

Stress Is the Order of Day - A Critical Analysis of BPO Employees

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ABSTRACT

Hans Selye was one of the founding fathers of stress research. His view in 1956 was that "stress is not necessarily something bad – it all depends on how you take it. The stress of exhilarating, creative successful work is beneficial, while that of failure, humiliation or infection is detrimental." Selye believed that the biochemical effects of stress would be experienced irrespective of whether the situation was positive or negative. Since then, a great deal of further research has been conducted, and ideas have moved on. Stress is now viewed as a "bad thing", with a range of harmful biochemical and long-term effects. These effects have rarely been observed in positive situations. The most commonly accepted definition of stress (mainly attributed to Richard S Lazarus) is that stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that Demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize. In short, it's what we feel when we think we've lost control of events. This is the main definition used by this section of Mind Tools, although we also recognize that there is an intertwined instinctive stress response to unexpected events. The stress response inside us is therefore part instinct and part to do with the way we think. In the most severe cases it can lead to panic attacks or a panic disorder. There are a variety of methods to control chronic stress, including exercise, healthy diet, stress management, relaxation techniques, adequate rest, and relaxing hobbies. Ensuring a healthy diet containing magnesium may help control or eliminate stress, in those individuals with lower

levels of magnesium or those who have a magnesium deficiency. Chronic stress can also lead to a magnesium deficiency, which can be a factor in continued chronic stress, and a whole host of other negative medical conditions caused by a magnesium deficiency. It has been discovered that there is a huge upsurge in the number of people who suffer from this condition. A very large number of these new cases suffer from insomnia. In a review of the scientific literature on the relationship between stress and disease, the authors found that stress plays a role in triggering or worsening depression and cardiovascular disease and in speeding the progression of diabetes.

Key Words: *instinctive stress-stress management - relaxation techniques- chronic stress - depression - psychological reaction - emotional stress - social stress - fatigue - Poor nutritional status.*

INTRODUCTION

Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) services play a very important role in the economic life of the nation. The health of the economy is closely related to the soundness of its Management system. BPO services not only create new wealth, their activities are spread over to various sectors of service industry. In this way they become very effective partners in the process of economic development and generating employment in the service sector since the 1980's, in both public sector companies and private foreign-controlled companies as well. The increase has been most marked in metropolitan cities.

Stress is found in all aspects of life. Stress is defined as a nonspecific response of the body to a stimulus or event. Stress is also defined as the “pressure or anguish resulting from difficult situations”. It refers to workers not being able to adapt to work and, therefore, involves some biological and psychological reaction. Several studies among various occupations regarding stress have been conducted. “Stress on family life may arise from both the schedule and the content of work”. It affects negatively on both the individual and organization as well. It prepares body for defense. Work overload has a strong influence on work exhaustion and sooner or later causes number of diseases. General Stress includes three scales; measuring general stress, emotional stress, and social stress with their consequences. It is important to note that absence of clearly defined work schedule increases the stress and impacts their health. A large number of BPO employees is said to complain of frequent headaches, back pain, fatigue and high blood pressure. Also factors such as Poor nutritional status, anemia, tension, concentrated attention required by some jobs in industries related to garments, electric appliances, gems, jewelry etc, which demands intellectual or mental activities increase fatigue. A large number of BPO employees complain of symptoms such as irritability, mood swings, and depression, sadness and concentration problems. **Role stress** is the stress experienced by the persons because of their role (job) in the organization. They assume a role based on the expectation of the self and others at work place. A lot of research has been conducted into stress over the last hundred years. Some of the theories behind it are now settled and accepted; others are still being researched and debated. During this time, there seems to have been something approaching open warfare between competing theories and definitions: Views have been passionately held and aggressively defended. What complicates this is that, intuitively we all feel that we know what stress is, since it is something we have all experienced. A definition should therefore be obvious...except that it is not.

Objectives of the study:

The general objective being a critical study on stress and its impact on BPO employees, the specific objectives of the present study are as follows,

- To find out the profile of employees in BPO centers.
- To assess the problems of the BPO center employees.
- To evaluate the stressful conditions among the BPO center employees.
- To assess the stressful conditions influenced by socio-economic factors.
- To examine the coping mechanisms adopted in order to release the work stress, and
- To suggest measures to cope up with the work stress

Research Methodology

Five hundred and Sixty BPO employees in the age group from 18-55 years above were selected from various BPO industries. They were from different income groups. Their marital status could be single/married/divorced/widows. The place selected for conducting the present study is in four metropolitan cities like Visakhapatnam, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai. Employees selected for this study were assured of absolute anonymity. The questionnaire method was used to gather information for the study. Based on the objectives of the study, the Standardized Questionnaire was distributed. The present study was an attempt to provide a practical and positive approach of using social support as a coping technique to BPO employees under stress.

