

**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STRESS OUTCOMES: A  
CONTEMPORARY ISSUE FOR THE BPO, S IN NCR,  
INDIA**

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**Abstract**

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. Though BPO industry has been considered one of the places which supports the women empowerment yet gender inclusivity, stereotyped culture, glass ceiling are some of the ill- practices which are still exist in this Industry. In this article, we investigated the gender response to stress outcomes among BPO employees in the BPO,s situated in Noida, India. This is a comparative study to analyze the differences between the stress outcomes among male and female BPO employees. The population of this study is BPO Industry and sample is the BPO,s in Noida. A Likert – scaled questionnaire was administered for the collection of data for this research. For the analysis, selected subjects were the employees who have worked with the organization for the at least last one year. t -test and rank analysis were conducted and shows that there are positive significant differences in the stress outcomes experienced by female and male BPO, s employees.

**Key words:** Business Process Outsourcing, Gender Differences, Stressors, Stress outcomes.

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## 1.0 Introduction

The word 'Stress' has been derived from the Latin word 'Stringere'. Stress However a lot of papers have been published on the topic of 'Stress Management' but still the big gap is existing between the research on different stress responses by each gender (males, females) and impact of this novel issue on the BPO sector. In present corporate scenario, most of the research and corporate training programs are focused towards managerial and technical aspects only. To aid the triumph in the competitive work environment, it is required for corporation to retain the most talented staff.

A competitive employee will work efficiently in an organization if he/she gets the job satisfaction and the stress free environment. Unfortunately, significant research programs based on the requirement of the different stress management techniques for different genders has not been encouraged and undertaken so far. Therefore to value a stress free work environment, this study will be a helpful tool for the effective supervision.

Stress was earlier used to represent force, strong effort. Later on, in psychology and physiology, stress refers to some stimulus which results in a measurable strain that cannot be tolerated by the organism and results in to ill-health. Responses or adverse reaction to the excessive demand at the workplace is called workplace stress. In the experience of workplace stress – a demographic characteristics GENDER plays an important role. Earlier studies did not reveal much about the role of gender in the stress responses but recent research on human recourses is focused on gender differences in the stress outcomes and found tat there are different stressors, responsible for the generation of stress among males and the females. Thus, to explore this topic more, deep investigation is still required at broad level.

## 2.0 Literature Review

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. Various approaches to stress emphasis the transaction between the affective and cognitive aspects of the individual and their environment. He has given the scientific explanation for the biological process. The hormonal result of stress is increased blood pressure and circulating blood sugar levels, and a less-effective immune system,

and also chronic stress can lead to serious health problems. Therefore Managing stress is a demand of our society and a good quality industry. Walter Cannon (1945) [4] experimented that different stressors produced a similar response which involves some physiological and psychological ailments inside the body of the living being. In recent times, however, it has been argued that external circumstances do not have any intrinsic capacity to produce stress, but instead, their effect is edited by the individual's perceptions and understanding of stress and their stress management capabilities.

In 1964, Kahn et al [7] was the one who proposed the concept of '*organizational role stresses*'. They define 'stress' as environmental characteristics which affect people adversely. Their work on role conflict and role ambiguity was the pioneer effort in organizational studies. Stresses are of two types -*Good Stress* and the *Bad Stress*. A healthy and the good work stress may motivate, challenge, and inspire an employee however, negative or the bad stress will depress the employee and as a result he might be frequently miss the work and later on will become a non performer; there is a strong relationship between positive stress, negative stress and the employee performance. Though some amount of work stress is also required to break the state of rust but on the other side, negative stress can cause burnout in a person. Therefore management is responsible to maintain the balance between these two types of stresses which is a challenge in front of the management.

In 1992, Pestonjee [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) Intrapsychic sector, (b) the social sector, and (c) job and the organization. Stress is most likely to occur in situations where - demands are high and the amount of control, an individual has is low and there is limited support available for the individual. Jobs such as negotiation, customer dealing, marketing or jobs of representing the institute to the public involve greater stress. They also found that some personality dimension includes- emotional sensitivity, introversion – extroversion, flexibility- rigidity and the need for career achievement contribute towards the work stress.

