

SOCIO ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN IN BPOS SECTOR IN TRICHY, TAMILNADU

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ABSTRACT:

According to the Government of India, the Ministry of Information Technology estimates that in 2007 - 08 the information technology BPO industry will provide direct employment to 2 million people in India. Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) is also known as subcontracting or externalizing. BPO was originally used in the manufacturing industry, but is now used in a variety of business processes. Over the years, women have used their opportunities effectively and have proven again and again that they are no worse than others. Negotiations and initiatives to empower women at the pinnacle of the 21st century give women ample opportunity to stand out in the BPO sector. Currently, women are playing a leading role in both the public and private sectors, and women are actively participating in all areas. The development of the business process outsourcing sector is significant compared to other sectors in India. Women in this country are already empowered and play an important role in business processes and information technology. BPO's employment and career opportunities are a welcome choice for women.

The main objective of this study was to understand the challenges faced by women working in the BPO sector. This study was based on primary data collected by Trichy City Corporation in Tamil Nadu. The survey method was chosen to efficiently collect data from respondents. Research shows that women working in BPOs face a variety of challenges and challenges at work. Some problems are certainly common, such as mental and physical stress, lack of proper work-family balance, ill-treatment at work, stressful life and discrimination at work. However, some problems depend on age or category, for example, prejudices and stereotypes, security issues, etc.

Key Words: Women, Employees, BPO, Information Technology Communication (ICT).

INTRODUCTION:

Business process outsourcing (BPO) refers to the process of contracting standard business functions to be performed by a third party outside the company. Business process outsourcing (BPO) is a type of outsourcing in which a company hires a third-party service provider to perform one or more business functions. Third parties are responsible for all operations related to business functions.

According to the 11th Five-Year Plan (2007-2012), information technology and communications (ICT) can play an important role in addressing gender inequality, directly benefiting women who use technology, and improving the delivery of services to women. This is also reflected in the relatively high proportion of women employed in India's IT & BPO sector compared to other sectors of the economy. The impact on gender equality is not limited to cities. There are also examples of how ICT is being used to expand women's income opportunities, develop productive skills for disadvantaged women, and provide knowledge-based services that help improve the productivity of women's businesses in small towns. Communication technologies provide opportunities for women to engage in e-commerce, distance education and e-government, overcoming barriers to women's economic development. Especially in scenarios where face-to-face contact with other men is not encouraged, women can enter the economy through virtual marketplaces and jobs that electronic infrastructure can provide through e-commerce sites, virtual hosted call centers, etc.

The global proliferation of software and IT services has opened up new perspectives for Indian women. The main resource required to outsource software and services in India is a continuous supply of skilled technical personnel or “knowledge workers”. Although the industry does not typically choose tech jobs, it is believed to provide good employment opportunities for women with the knowledge base and flexibility needed to adapt to the outsourcing industry.

According to a NASSCOM report, the BPO industry favors women because of their better voice and attitude when interacting with customers. In India, almost 70% of all young people work in BPO. Women workers make up about a third of the total workforce in India's business sector. Important factors that motivate women to enter the IT sector are relatively high wages, easy international mobility, knowledge-based gender-neutral policies, flexible work schedules and job search with less demanding work processes in a comfortable internal work environment (Upadhya: 2006).

Today, women occupy an important position in the labor market. According to NASSCOM, the focus of the IT & BPO industry on women is in part recognition of the growing role of women in the Indian economy. Indeed, India's IT & BPO industry has become synonymous with truly groundbreaking work involving women workers, and more than any other industry in India, the sector is launching initiatives to advance women's interests in the workplace.

Although women make a significant economic contribution to the BPO industry, there are still many challenges and challenges for women workers to address. Some of the key concerns include safe transportation, flexible working hours, night shifts, socio-cultural factors and sexual harassment. Despite the fact that the Indian government has established strict rules and regulations regarding the safety and protection of women working in FWC and call centers, murder and rape cases are on the rise in India. Based on this, the main objective of the study was to understand the challenges faced by women working in the BPO sector.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Howcroft and Richardson(2008) in their article “ICT enabled services- will women benefit?” pointed that encompasses that the subcontractors of the call-centres provide less training and pay lower wages and employees have lower levels of job discretion, more intense monitoring and weaker collective representation. Employers prefer young, single women, with a good education and rapidly shifting technologies tend to see the remuneration of young new hires rather than experienced workers. Underlining the assembly line nature of the work, employers require flexible working, which frequently prevents women with families from jobs during off-peak hours. The authors however, concluded that although labour market issue in the global market cannot be “black boxed” with the formal being divorced from the prevalent and expanding informal economy, where many women workers are concentrated. Far from re-shaping women’s lives and creating new opportunities, ICT –enabled service work offers limited benefit to women, especially the poor.

Preeti Singh and Anu Pandey (2005) in their study “Women in Call Centres” reflected one of the basic facts that most of the women employed in call centres are basically in the process job. There is no discrimination against women in the entry level but a very few are in the top management level. This study also highlighted that most of women employed are unmarried

who take up this jobs and drop out of their jobs to get married and bear children. Although this study is completely dedicated to the women employed in the call-centres but the limitation is that it is exploratory in nature and covers only 100 respondents at a random.

