Disparity in Stresses among Males and Females in Outsourcing Industry

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ABSTRACT
Outsourcing has become an essential part of the industry in the present era to provide economic balance to the businesses. Multinational companies are looking forward to have their businesses outsourced from India because plenitude of human resources is available here. Earlier, only men were opting for BPO industry for their livelihood, but today a number of women are working in industries. Although everything is not green inside the Indian BPO, s but even then BPO’s work culture has become an attraction for the Indian youth. Researchers had highlighted gender differences in the discussion of stress outcomes. Earlier research suggests that psychological, biological and physical stress is significantly different in females and males. In this research study, we have been describing that how stress operates in the BPO industry. The current study is a comparative study and aimed at analyses and comparison of stress and stress responses by each gender. This research study would also sensitize the management of the BPO, s is regarding their responsibilities to reduce the stress levels of their employees to minimal level by understanding the need of their employees (Male and Female). As stress and stress responses are not same for each gender. 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 by making it gender based techniques. The study also suggested some cost – effective gender based strategies/ recommendations for employees to make a harmonious and vivacious environment in the Indian BPO’s which can be profitable for policy makers, practitioners and employees too.

Key Words: Business Process Outsourcing, BPO, s, Occupational Stress, Stressors, Women Employees, Glass Ieiling, Gender Inclusivity, Gender differences.

1. INTRODUCTION
Hans Selye, a pioneer in studying the influence of stress on the body, once said that it doesn’t stress itself but our reaction to it that's killing us. Stress is a widely spread universal phenomenon. Stress creeps in, when there is increased anxiety and mental pressure. Though Stress seems to be simple to understand, but it is very complex and generally people misunderstand stress. Stress cannot be defined in a rigid way. According to the most definitions of stress, it is caused by physical or psychological stimulus and the response of individuals to unfavorable conditions (stimulus for the stress). Stress is the process of adaptive response of an individual to face the alarming situations (physical or psychological). No one is capable to ignore stress in their life. Though it is invisible, but, every individual and organization is suffering from stress. Stress is the mental condition or state of mind which acts like a disease, though, its response remains non- specific to demand, stress has become a major concern of the modern times as it can cause harm to the employee’s health and performance. In the corporate sector, it requires significant attention, especially in industries such as f BPO, s and ITES in India.

2. BPO INDUSTRY
Early eighties were the time when the term ‘Outsourcing’ has started. Some organization started delegating their functions which were non-core functions and could be easily executed by the external organization which were specialized in providing a particular service, function or product on their behalf. Outsourcing is requirement of today’s competitive world and advantageous in the global corporate world. Back office functions and the front office functions are the two categories of the jobs in BPOs. Whereas, the back office jobs include internal business functions such as procurement and payment, front office jobs include - customer related services such as after sales support and technical support etc. In the recent times, there is an endless job opportunities for those who are willing to render BPO activities
starting from customer calling to data processing and knowledge services, transcription services. Therefore, there is no dearth of BPO Jobs in the current era. In other terms, jobs in BPOs are fairly well paid, which is 2-10 times of the starting salary in any of the other industry. Generally, we have a flat compensation profile but, in BPO industry salaries often increase rapidly with the experience.

3. RELATED WORK

This section reviews the existing literature on gender differences in stresses among male and female BPO s employees carried out by various authors. Hans Selye (1960) [9] defines the stress as a force which can be either physical or Psychological. It is a pressure applied to the human system. Walter Cannon (1945) [4] experimented that different stresses produced a similar response which involves some physiological and psychological ailments inside the body of the living being. In 1964, Kahn et al [7] was the one who proposed the concept of ‘organizational role stresses’. They define ‘stresses as environmental characteristics which affect people adversely. Pestonjee (1992) [12] has attempted to present the nature and consequences of the stress phenomenon. He has 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. Gianakos (2000; 2002) [6] reveals 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. Yu-chi and Keng-yu (2010) [18] had done a research on Taiwanese bank employees. Participants were supposed to complete two questionnaires, one based on work-related stress and another based on the employee’s masculine and feminine characteristics. They found that the masculine characteristics exhibited the less stress level as compared to the feminine characteristics. Bekker, Nijssen et al (2001) [2] 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. Melissa M. Sloan (2012) [10] 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 more happiness then men in the workplace. Sudhashree et al (2004) [13] described that everything is not in a good situation in the BPO industry. This industry has also given a name - ‘BOSS - Burn out Stress Syndrome’.