As per the bibliography, in the expression of stress, gender plays an important role. According to Gianakos (2000; 2002) [6] 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 employee's masculinity 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 gender, 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 females workers in the expression of emotions at work and investigated that women express anger less and more happiness than men in the workplace.

Our research study for this paper focuses on gender differences in stress outcomes in the BPO,s. *BPO* is the rapidly growing sector of India in the global market. As growth always associated with some malfunctions, this flourishing BPO industry has 'stress among the employees' as one of the shortcoming factors. Zealous BPO take on more work from employees than they can handle, forcing employees to work round the clock, and which makes them unable to manage permissible level of their stress. From the available literature survey, we can enlist the different types of stressors in the BPO,s

One of the study conducted by the Sudhashree et al (2004) [13] described that everything is not in good situation in the BPO industry. This industry has also given a name - 'BOSS -Burn out Stress Syndrome'. BOSS can be seen very commonly in BPO,s. Chronic fatigue and insomnia are the symptoms of this syndrome. Gastrointestinal problems are also inevitable due to chronic stress in BPO's employees who are working for 24 X 7.

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. The association of emotionality with women, and of illogical with the emotionality has stuck women's prospects in many types of work. Often, women's position in the workplace gets affected by the stereotyped beliefs about emotions and gender. Also gender differences is due to emotional expressibility at the workplace but different conditions under which men and women work may actually be responsible for the emotional expressibility. Stress responses and adaptation of coping skills is totally different for different genders.

In a study, 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. In a stressful experience, women are more likely than men to say that they feel sad or anxious, which may lead to risk for depression and anxiety disorders. 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. Compared to males, females' physical aggression and fear-related behaviors are less intense. So, while both sexes share the capacity for 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* and women enjoy a greater life expectancy than men. Managing stress is quite different by sex as 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.

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.

Stressors are the environmental factors that may function as sources of stress. The most common stressors involve major changes in a person's life and everyday issues he /she cannot control.

**Some of the stressors in the fastest growing BPO industry are as follows:**

- 24X7 work culture
- Demand of excellent energy levels
- Overtimes
- Prolonged working in shifts

- ill- work environment
- Work- life balance
- Competitive peer pressure
- Industry's requirement for the Competitive latest technology /soft skills
  
- Electronically monitored work
- Bureaucratic and multinational administration
- Health problems ( sitting in the same posture for long hours/ continuous usage of electronic devices etc )

Above stated stressors generate stress among BPO employees and if not treated well on time can further be the reasons for several ill aftereffects. Continuous stressful environment would lead to severe damage to the employees' mental, physical health and can result in the following some of the acts:

- De-motivated/low morale employees
- Increased Tobacco consumption
- Health Hazards (cardiac problems / insomnia/ bad appetite etc )
- Low decision-making power /low risk taking capability
- High attrition rate
- Less retention period
- More number of absenteeism
- Increased employees grievances/Industrial disputes
- Low standard performance
- Increased number of Suicidal

Cases

It has been reported that there are different types of stressors 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. There is difference in management of demand and maintenance of energy, as male seek the adequacy of performance for the attainment of their self-respect, and females seek for the adequacy of relationships. Over demand and insufficient self-maintenance tends to cut somewhat dissimilar ways for men and women.

Men enter stress in desire to achieve a winning performance. On the other hand, for women, relationship loss is a main stressor. According to 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 workplace is often symbolized as gender neutral place. These factors contribute to working women’s stressors. For women, one of the major sources of work stress is lack of career progress. The glass ceiling is the impediment in the growth of career for women in many of the places. Glass-ceiling refers to a slight but prevailing barrier that confines the women’s career development to the top management.

