

# Impact of Gender Sensitive Practices on Job Satisfaction & Stress Levels

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*The study aimed at assessing the impact of gender sensitive practices on job satisfaction and stress levels of women executives working in call centers in India. Data was collected from 302 women executives working in eight call centers in Delhi, Gurgaon and Noida. Structural Equation Modeling through AMOS (version 16) was used to test the model fit. It was found that gender sensitive or family friendly policies positively impact on job satisfaction and negatively affect the stress levels of women executives which in turn affect the organizational commitment and intent to leave.*

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## Introduction

Demographic transformations and changes in the structure of society have resulted in a shift in social trends. The inclusion of large number of women in employment is one of the many changes which are taking place in these new working life patterns (Noon and Blyton, 1997) and has created variations in the way employment terms are offered. In 1984, John Atkinson at the University of Sussex (UK) talked about a new model of the firm called the “flexible firm” (Atkinson, 1984) which was a result of these changes. The main premise of the flexible firm is that it divides its workforce into different segments each employed on different terms and conditions, which reflect the nature of their contribution to the production process. Organizations, in order to gain competitive advantage and increase employee’s commitment, seek to attain flexibilities – numerically, financially, functionally and temporally (Johnson, 2004). Also, interest in flexible working arrangements has been growing, as such practices have been regarded as the measures to reconcile or balance increased pressures of work and family life (Dex & Scheibl, 2001).

**A sudden and steep increase in female employees may require a new HRM policy which is different from a traditional male oriented personnel policy.**

Recently, India has also experienced a considerable increase in female employment in BPO industry. The industry has the highest percentage of women workforce and there is a continuous increase in the number of women professionals over the years with one fifth of the female employees at the managerial level or above. A sudden and steep increase in female employees may require a new HRM policy which is different from a traditional male oriented personnel policy. Traditionally, work structures were designed to fit males only. Conventional management policies did not consider the dual responsibilities of female employees between work and families. As a result, there is a sudden development of gender sensitive practices in many organizations in India, including BPOs. From an organizational perspective, the primary focus for being more family-friendly is to attract and retain qualified employees (Rogier & Padgett, 2004). However, with the increase in the number of female employees, there has been additional pressure to become more family friendly on moral or ethical grounds (Cohen & Single, 2001). This argument can be supported by the fact that organizations have an obligation to provide mechanisms to help employees balance their work and home life so that employees, particularly women, are not forced to choose one over the other.

Many organizations are adopting gender sensitive or family-responsive human resource policies to help employees achieve a better balance between work and family (Rogier & Padgett, 2004)

The purpose of this study is to explore the satisfaction and stress levels of women employees of call centers who avail the benefits of various gender sensitive practices. Over the long term, this may encourage women to reduce their intentions to leave the organization and increase the level of organizational commitment. Many researches have been conducted in various other sectors which focus on the impact of family friendly policies on job satisfaction, career advancement and organizational commitment of women employees (Park & Kim, 2001). However, there is dearth of similar studies in an unconventional work environment like call centers. With a sample of women employees working in BPOs / call centers, this study tries to fill this gap by examining how gender sensitive policies influence job satisfaction, organizational commitment, stress and intention to leave the organization.

## **Literature Review**

*Family – friendly Policies:* Today, unlike in the past, employees demand a high quality life both at family front as well as the workplace (Moon & Roh, 2010). This high quality life seems to provide satisfaction and happiness to the employees' family life which according to Romzek (1991) can have a positive impact on the workplace. This may be one of the main reasons why gender sen-

sitive or family friendly practices have been recommended to help employees reduce work-family conflict by allowing them more control over their work schedule. Park & Kim (2001) found that family-friendly policies in S. Korea have a positive influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Similarly, Moon & Roh (2010) in their study found that the balance between work and family was the strongest predictor influencing job motivation, work performance and employee morale.

**Flexible work schedules provide organizational benefits such as increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment and productivity and decreased absenteeism and turnover.**

Researches indicate that out of the many components of family friendly policies, women are more likely to work flexible schedules (Almer & Kaplan, 2002; Cohen, 1997). Almer & Kaplan (2002) reported that employees working a flexible arrangement experienced lower levels of stress and burnout. Similarly, Galinsky, Bond & Friedman (1996) found that having control over work schedules, leads to employees feeling less stressed, which suggests that they may also perceive less work family conflict. Since women are entrusted with the responsibilities at the family front, this can be considered as the reason for women working flexible schedules. It has also been found that flexible work schedules provide organizational benefits such as increased job satisfaction, organizational

commitment and productivity and decreased absenteeism and turnover. According to work adjustment model (Pierce & Newstrom, 1980), a good match between the rewards offered by a job and the needs of an employee results in positive job attitudes. Positive job attitude implies increase in job satisfaction (Baltes et al, 1999; Pierce & Newstrom, 1980) and a reduction in absenteeism and turnover (Pierce, Newstrom, Dunham & Barber, 1989). In addition, this balance will further result in an increase in organizational commitment (Rogier & Padgett, 2004). More recent researches tend to confirm these findings. A literature review on family responsive work place policies including alternative work arrangements, concluded that productivity, organizational commitment, retention and job satisfaction are all positively affected by these policies (Glass & Finley, 2002).