Alexandros- Stamatios et al (2003) [1] found that role of management in a firm is one of the aspects that affect the stress related to work among employees. Kristiansen, Hellzen and Asplund (2006) [8] 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. 

Role of the Gender:

[Luts, Lois, Pierce & Shields, as cited in Sloan, 2010] [14] 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. Tara M. Chaplin (2008) [15] who is a research scientist at Yale University School of Medicine, found that differences in the responses of women and men to stress are not limited to neurological evidences only. Kenth [9] (2007) suggested that pregnant and the nursing women must be protected from the excessive physical and emotional stress and working in the night shifts. Dr Shelley Taylor of UCLA (2011) [16] has done a research on stress responses for 30 years and recognized that women respond differently to stressful situations. Taylor, Klein et al (2000) [17] 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. It has been reported that there are different types of stress for each gender. Fozia, Khalid (2013) [5] bring into being that males often develop stress due to their career, whereas females often encounter stress due to their interpersonal relationship. Nelson, Burke (2002) [11] women are particularly likely to face role overload and suffer from conflict between demands from different roles. Burke RJ (2003) [3] instigate that in big organizations, data suggests that glass ceiling, gender bias do exist, though the workplace is often symbolized as gender neutral place.
4. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the disparity in stresses among male and female BPO’s employees and their responses to stressful situations.
2. To examine the disparity in perception about existing Employees Assistance/stress management programs in the BPO’s.
3. To recommend ‘stress management programs’ which is gender based and can be adopted by top officials for the optimum utilization of these programs.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of the present study is descriptive to a large extent and exploratory to some extent. Further the study is diagnostic due to the fact that an attempt has been made to see the differences in stresses among male and female employees in the BPO’s sector. The survey population of the study includes only those business process units, which are situated in NCR (National Capital Regions). This study includes in total eight BPO’s situated in NOIDA, FARIDABAD, GURGOAN, DELHI (National Capital Region). The study has been conducted on the basis of a sample of 500 respondents in the area of NCR (Delhi and neighborhood cities). The sample for the study has been taken from the survey population and that is too being confined only to the eight BPO’s, two from Noida and two from Delhi, two from Gurgaon and two from Faridabad. The sampled BPO’s has been chosen on the basis of ‘Stratified Random Sampling’ and for this purpose, the user’s list has been obtained from the sampled BPO’s. Among 500 respondents, 250 males and 250 female executives have been taken for the present research study.

5.1 DATA COLLECTION

The data were collected by administering the questionnaire with the participating respondents. The individual respondents were interviewed with an objective to understand their perception about stresses. Since the nature of the proposed study is empirical and, therefore, the data has been used is mainly primary. However, secondary data have also been used in the study.

5.2 DESIGN AND FORMULATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The data for this research was administering a questionnaire to BPO employees situated in NCR. To conduct this study, 555 employees gave their responses, and in total 250 male respondents and 250 female respondents were chosen for the present study.

Questionnaire contains different categories of questions to collect the demographic details of the employees. Types of questions in the questionnaire were (a) Five – point Likert Scale (b) Open and Closed ended (c) Dichotomous. Items of the questionnaire can be classified in relation to job assignments, skills and traits possessed, stressors, impact of stress, perception about employees assistance programs.

5.3 STATISTICAL TOOLS USED

In order to evaluate the collected data for translating it into valuable information; the following statistical tools have been used.

a) The percentage analysis of each element was done to develop the understanding of the position of each variable.

b) Weighted Arithmetic Mean has been used for the reliable demonstration of the entire data.

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

6. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In the present study, a significant differences between various parameters of stresses and the ‘GENDER’ have been found.

Stressors: Gender Differences
However, stress level between males and females is not differentiable through a formula or a fixed value, but the outcomes of the present study have revealed that stressors, impact of stress on each gender and their stress responses are comparably differentiable on the bases of respondent’s mean percentage responses given by each gender.