Following table consists of the list of some unlike stressors for each of the gender in the BPO, s:

**TABLE 1: Stressors for Each Gender in the BPO Industry**

Men	Women
Career Growth	Glass- Ceiling
Work– overload/isolation	Security Problem
Job dissatisfaction	Multiple Roles
High Performance pressure	Gender Biasness
Project Deadlines	Home/ Work interface
Role Conflict/ambiguity	Sexual- Harassment
Competitive Peer – Pressure	Societal Norms
Family responsibility as bread –butter earner.	Stereotyped culture
Work – Life balance	Working in the night shifts

### 3.0 Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to investigate the gender response to stress outcomes among BPO employees in the BPO,s situated in Noida, India.

#### 3.2 Sampling and Data Collection Procedure

The population of this study is the BPO,s industry. To conduct this study, total of 300 questionnaires were distributed among the employees working in the BPO, s in Noida.

But after the completion of the survey, only 253 employees gave their responses, but only 240 questionnaires are included in this study. So the response rate was 80 %. During the study, non probability cum convenience sampling techniques was used.

A pilot study was conducted onto 50 IT professionals in the Noida segment. Some items were changed and cancelled to ensure the reliability and the validity of the instrument after the pilot study. Data screening process was involved in the statistical analysis.

#### 3.3 Survey Instrument

The data for this research were administering a questionnaire to BPO employees situated in Noida. Responses to the questionnaire were made on a 5 – point scale from 0= never to 4 = very often, the questionnaire with the cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$  was used. Selection of stress scale was done on the basis of selection of best alternatives among all the possible alternatives to achieve the researcher's objectives. There are 20 items used to measure the stress outcomes. Theses items can be classified in to intention to quit, somatic complaints, job dissatisfaction and fatigue. Perceived stress scale (1995 ), Camman et al. (1979), Rizzo (1972) Karasek(1979) and Mearns et al.(2003) are the base of scale for this study. The reliability of this measure is 0.788.

### 4.0 Data Analysis and Research Methodology

Statistical analysis include descriptive and the inferential analysis. Demographic profile of the respondents, the hypotheses testing results and the gap analysis between the groups are presented by this study.

#### 4.1 Demographic Profile:

Table 2 is presenting the demographic profile of the respondent. As table is clearly depicting, a significant number of the respondent were between 26-30 years of ages. Females were in

majority (53.3%) and the employees who have worked with the organization for 3-5 Years were (27.5%).

**TABLE 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

Elements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	112	46.6
Female	128	53.3
<b>Age( Years old)</b>		
≥25	35	14.5
26-30	65	27
31-35	60	25
36-40	32	13.3
41 – 45	28	11.6
≤46	20	8.3
<b>Tenure of service (Years)</b>		
≥2	44	18.3
3 – 5	66	27.5
6 – 8	32	13.3
9 – 11	24	10
12 – 14	29	12.0
≤ 15	45	18.7

**Gap Analysis of the Stress Outcomes by Genders:**

Table 3 presents the gap analysis of the stress outcomes means experienced by the BPO, s male and female employees. Based on the analysis, both genders have differences in the stress

outcomes they experienced. Twentieth item - Do you think that you have had a perfect career growth in the present organization; is having the most prominent mean difference and the gap was smallest in the first item- Are you sure that your organization have performance based promotion system?

**TABLE 3: Demographic profile of the respondents**

S.No	Item	Mean Male	Mean Female	Gap	Rank
1	Are you sure that your organization have performance based promotion system?	4.58	4.57	0.01	20
2	Do you have less faith on this organization?	4.69	4.75	0.06	17
3	How often have you been upset due to work environment of your organization?	2.43	2.45	0.02	19
4	Do you often feel overstressed due to work?	2.95	2.76	0.19	3
5	Are you doing job just to earn money?	4.79	4.69	0.1	12
6	Are you suffering from health problems due to over stress at work?	4.54	4.71	0.17	5
7	Do you often deal successfully with irritating life hassles?	2.82	2.97	0.15	7.5
8	How often have you found that you could not manage multitasking you had to do?	2.76	2.95	0.19	3
9	Do you easily get tired at work?	3.37	3.49	0.12	9
10	How often have you felt depressed and lazy to work due to tiredness due to work?	2.9	2.73	0.17	5
11	Do you often be angered because of things that were outside of your control?	4.06	4.26	0.2	2
12	Do you find your health condition as in perfect state?	3.23	3.08	0.15	7.5
13	Do you often think about quitting the present organization and join another one?	3.69	3.58	0.11	10.5
14	Do you often find your faster heart beat than usual due to work problems?	3.17	3.28	0.11	10.5
15	Do you find your job monotonous?	4.99	4.92	0.07	16

