
THE WORKPLACE: A BREEDING GROUND FOR ROMANCE?

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Abstract

Organizations are changing and this change is resulting in a paradigm shift in the role of HR. new challenges new issues and new problems are arising. This calls for new policies and strategies to be adopted. One such issue cropping up today is – “Workplace Romance.” This is becoming a common trend of the modern organizations. Though is not very common in India, but is still found and certainly on a rise if one has to believe the trend visible. .HR has its task cut-out to deal with such unfamiliar instances. This paper tries to look into different aspects associated with workplace romance. There is a questionnaire too for deeper insights into the concept. A study into this aspect is called for as Workplace romances aren't fading anytime soon, considering urban professionals are only stretching the hours they spend in office and work under stressful situations so they think it is something lighter to handle, though it is not. A total number of 200 respondents were randomly selected in Mumbai city and a self-developed instrument called “Factors Responsible for Extramarital Affairs Questionnaire” was used to collect relevant data from the respondents. The identities of the respondents have been kept confidential, due to known reasons. Collected data was analyzed with descriptive statistics. Descriptive static was employed for the personal data and research question. Based on the findings of the study, it was therefore recommended that counselors should organize continuously on the mass media enlightenment programme on the various factors responsible for extramarital affairs so that employees can learn and work on themselves to secure their job as well as their marriage life.

Key words: workplace romance, extramarital affairs, office romance, factors responsible for extra-marital affairs, workplace dating, workplace flings

1.1 Introduction

Young professionals often spend more time at the office than at home. As a result, there are a lot of single men and women who don't have the time to meet new people. Naturally, they seek their potential partners within their surrounding environment — the office. Single people feel that work is a natural place to meet new people. After all, you spend at least 40 hours a week there, with individuals of similar backgrounds and interests. Relationships with coworkers can be especially tempting because hard work doesn't leave much time for socializing.

1.2 The workplace: a breeding ground for romance? Pros and cons of an office romance

1.2.1 Office romance - the good

There are many issues — both positive and negative — to consider before engaging in office romances. One of

the positive aspects is time efficiency, since you no longer need to search for a significant other in the evening. Why look around for potential dates when you have an office full of beautiful and glamorous colleagues? You save both time and money. A second advantage to dating someone in the workplace is that since you spend so many hours together at work, you already have an idea of what he's / she's like. This can save you from lots of headaches down the road. A final advantage, besides being together, you can even carpool. Not only do you get to spend time together, you also save on gas if you carpool. Wow, what are the chances that you could date women who would save you gas money?

1.2.2 Office romance - the bad

Office romances also have their drawbacks. For example, no matter how well the relationship is going, the situation itself is a recipe for disaster. The fact that

couples are in constant contact with one another day and night may cause friction within the relationship. Everyone needs "alone time" to pursue hobbies or hang out with friends and the lack thereof may cause relationships to self-destruct. Office romances may interfere with individuals' abilities to perform their professional duties. Imagine telling your girlfriend that she's fired. There is obvious potential for conflicts of interest between office situations and relationships. Be sure to avoid accusations of favoritism, which may harm the morale of colleagues. Jealousy is another negative issue. Because you must usually keep office relationships a secret, other employees may flirt with your partner or vice versa. You have to keep in mind that this type of flirting is common and happens all the time in the workplace. So keep cool or the cat's out of the bag.

1.2.3 Office romance - the ugly

Before beginning a relationship, consider its potential outcomes. If things don't work out, will your work life become awkward? Prepare yourself for the unwanted situations that might follow. In order to be prepared, evaluate who's date-worthy, their position and the consequences of a breakup:

1.2.3.1 Dating colleagues

Rivalry and competition may harm the relationship. Uncomfortable situations may arise after the breakup when career advancement issues come into play.

1.2.3.2 Dating subordinates

False accusations of favoritism may arise, as well as accusations of sexual harassment after the breakup.

1.2.3.3 Dating bosses

False accusations of favoritism may arise. You may get fired after the breakup. If your boss seeks favours that make you uncomfortable, your situation becomes awkward. Since the person is your boss you will have to listen whatever he says or demands.

