

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY OF CALL CENTRE EMPLOYEES IN INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF MUMBAI REGION

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INTRODUCTION:

Call center is a centralized office used for receiving or transmitting a large volume of enquiries by telephone. An inbound call center is operated by a company to administer incoming product or service support or information enquiries from consumers. Outbound call centers are operated for telemarketing, for solicitation of charitable or political donations, debt collection, market research, emergency notifications, and urgent/critical needs blood banks. A **contact center**, further extension to call centers administers centralized handling of individual communications, including letters, faxes, live support software, social media, instant message, and e-mail.

BPO AND CALL CENTRES IN INDIA:

Globalization and Liberalization policy adopted by Government of India in 1990's paved the way for the growth of BPO sector in India. As per the estimates of NASSCOM (2011),¹ BPO industry in India grew at the rate of 35 percent since 2005. The revenues accrued by BPO sector was of the tune of US \$ 88.1 billion in fiscal year 2011. 34 percent, as the estimate continues, of worldwide BPO market has been captured through which India labelled as the largest destination of BPO services delivery.

The country has emerged as the largest private sector employer of India as it generated the employment to the tune of 4.5 million people (direct and indirect) out of which 50 percent comes in the category of below 25 years of age (NASSCOM, 2011). The study undertaken by Vaid (2009); Amoribieta et.al, (2001); NASSCOM and McKinsy (2005) stated that India continued to be the prominent location to outsource business activities, in spite of tough competition from other developing nations. Ramesh (2004) reasoned that the growth of Information Communication and Technology (ICT), low cost labour and availability of larger number of English speaking youth have emerged India as one of the desired destinations of BPOs.

¹ NASSCOM report (2011)

The non-voice sector cum front office and voice based sector are the two kinds of back office outsourcing. Data encoding, market research, data base development, loan processing, handling included in non-voice process whereas the voice sector which is also called as Call Centre industry deals with customer service as its service is based on interactive communication with the customers or clients (Tara and Ilavarasan, 2009). The call centres, thus, constitutes more than one-third of the total employment of BPO sector.

Two types of calls are handled by the call centre employees viz., outbound calls and inbound calls.

DEFINITION OF CALL CENTRE:

A call centre often facilitates entering into contracts and deals. As a result, customer interaction is an inevitable factor existing in the work culture of a call centre. Primarily and to be precise, a call centre aims to provide product support and information to customers with the help of a telephone or via mail, fax or email. This bifurcates the functions of call centre as attending telephone calls and to handle interactions with clients. Thus, according to North American Quit line Consortium (2010), the functions of call centre work can be categorized in to five. They are work force management, technology management, financial management, quality management and reporting and communications.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The present research on the '**Socio-economic study of call centre employees in India: A case study of Mumbai region**' depends upon various references from the books, journals, periodicals, RBI reports and so on. Some of the reviews are given as follows:

Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) emphasized that the working adults learn to build networks of support at **home**, at work, and in the community. Family- friends firms have a significant impact on the lives and careers of business professionals who work in them (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000).

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's seminal book (1977), *Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and agenda for Research and Policy*, brought the issue of work-life balance to the forefront of research in organization. Initially, the issue typically focused on support for women and children. But very soon it came to be considered as less gender specific.

Past research has focused on job satisfaction as well as work-life balance from a dispositional (Arvey, Bouchard, Segal and Abraham, 1989; Ilies and Judge, 2003; Staw and Ross, 1985),

situational perspective (Hackman and Oldham, 1975; Loher, Noe, Moeller and Fitzgerald, 1985) or inter-actionist perspective. All perspectives have received support in literature.

A study was conducted by Landauer,1997, with focus on work- life programs with a number of clients (e.g., DuPont, Johnson and Johnson, Hoechst Celanese, IBM and others). At DuPont, for example, employees who used the company's work-life programs were 45% more likely to agree strongly that they will 'go the extra mile' and are least likely to feel overwhelmed and burnt out (Landauer,1997). Work-life balance primarily affects five key areas: employee time saved; employee retention; increased motivation and productivity; absenteeism; and decreased health care costs and stress- related illnesses (Parus, 2000).