FACTOR ANALYSIS:

Descriptive Statistics

Table 5.1		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Job Stressors	.2089	.57539
Physical Health	1.3476	.92842
Job Stress	.6185	1.63153
Role Stress	.3415	.95176
Coping Strategies	2.5847	.56685

The above table depicts the Average scores and its standard deviation of each and every dimension of stress and its Impact.

Table 5.2

Correlation Matrix

	Job Stressors	Physical Health	Job Stress	Role Stress	Coping Strategies
Correlation	1.000	-.468	-.336	-.340	.301
Physical Health	-.468	1.000	.414	.375	-.517
Job Stress	-.336	.414	1.000	.909	-.718
Role Stress	-.340	.375	.909	1.000	-.791
Coping Strategie	.301	-.517	-.718	-.791	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)					
Job Stressors	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Physical Health	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Job Stress	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Role Stress	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Coping Strategie	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. Determinant = .034

The above table is an abridged version of the R-matrix. The top values of this table contain the Pearson correlation coefficient between all pairs of the factors whereas the bottom values contain the single-tailed significance of these coefficients. We can use this correlation matrix to check the pattern of relationships. First scan the significance values and look for any variable for which the majority of values are greater than 0.05. Then scan the correlation coefficients themselves and look for any greater than 0.9. If any are found then there is a problem of singularity in the data and we have to remove those variables.

The above table brings to notice that there is a significant correlation between each and every pair of variables. The determinant of the matrix of this data is 0.034 which is greater than 0.00001. So multi-co linearity is not a problem for this data. The negative value of the r-value indicates that there is a negative correlation between that pair, For instance, the relationship between Job stressors and physical health gives the negative correlation which suggests that has the job stressors is increased then the physical health is decreased.

Table 5.3

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.691
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square = 888.479
	df = 10
	Sig. = .000

The above table reveals the KMO statistic which varies between 0 and 1. A value of 0 indicates that the sum of partial correlations is large relative to the sum of correlations, indicating diffusion in the pattern of correlations (hence the factor analysis is likely to be inappropriate). A value close to 1 indicates that patterns of correlations are relatively compact and so factor analysis should yield distinct and reliable factors. Here the value is nearer to 0.7 so we can say that the range of being is good.

Bartlett's measure tests the null hypothesis that the original correlation matrix is an identity matrix. For factor analysis to work we need some relationships between variables and if the R-matrix were an identity matrix then all correlation coefficients would be zero. Therefore, we want this test to be significant (i.e., have a significance values less than 0.05). A significant test tells us that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix; therefore, there are some relationships between the variables we hope to include in the analysis. For these data, Bartlett's test is highly significant (p<0.001), and therefore factor analysis is appropriate

Table 5.4

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
Job Stressors	1.000	.306
Physical Health	1.000	.442
Job Stress	1.000	.801
Role Stress	1.000	.825
Coping Strategies	1.000	.766

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The above table shows the communalities of extraction. Principal component analysis works on the initial assumption that all variance is common; therefore in initial the communalities are all 1. The communalities in the column labeled extraction reflect the common variance in the data structure. So, for example, we can say that 30.6% of variance associated with stress and its impact is common, or shared, variance. Another way to look at these communalities is in terms of the proportion of variance explained by the underlying factors.

Table 5.5

Total Variance Explained

Comp	Initial Eigenvalues		Total of Variamulative		n Sums of Squared L	
	Total	% of Variamulative	Total	% of Variamulative	Total	% of Variamulative
1	3.139	62.788	3.139	62.788	3.139	62.788
2	.963	19.266	4.102	82.053		
3	.558	11.153	4.660	93.206		
4	.264	5.287	4.924	98.493		
5	.075	1.507	5.000	100.000		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

The Eigen values associated with each factor represent the variance explained by that particular linear component and also display the Eigen value in terms of the percentage of variance explained so factor 1 explains 62.788 % of total variance. It should be clear that the factor explain relatively large among of variance whereas subsequent factors explain only small amounts of variance. There is only one factor extracted among all with Eigen value greater than 1.

FINDINGS

- It is analyzed from the questionnaire filled by the BPO employees that the majority of the BPO employees working in the bank (60%) are completely satisfied with the flow of information in the organization.
- (45%) employees are completely motivated by their work to perform their job
- Due to high stress BPO employees are suffering from loss of appetite, headaches, insomnia mostly

- Inadequate guidance and back up from superiors they are facing high level of stress
- Due to the domination of the opposite sex, BPO employees are facing stress at high level
- From the survey it is also observed that in order to cope up with their stress levels the BPO employees try to manage their time effectively, set priorities and deals with the problems accordingly.
- The above analysis is done by the data received from the questionnaire. So the accuracy of data depends upon the response of the employees.
- It is proved in respective of the respondents opinion that these five dimensions i.e., job stressors, Physical health, Job stress, Role stress and Coping Strategies are combined together to get the stress and its impact.
- Out of the total sample of 560, half of the respondents opined are dispassionate with the dimension job stresses.
- 82.63% of the respondents are facing the health problems due to their stress in their respective jobs.
- 64.17% of the respondents opined that they are feeling job stress.
- 60% of the respondents opined that they are felling role stress.
- 98.25% of the respondents from all the four organizations are opined that there are managing strategies.
- There is significant positive relationship between Physical health's, Job Stress and Role stress with education whereas there is a negative relationship between the coping strategies and education Further there is no change in the opinion of the respondents on the dimension job stressors as the education increases.
- There is significant positive relationship between the Job stress and coping strategies with experience whereas there is a negative relationship between the dimensions Physical health, Job stress and Role stress with experience.