1.3 Guidelines for success

Always remember; while intra-office dating is not necessarily illegal, many companies have policies

against it. The tricky part regarding such policies is what defines dating. Most companies encourage friendships, so where's the line between friendship and dating? If you start dating someone in the office, who can you tell? Should you try to keep it a secret? What if someone finds out? Would it have been better if you had been honest with your coworkers from the get-go?

Here are a few preventative guidelines to help develop a successful office romance without falling into any pitfalls or lawsuits..

- Be careful if you are new at a job or in an extraordinary situation like a trade show or a conference and someone seems overly friendly, prying into the intimate details of your personal life.
- Test your business friend with "low risk" trust tests, to see how reliable they are. Is something you shared repeatedly with others? Are you discovering references from private conversations being mentioned in staff meetings? Does the new friendship seem equal and reciprocal or one-sided?
- You can be friendly in the workplace without jeopardizing your career; you don't have to reveal your family secrets to make friends.

1.4 Things you should never say

- Anything you would not want repeated on the evening news or read about in a newspaper.
- Talk about confidential information you have on your romantic partner as well as any former romantic liaisons.
- Business topics those are unethical or indiscreet.
- Bad-mouthing, or anything disparaging about clients

E-mail communications present a new challenge to discretion in business relationships. There is something about e-mail that makes men and women let down their guards, so before hitting the send button on your computer, reread your message and make sure that it is appropriate for a business environment.

1.5 Workplace flings

Office romances can be fun and successful — a growing number of newlyweds are coworkers. They should take the proper steps, however, to ensure that the relationship will last without interfering in the workplace. Finally, they should also consider the consequences of breaking up with a colleague before beginning the relationship.

In the *Journal of Management*, May-June, 1998 issue, Gary N. Powell summarized the research that has been conducted over the past few decades about office romance. The research concludes that enough has not been pursued with vigor by organizational behavior scholars, by the way. He says he reviewed the "meager scholarly literature on the subject to date."

The research found that "at some times, workplace romances present a threat to organizational effectiveness through their negative effects on participants and coworkers. At other times, workplace romances enhance workplace effectiveness through their positive effects on participants.

"Two kinds of romances have the most damaging effect on group morale and organizational effectiveness, (a) hierarchical romances in which one participant directly reports to the other, and (b) utilitarian romances in which one participant 'satisfies personal/sexual needs in exchange for satisfying the other participant's task related and/or career-related needs.'" Additionally, recent CareerBuilder surveys find that approximately 40% of all employees have engaged in an office romance. A third of the respondents went on to marry the coworker whom they dated.

1.6 Review of Literature:

1.6.1 (Kaufman & Hotchkiss, 2003).

Romance in the workplace is not a novelty. However, it is believed to have increased as a result of the influx of women into the labor force in the last 50 years. In 1950, less than 30 percent of the 64 million labor force participants were women. Between 1950 and 2001, six out of ten additions to the labor force were women. As of 2003, women composed 46.6 percent of the labor force

1.6.2 (Kaufman, et al., 2003).

Not only are more women than ever before in the labor force working alongside men, but the average number of hours spent at work have also increased since the 1980s. The average hours worked per week in 1982 were 38. It increased to 39.2 by 2001, with forty percent of employees working exactly 40 hours per week, approximately 10 percent working 50 hours, 10 percent working 60 hours or more. In addition, the "ratio of the number of persons at work to the number employed has also been rising since the early 1970s. This means that among those employed, fewer people are taking time away from work for vacation, sickness, and other reasons" (Kaufman et al., 2003). While time, in theory, is perpetual, we are placed in the confines of a zero-sum game. The more time we spend at work, the less time we spend with our friends and families—unless you are one of the lucky (or cursed) few who work with your family.

The combination of a gender-mixed workforce and time spent at the workplace has the effect of conjuring up human emotions that often give birth to romance between co-workers and between subordinates and their supervisors. This may have significant consequences at the workplace. Employers are primarily concerned with potential sexual harassment suits. Employers have vested interests in protecting the firm from law suits they deem preventable. If a relationship has the potential to breed a law suit, then the reasonable thing to do is to prevent the relationship. Of course, it is not always that simple. Employees, on the other hand, are concerned with pursuing their interests as long as it has no bearing on their performance at work. Is there a way to balance everyone's interests while simultaneously protecting both the employer and the employee?