Ramesh (2004) and Singh and Pandey (2005) reported that for many women workers, the job is not a economic necessity but is a supplement to the family income or is something they have taken up as a ‘pastime’. This is true especially for women from middle and upper-middle class families, and explains both the absence of a desire for upward mobility and the fact that many women continue to work only as long as the job does not interfere with their domestic responsibilities. However, for many of those from lower income groups, their earnings are the major source of family’s income.

Pradhan and Abraham (2005) in their study titled “Social and Cultural Impact of Outsourcing: Emerging Issues from Indian Call Centres” mentioned that employment in call centres for women is still considered to be less dignified work due to the odd working hours and is also sexually stigmatized. According to the study, perhaps the most important negative impact that call centres have generated is the wide-ranging social division within family and outside. Most of the call centre employees neither possess the necessary skills to be employed in the high-end BPO sector nor the skills to get other professional work; this has a serious social and cultural repercussion.

Rekha Pande (2005) cited that a large number of women tend to be concentrated in the end-user, lower skilled jobs and comprise a very small number among managerial, maintenance and design personnel. The call centres are utilizing the available human resource of a large pool of English speaking youngsters. But the concluding remark of Pande emphasized that call centres are unavailable to really change gender relation but facilitating the growth of gendered division of labour.

Mattingly (2005) pointed out in her study “Indian call centres: The outsourcing of ‘goods jobs’ for women” pointed out that the work in monotonous and grueling, night work and regular shift changes take a huge toll on health and social life, many work place have mandatory overtime, leaves can be difficult to get, the pace of the work is brutal and most workers neither advance in the industry nor learn hard skills they can use in getting another job. But at the same time, the work offers young women a mean of escaping the rigid patriarchal control exercised over middle class daughters. The social stigma associated with the job violates norms

surrounding the middle class women's employment and does not bring status to the men in their families.

Vijaybhaskar (2000) and Ghosh (2003) has recommended that the sector shows clear signs of labour market segmentation by gender, where women are engaged in low-paid and less skilled occupations, thereby reinforcing or aggravating the existing gender inequities in the labour market. It has been observed that while the proliferation of ICT based jobs will certainly draw more educated women into paid jobs and reduces the problem of educated unemployment to some extent; it would not bring about any major transformation in aggregate employment patterns in the near future.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the socio-economic profile of women employees working in the BPOs.
2. To study and analyze the socio-economic, socio-cultural and health related challenges faced by working women in the BPOs sector.

METHODOLOGY:

The following methodological procedures were used to conduct this present study.

a) Type of Research Design:

Descriptive research design was adopted for the present study.

b) The Universe and the Sampling Design:

The present study was conducted in the urban and suburban area of Trichy with a selection of BPO employees. A convenient sampling method was adopted for a more accurate and simple study. A sample of 70 women employees was selected for primary data collection.

c) Methods of Data Collection:

Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires, discussions with BPO employees, and personal observations as data collection tools. Secondary data were collected from books, magazines, journals, articles, published reports, newspapers, the Internet, and unpublished reports.

d) Analysis and Interpretation of Data:

Statistical tools such as percentages and averages used in data analysis. The collected data were analyzed by computer using SPSS 16.0 and Excel software. The results were used for analysis and interpretation.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

A) Respondent’s Profile:

The profile of women employees in BPOs, their age, caste category, family residence, their education, marital status and family’s monthly income data has been analyzed and the results are presented in Table-1.

Variables		Frequency	(%)
Age	18-25	24	34.00
	26-30	21	30.00
	31-35	14	20.00
	36 and above	11	16.00
Caste category	No Comments	46	65.71
	SC	10	14.29
	BC	14	20.00
Family residence	Sub Urban	29	41.43
	Urban	41	58.57
Education	Graduate	25	35.71
	Post Graduate	19	27.14
	Diploma	16	22.86
	Other (ITI, etc.)	10	14.29
Marital status	Married	21	30.00
	Unmarried	49	70.00

According to the data shown in Table no-1, majority (24 or 34%) women employees working in the BPOs are between 18-25 years of age. Very few of them are above 36 years. Majority (46 or 65.71%) women employees said no comments to caste category and their family residence from urban area (41 or 58.57%). Majority (25 or 35.71 %) respondents have completed graduation, 16 (22.86%) respondents have completed diploma, 19 (27.14 %) respondents have completed Post-graduation and remaining 10 (14.29%) respondents have completed ITI education. Very few of the women employees are married (21 or 30.00%). Most of them are unmarried (49 or 70.00%).