The present study, in terms of weighted mean (M), shows that the majority of women are more concerned about the following stressors in comparison to men:

- Multitasking Roles: Female (M= 4.38), Male (M= 3.45)
- Glass-Ceiling: Female (M = 4.23), Male (M = 2.19)
- Gender biasness: Female (M = 3.56), Male (M = 2.34)
- Stereotyped work culture: Female (M = 4.56), Male (M = 3.47)
- Personal Insecurity: Female (M = 3.30), Male (M = 2.45)
- Sexual Harassment: Female (M = 1.45)
- Odd timings of working shifts: Female (M = 4.49), Male (M = 3.24)
- Family Pressure: Female (M = 4.29), Male (M = 2.49)
- Maternity phase: Female (M = 4.29), Male (M = 2.4)
- Harassment in form of behavior and unkind words: Female (M = 3.12), Male (M = 1.45)
- Societal Norms: Female (M = 4.48), Male (M = 1.86)
- Worried and anxious customers: Female (M = 3.75), Male (M = 3.10)
- Lesser time Flexibility/Work from home: Female (M = 3.67), Male (M = 3.05)
- No time for personal hobbies/Interest: Female (M = 4.40), Male (M = 3.54)
- Work-home interface: Female (M = 3.56), Male (M = 1.89)
- Hectic/insecure office transport: Female (M = 4.29), Male (M = 3.65)
- Disturbed work-life balance: Female (M = 3.95), Male (M = 3.26)
- Work isolation: Female (M = 2.48), Male (M = 1.88)

On the other hand, the present study, in terms of weighted mean (M), shows that the majority of men are more concerned about the following stressors in comparison to women:

- Gender inclusivity: Male (M = 4.67), Female (M = 2.54)
- Role overload: Male (M = 3.18), Female (M = 2.15)
- Job dissatisfaction: Male (M = 4.19), Female (M = 3.66)
- Competitive Peer pressure: Male (M = 3.39), Female (M = 2.96)
- Role ambiguity: Male (M = 4.15), Female (M = 3.77)
- Frequent traveling/long traveling time: Male (M = 4.17), Female (M = 2.55)
- Discontented career growth: Male (M = 4.13), Female (M = 3.15)
- Overseas colleagues: Male (M = 2.38), Female (M = 1.94)
- Bureaucratic and multinational administration: Male (M = 2.65), Female (M = 2.05)
- Jobs instability/financial insecurity: Male (M = 4.06), Female (M = 3.45)
- Remunerations: Male (M = 4.47), Female (M = 3.91)
- Monotonous work: Male (M = 2.78), Female (M = 2.09)
- Health disorders: Male (M = 3.68), Female (M = 3.06)
- Electronically monitored work: Male (M = 4.37), Female (M = 3.77)
- Overtime Male (M = 2.68), Female (M = 1.87)

The impact of stress: Gender Differences

Apart from stressors, impact of stressful responses in stressful situations on each gender is also notably comparable in this study. While both sexes share the capacity to fight or flight, females seem to use it less than men at time. Also men handle their stress logically whereas women handle their stress
emotionally. Women often seek support to talk out the emotional experience, to process what is happening and what might be done. Whether its friends, family, or a support group, women like to tell their stories. As we described, that responses in stress outcomes can be often characterized as *tend and befriend* among women whereas, *fight or flight* among men. The presented study has also supported this observation through results outcomes.

Based on the data analysis, the present study in terms of weighted mean (M) shows that the majority of women are more concerned about following factors as their perception of the impact of stresses on themselves in comparison to men:

- Poor memory: Female (M= 4.65), Male (M = 4.05)
- Increased industrial accidents: Female (M= 2.78), Male (M = 2.15)
- Moodiness: Female (M= 4.17), Male (M = 1.95)
- Emotional weaknesses: Female (M= 4.24), Male (M = 1.89)
- Afraid of isolation: Female (M= 4.18), Male (M = 2.45)
- Psychological impact: Female (M= 3.98), Male (M = 2.43)
- Lack of concentration (Female: M= 4.17), Male (M = 3.35)
- Poor performance: Female (M= 2.59), Male (M = 2.45)
- Depression: Female (M= 2.87), Male (M = 2.01)
- Lack of enthusiasm/initiatives: Female (M= 3.85), Male (M = 3.01)

On the other hand, the present study in terms of weighted mean (M) shows that the majority of men are more concerned about following factors as their perception of the impact of stresses on themselves in comparison to women:

- High churn rate: Male (M= 4.18), Female (M = 3.15)
- Lower decision making skills: Male (M = 3.68), Female (M = 3.05)
- Increase in absenteeism: Male (M= 3.58), Female (M = 2.95)
- Decrease in quality of work: Male (M= 4.39), Female (M = 3.65)
- Less sociable: Male (M= 4.10), Female (M = 1.89)
- Binge alcohol consumption/smoking: Male (M= 4.38), Female (M = 1.86)
- Self destructive behavior: Male (M= 4.16), Female (M = 2.68)

**Employee’s Wellness Programs: Gender Differences**

Though there are many factors responsible for an ill-environment of the organization, but stressed employees are significant which affects efficiency and loyalty of employees and hence growth/production of the organization. Though stressful environment is an integral component of any corporate sector, especially the BPO industry, but permissibility of stress into any organization must be up to a manageable limit because, beyond a limit, person’s individuality starts getting affected and its consequences might include unhealthy environment in organization, loss of productivity, increased conflicts among stakeholders, high attrition rate of talented employees of each gender which results in no profitable returns. Hence, responsibility of top level management arises to plan effective stress management / wellness Programs which can reduce the stress level of their employee. According to Hofboll et al (2011), studies have found that the provision of workplace support is more effective in reducing occupational stress in men than in women. Thus a good leader/management should be aware of these essentials and plan employees’ welfare policies accordingly. The present study has also highlighted the preferences of male and female employees in terms of their perception about the effectiveness of EAP, s for them provided by the management of their organization.

Based on the data analysis, the present study has shown that female employees place more emphasis on the need to following employee’s welfare/stress management programs:
Today management does take care of their employee’s wellbeing in all respect. This may be due to good philosophy of top management or pressure by the employee’s trade union, human rights association, enforcement by employment laws or provision of corporate social responsibility. BPO’s firms are providing number of employee’s wellness /stress management programs, but effectiveness of various EAP’s is not guaranteed. Hence, present research is supporting new interventions in these programs by suggesting the concept of gender based EAP’s.

In view of the present study, male employees place more emphasis on the need to following employee’s welfare/ stress management programs:

- Recreational/ Excursion activities (at least for 5-6 days): (Male (M= 4.06), Female (M= 3.20)
- Opening of BPO’s forum for employees networking( Male (M= 4.13), Female (M= 2.55)
- Training for building manager/leaders: Male (M= 3.88), Female (M= 3.15)
- Provision of sabbatical leaves: Male (M= 4.15), Female (M= 2.54)
- Programs on career counseling: Male (M= 4.40), Female (M= 3.45)
- Sports Tournaments (cricket etc): Male (M= 4.29), Female (M= 3.20)
- Medical insurance: Male (M= 4.57), Female (M= 3.97)
- Fun Games/Activities at office: (Male (M= 3.48), Female (M= 2.85)
- Discounts/family passes on Gym/health club: (Male (M= 4.19), Female (M= 3.15)
- Alcohol substance abuse program Male (M= 4.38), Female (M= 1.97)
- Training/awareness session on employment laws/taxes: Male (M= 4.25), Female (M= 3.09)

In the view of the observations, the study reveals that out of the forty (40) stressors included in the questionnaire (which were extracted from literature review), majority of women shows more concern about eighteen (18) stressors in comparison to men. On the other hand, majority of men shows more concern about fifteen (15) stressors in comparison to women. In spite of this, there were seven (7) stressors whose value of mean differences was not significant (here mean differences ≥ 0.5 was considered as significant difference) for both the gender. Similarly out of twenty (20) factors to analyze impact of stress on respondents, majority of women have given high score (mean value) to ten (10) factors in comparison to men. On the other hand, majority of men gave high score (mean value) to seven (7) factors in comparison to women. Out of ten, only three (3) factors were found almost common in
them. Further analysis has also shown that female employees place more emphasis on the need to twelve (12) employee’s welfare/ stress management programs out of twenty seven (27) EAP’s included in the questionnaire whereas, male employees place more emphasis on the need to eleven (11) employee’s welfare/ stress management programs out of twenty seven (27). Out of twenty seven, only four (4) factors were found almost common in them.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In medicines, the community recognizes the need to fit into gender based treatments differences in their treatment practices, it’s time for the business community to do the same in their employee wellness - programs and also their management training efforts. Understanding of how gender matters in businesses, not only in terms of how someone performs and communicates, but also in terms of how employees are managed, is a key step in creating a 21st century’s workplace characterized by harmonious, stress free, cohesive and vivacious to maximize the productivity of their employees. Management must think about their employees critically along with their machinery, methods, materials and money.

