

Study of physical exhaustion due to stress among business outsourcing employees in Chennai

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Abstract

Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) has been the one of the largest employing sector in India. For many employed in the BPO sector, "the daily experience is of repetitive, intensive and stressful work which frequently results in employee "burnout". The present study was undertaken with the objectives to assess the work load and physical exhaustion due to stress among the business process outsourcing employees. A Cross sectional study was undertaken among 90 BPOs in a private organization in Chennai. One-Third of the respondents do not have 7 to 8 hours of sleep every day and 54% of the respondents complained of frequent headache at work. Majority of the respondents reported lack of memory, while 42.2% of the participants complained that they were losing weight. The outcome of the present study indicates that there is a need for proper addressing of stress related exhaustion in working place.

Keywords: Stress, work load, physical exhaustion,, business process outsourcing

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1.0 Introduction

The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in the global scenario. When a company concentrates on the core business and outsources its non-core activities like payment services, customer services and administration, then it is referred as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO). The BPOs provide all these services to the local as well as the international customers through a wide telecom, web and database network [1,2].

The information technology and ITES-BPO industry in India has grown rapidly, registering a compound annual growth rate of 26 percent over the last decade. The number of ITES-BPO professionals employed in India increased from 2,84,000 (1999–2000) to over 1.6 million (2006–07) [3]. With 70 percent of the workforce in the age group 26 - 35 years, the IT-ITES industry is likely to become one of the largest employers of young adults in India. Even though, the BPO sector has opened up vast career opportunities for young adults, at the same time employment in the sector has an impact on young people's lives. Among the work related problems observed across 26 occupations, the BPO sector was identified as having worse than average scores on three factors namely physical and psychological well being and job dissatisfaction [4]. Typically, each BPO employee responds to a minimum of 100 phone calls per shift [5].

While employment in the BPO sector has meant that young adults are reaching their career

milestones and financial goals much earlier than before, surveys show that workers in the BPO sector experience high levels of stress and employee "burnout" as a result of working in closely monitored environments with pressure to meet ambitious performance targets.

In addition, continuous night shifts create biological imbalance and finally makes them stressful. Burn Out Stress Syndrome (BOSS) affects young people working in BPO offices due to increased depression which affects the well being of the individual [6]. A growing number of employees also experience physical and emotional problems such as panic attacks, depression, relationship problems, alcoholism and sleeping disorders. BOSS not only affects the individuals and the industry but the country on the whole. The problems of BPOs are multi-dimensional in nature and the complex issue of BPOs is worth investigating. Hence investing in BPOs makes sense.

It was strongly felt that employees working in BPOs are at increased risk of developing stress at a younger age. It was therefore decided to carry out the present study among BPOs, as it was felt that they may have scholastic problems of having to cope with the burden of stress and work, in addition to various health problems.

In the present work, an attempt has been done to study the level of work load among Business process outsourcing employees in Chennai and to determine the physical exhaustion due to stress among the Business process outsourcing employees of Chennai

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2.0 Materials and methods

The study was carried out in Cadent Info Solutions Limited, one of the Business Process Outsourcing Services in Chennai working for Multinational companies. It was decided to conduct the study among Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employees as it was felt that,

(1) Business process outsourcing employees are at more risk of developing stress due to their job pattern.

(2) They have to toil for long duration of work time.

(3) As these organizations works for International companies they work as night shifts.

a) Type of study : Cross sectional study.

b) Place of study : Cadent Info Solutions Limited, Chennai

c) Sample size : 90

d) Sources of data collection: Primary Data - Survey method was employed to collect the data from the respondents and the data was collected with the help of Questionnaire.

Table-1: Distribution of employees by age group

Sl No	Age group	Frequency	Percentage
1	20-24	61	67.8
2	25-30	29	32.2
	Total	90	100

e) Sampling:

The study was planned among 100 Business process outsourcing employees. Employees were selected by simple random sampling method. But only 90 of the employees could be contacted and hence the final sample size was 90.

f) Parameters studied:

1. Background: age, gender, education, occupation, income, night shifts.

2. Workload

3. Physical exhaustion

g) Technique and tools used: All the participants chosen were given a pre-tested self-administered questionnaire to fill.

h) Procedure

The Managing Director (MD) of the organization was contacted, the purpose of the study was explained to him in detail and permission was obtained to conduct the study. The total number of employees enrolled in the organization was noted. Using a simple random technique 100 employees was selected for the study. The questionnaire was prepared and field tested among 10 employees of another organization. After making a few modifications based on the responses obtained, the questionnaire was finalized. The pre-tested questionnaire form was given individually to all the participants in the study after obtaining informed consent. The purpose of the study and the contents of the form were explained to them. They were assured that all the information provided by them would be kept confidential. Out of the 100 eligible participants only 90 participants could be contacted finally.

Data analysis

The data was analyzed using Microsoft excel and SPSS (version 17) for calculating summary statistics, mean, and standard deviation.

3.0 Results and discussion

In the study population, majority were males and were in the age group of 20-24 years (Table-1).

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Most of them were undergraduates. All the participants had 6 night shifts per week as they were working for multinational companies. Majority of the respondents (83.3%) were customer support executives, 4.4% were team leaders and quality

controllers. Majority (53.3%) of the participants were getting salary between Rs.10,000 to Rs. 19,000 per month. 35.65% of the respondents had earning less than Rs. 10,000 and the rest 10% of them were getting between Rs. 20,000 to 29, 000.