1.6.3 SHRM white paper, Andrea C. Poe

In a SHRM white paper, Andrea C. Poe, an HR freelance writer, found that adulterous affairs were a problem in some workplaces. From a recent Vault.com survey of several thousand employers and employees, she states that inappropriate sexual behavior in the workplace is also common on company time and at company locations.

1.6.4 In 2005, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Wall Street Journal

In 2005, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Wall Street Journal combined resources and conducted a poll of HR professionals and employees on a number of workplace romance issues. The poll was compared to one conducted in 2001.

In both 2001 and 2005, over seventy percent of firms did not have a formal written or verbal policy addressing workplace romance. Of those that did, the majority permitted dating, but discouraged it. Only nine percent prohibited dating.

1.7 Why Do So Many Romances Originate in the Workplace?

“Pressure, heat and a longtime period combine to produce the tightest bonds in nature—the diamond. The conditions for bonding a personal diamond are common in today’s business environment”(Cooper, 1985). With the increased number of women in the workforce and the increased amount of time spend at the workforce, it is not surprising that man and women develop close friendships with each other, and turn to one another for emotional support. This is likely to happen both to married as well as single individuals.

Today’s worker spends more time with business colleagues than with his or her mate. Outside the regular work schedule, deadlines and last minute demands from clients further take precedence over personal activities. This time spent away from home is not necessarily a negative experience. The workplace can be more stimulating and gratifying than the home life. It produces adrenaline and excitement as deadlines quickly approach. It produces a sense of accomplishment and responsibility, both emotional highs. The office is a world of high finance, legal stakes, production, sales and public relations. No one is wearing two-day beards, curlers or sweats. They are often in their best behavior. At work, people’s opinions and ideas are valued. They receive feedback and recognition and are even award praises or bonuses for good performance.

Home, on the other hand, may not always be a place to unload. If the employee is rearing children, it is often a

place where there are screaming kids and dirty dishes, not awards and recognition. Recognition at home is usually dictated by the calendar—Valentine’s Day, birthdays, etc.—and may not be based on spontaneous appreciation or recognition. Alternatively, for a single worker, home may be a place to greet the inconsiderate roommate, or simply a place where it’s too quiet.

“It is no wonder there is often a highly sexually charged atmosphere. Working long hours with attractive people in a plush setting to accomplish important goals can be quite seductive”(Cooper, 1985). Eventually people find out they think more of each other than a mere professional friendship. If there is mutual attraction, this friendship may evolve into one of a romantic, sexual nature.

The workplace described above sounds very ideal, doesn’t it? It also sounds as if there was an epidemic of sex and romance at the workplace. After all, not everyone works in “plush” settings and their co-workers don’t necessarily look like they belong on the cover of GQ or the latest Victoria’s Secret catalog. However, it seems that they don’t have to. Forty-percent of employees polled in 2005 have been involved in a work place romance (Parks, 2006). This does not mean that 40% of your employees are romantically involved with each other. As a matter of fact, it may be that there are no existing romantic relationships at your firm the moment. It is, however, important to know that at least 40% of workers have been or will be, at one time or another during their careers, romantically involved at the workplace. This is not a matter of hormones gone wild or a general regression of emotional intelligence. It is the human condition. Human needs and interpersonal attraction has been widely studied by psychologists and sociologists.

1.8 Interpersonal attraction:

Who we are attracted to where and when plays an important role in our lives. It is of great importance to everyone up and down the corporate ladder, because our own existence depended on two other people finding this attraction. “Its significance is raised to the highest power when the role it plays in the welfare and

survival of the species is considered. For a species to survive, its members need to find food, to avoid injury, to reproduce, and for higher animals, to rear the young... As a consequence, humans are among the most social creatures in the animal kingdom, and our evolutionary development hassled to hair- trigger disposition for making discriminator judgments along the attraction dimension” (Lindzey&Arosen,1985).