16	Are you satisfied with your current job?	3.2	3.25	0.05	18
17	Do you feel proud, working in the present organization?	3.79	3.7	0.09	13
18	Do you often ger worry about the fate of your organization	5.38	5.3	0.08	14.5
19	Do you think that stereotyped culture (gender Inclusivity) is one of the problems in your organization?	4.32	4.4	0.08	14.5
20	Do you think that you have had a perfect career growth in the present organization.	3.41	3.2	0.21	1

**T-test**

To test the hypothesis, t-test procedure was carried out using the SPSS (Version.16). Based on the output in Table 4, the two – tail significance for stress outcomes indicates that  $p < 0.05$  and thus null hypothesis is rejected because there is significant difference. Therefore it could be concluded that there is a significant difference in the stress outcomes experienced by different genders (male and female) BPO,s employees.

**TABLE 4: Output for the two – tail t-Test:**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	std. error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
Stress outcome	Equal Variances assumed	1.99	0.025	-.451	238	0.201	-0.698	0.577	-2.381	0.322	
	Equal Variances not assumed			-.499	175.701	0.243	-0.698	0.614	-2.314	0.253	

**5.0 Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the stress outcomes experienced by the BPO’s employees on their gender. Researchers’ have concluded after analyzing several points that female workers dominant the outsourcing industry at the front hand whereas males dominate the back end segment of the outsourcing Industry. The workers are in the age of 26-30 years old.

The gap analysis among males and females provides differences on their stress outcomes. The most prominent difference is the mean of the twentieth item - Do you think that you have had a perfect career growth in the present organisation. Based on the mean, it can be said that females get easily satisfied with their career growth in jobs, as females’ score is lesser than males’ for this item in the questionnaire. Result of Suzanne K. Murrmann, et.al (2009) is also aligned with our present study’s result. These scholars highlighted in their study that women tend to be satisfied with their jobs when they can balance their multitasking at home and at office both, while when men’s performance tends gets valued by others, then they feel satisfied in their jobs. In this study, hypothesis testing also gives us same findings about different stress outcomes of each gender. This result does support the findings reported by some researchers such as Matud (2004), Liu et al, 2008), Mclean, Anderson (2009), Schmaus, et al (2008). The BPO’s staff reacts heterogeneity to their jobs and stressors according to their gender. For the heterogeneity in reaction to a stressful situation, their biological differences are also responsible. As women give emotion-based reaction whereas men faces stress logically.

Apart from questionnaire assessment, personal interviews were also conducted. The interviews were planned to provide impending into the qualitative differences in the exposure of men and women in their roles in a spruce BPO Industry. Table 3 is summarizing the interview assessment for each gender:

**TABLE 5: Personal Interview Assessment for each Gender**

S. No	Types of Stressors	Effect on Females	Effect on Males
1	Marital status/ children	After marriage, women have to sacrifice many times their jobs due to increased responsibilities at home and after a break they don’t get the desired jobs.	Responsibilities of men also increase as a head or bread –butter earner for family.