Karatepe, Osman, and Mehmet (2006) found that work-family conflict increased emotional exhaustion and decreased job satisfaction among the front-line bank employees; this finding is in consonance with past research (Boles et al.1997; Boles and Babin, 1996; Hyman and Summers, 2004; Babakus et al., 1999; Low et al., 2001). Work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion are among the two critical variables that have adverse effects on job outcomes of front-line employees (Babakus et al., 1999, Boles et al., 1997, Netemeyer et al., 2004).

A survey revealed that the pressure on employees to work longer hours under inflexible work schedules is ever increasing (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002). The literature also suggests that lack of balance between work and non-work activities is related to reduce psychological and physical well-being (Sparks et al., 1997; Frone et al., 1997; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Martens et al., 1999).

PROBLEMS OF CALL CENTRES EMPLOYEES:

Security Problems

There are several reports to substantiate that call centres arrange adequate facilities of transportation for the workers. Pathak and Anil (2011) describe this in the context of Pune. They have observed that large number of vehicles, to be precise 5500 cabs were hired exclusively for transportation facility of around 35,000 employees engaged in call centre related or BPO related work. Many leading firms opined that it is essential in the context of maintenance of security. Travel during night hours is a risky issue, such a measure or arrangement of pick up and drop facility by taxis are inevitable for women. They opined that the women felt safe working in shift and the same bothers them a lot.

Health Issues.

In 2015, ASSOCHAM conducted a survey and reported that long working hours and time-bound work pressure created by stress fail to balance the family obligations and relationships. Hossfeld (1990) strongly suggested the triple shift as a remedial measure for women whereby women are involved in paid labour in the formal sector, paid labour in the informal sector, and the uncompensated labour associated with their personal households. Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre(2001), on the basis of data collected from USA has shown that women spend their career in night shift are likely to experience the risk of getting 60 percent chances of breast cancer. The National Sleep Foundation of America on the basis of survey conducted by them argues that women who do night duty are exposed themselves to serious medical problems arising out of inadequate sleeping time. Biological, physiological and emotional needs of a person are directly related to an appropriate sleeping pattern which, in turn, ensures relaxation.

Relevance of biological differences in call centre work

According to Major reviews of academic literature on gender disparities discovered that the biological difference is directly related to psychological differences between men and women. Notwithstanding, there are some psychological differences with respect to as how the problems are managed and passionate recognitions and responses which may identify with their hormones

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present research on the ‘**Socio-economic study of call centre employees in India: A case study of Mumbai region**’ has certain objectives, which are as follows;

- 1) To study the socio- economic status of call centre employees in India.
- 2) To evaluate various problems of call centre employees in India.
- 3) To suggest various measures to overcome the problems of call centre employees in India.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The present study on ‘**Socio-economic study of call centre employees in India: A case study of Mumbai region**’ has the vast scope but still limited to the study at the Mumbai city and around.

METHODOLOGY:

For the present research on ‘**Socio-economic study of call centre employees in India: A case study of Mumbai region**’ the researcher has gone through primary as well as secondary data collection. Various objectives have been proved with the appropriate methodology and statistical tools as well as graphs. The universe of the study involves 82 domestic and 63 international call centres located in and around Mumbai such as Malad, Goregaon, Kandivli, Borivli, Andheri, Powai, Vikhroli, Lower Parel, Dadar and Ghatkopar. It represents 10 percent of the overall call centres identified for the study. Among these call centres 338 males and 175 females were selected as respondents of the study based on Simple Random Sampling. It was verified with the help of appropriate statistical formula that the sample size chosen is optimum.

Following are some of the problems of call centre employees:

Quality of Sleep With Reference to Gender

As reported during the sample survey, since many of the employees of call centres spend hours or work by avoiding sleep, it takes toll on their health. In certain cases it results in sleep walk. This is an indisputable fact that such sleep deprivation basically affects females and long lasting repercussions are observed in female call centre workers. It has been observed that female call centre employees amounting 344 in number are disturbed while sleeping and so more prone to sleep disorder as narrated in Table which proves the fourth hypothesis.

