

A Study on Factors Affecting Gender Inequality and Occupational Health Issues among Women Employees in Business Process Outsourcing Units

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Abstract

In today's world, women are equal participants and shoulder the responsibility equally with men. More women would venture into the fields that have historically been dominated by men in the future. Women will generate revenue and feel more fulfilled as a result of this. The governments of practically every nation make extensive arrangements for the advancement and enforcement of women and help to maximize their potential. Women contribute significantly to every aspect of the economy. The extent of contribution of women entrepreneurs and workers to the nation's economy is evident from a tiny hamlet to a big city. This study aims to highlight the main factors responsible for gender inequality, workplace health issues among women employees, and suggests remedial measures to eradicate these inequalities at Business Process Outsourcing Units so that women can carve a niche for themselves in this sector.

Keyword: Gender equality, Gender Diversity Challenges, Women Employees, Call Centre, Business Process Outsourcing.

Introduction:

In addition to being a basic human right, gender equality is also a prerequisite for a world that is sustainable, affluent, and peaceful. It is attained when girls, boys, women, and men all have equal rights, opportunities, and circumstances, as well as the ability to influence their own lives and make advancement in the society. In the areas of education, healthcare, economic resources, employment, leadership roles, involvement in political life and decision-making, and contributing to the social, political, and economic advancement of a country, it entails equal opportunities for women, men, and transgender individuals. For instance, it can suggest that in order to achieve healthcare equality, men and women should be compensated equally for performing the same tasks or that they should receive separate medical care using different medications and techniques ^[1]. Like any

other industry, the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector faces difficulties in implementing gender equality. Since hiring new employees and keeping existing ones are essential to their services, BPO firms may even have to deal with this problem more.

Women make up nearly one-third of the BPO industry, and they play a significant role in it. The need for female professionals in the BPO industry has been heightened by technological advancements and specific requirements and legal developments. Easy admission and exit, decent compensation, low educational requirements, and lifestyle are the main reasons for the people to enter this field. However, they deal with significant problems such as changeable work schedules, night shifts, transportation, sociocultural aspects, and sexual harassment ^[2].

Gender Equality

The equal rights, obligations, and opportunities of men and women, as well as girls and boys, are referred to as gender equality. Women and men will not become the same as a result of gender equality. By stating that men's and women's rights, obligations, and opportunities will not be based on their gender, it instead aims to eradicate gender inequity. In addition to being a human rights concern, gender equality is seen as a prerequisite for and a sign of long-term, people-centered development.

Gender diversity challenge in BPO Industry

Due to the call centre's night shift, Western culture and lifestyle, and the perception of a youthful workforce, BPO jobs were viewed as a less respectable career choice for women in India. A few years ago, working for a BPO company raised doubts about the woman's reputation and negatively affected her family's reputation. Put another way, working at a call centre has led to a wide range of social divisions both inside and outside of families. Creating a more welcoming atmosphere also helps workers feel that their employer values them, which boosts morale, productivity, and loyalty^[3]. Employers benefit commercially from these features, which enable them to maximize their staff and retain talent, especially women who are planning to extend their family.

Factors Responsible for Gender Inequality in India

Preference for Sons: Girls have always been viewed as an undesirable burden that parents do not mind getting rid of. Women are discriminated right from the moment of their birth. The horrific crimes of infanticide and female foeticide demonstrate just how cruel the world can be to women. Religious customs that are allegedly exclusive to men, such as the fact that sons are frequently the only ones allowed to perform their parent's funerals, provide for their elderly parent's financial security, carry on the family name, etc., are another significant element.

Discrimination at Job: Due to the widespread perception that married women are typically forced to quit due to job and family obligations, marriage, and pregnancy, employers are interested in recruiting more young women. When it comes to the same labour, women are paid less than males.

Relationship between Women Empowerment and Gender Equality

There are connections and entanglements between the ideas of gender equality and women's empowerment. The first and most important requirement for women's empowerment is the advancement of gender equality [4]. At the same time, empowering women is a fundamental requirement of the quest for gender equality. Therefore, gender equality and women's empowerment both compliment each other.