In the 1950's researchers believed that opposites attract because they would complement each other's needs, but little support for this proposition. Perceived similarity instead seems to be a “much more important criterion. Recent studies have consistently found that higher perceptions of similarity are associated with increased levels of relationship quality” (Hogg & Cooper, 2003) (emphasis added). Physical attractiveness and reciprocity of liking are the real factors of interpersonal attraction. Another factor is the exposure effect. People have a tendency to marry people from their own neighborhoods' or workplaces, not because of geographical proximity, but due to “functional distance,” the extent to which they cross each others' paths. Individuals also place an extremely high value on kindness, loyalty, and emotional stability “because when we entrust our psychological and often physical welfare to another human being, it is important that he or she poses no threat to our safety and can be relied upon to act in a caring and consistent fashion”(Hoggetal.,2003). As a matter of fact,” the association between close physical proximity and attraction is one of the best documented within the attraction literature” (Lindzey et al., 1985).

The work place is an ideal setting because not only is there constant exposure, but because there is constant exposure, individuals are able to carefully evaluate each other in a non- threatening atmosphere. They learn who they perceive to be similar in character, is kind ,loyal and emotionally stable. This is especially difficult to learn on traditional dates when everyone is in their best behavior at small land separate intervals of time.

There is also documentation of professions in which office romances are especially common. For example, those who work in hospitals, at newspaper offices,

police stations and law offices not only tend to spend long hours together(the exposure factor), but also work under intense circumstances where employees depend on each other in situations that have the potential for catastrophic consequences. This has the effect of speeding up the creation of interpersonal bonds. “You get turned on by competence, by being in a team that wins, by being better together than separate. That's often erotic and compelling” (Loftus, 1995).

It is important that employers acknowledge this human dynamic at the workplace. Employers are justified in wanting to ignore human sexuality simply because it has nothing to do with what the employees are getting paid to do work. Nevertheless, sexuality walks through the front door of the work place with each and every employee. Most often it is not romantic or visibly sexual in nature, and manifests itself in socially acceptable forms a glance or a smile. It's natural to be drawn to the beauty of the opposite sex. However, sexuality in the office can also be more expressive, and if the attraction reciprocal, then it has to be romantic, with dire consequences.

Employees are human first, professionals second. But emotional intelligence facilitates the balancing and cohabitation of the emotional with the professional. “Emotional intelligence skills refer to individual skills and competencies that allow people to deal with their own emotions and the emotions of others.” There is a trigger an emotional response, and a behavioral response, if any (Scholl, 2002). “The term encompasses the following five characteristics and abilities: **(1) Self-awareness** --knowing your emotions, recognizing feelings as they occur, and discriminating between them; **(2) Mood management** --handling feelings so they're relevant to the current situation and you react appropriately; **(3) Self-motivation**--"gathering up" your feelings and directing yourself towards a goal, despite self-doubt, inertia, and impulsiveness; **(4) Empathy**--recognizing feelings in others and tuning into their verbal and nonverbal cues; and **(5) Managing relationships**--handling interpersonal interaction, conflict resolution, and negotiations” An ideal employee will be fully adept at handling these social occurrences as they develop at the workforce.

The tricky part for the employer is to determine the extent it wants to control romantic behavior. Romantic relationships are inherently complex in themselves. Throw in work responsibilities, third party reactions, professional relationships, and sprinkle them with different levels of power and authority and you may have a legal minefield. Or do you? They don't always become a dramatic event or a legal issue. Many workplace romances come and go without issue. Some do not. However, employers want to minimize any risk of liability and protect their interests.

1.9 Current state of mind regarding workplace romance

In 2001, ninety-five percent of HR professionals felt that fear of sexual harassment claims was reason to discourage romance, but the percentage dropped to seventy-seven percent in 2005. Instead concerns about conflicts between co-workers whose relationships ended grew from twelve percent to sixty-seven percent. However, instances of decreased productivity, sexual harassment and complaints of retaliation declined as also the number of office romances that ended with a negative outcome (Parks, 2006).

The majority of employees, fifty-two percent, felt that the consequences for violating a dating policy should be a formal reprimand. Only eleven percent felt that termination was appropriate (Parks, 2006). The theme of workplace romance has become so popular that mainstream magazines have recounted stories of cubicle romance and provided some practical suggestions for those wanting to get involved in a workplace romance. For example, Men's Fitness, wrote an article in which "Lydia Ramsey, a business-etiquette expert and author of *Manners that Sell*, says besides maturity, a willingness to negotiate honestly is a must when dating within the office. Once you decide you really want a workplace relationship, you have to talk to each other about how you'll conduct yourselves at work and how you'll behave if you stop dating. If one of you has difficulty talking about this, you really shouldn't be in this relationship (Kim, 2004).

