250	159.58	39895.00
	Total	500		
Hectic / Insecure Office Transport Service	Male	250	201.78	50444.00
	Female	250	299.22	74806.00
	Total	500		
Gender Inclusivity	Male	250	328.50	82124.50
	Female	250	172.50	43125.50
	Total	500		
Electronically Monitored work	Male	250	284.00	71000.00
	Female	250	217.00	54250.00
	Total	500		
Reversal of Body Clock	Male	250	206.67	51667.00
	Female	250	294.33	73583.00
	Total	500		
Role Overload	Male	250	305.40	76350.00
	Female	250	195.60	48900.00
	Total	500		
Societal Norms	Male	250	186.65	46661.50
	Female	250	314.35	78588.50
	Total	500		
Family Pressure	Male	250	176.34	44085.50
	Female	250	324.66	81164.50
	Total	500		

Source: SPSS outcome