We see the different barriers that stand in the path of women's empowerment. Women are making every effort to effectively manage both their personal and work life. However, a number of obstacles are preventing them from doing so. Only until we eradicate problems like wealth inequality and gender bias will we be able to demonstrate progress. Encouraging women and granting them the same rights as men will benefit society overall in addition to women's status. Women must therefore be granted the freedom to make their own decisions as well as take concrete safety measures they need in order to feel powerful and secure.

Need of motivation

The ability of BPO workers to become resilient in the face of stress is one factor contributing to their job happiness. It can be psychologically and emotionally taxing to work at a call center because of the large frequency of client inquiries and problems that must be addressed. Notwithstanding, these workers have demonstrated an impressive ability to adjust to the demands of their jobs while keeping a cheerful disposition. Because of their resilience, they are able to deal with challenging circumstances well, which results in a feeling of accomplishment and job satisfaction. Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) workers have continuously shown job satisfaction and a strong will to accomplish their life goals, despite the inherent stress that comes with high-pressure work environments like call centers. Maintaining a feeling of identity and lowering turnover intentions require an awareness of and comprehension of the elements that influence this drive [5]. Employees can use this information as a compass for both professional and personal development by understanding what truly drives them and the reasons behind their decision to remain in the field. It emphasizes how important financial security, wholesome relationships, and supportive leadership are affecting employee engagement and retention. People can make well-informed judgments regarding their professional pathways and cultivate a feeling of purpose and dedication to their work by comprehending these underlying motivators. As a result, this research is a useful tool for employers and workers alike, helping them to establish a work environment that fosters employee happiness, boosts output, and eventually helps the BPO sector to succeed in the long run.

Review of Literature

Despite the development and civilization, India still engages in the heinous practice of female foeticide. Many families view girls as a burden and a source of difficulty, and they have no qualms about using whatever methods to stop them from being born. Such behaviours are a result of the traditional patriarchal attitude, which holds that a girl kid will be married off to another family while a male child will provide for the family and carry on the family line (Gender Discrimination, 2016) [6].

Violence and abuse against women are not only crimes but also violations of women's human rights, and gender inequity is a global issue. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women also recognizes that rape and other gender-based violence impact women's freedom and equality (Ignatius, 2013, p. 13–14) ^[7].

In their study "Women in Call Centres," Preeti Singh and Anu Pandey (2005) ^[8] reflected one of the fundamental facts: the majority of women working in call centres mostly perform procedural jobs. Women are not discriminated against at the entrance level, but very few hold high management positions. This study also showed that the majority of working women are single women who quit their occupations to marry and have children. Despite the fact that this study is entirely focused on the women who work in contact centres, it has the drawback of being exploratory in nature and only randomly selecting 100 respondents.

In their research on "Gender, Technology, and Development," Clark and Sekher (2007) ^[9] posed the question, "Can career-minded young women reverse gender discrimination?" They created the aforementioned context with Bangalore's high-tech industry in mind. They acknowledged that economic development is a key driver of the accelerated demographic transition and societal change. Furthermore, as more young women enter the new global job market, which offers ostensibly glamorous occupations with handsome salaries, regardless of its risks and insecurities, the idea of the "male breadwinner" gradually giving way to gender transformation towards an equal double-income family will most likely intensify.

According to Pathak S. (2011) ^[10], professional women in India encounter a variety of opportunities and difficulties. It seeks to give a broad picture of the adjustments needed to address the largest issue facing women's, stress. The article also discusses coping mechanisms that can be used to enhance women's advancement in companies and the path towards gender inclusiveness. BPO workers put in twenty-four hours a day. Women are separated into two categories: office and home. They are under pressure to manage two worlds as a result. Women's perceptions of men as leaders would be another obstacle. The essay therefore recommended actions to reduce gender bias. recommended tactics. It even recommended that women should receive time management training for both the workplace and the home. Career counselling, cultural events, and networking forums were a few more suggestions.

J. Y. Suchitra, Lahoti Rahul, and Swaminathan Hema (2012) ^[11] point out that there is a significant disparity in asset ownership between men and women. The impact of rural women's property ownership on their mobility and decision-making autonomy is examined in this research. In addition to building on the empirical literature that addresses the significance of asset ownership for women, the study was conducted to quantify the level of gender differences in wealth and asset ownership in the state. Married women were more likely than single women to be homemakers, which may indicate that women are not permitted to work until there is financial hardship in the home. Therefore, the results of this study highlight the necessity of stepping up governmental measures meant to expand women's asset base and close the gender asset gap. The study's conclusions highlight how crucial work is to women's lives.