In 1994, Fortune magazine conducted a survey, not of

HR professionals and employees who bear the brunt of work details, but of 200 chief executive officers. Seventy-five percent said that romances between workers were not the company's business. Maureen Scully Ph.D. who focuses on organizational work ethics at MIT states, today's office romances are very different than the 'powerful boss seduces beautiful young secretary' variety of the past... These are professional colleagues working together on intellectually stimulating problems" (Loftus, 1995). Lisa Mainiero, Ph.D., a professor of management at Connecticut's Fairfield University has identified four common stages of office romance:

"Fantasy: A sudden romantic interest in a colleague develops; it may result in dressing up, daydreaming, and working harder to try to impress the potential lover.

Honeymoon: The employees realize the attraction is mutual and act upon it. They go on a date, begin a relationship, and may be distracted at work, with eyes only for each other.

Renewal: The relationship enters a stable phase; concentration on work returns. The couple feels comfortable and secure with one another and gets into a routine.

Climax: The couple makes a decision to head toward a long-term commitment, such as marriage, or to break off the relationship. There's often a painful period of self-evaluation" (Loftus, 1995).

1.10 Methodology:

This study was based on primary data gathered with the help of a questionnaire comprising four sectors. This survey comprised of a relatively small sample (n=200) of employees currently working in Mumbai, related disciplines like banking, academics, call centers and retail sectors. The survey was evenly dispersed between males (79) and females (121), with the majority of respondents falling in the 45-55 years, age category. From our study 25-35 age group 32 people and 35-45 age group 48 people falling under this category. Majority of the respondents are 45-55 age groups of the people.

ANALYSIS

Table:1 Factors for extra marital affairs

Variables	Banking		Retail		Educational Institutions		Call centers	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Do you think that 'there is nothing wrong in romancing married colleagues'/boss?	12	38	22	28	2	48	40	10
3. Is it males who usually initiate office romances?	26	24	26	24	10	40	34	16
5. Does an organizational culture have a direct impact on workplace romance/ affairs?	32	18	25	25	40	10	45	5
6. Have you ever been romantically involved with any of your colleagues at work?	36	14	37	13	5	45	40	10
7. Does HR have a positive and constructive role to play?	36	14	21	29	30	20	9	41
8. Do you agree that such affairs at workplace have any impact on quality and speed of work?	39	11	40	10	27	23	42	8
9. Is there a policy in your organization to tackle this issue?	35	15	36	14	8	42	42	8
12. Does your organizational HR policy encourage this trend?	15	35	21	29	29	21	31	19
13. Does HR prevent you /anybody from having personal affairs?	15	35	29	21	13	37	22	28

Source: Primary questionnaire

From this table, in educational sector 48 people favor the fact that, there is wrong in romancing married colleagues/boss. In education sector 40 respondents responded, males are usually initiates office romance and call center responders are saying at the next higher level. 45 respondents suggested in call center/BPO sector, they are saying organizational culture has a direct impact on workplace romance/affairs. In education sector 42 respondents submitted they don't have any policy in their organization to tackle their

issue. In retail sector 35 respondents are responded, in their organization no HR policy to encourage this kind of trends. In education sector 37 respondents said HR is not preventing any body from having personal affairs. We recommend, all sectors can improve their HR policy as well as counsellors should organize continuously on the mass media enlightenment programme on the various factors responsible for extramarital affairs so that employees can learn and work on themselves to secure their job as well as their marriage life.