Table -1 Category of Sleep Deprived Employees

Category	Total in numbers	Sleep Deprived	Percentage of Sleep Deprived
Male	250	64.43	73.96
Female	169	96.57	96.57

Source: Results of Sample Survey, 2016

Food Habits and Addictions

Call centre employees are distinct class in themselves and by Indian standards such as employment is considered unconventional night shift, a young employee base and western lifestyle including holidays. With high disposable incomes at a young age, they easily resort to smoking and drinking. Smoking was considered by many to be a quick-fix solution to their stress problems.

The flowing table numbering following Tables indicate the adherence of call centre employees to drugs and smoking.

Table-2 Drugs

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	8	1.50
No	505	98.50
Total	513	100.00

Source: Results of Sample Survey, 2016

Table-3 Smoking

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	272	53.00
No	241	47.00
Total	513	100.00

Source: Results of Sample Survey, 2016

Irregular food consumption habits, among the respondents of sample survey, use of drugs and risky sexual behaviour were also were reported by some. Many were into drinking and smoking simultaneously.

Training Related Aspects

Training is an inevitable aspect related to call centre jobs. It has been found that as high as 82.50 percent has acquired necessary training as indicated in Table. Among those trained, 78.00 percent found that training was relevant.

Table-4 Got Training Before Joining Call Centre

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	425	82.80
No	88	17.20
Total	513	100.00

Source: Results of Sample Survey, 2016

As high as 82.80 percent came under this category, whereas the rest had not undergone any relevant training for the job

Salary Structure

The respondents who constituted the category of salary recipients of Rs.10, 000 were 21.44 percent and another 48.15 percent has a salary between Rs. 10,000 - 20,000. While bifurcating the same income range owing to concentration of large number of respondents the

income range in bifurcated to 10,001 to 15,000 and 15,001 to 20,000 which is represented by 106 and 147 call centre workers, as indicated in the table. The salaries drawn by respondents of the current study is on par with those who received salaries from corporate sectors in certain cases. Since call centre operations keep on happening all throughout the year irrespective of a single holiday, it is necessary to design the duty charts of the call centre employees by taking into consideration of the same. So, different shifts are arranged for the firms and the workers attend to duties in varying shifts. It is a unique feature of the call centre.

Table-5 Monthly Salary Descriptive Statistics

Mean	17801
Median	16000
Mode	20000
Standard Deviation	8418

Source: Results of Sample Survey, 2016

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The present study on ‘**Socio-economic study of call centre employees in India: A case study of Mumbai region**’ the primary survey conducted, it has been found that profile of the respondents vary from call centre to call centre. Majority of the call centres are gender friendly whereas certain call centres though limited in number predominate in the appointment of men as their employees.

The call centre employees were not satisfied with the duration of lunch break obtained. They complained that they had to finish consuming food in a hurried way which adversely affects their healthy eating habits since they are compelled to eat under stress which proves the second hypothesis.

It is interesting to note that the industry is completely entirely handled by young employees. They work in night hours and sleep throughout the day barring few hours earmarked for their personal and private needs. Such routine jobs affect the biological balance of the employees. It seems that they are totally alienated from the relatives as well as from the society. They are, no doubt, prone to sickness. Most of them are ill-tempered and in dejected moods. This problem was found to be more common among females which proves third hypothesis.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The present study on ‘**Socio-economic study of call centre employees in India: A case study of Mumbai region**’ has following key recommendations;

- 1) The policy makers and Government Departments who are handling labour welfare aspects will have to take care of the mounting stress factors among call centre employees.
- 2) How to engage young call centre workers in continuing their education is yet another policy matter to be debated. Many enter into labour market after securing SSC or HSC is a matter of concern.
- 3) The problems faced by female call centre workers require special attention. Their security related and health related issues need to be taken care of.

Thus, the present study on the call centres and the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry has an appropriate importance.

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