- The relationship between number of children and physical health is significant. Further, there is no significant relationship between the independent variable number of children and the dependent variables such as Job stressors, Job stress, Role Stress and coping strategies
- There is a significant correlation between the dependent variable Number of sick leaves and the independent variables Physical health, Job stress and Role stress. Further, there is a significant negative relationship between the independent variables Job Stressors and coping strategies with the dependent variable Number of sick leaves.
- Organization has no significant impact on all the dimensions related to stress and its impact on BPO industry as all the employees opined in unanimous way.
- Age has impact on all the dimensions related to stress and its impact on BPO industry as the employees opinion is changes as their age changes.
- With regard to all the dimensions related to stress and its impact on BPO industry designation has a significant impact.
- As the marital status of the respondent changes then the perception of the respondent changes all the five dimensions.

Task: Organize *Stress Management training programs'* with specific human resource development goals in consultation with Senior Management.

Prerequisites:

Successful Stress

Management training programs' requires the involvement and support of top officials and the cooperation from employees. It depends upon a clear plan, ongoing evaluations of progress, and clear goals for measuring success.

Stress management Strategies

1. Take adequate steps to redesign jobs, which are taxing to employees' abilities and capacities.
2. To reduce the workload role slimming and role adjustment process should be resorted to.

3. Encourage the cross-functional and interdepartmental work arrangements to reduce work related stress among low performers and low achievers.
4. Facilitate role enlargement, role linkage and role enrichment to manage role isolation, self-role distance and role erosion.
5. Adequate role clarification to be made whenever necessary to eliminate role ambiguity.
6. Introduce more job oriented training programs, which improve employee's skill and their confidence to work effectively.
7. Do concentrate on career planning to manage role stagnation.
8. Encourage open channel of communication to deal work related stress.
9. Let the employee clear about hard work related reward and smart work related reward.
10. Adequate resources i.e., material, technical and human, should be extended to make employee feel safe and secure to perform their work effectively.
11. Undertake stress audit at all levels in the organization to identify stress area improving conditions of job and alleviating job stress.
12. Ensure justified use of grievance handling procedures to win trust and confidence of employees and reduce their anxiety and tension related to job related problems.
13. Encourage involvement of leaders and personnel at various levels in all phases of strategic interventions to ensure successful and long-standing interventions.
14. Formulate HRD interventions and individual stress alleviation program.
15. Introduce 'Pranayam' (Brain Stilling and control of Vital Force) as a holistic managerial strategy to deal with occupational stress.

16. Provide counseling on work related and personnel problems and support from a team of welfare health and counseling staff.
17. Attractive system of reward and recognition of good work.
18. Ensure an organizational climate with career planning and career growth to ensure further the retention of talented employees.
19. Extend the counseling practices at employee family level including dependents and relatives.
20. Effective follow up should be made to different leave category absentee employees.
21. Organization should organize regular check up and those found suffering from very high stress should be subjected to stress management process.
22. Cut back excessive hours, which directly affect the employee's physical fitness.
23. Develop realistic self-concept among employees that is neither inflated nor deflated.
24. Encourage management to practice proactive approaches rather than reactive approaches as a strategic step.

CONCLUSION

The productivity of the work force is the most decisive factor as far as the success of an organization is concerned. The productivity in turn is dependent on the psychosocial well being of the employees. The key stressors which affect maximum number of BPO professionals are Poor Peer Relations, Intrinsic Impoverishment and Under-participation. This is because BPO employees are becoming more and more career conscious, they want to accept challenges, improve performance and want to become socially and economically independent. The BPO professionals were of the view that now a day it was difficult to survive on single income, so their working is very much accepted by family members. The family members try to adjust their roles within the family and a change is being felt in their attitudes also. Besides this, due to better working conditions, better

transportation facilities and improved technology, the stress on BPO professionals is reduced and their efficiency has increased. They have the support of their family and friends and are able to cope better with stress. Social support provides us with important benefits in terms of both physical and emotional health. Some of the other benefits of social support include improved marital and job satisfaction and lower stress levels. If the BPO women professionals want to be accepted as efficient homemakers as well as employees, they have to make use of effective stress management techniques, use appropriate coping patterns, must be optimistic and have a positive attitude in life.

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