Just as vital as physical and mental well-being is psychological stability. Long workdays can disrupt and negatively affect BPO employees' psychosocial well-being. There are several workplace stressors in BPOs. These can include erratic job hours that interfere with their social and family lives. Additional pressures could include fast-paced workloads and erratic duty schedules that cause safety issues with mobility. According to the case study cited by the BPO Workers of Association of the Philippines (BPOWAP, 2015) ^[12], psychological stressors could also be a significant contributing factor to health problems.

Disruptive family relationships, a lack of recreational opportunities, alcohol and tobacco usage, and unhealthy eating habits were all signs of numerous psychosocial issues. According to Sharan (2003), the Health and Safety Executives (HSE) have defined work/occupational stress as "the adverse reactions people have, to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them" ^[13].

In their paper titled "A study on Home related pressures of working women," Sujatha Mellacheruv (2008) ^[14] claims that women are joining the workforce, obtaining recognition, and selecting demanding professions. They consequently deal with a range of demands both at work and at home. Women who have to care for elderly family members or smaller children at home face significant pressures related to their homes. Conversely, women who have grown children and who have the support of their family members are under less stress. These women use a range of coping mechanisms to handle pressures from the home.

In their paper titled "Problems of Women Employees in Call Centre's," Dr. P. Akbar Batcha (2007) ^[15] argues that women working in contact centres should be granted all equal rights like other working women and not treated like slaves. The human rights and dignity of people, especially those of their female co-worker's, should be brought to the attention of employers and male co-worker's, including cab drivers who transport people home at night.

Objectives

- To study concept of gender equality
- To study factors responsible for gender inequality
- To study women worker percentage in BPO industry
- To study health problem faced by gender in BPO
- To study average number of workers per firm
- To study BPO market

Research Methodology

A research technique is a general approach to addressing a study topic through data collecting, analysis, and conclusions derived from the study's findings. The researcher has used descriptive research method as it explains the existing conditions of gender inequality and occupational stress among women employees in BPO sector.

The study is based on secondary data collected from various sources like Journals, books, Magazines, Published Research Paper, Government reports like Nasscom, NSO and Grand View Research.

The analysis is done through review, comparison, graphical representations and interpretations of the available existing data.

Result and Discussion

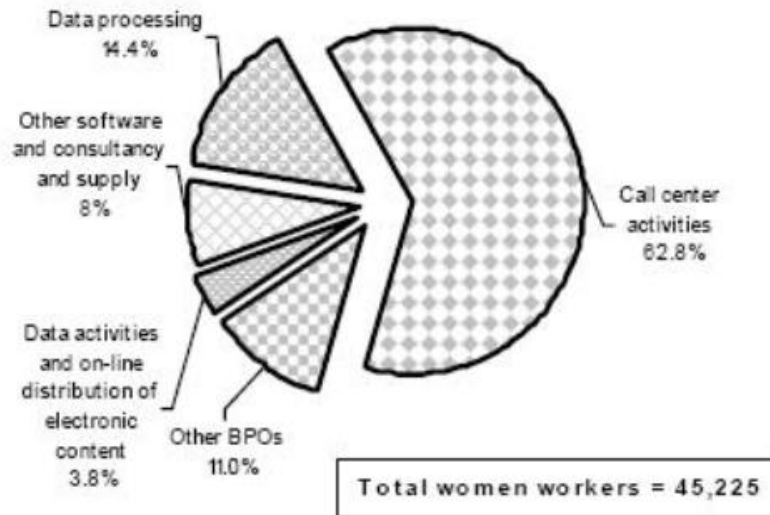


Fig. 1 Percentage Distribution of women workers in BPO Industries

Source : (NSO,2005 Annual Survey of Philippine Business and Industry)

An average of 15 women were employed by business process outsourcing companies. The top five industries that outperformed the average for all BPOs were call centre operations, data processing, medical transcription, software publication, and animated film and cartoon creation.