2	Age ( middle-aged 32-42 yrs employees )	Due to child- birth and their upbringing responsibilities, women often feel less energetic at their workplace as compared to men.	Men don't have much impact of age on their physical strength at this stage and they can enjoy a good energy level and strength.
3	Work-life balance	In Indian society context, management of house hold activities are more on females than males which leads to stress in balancing the work- life among women.	Men are considered to secondary support in terms of house hold responsibilities.
4	Job-satisfaction	Because of other priorities in life, Women are generally get satisfied with their present work easily.	Men have different parameters of job – satisfaction (salary /designation/type of work).
5	Multiple Role	Role conflict between professional women/Nourishing mother/good wives is difficult to handle for women.	Stress of multiple roles is comparatively less in men.
6	Competitiveness/ Career Growth	Studies have shown that women are generally less competitive about their career growth.	Men are competitive by nature. They see their career – growth and increments more seriously than women
7	Role Conflict at office	Percentage of women is high at the middle management and roles at middle management are comparatively specific and clear than higher level of management.	Male employees have to face the non-specific roles without any leverage at different level of management. Men face role overload, role ambiguity, work overload at the office
8	Glass-ceiling	As level of management goes higher, percentage of women reduces. So, there is a fixed growth level in management for women which is a stressful situation for competitive women.	Men don't suffer with glass- ceiling problem. They have freedom to choose their career goals according to their competitiveness.
9	Security Factor/ Harassment	Women have to fight with the fear of being in secure while performing their on-field and off-field duties.	Security factor is comparatively less stressful for men.
10	Stereotyping/ Gender Discrimination	Women suffer gender discrimination / stereotype mentality at office more as compared to their male colleagues.	In this male dominating society, stereotyped cultures have less effect on males.

In a nutshell, this study supports the proposal that there is difference in stress outcomes of each gender in the BPO,s. While the conclusion presented earlier are supported by the data, this study uses only BPO,s situated in Noida as its sample. Thus, there should be future research to overcome this limitation by taking the sample from various cities and various IT industries.

## 6.0 What is there for Business to do?

In every organization there are two types of employees, One who is full of positive energy and wants to work efficiently to contribute in the company's production but simultaneously there is other type, who are negative and believe in critics to the management and spread negativity to their surrounding ( as per the Mc Gregor's X and Y theory ) so if management will not take care about negative /stressful environment of their organization, these negative or stressed people will spread their negativity to the other people also and the Y type employees will get converted into the x – type people. The percentage of these stressed employees can gradually be increased and will be impedance in the growth of the firm. Though there are many factors responsible for an ill- environment of the organization but negative stress among employees is a significant factor which is required to be handled carefully by management to maintain the efficiency and loyalty of the employees and hence growth/production of the organization.

Apart from this perspective, management should also know the requirement of gender based stress management techniques to improve benefits of the employee's well-being programs. If in medical science, it is recommended that there should be a different treatment for males and females then when it comes to the part of recreational activities to heal the male's and female's stress, it should also be gender based. It is advised that these programs should also not be generalized even in the BPO sector. A gender based recreational program will be a result oriented program. It would be beneficial for the employees and management as well. According to Hofboll et al, studies have found that the provision of workplace support was more effective in reducing occupational stress in men than in women. Thus a good leader/management should be aware of these facts and plan accordingly.

People believe that stress is inherent in human beings and this is also natural which cannot be lowered. But Stress might become manageable if a person learns to adapt the coping skills. A person must learn to accept changes. It might mean lowering expectations and becoming more flexible with daily demands. Common stressors may ease when a person seeks help from supportive friends and family members. In cases where no solution to a problem exists, creating distance might help. This tactic might work with an overly critical relative or bad-tempered coworker. Also, According to the lead University of Pennsylvania researcher, Dr. J.J. Wang, (2009) "In the future, when physicians treat patients - especially for depression and post-traumatic stress disorder - they need to take it into account that really, gender matters." If

the medical community is recognizing the need to incorporate an understanding of gender differences in their treatment practices, it's time for the business community to do the same in their employees 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 well-being, reduced stress, deeper engagement and maximized productivity. The two models which are Transactional Model and the Health Realization / Innate Health Model must be applied in stress management program as per the requirement of the different gender because men and women just handle it differently when it comes to manage stress.

### 7.0 Limitation of the Study

Besides budgetary constraints, the sample size of 240 people belonging to various socio-economic strata in Noida region may not be the true representation of Indian society. Since sampling methods are used; there might be some error in this method.

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