EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AND VULNERABILITY STATUS DUE TO STRESS AMONG BUSINESS PROCESS OUTSOURCING EMPLOYEES IN CHENNAI

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ABSTRACT

Background: *A growing number of employees in BPOs experience physical and emotional problems such as panic attacks, depression, relationship problems, alcoholism and sleeping disorders. In this background the present study was undertaken with the objectives to determine emotional exhaustion due to work load and vulnerability status among the business process outsourcing employees in Chennai* ***Methods:*** *A Cross sectional study was undertaken among 90 BPOs in a private concern in Chennai. Pretested structured questionnaire was used to collect the data.* ***Results:*** *It was found that 66.7% of the participants were emotionally drained by their work. Only 40% of the participants were able to think clearly. Majority of the respondents feel that they are useless totally or sometimes. Almost half of the participants under the study find it extremely difficult to take decisions. It was also found that 53.4% of the participants become nervous and 34.4% get stressed by external persons. Almost, 41.1% of the participants felt that were unable to think clearly. Almost half of the participants were reluctant to take risk. Majority of the respondents had suicidal ideation crossing their mind at some point of time. 42.2% of the participants rarely explain things nor apologize. It was revealed that 44.4% of the participants do work for reward. 41.1% of the participants get depressed after victory.* ***Conclusion:*** *The study concludes that emotional exhaustion vulnerability is high among BPOs. It needs to be addressed without delay.*

Keywords: Stress, Emotional exhaustion, Vulnerabity, Business Process Outsourcing employees

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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). BPO sector employment involves, for the most part, such activities as customer care services, data entry and analysis, payment processing services, audit checks for companies and so on. BPO provides all these services to the local as well as the international customer. Typically, each BPO employee responds to a minimum of 100 phone calls per shift (Sharma, 2009).

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 information technology and ITES-BPO professionals employed in India increased from 2,84,000 in 1999–2000 to over 1.6 million in 2006–07 (Government of India, Annual report, 2007-2008). 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.

The new mantra for job opportunities among young population is "BPO center". Aside from attractive salaries, the attractive work environment and benefits offered by the BPO sector have motivated many young adults to seek employment in this sector (Sharma S, 2004). But the BPOs are having low levels of job satisfaction and most stressed regarding physical and psychological well being (Sheena, 2009).

The employment in the BPO sector has meant that young adults are reaching their career milestones and financial goals much earlier than before, surveys and anecdotal evidence show that workers in the BPO sector experience high levels of stress as a result of working in closely monitored environments with pressure to meet ambitious performance targets. Burn Out Stress Syndrome (BOSS) affects young people working in call centers, BPO offices due to increased depression which affects the well being of the individual (Satish, 2005). A growing number of employees also experience physical and emotional problems such as panic attacks, depression, relationship problems, alcoholism and sleeping disorders.

The problems of BPOs are multi-dimensional in nature. It was strongly felt that employees working in BPOs are at increased risk of developing stress at a younger age. It was therefore

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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. Some strategies to cope up with stress are also suggested.

Objectives:

1) To determine emotional exhaustion due to work load among the Business process outsourcing employees of Chennai

2) To study vulnerability status among the Business process outsourcing employees of Chennai.

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 usually work as night shifts.

(4) Safety to the employees is to be questioned especially during night shifts.

a) Type of study **:** Cross sectional study.

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

c) 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 pretested structured Questionnaire.

d) Sampling:

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The study was planned among 100 Business process outsourcing employees. By this, 100 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.

e) Parameters studied:

1. BACKGROUND: age, gender, education, occupation, monthly income.

2. EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

3. VULNERABITY STATUS

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

G) 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 oral 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. Using the questionnaire, necessary details was collected from the participants.

Data analysis

The data was analysed using Microsoft excel and spss - version 17 for calculating summary statistics, mean, standard deviation.

RESULTS

In the study population majority was males and were in the age group of 20-24 years. Most of them were undergraduates. All the participants had 6 night shifts per week as they were working for multinational companies.

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The proportion of employees with symptoms of emotional exhaustion due to stress is given in Table 1. It is evident that majority (66.7%) of the respondents, felt that they were emotionally drained by their work. 32.2% of them felt that life is a burden and 17.8% sometimes felt that life is a burden. About 40% of the respondents were able to think clearly. 23% of them felt that were able to think clearly only sometimes. Nearly 35.6% of the respondents felt that they were useless when their boss scolds them for small mistakes. Only 18.9% of the respondents felt they were useless sometimes. 48.9% of respondents find it extremely difficult to take decisions at work. 23.3% of them have difficulty in taking decisions sometimes. Majority (53.4%) of the participants become nervous when the organization requirements are not met. 11% of them sometimes exhibit such an attitude. About 41.1% of the respondents can't think clearly. About 22.2% of them felt hat they are unable to think clearly sometimes. 34.4% get stressed by external persons and another 27.8% of them become stressed sometimes.

