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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

NIGHTSHIFT AND ITS EFFECT ON THE HEALTH OF WORKING WOMEN IN BPO CHENNAI

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ABSTRACT

Background of the study: Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) is the fastest growing segment of information technology enabled service industry in India. This research will focus on nightshift work and try to give a brief outline of the health problem faced by employees. Objectives of the study are to understand the health status of the women working in BPOs, to examine how the nightshift duty affects the health of the women working in BPOs and to analyze consequences of the nightshift on the social life of the women working in BPOs. **Methodology:** It is a qualitative study which helps the researcher for an in-depth understanding. The study was conducted in Tata Consultancy service (TCS), Chennai. Primary data were collected through interview guide and secondary data from Books, Journals, Published articles, etc. Descriptive research design was employed to study the stated objectives. **Result:** Social life of women employees has been affected and they are facing more mental pressure and depression; majority of the respondents faces various health problems like obesity, eye irritation, irregular menstrual cycle, etc. **Conclusion:** Night shift has influenced the lifestyle and health of women primarily due to its contemporary work settings.

Keywords: Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), health problems, mental pressure

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INTRODUCTION

Business Process Outsourcing is the fastest growing sector of the information technology. Economy scale, cost advantage, superior competency and utilization improvement are some of the factors have led to the economic growth of the BPO industry. In India, Business process outsourcing started around the mid-90's and India is now the world's promising and favored market for BPO companies among other countries such as, China, Australia, Ireland and Philippines. The World Health Organization and International Labor Organization have defined Occupational Health as the promotion and maintenance of highest degree of physical, mental and social well being of workers in all occupation by preventing departures from health, controlling risks and the adaptation of work to people and people to their work^{1,2}.

Shift workers usually tend to suffer from psychological and behavioral syndromes like irritability, ulcers, alcohol use, anxiety and depression and concentration problems. Health disorders like severe sleepiness, tiredness and stress experienced by night workers normally causes reduced alertness and consequently increases the risk of accidents, while on rare occasion it may even cause so-called "nightshift paralysis"- an unusual phenomenon observed among air traffic controllers and night nurses whereby the lack of sleep renders a person unable to react to stimuli which would normally generate a reaction³.

The new commercial viable phenomena for the Indian economy better termed as 'call centers' or 'BPO'. India has witnessed a tremendous growth in these global outsourced shops. The BPO industry in India is gaining momentum and promises to add 3.3million rupees in India a

country where productive employment is rare. A safe and healthy work environment is the basic right of every worker in every industry⁴.

Occupational health and safety is becoming more important in terms of managing human resources in organizations. In an organization the workplace environment directly influences the physical, mental, economic and social well being of workers which in turn affects their families, community and society. Women employees are subjected work stress, odd working hours and frequent shift changes apart from environmental and domestic stressors leading to increased physical and mental health problems. Employees are vulnerable for many diseases because of psychosocial stress. The disturbed social relations in family, occupation, etc lead to emotional stress and cause mental health problems and psycho-somatic disorders⁵.

Objectives of the study: To understand the health status of the women working in BPOs, to examine how the nightshift affects the health of the women working in BPOs and also to analyze consequences of the nightshift on the social life of the women working in BPOs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: It is a qualitative study which helps the researcher for an in-depth understanding. A case study has been used for flexible and open-ended technique of data collection and analysis. And therefore descriptive research design is employed to study the stated objectives. Descriptive method attempts to describe the health problem in-depth.

Population and study setting: Tata consultancy services (TCS) is a multinational company which is found as the top most IT Company in India.

The demand for employment opportunities were found among both male and female in this organization in which more females are working in nightshift. In recent journals and in debate there was a discussion about the health of working women in nightshift jobs so the researcher was interested in selecting the study area.

Sampling of the study: The study was conducted in Tata Consultancy service (TCS), Chennai. The universe of the study was, all the women who are working in nightshift under BPO process in the organization. Non-probability sampling design was used where the number of respondents in a population was unknown, in which the snowball sampling is used where the process of selecting a sample using networks.

Outcome measures: Data collection can be categorized into two types: one is primary and another is secondary. Primary data are collected through interview guide directly from the field related to a specific research question and a specific purpose pertaining to research objectives. Secondary data are collected from Publications of NASSCOM, Books and Journals relevant to the study conducted, Published and unpublished research reports, articles, etc. for descriptive and current narrative information.

