**This survey is a part of the Major Research Project undertaken by me for University Grants Commission, UGC, The apex body for Higher Education in India during the year 2014. The findings were submitted and the study has been highly acclaimed for its genuinity and new age findings by all who are in the field of information and Technology boom in India.**

**Health Parameters : Call Center/ BPO Blues**

Stress is usually sensed as the body readjusts to too much pressure. Scientists use the term ‘Homeostasis’ to define the physiological limits in which the body functions efficiently and comfortably. Stress Homeostasis by creating a state of imbalance.

Long hours of work, permanent night shifts, and incredible high work targets are inherent factors of Call Center –CC and Business Process Outsourcing- BPO jobs. These and other social factors emanating from night shifts cause a multi level stress amongst the CC/ BPO employees. Over a long period of time the stress response begins to take a toll on the body. The puffy eyes, red and blotchy skin, and edgy temperament demonstrates the stressful state of CC/BPO employees. CC/BPO workforce normally experiences weight losses, deterioration of eyesight, shin problems, insomnia.

One of the prime targets affected in this stressful condition is the Thymus gland, which plays a key role in the body’s immune system. A weakened immune system makes a person vulnerable to infection and this is why people under stress often experience regular attacks of cold and flue.

A few CC/BPO offices have their in house doctors, but they cannot prevent stress bound illness, which is rampant amongst CC/BPO workforce since the stressful state is caused by the very nature of their job.

In the course of this survey, when the CC/BPO employees were interviewed, 23 year old Swapna (name changed), who is working in an international CC firm Bangalore, said the incessant calls would hardly provide her breathing space in between, and many a times she had to take her food while talking over the phone. Towards the end, she would feel quite exhausted and crave to see the end of her shift.

The shift timings keep changing depending from where the projects come , calling for the need to adjust to different sets of timings which again adds to the stress, since body clock takes time to adjust. Sometimes, the much needed mind relaxation does not happen even during the holidays which coincide with that of client countries, and the employees are out of sync with family and friends.

Some people in CC/BPO centers also suffer from the loss of identity, which again contributes to the stress level significantly. After speaking in American accent and responding to the anglicized names – when Sujata becomes Susan, and Madhu becomes Mary for the overseas clients, they feel a strange sense of identity crisis. When they have to revert to their original selves at home as Sujata and Madhu, they find it very difficult to fit in many cases. It is being reported that the outsourcing back lash is getting abusive and ugly. Over the years, ordinary citizens have become sensitive to the job loss in their countries because of the out sourcing , thanks to furor raised by Western media. Here, the employees on the phone are subjected to the angry outbursts of the clients bordering on the racist and sexist.

When the strains of stressful state are almost same for men and women, the impact is more in the case of women. On one hand they have to deal with obscene phone calls, and invitations, and on the other they have to live with the doubts and suspicions of neighbors’, relatives and friends about the nature of their jobs. Fortunately the time is over when the general public was by and large ignorant of the functions of CC/BPO. Some people used to imagine that these are dubious places where one could procure call girls. As it happened in the case of Priya (name changed) who had been working for an international CC in Bangalore for more than two years, and whose parents were quite uncomfortable about the timings of her job in the beginning, but gradually they have come to accept it. The social acceptance of CC/BPO jobs is one of the positive aspects lessening the stress on social accounts.

While conducting the survey a unique ‘Health and Work Stress Scale’ was conducted. The findings are very disturbing: They typically reported symptoms like fatigue, stiff neck, sore eyes, back/headaches, impaired vision, numbness in fingers, fever, asthma, sore throats, nausea, dizziness, rashes, kidney stones, and ulcers,. There are also the findings, which affects their ‘Bio Rhythms’

There are 22 health parameters, which the project thought of quizzing the respondents with. Below are some sample responses from Bangalore- ‘The Silicon Valley of East’ ITES/BPO service centers: (similar studies were conducted in Gurgaon, Pune, Hyderabad and Kolkata)

**HEALTH & WORKS STRESS SCALE**

Bangalore

There are work related events and situations. Whether or not you have experienced the situation and the level of stress if experienced on a scale of 1(not a source of stress) to 5(extreme source). The number 1 2 3 4 is written as very less, less, more, much more, and in the column 5 no respondents falls.

Item v.less % less % more % much % nm %

1.Excess 72 48% 36 24% 18 12% 24 12% 05 ---

temp

2. Insufficient

Lighting 108 72% 72 48% 72 8% --- --- 108 12%

3. Excess

Noise 90 60% 72 48% 36 24% 24 16% 18 12%

4. Vocal Probl 102 68% 18 12% 06 4% 06 4% 18 12%

5. Optical Probl 96 64% 36 24% 12 8% 18 12% 18 12%

6. Auditory Prob108 72% 06 4% --- ---- 12 8% 24 16%

7.Musco skeletal

Problems 78 62 42 28 6 4 -- -- 24 16

8.Work over-

Load 06 4 60 40 60 40 6 4 18 12

9.Time pressure

& Deadline to

Meet -- -- 12 18 114 76 -- -- 18 12

10.Fear of making

Mistakes 24 16 72 48 36 24 -- -- 12 08

12.Feeling insecure

In this job 78 52% 48 32% 6 4% -- -- 18 12%

14.Jealousy &

Competition 108 72% 18 12% 6 4% -- -- 18 12%

15.cannot

Participate in

Decision

Making 42 28% 48 32% 42 28% -- -- 18 12%

18.Having

To work

Continually

Straining 24 16% 36 24% 66 44% -- -- 24 16%

19.my work

Is mentally

Straining 24 16% 102 68% 24 16% -- -- -- --

20.difficult

To distance

Myself from

My work 54 36% 72 48% 6 4% -- -- 18 12%

22.lack of

Promotion

Prospects 42 28% 48 32% 42 28% -- -- 18 12%