Table-2: Work load among BPOs

SI No	Symptoms of work load	Yes	Ocasionally	No	Total
1	Given Enough time	80%	0%	20%	100%
2	Upset	33.3%	6.7%	60%	100%
3	Neglected	65.6%	11.1%	23.3%	100%
4	Tension	56%	23%	21%	100%
5	Concentrate	82.2%	2.2%	15.6%	100%
6	Hesitate	36.7%	7.8%	55.6%	100%
7	Role	62.2%	12.2%	25.6%	100%
8	No Information	33.3%	15.6%	51.1%	100%
9	Work load	47.8%	22.2%	30%	100%

It is evident from Table-2 that, majority (65.6%) felt that they were neglected as a team. Almost, 56% of the participants do their work under tension. It was also found that more than three-fourth (82.2%) of the respondents had difficulty to concentrate in work. Majority of respondents feel that their role is against their judgment. Only, 51.1% had necessary information regarding their work. 47.8% of the participants felt that they were overburdened with too many jobs. One- third of the respondents do not have 7 to 8 hours of sleep every day. 54% of the respondents complained of frequent headache at work. Majority of the respondents had minor memory problems like they have tendency to forgets regular things easily. 42.2% of them complained that they were losing weight. Majority of participants became restless while

working and were not comfortable. Almost half of the respondents, (46.7%) of the participants smoke less than half a packet of cigarette everyday and 38.9% of the respondents drink frequent alcoholic drinks. About two- fifth of participants had no one to share their personal feelings. It was also found that 46.7% of the participants have no fun or do not involve in recreation activities (Table-3). Results from the present study shows 47.8% of the respondents are loaded with too many jobs. About 22.2% of the respondents felt that they were sometimes loaded with many jobs. Similar work by Ghazi found that majority 82 percent of the employees experience high level stress due to workload [2]. Observations from other studies show that symptoms and health problems caused or aggravated by work are common

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[7,8]. The present study shows 34.4% get stressed by external persons and another 27.8% of them become stressed sometimes, feedback about job performance, workload and job security are creating more stress [1].

The current study found that all the respondents had six night shifts per week. In India and Philippines night work is common in BPO industry affecting between one-third and one-half of all the

BPO employees respectively [9]. Night work is often associated with occupational safety and health issues such as sleep problems and fatigue [10]. Nearly half of BPO employees reported sleeping problems or insomnia [11]. Thus obtained results are concurrent with Ghazi, which found that majority of the respondents are experiencing stress due to lack of job security [2].

Table-3: Physical exhaustion among BPOs

Sl No	Symptoms of physical exhaustion	Yes	Occasionally	No
1	Sleep disturbances	71.1%	6.7%	22.2%
2	Headache	27.8%	27.8%	44.4%
3	Forget things	38.9%	20%	41.1%
4	Lose weight	42.2%	24.4%	33.3%
5	Restless	52.2%	21.1%	26.7%
6	Cigarette	46.7%	20%	33.3%
7	Alcohol	38.9%	24.4%	36.7%
8	Share with others	38.9%	20%	41.1%
9	Speak openly	48.9%	13.3%	37.8%
10	Fun and recreation	24.4%	28.9%	46.7%

Note: In all the readings, total was 100 %

The present study shows that 22.2% of the employees do not get 7 – 8 hours of sleep every day. Drake et al demonstrated that in individuals with shift work sleep disorder are at risk for significant behavioral and health related morbidity [12]. Moore et al observed that 21% of the service sector employees had disturbance in biological rhythms. Most people experience regular shifts in alertness, mood and energy throughout the day. Research findings indicate that such shifts are related to changes in underlying bodily processes [13]. In occupations such as BPO industry where individuals must

work at times when they would normally be sleeping this biological clock may be deranged. The resetting of the biological clock is draining both physically and psychologically [14]. These effects, in turn have been linked to poorer on-the-job performance, increased industrial and traffic accidents and adverse effects on health [15,16]. Procedures for minimizing such disruptions involves keeping employees on the same shift for several weeks rather than for a short duration [14] as schedule rearrangement gives individuals more opportunity to reset their biological clocks than do weekly changes in shift. Another

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procedure is to expose people who must stay awake at night to bright light just before they would normally go to sleep; this resets their circadian rhythm, so they are stay awake and alert [17]. However, disturbed sleep was reported by 29% of the workers in the other studies leading to sign of fatigue and occupational burn out [18, 19].

Occupational burnout is characterized by impaired sleep. Ekstedt et al [18] suggested that impaired sleep may play a role in the development of exhaustion in burnout. Burnout patients may show pronounced sleep and mental fatigue most of times in weekdays without reduction during weekends. Burn out Stress Syndrome (BOSS) affects young people in the computer field.

In the current study 46.7% of the participants smoke less than half a packet of cigarette everyday, 38.9% are alcoholics and 24.4% are occasional alcoholics. Shailendra et al found that alcohol dependence, smoking, sexual promiscuity and burnout are some of the common traits of some technologically brilliant, emotionally unintelligent or not so intelligent people [20]. Similar observation from another study among BPOs demonstrated large proportion of young BPO employees reported smoking (72% of young men and 43% of young

women) and even larger percentages reported the consumption of alcohol (81% and 64%, respectively) [10].

The present study revealed that 41.1% of participants had no one to share their personal feelings. Studies have highlighted the importance of close parental interaction for the healthy development of youth [21-23], others have noted that young people's interaction with parents is particularly limited when it comes to discussing sensitive issues [24-26].

4.0 Conclusion

Stress issue has become contemporary, being an occupational hazard in fast pacing IT profession, especially among BPOs. It needs to be addressed without delay. Further, it is not only important to identify stress problems and to deal with them but to promote healthy work and reduce the harmful aspects of work. However, as the research is restricted to Chennai, job related stress issues cannot be generalized to other areas of India. As the present study was carried out on limited number of respondents due to time constraint, further studies involving large number of respondents would be more useful in establishing the stress related effects on employees of service sector.

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