RESULT

The study found that many factors affected on social, physical and mental health of working women. Attractive salary, travel facility, medical facility, incentives, insurance policies, etc., were motivated them to work on shift timings. Working women felt they are facing more mental pressure and depression, which affect on their social life. Employees have been socially alienated in the family. Women were

forced to leave their small children at home because of their work which resulted in lack of proper care, support and love for them. Productivity and work performance also have affected due to their work schedule. Majority of the respondents have faced various health problems like obesity, eye irritation, irregular menstrual cycle, etc. Shift timings affect on dietary pattern, mental stress, sleep disturbances, musculoskeletal problems, vocal, auditory and visual problems and menstrual disturbances have been reported among them. The biggest and fastest change that occurs in the life of a BPO employees is their lifestyle ⁶.

DISCUSSION

A) Health status of the women working in BPOs:

Generally working women faces various physical, mental and health problems in the society. Women in the BPO stated that there is a difference in their health status before and after joining the BPO job. They started to face various health issues as the days passed by. Women who experienced below one year and above five years are found to be facing health issues which are both minor and major. Their health status has been changed due to the shift timings. BPO employees were more stressed and more anxious ^{7,8,9}.

B) Nightshift affects the health of the women working in BPOs:

Employees are provided with 3-6days medical leave and medical facility is found also monthly once free medical checkup are provided and also provided with IVF treatment for infertility problem with complete bed rest for four months with salary. If the employee is under medication they were not able to take medicines in time due to shift timings which affects their health. Increased likelihood of obesity, higher risk of mood changes, increased risk of gastrointestinal

problems, etc are found. If the women employee is pregnant for their normal delivery 50Kare provided and for caesarean 75K is provided. Medical room facilities and also 24/7 ambulance are provided by the organization. Although employees faces many health problems but still continues to work for their economic and to achieve their goals. Women face several problems like obesity, headache, body pain, eye irritation, irregular menstrual cycle, digestive problem, respiration problem, and infertility problem^{10,11}.

C) Consequences of the nightshift on the social life of the women working in BPOs: Cultural pattern is bearing an association with health problems. BPO industry has led to the disintegration of joint family system resulting in more burdens and less support which cause physical and mental illness. Due to odd shift timings women had to balance between the dual burden of work and home which results in disruption in family life and lack of socialization. Many women stated that they are not able to spend time with their family members where the socialization was missing due to shift timing and also not able to do the regular activities and unable to engage in family occasions. Married women face the problems with their spouse as they are not able to spend time and also not able to do the daily chores and also not able to look after the child which totally affects the Childs socialization and education. The main source of social support will be her family members for unmarried women while in the case of married women it will be the spouse and the in-laws. In this sector parental support is crucial for the survival of women employees in the dominant patriarchal society as prevalent in India. No sexual and physical harassment is found. Though they are working in multinational

company employee should present good looking during work time. Although employees faces many health problems but still continues to work for their economic and to achieve their goals. As the company is provided with attractive salary, travel facility, medical facility, incentives, insurance policies, etc. the employees are attracted towards the organization.

CONCLUSION

Women lead a dual life as westerners by night and Indians by day where they are alienated from their family and friends. Though the night shift jobs acts as an agent of empowering the young women by giving job opportunities and making them financially independent at young age and improving their spatial and temporal mobility. But it also brings health hazards, psychological stress and social problems. In order to attract good talent and find suitable employees the BPO employees are paid well, given good transport facilities besides good food. These employees live a life of luxury compared to their other country men.

This is especially true of Asian countries like India, China and Malaysia and African countries like Ghana and Kenya. Shift duty disturbs the regular resting time and night sleep. Such conditions lead to psychosis, neurosis, hypertension, heart diseases and other health problems. Further lifestyle factors like smoking and alcoholism have increased in industrial society and caused various health problems. Women employees suffer from a number of health problems including psychological stress. Women adopt different ways and strategies to cope up with the high level of stress that they face, with certain degree of success but the odd working hours and the highly pressurized

work environment along with the burden of western accent and changed lifestyles.

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