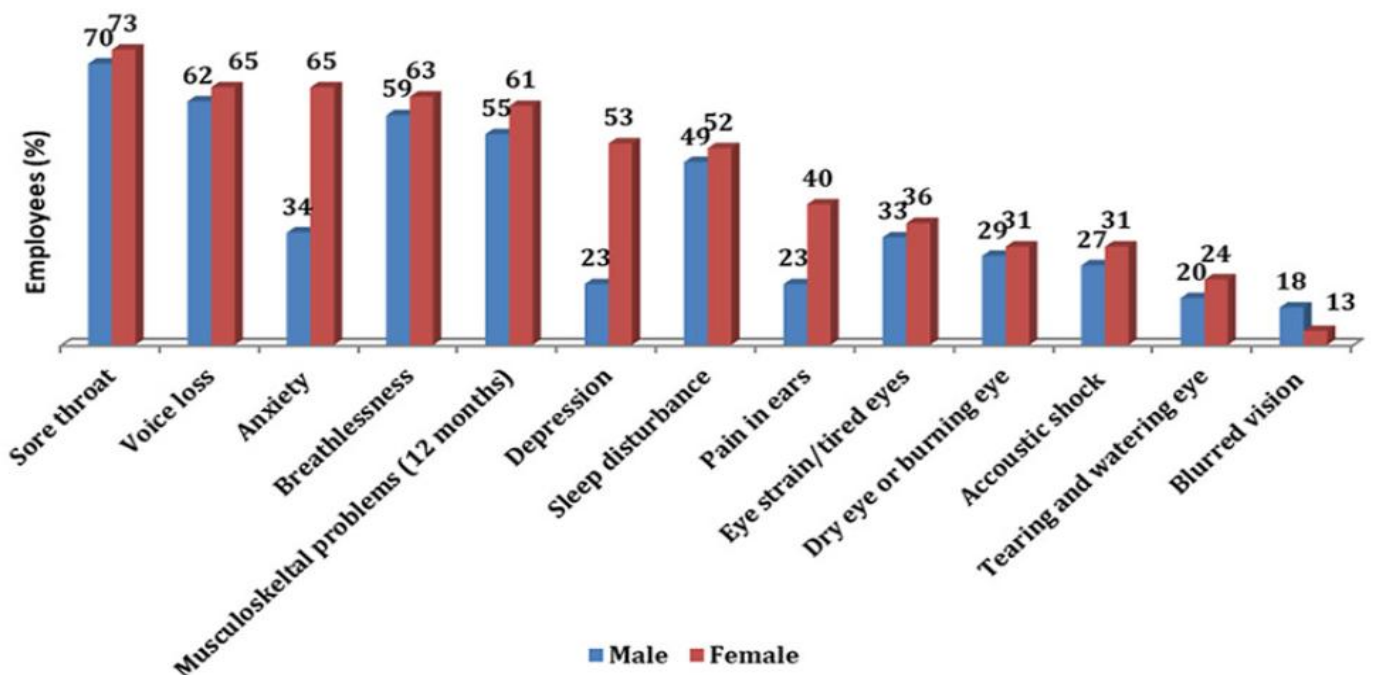


Fig. 2 Gender differentials in health problems among BPO employees.

Source: (Gupta, A., & Sekher, T. V. (2023). Call Centres and Associated Health Hazard for Women Employees: A Review of Health Implications for Women Employees of Transnational Call Centres in India. SAGE Open, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231192152> (Original work published 2023))

The employees' primary physical health issues were musculoskeletal, sleep, eye, and ear issues, as well as throat-related issues. The most common complaint among female employees was throat-related issues ^[16]. Over three-fifths of the women experienced throat-related issues, including voice loss, painful throats, and dyspnea. Musculoskeletal issues were the second most common health issue (61%). Pain in the wrist, hands, shoulders, neck, and lower back were among the musculoskeletal conditions. Additionally, a sizable percentage of the staff members experienced issues with their eyes and ears. Eye-related issues included eye strain, dry or burning eyes, frequent weeping and watering of the eyes, and blurred vision, whereas ear-related issues included acoustic shock and ear pain. Due to the nature of their jobs, slightly more than half of the female employees suffered from depression, and almost two-thirds were prone to anxiety-like symptoms while at work.