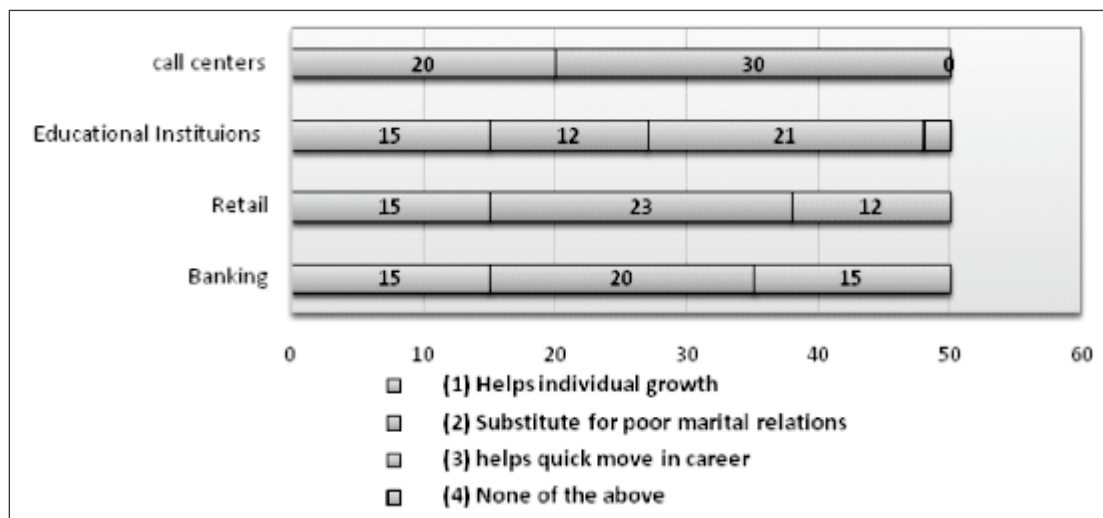
Table:2 Employee having romantic relation with his/her boss

2. Why would an employee have romantic relation with his her boss?	Banking	Retail	Educational Institutions	Call centers
(1) Helps individual growth	15	15	15	20
(2) Substitute for poor marital relations	20	23	12	30
(3) Helps quick move in career	15	12	21	0
(4) None of the above	0	0	2	0

From this table, In call center 20 respondents said employees having romantic relation with his /her boss helps individual growth, and 30 respondents from the call center they favor it substitute for poor

marital relations. In education sector 21 respondents submitted their response that it helps quick move in their career.

Chart: 1 An Employee have romantic relation with his/her boss



Source: Primary data (Questionnaire)

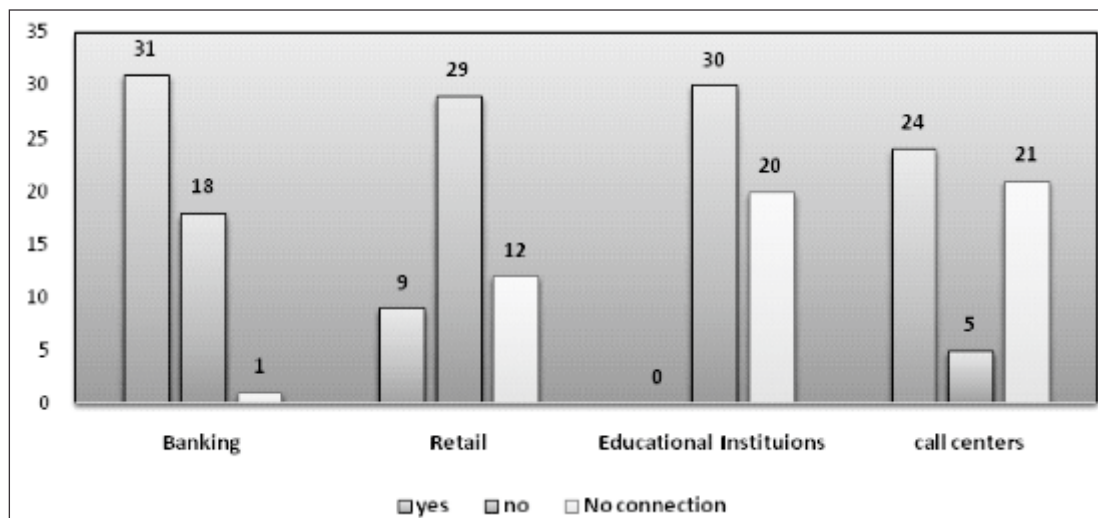
Table: 3 Management Intervention

4. Is it fair for an HR/ Management to intervene between employees who are involved romantically?				
	Banking	Retail	Educational Institutions	Call centers
Yes	31	9	0	24
No	18	29	30	5
No connection	1	12	20	21