Reason for joining BPO Sector:

It was very interesting in this study to know the reason behind joining the BPO sector from women respondents. Multiple responses are reported by respondents and these are distributed in table no. 2

Table No. 2: Reason of the joining the industry

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Can't get a better job	17	24.29
Not much educational qualification Required	13	18.57
Good work environment/culture	16	22.86
Good benefits/ Pay Packages	13	18.57
Attractive Life-Style	11	15.71
Total	70	100.0

The above Table no-2 reveal that according to majority (17 or 24.29 %) of respondents, the most predominant reason why employees choose the BPO sector is that, they did not get a better job than that of this sector. While, 13 (18.57%) reported that good pay packages are their major factor behind joining the BPO sector, 13 (18.57%) respondents give preference to BPO sector because not much qualification required here and 11 (15.71%) because of attractive life style. Respondents, also cite reasons of work-culture, as other contributing factors in decreasing order of priority.

Work Experience:

The classification of respondents on the basis of their work experience has been given in Table no. 3.

Table No. 3: Work Experience of the Respondents

Experience (Yr.)	Frequency	Percentage
Below 1 years	26	37.14
1 to 3 years	32	45.71
above 3 years	12	17.14
Total	70	100.0

Most of the respondents (32 or 45.71%) are new in the BPO sector with an average of 1-3 years experience of service. The next most numbered years of service experience are below 1 year (26 or 37.14%).

B) Challenges Faced by Women Employees

There are many socio-economic, socio-cultural and health related challenges faced by the women employees in call centers. The responses of the respondents regarding these challenges are presented below.

Socio-economic Challenges:

The responses of the respondents regarding socio-economic challenges are presented in table no. 4.

Table-4: Socio-economic Problems faced by Women Employees

Challenges	Agree	Disagree
Lack of family support	11 (15.71%)	04 (5.71%)
Work-Life Imbalance	08 (11.43%)	03 (4.29%)
Lack of socialization	09 (12.86%)	02 (2.86%)
Gender Discrimination	13 (18.57%)	04 (5.71%)
Financial problems	14 (20.00%)	02 (2.86%)

The major socio-economic problem faced by women employees is lack of socialization. 12.86% of the respondents agree for they have no time to socialize and many of them have lost many friends as they are unable to spend time with them. 11.43% of the respondents agree that they have faced many problems related to their work-life imbalance. 15.71% of the respondents said that due to odd timings and less salaries they have faced the problem of lack of family support. 20.00% of the respondents said that they have faced financial problems also as the salaries drawn by them are very less to meet their own expenses, then savings and rearing families is out of question. 18.57% of the respondents have complained about gender discrimination.

Socio-Cultural Challenges:

The responses of the respondents regarding socio-cultural challenges are presented in table no. 5.

Table-5: Cultural Challenges faced by Women Employees

Challenges	Yes	No
Unequal respect	15 (21.43%)	04 (5.71%)
Sexual harassment	09 (12.86%)	05 (7.14%)
Drug addiction	03 (4.29%)	06 (8.57%)
Illegal Relationships and Affairs	06 (8.57%)	05 (7.14%)
Unhealthy Comments by co-workers	13 (18.57%)	04 (5.71%)

The above table no. 5 shows, majority (15 or 21.43 %) of respondents feel that they have faced the challenge of unequal respect from the male co-worker. 12.86% reported that they faced sexual harassment at the workplace. 4.29% of the respondents reported that they have faced the problem of drug addiction e.g. smoking and drinking at the workplace but 8.57% of the respondents said that this has become the part of work culture and they are comfortable with it. 8.57% of the respondents said that they have faced the problem of illegal relationships and affairs with partner. Less than half (13 or 18.57%) of the respondents said that they faced the problem of unhealthy comments by their co-workers as they use language about which they were not aware of and they use slangs which are not common with them.

Health Challenges:

Stress has affected employees working in all sectors, especially the service sector. Professional stress or job stress poses a threat to physical and mental health. Work related stress in the life of employees, would affect the well-being of the organizations as well. The most important stress causing factors are: the pressure to achieve the targets, work timings, work load, irate customer, etc. Therefore it is interesting in this study to know that the employees who works in BPO are face any health problem due to their nature of work.

The classification of respondents on the basis of their opinion about facing health challenges due to nature of their work has been given in Table no. 6.

Table No. 6: **Opinion about Facing Health Problems**

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	36	51.43
No	34	48.57
Total	70	100.00

The above table no. 6 shows, majority (36 or 51.43 %) of respondents feel that due to their nature of work they face various health hazards/problems like: nervousness, chronic fatigue, body ache, insomnia, anxiety, restlessness, depression, vision problems, etc. Less than half (34 or 48.57 %) respondent's feel that they have not face any health problem due to nature of work.

CONCLUSION

Conclusions on the challenges of women employees in the BPO sector based on analysis of responses: Women are discriminated against in all areas of their lives. Women are enslaved, dominated and exploited at work and at home. Women are generally unable to devote adequate and quality time to their families, thus balancing work-life and providing for their families. Working women commonly face sexual harassment, gender discrimination and financial problems in the workplace. Stress at work causes them to face a variety of health problems in life. The woman is the creator and now assumes the role of head of the family. Support from the community and family is essential to uplifting their spirits, and equal treatment in the workplace is equally important to success in life.

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