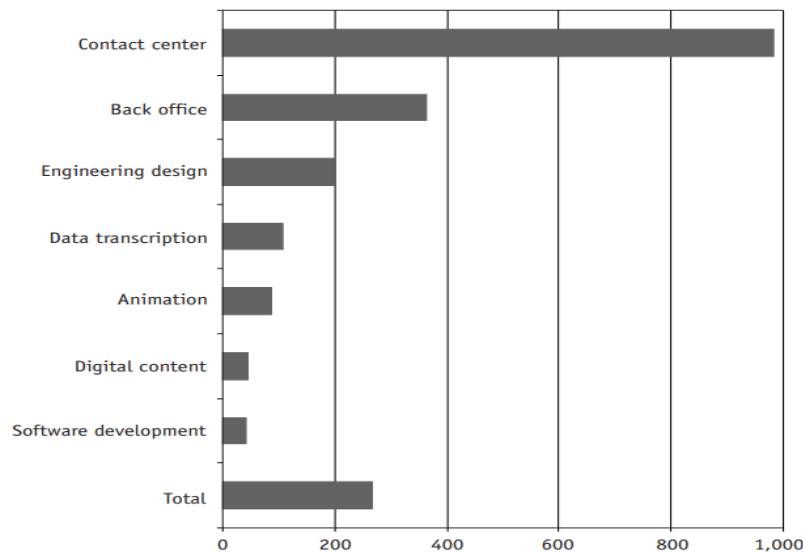


Fig. 3 AVERAGE NUMBER OF WORKERS PER BPO FIRM

Source: (Magtibay-Ramos, Nedelyn & Estrada, Gemma & Felipe, Jesus. (2007). An Analysis of the Philippine Business Process Outsourcing Industry. ERD Working Paper Series. 1-53. [10.2139/ssrn.4921534](https://ssrn.com/abstract=4921534).)

With an average of 1,000 employees, contact centres are the top employers in the sector in terms of employment size; this is roughly four times the size of the typical Philippine BPO company. With an average of 360 employees, back-office operations companies rank second in size after contact centres ^[17]. With the exception of engineering design, which employs roughly 200 people per company, the other BPO subsectors are tiny businesses with a maximum workforce of 100 employees.