Source: Primary data

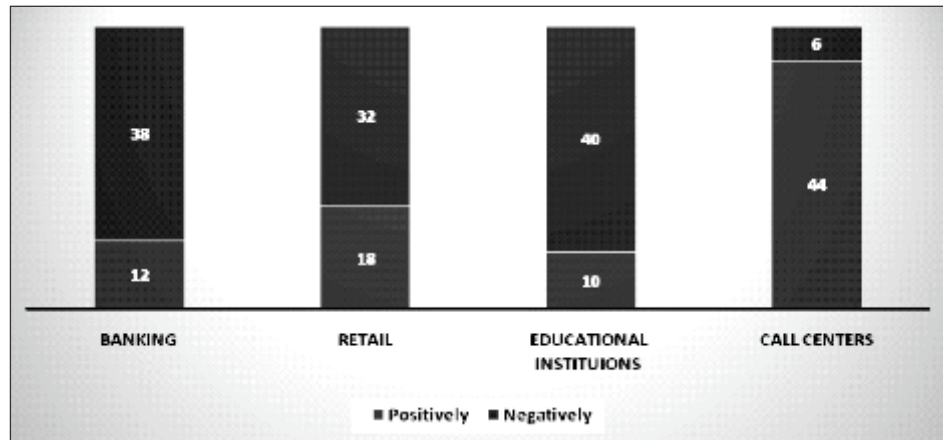
From this table, in banking sector 31 respondents favored HR/ Management is intervening between these issues. But in education sector 30 respondents

responded the management or HR is not involving in the romance issues. In banking sector only one person said there is no connection in these issue.

Chart: 2 Management intervention*Source: Primary data***Table :4 Impact of individual's performance**

10. Does it impact your performance adversely or positively?				
	Banking	Retail	Educational Institutions	Call centers
Positively	12	18	10	44
Negatively	38	32	40	6

Source : Primary data

Chart: 3 Impact of individual's performance

Source: Primary data

When the respondents were asked about the impact of work place romance on the performance, the response received were in the banking sector 38 out of 50 said the impact was negative. While 12 felt it was positive. There was a marked difference with other sectors which responded as : the retail sector

32 felt the impact was negative and 18 felt it was positive. In educational Institutions 40 said it was negative. While 10 said it was positive. The response of call centers was on expected lines with 44 saying it was positive and only 6 saying it was negative.

Table: 5 Biased behavior

11. Does it lead to partisan behavior if the person is your boss?	Banking	Retail	Educational Institutions	call centers
Certainly bosses are soft on individuals they are involved with	16	21	8	23
No organization and people are very professional	31	24	38	23
They need to adopt indifferent attitude	3	5	4	4

Source: Primary data

One of the main concerns addressed through the questionnaire was whether work place romance leads to partisan behavior especially if the person is one's boss. The responses were as follows:

BPO sector 23 respondents felt bosses are soft on individuals they are involved with. 23 felt it does not affect the behavior as people and organizations are professionals. While 4 felt bosses need to adapt a more indifferent attitude. Retail sector 21 respondents felt bosses are soft on individuals they

are involved with. 24 felt it does not affect the behavior as people and organizations are professionals. While 5 felt bosses need to adapt a more indifferent attitude. Education sector 8 respondents felt bosses are soft on individuals they are involved with. 38 felt it does not affect the behavior as people and organizations are professionals. While 4 felt bosses need to adapt a more indifferent attitude.

Chart: 4 biased behavior

Source: Primary data

1.10 Conclusion:

The study gives a very clear and open indications the work place romance can have serious implication especially when the limits are crossed. Keeping in mind the seriousness of the issue HR cannot turn a blind eye to this issue which can have serious social and legal implications, instead needs to evolve a clear cut policy for both employers and employees to control this menace. This bud needs to be crushed at its very origin. The other form of workplace romance is extra marital romance which can lead to serious consequences for the family. The study also concluded the BPO sector has many cases of work place romance while the education sector has the least. Professional counselors through Counseling Association should organize enlightenment programmes on mass media on various factors responsible for extramarital affairs so that married couples and youngster could learn and adjust extensively to sexual obligations and challenges that are attached to marriage.

Counseling programmes should also be designed by counselors at higher institutions of learning to educate youths on family, sex and marital counseling so as to get their minds prepared on the functions they are expected to perform when they get into marriage and how marriage could be

sustained and satisfied. Forum, workshops, and seminars should be organized to educate marriage couples on the effects of extramarital affair in their marriage.

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