Table 2 exhibits vulnerability status due to work stress. Majority (58.9%) of the participants are ahead compared to others. 37.8% of the respondents love to take risk when the stakes are high. 21.1% of the respondents take risks sometime. About 23.3% of the respondents become mad sometimes and 20% of the respondents become mad and do not become normal quickly. 21.1% felt that suicidal ideation comes to their mind sometimes. However, 32.2% of them felt that suicidal ideation had crossed their mind at some point of time. Almost 42.2% of the respondents rarely explain things or apologize. 21.1% of them apologize sometimes. 40% of the respondents feel that life is serious of achievement and challenges and 22.2% of respondents sometimes felt that life is serious. About 44.4% of the respondents expect to be rewarded for their work. 41.1% of the respondents get depressed after a victory. About 30% of them get depressed sometimes.

DISCUSSION

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. (Messenger and Ghoshel, 2010). Night work is often associated with occupational safety and health issues such as sleep problems and fatigue (Vaid). According to Ghazi, majority of the respondents are experiencing stress due to lack of job security (Ghazi, 2006).

Majority (66.7%) of the participants were emotionally drained by the work in the current study. Ekstedt et al suggested that impaired sleep may play a role in the development of

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exhaustion in burnout (Eksdedt et al., 2006). 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 due to increased depression.

The current study observed 45.6% of the respondents become nervous and 14.4% sometimes exhibit such an attitude when the organization requirements are not met. Bhuyar et al found that anxiety was reported in 55% of the workers. This was significantly higher in international call centre compared to domestic call centre (Bhuyar et al., 2008). Generally it is believed that some stress has positive effects on individuals which is referred to as "Challenge or Positive Stress" but when stress goes beyond the amount which you are not been able to handle then both physical and mental alterations may arise.

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; (Laird et al., 2003, Marta, 1997, Sroufe, 1991), others have noted that young people's interaction with parents is particularly limited when it comes to discussing sensitive issues such as boy-girl relationships (Alexander et al., 2006 a, Alexander et al., 2006 b, Lambert and Wood, 2005, Mehra et al., 2002).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that emotional exhaustion vulnerability is high among BPOs. Stress issue has become contemporary, being an occupational hazard in fast pacing IT profession, especially among BPOs. It needs to be addressed without delay.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At organizational level, well designed coping strategies have become the attention of these sectors. Successful employers and managers provide leadership qualities in dealing with the challenge of work stress. It is important that the workplace is being continuously monitored for stress problems.

Stress can make an individual productive and constructive when it is identified early and well managed. In times of great stress or adversity, it's always best to keep busy, to blow anger and energy into something positive. Positive attitude and meditation will be helpful for

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coping the stress. Having broader perspective of life will definitely change the perception of stress.

LIMITATIONS

As the research is restricted within Chennai, results are not applicable to other areas of India. Limited number of respondents has been chosen due to time constraint and this could affect the accuracy of result to certain extent.

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Table 1: Emotional exhaustion among respondents

S.No	Symptom of emotional exhaustion	Yes	Sometimes	No	Total
1	Drained	66.7%	3.3%	30%	100%
2	Burden	32.2%	17.8%	50%	100%
3	Think	40%	25.6%	34.4%	100%
4	Useless	35.6%	18.9%	45.6%	100%

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5	Decision	48.9%	23.3%	27.8%	100%
6	Nervous	53.4%	11%	35.6%	100%
7	Unable to think	41.1%	22.2%	36.7%	100%
8	Stress	34.4%	27.8%	37.8%	100%

Table 2: Vulnerability status among respondents

S.No	Symptoms of vulnerabity	Yes	Sometimes	No	Total
1	Ahead	58.9%	5.6%	35.6%	100%
2	Risk	37.8%	21.1%	41.1%	100%
3	Normal	56.7%	23.3%	20%	100%
4	Suicide	46.7%	21.1%	32.2%	100%
5	Apologize	42.2%	21.1%	36.7%	100%
6	Challenge	40%	22.2%	37.8%	100%
7	Rewarded	44.4%	15.6%	40%	100%
8	Depressed	41.1%	30%	28.9%	100%

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