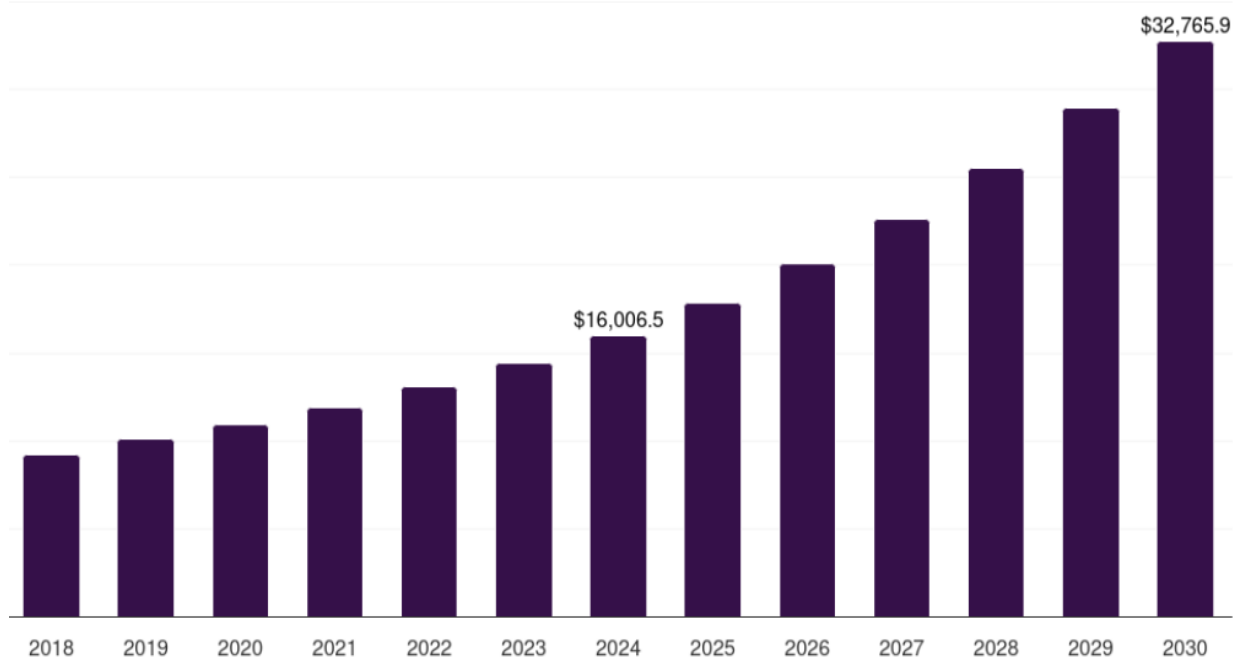


Fig. 4 India business process outsourcing market, 2018-2030

Source: (<https://www.grandviewresearch.com/horizon/outlook/business-process-outsourcing-market/india>)

By 2030, the Indian business process outsourcing market is anticipated to generate US\$32,765.9 million in revenue. The Indian business process outsourcing industry is anticipated to develop at a compound annual growth rate of 12.9% between 2025 and 2030. By 2030, the business process outsourcing industry in India is projected to have grown from USD 14,421.4 million in 2023 to USD 32,765.9 million ^[18]. A compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.4% is anticipated for the India market between 2024 and 2030. Customer service was the service category that generated the most revenue in 2023.

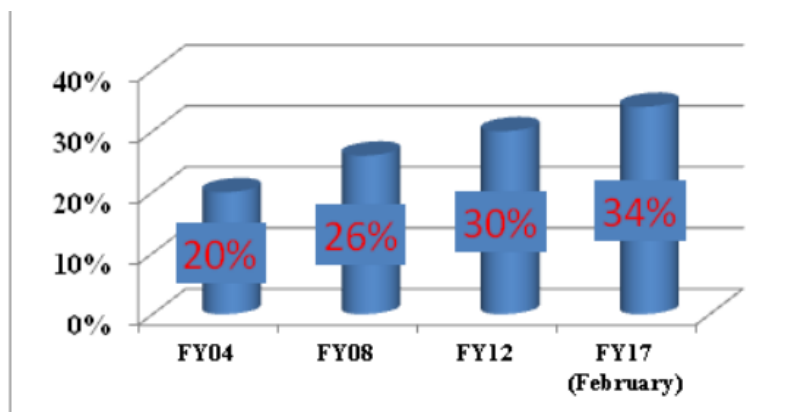


Fig. 5 Share of Women in BPO Workforce

Source: (*Women Safety 2013, Nasscom and Nasscom Diversity and Inclusion Summit 2017*)

The Indian IT-BPO sector puts a significant emphasis on employing women and has long been an equal opportunity employer. As of February 2017, women make up 34% of the IT-BPO workforce, or more than 1.3 million employees. This is a roughly 1.8-fold growth since FY2009. About 1% of these women work in the C-suite, while almost 10% hold senior management positions ^[19]. Additionally, almost 28% of the sector's female employees are the main providers for their families, which shows how the employment and

participation of women in the sector is evolving. As illustrated in Figure 5, women's engagement in the BPO sector grew from 20% in 2004 to 26% in 2008. During the fiscal year 2012, thirty percent of women participated ^[20].

Conclusion

A just and equitable society must prioritize women's rights and gender equality. Despite the tremendous improvement, there are still important issues that require attention. We can endeavour to create a more inclusive and equitable world by recognizing the significance of gender equality, advocating for women's rights, and putting into practice sensible policies. In order to promote gender equality and enable women to realize their full potential, it is imperative that people, communities, and governments take the initiative. We can only create a society that values and encourages equality for all if we join our hands together. BPOs should prioritize yoga management programs and gym facilities. Through orientation programs, welcome parties, get-togethers, outings, and group activities, a healthy work atmosphere with male co-workers should be established. Programs that encourage work-life balance and stress management, such as gaming zones and enjoyable hobbies, should be made accessible and counselling should be provided by full-time counsellors. All these measures will go a long way in enhancing gender equality.

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