Thus, as stressors for 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 both the genders. In today’s competitive working environment, if management wants to go for output based employee welfare programs to lower down the stress level of their employees, it must include gender based techniques. If this uniquely designed gender based stress management programs will not be introduced, the success rate of such EAP’s cannot be ensured. Management must know the requirement of gender based stress management techniques to get more benefits out of these well-being programs. Thus, this is recommended that EAP’s programs should not be generalized in the BPO sector. A gender based recreational program may become a result oriented program. It would be beneficial for the employees and management as well.

The focus on women in the BPO industry is an acknowledgement of their growing role in India’s economy. Analysts state that there is a direct correlation between the employment of women and the economic well being of a nation. BPO companies must further refine their policies and processes to strongly influence the participation of women in key leading projects and identify procedures that can be restructured to encourage participation of women in organizational decision making activities. Companies must have to understand the requirement of managing stress among women employees to make the environment conducive for them to retain skilled talented women.

Based on our findings, it is recommended that the respective management may provide some dissimilar and some common EAP’s/stress management programs for the male and female BPO, s employees to make these programs more cost-effective and beneficial to both the gender. Apart from the existing EAP, s, some of the suggested gender based EAP, s are as follows:

For Female Employees
- Policies to promote gender sensitivity
- Equal / benefits / opportunities as a compensation of the time period loss due to maternity phase.
- Small committee formation (action oriented) to enforce women’s security laws
- Emotional Quotient Enhancement’s workshop
- Seminars on child care
- Training to learn time management skills
- Women engagement programs in senior management
- Manifold channels to communicate
- Elimination of gender discrimination
- Secure transportation system
- Separate network forums (each gender)
Counseling over women’s rights
Women cell
Training / Role play for higher level jobs
Rotation of jobs
Selective recreational activities
Family friendly policies for women employees
Facilities to overcome work isolation
Especial (gender based) assistance programs for employees
Social awareness

Therefore, women can become skilled at performing their responsibilities at the office along with their personal roles.

For Male Employees
- Paternity leaves (at least two weeks paid leave)
- Smoking, substance abuse program
- Shift rotation
- Increase their job loyalty and satisfaction by promoting worker participation in management.
- Promotion about awareness, about gender sensitization
- More monetary benefits
- Provision of higher educations (part time) programs
- Sessions on expectation from jobs and contentment
- Sessions on gender - egalitarian to mold perception of male about gender inclusivity
- Training session on management of role overloading and role ambiguity
- Training / awareness session on employment laws / taxes
- Session on job growth and career objectives
- Financial planning guide plan
- Brown bag sessions
- Corporate discounts

Consequently, the current study reveals that top management of IT industry, especially BPO,s is more concerned regarding diminishing the stresses among their employees to improve their production. It is advisable to the BPO, s management to initiate such effective stress relieving programs, rather than to just impose common EAP, s stress reducing programs for each gender. Although many stress diminishing programs and gender equality programs are being enforced in the IT sector. But the impact of stresses on each gender, their stresses, and perceptions about EAP, s by each gender are different, then common EAP, s can not resolve this problem completely. Thus, the responsibility of the top management is to understand the importance of gender based stress management EAP’s / strategies rather than common stress management programs for each gender. These new interventions must be implemented by the BPO, so therefore, congruence in the standards of the BPO, s and its conduction can be achieved and effervescent environment can be maintained.

8. LIMITATIONS
1. NCR as sample for the study cannot represent the true picture.
2. Sample size of 500 respondents due to financial restraint, can also affect the results
3. The approval of ‘Stress management programs based on gender’ might not be easily possible.

9. SCOPE FOR THE FURTHER RESEARCH WORK
1. Latest data can be added by the future researchers on gender difference in stresses.
2. Various functional areas of organizations can be added for future researches.
3. Unpredictable environment of BPO’s is based on the international business, so repetitive study is required to get latest results time to time.
REFERENCES