Flexible work schedules make it easier for women to progress into upper management positions. Researches suggest that women face a number of barriers to advancing into upper management (Cohen & Single 2001; Friedman & Galinsky 1992). Collins, (1993) reported the difficulty of balancing work and family as one such barrier. Women who are faced with this conflict choose family over work and forgo advancement at work (Conlin 2000). This indicated that if given an opportunity to have a flexible work schedule, it is more likely that career-oriented women will remain in their jobs, even demanding jobs, as they are able to balance work and family. This should lead to greater number of women advancing in their career. On the

other hand, Judiesch & Lyness (1999) found that there were significantly fewer promotions and smaller salary increases both for men and women, working on flexible schedules. MacDermid, Lee, Buch & Williams (2001) in their research on women managers and professionals concluded that most of the respondents had sacrificed some upward mobility in their careers, especially in the short run because of reduced workload schedules. Similarly, Cohen & Single (2001) in their study showed that the manager (both men and women) were perceived more negatively on manager's desirability for an engagement with high likelihood of turnover, when on a flexible schedule.

These studies are a first step in understanding the job satisfaction, stress levels, organizational commitment and intent to leave of working a flexible schedule. How-

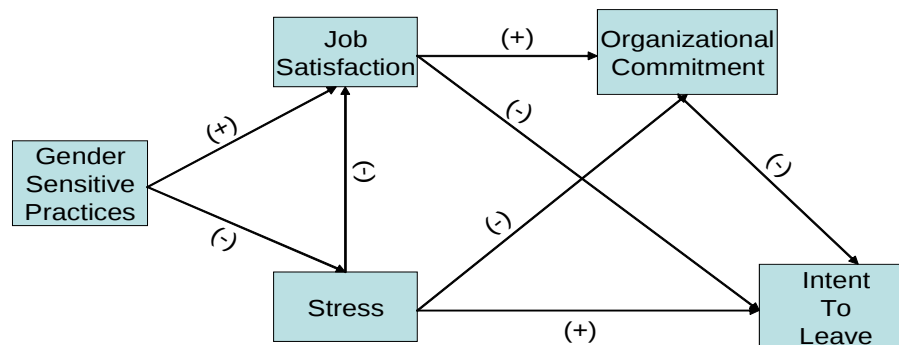
ever, there is dearth of such researches in call centers. The research described here seeks to understand, how not only flexible work schedules but the entire gamut of gender sensitive practices or family friendly policies affect the satisfaction, stress, organizational commitment and intention to leave of women in call centers. Based on this reasoning, we hypothesized that:

H1: Gender sensitive practices will predict job satisfaction with outcome related dimensions of organizational commitment and intention to leave.

H2: Gender sensitive practices will predict stress with outcome related dimensions of organizational commitment and intention to leave.

Based on the literature review, following research model is conceptualized (Fig.1):

**Fig. 1 Hypothesized Model to Assess Construct Relationships**



## Methodology

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire from 302 women executives employed in eight call centers situated in Noida, Gurgaon and Delhi. We approached call centers to

get permission to collect data from their women employees and got permission from two call centers. Those who voluntarily agreed to participate in the survey were distributed questionnaires containing a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, instructions for

completing the questionnaire and the demographic details. Participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Out of the 150 distributed questionnaires, we received 112 usable questionnaires reflecting 75 percent response rate. The remaining 190 responses were collected through snowball sampling.

Out of a total of 302 participants, 77.4 percent were unmarried and only 22.6 percent were married. The mean age of the respondents was 21.7 years (SD = 0.947) and mean experience in the call centre was 1.40 years (SD = 0.729). Majority of the sample was in junior position (75.3 %), 19.3 percent were in middle level and only 5.4 percent in senior position levels. 36.5 percent of the respondents were graduates, 47.8 percent were postgraduates, 11 percent had professional qualifications and 4.7 percent fell in the 'other' category.

### **Gender Sensitive Practices**

Gender Sensitive Practices were assessed through a scale developed and used by NASSCOM-IIM (A) study (2009) on 'Crossing the Digital Barriers'. Five items were taken for the present study. The respondents were asked to rate as to how much they agree with each of the items on a five point scale (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). A sample item is "Flexi Timings of the organization help me to meet my family demands". The reliability of the scale was 0.59.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction was assessed through a 6- item scale developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951). Out of the 6 items, three were reverse coded. The respondents were asked to rate the items on a five point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). A sample item was "I feel fairly well satisfied with my job". The reliability of the scale was 0.79.

### **Stress**

Stress was measured with four burn-out and anxiety related items (e.g. I feel emotionally drained by my job, I feel tense at my job.) adapted from the scale developed by Tate et al (1997). Participants indicated on a six point scale the degree to which they experienced each of these symptoms. The reliability of the scale was 0.79.

### **Organizational Commitment**

Organizational Commitment was assessed by using the scale developed by Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979). Seven items from the original scale were used for assessing this construct (e.g. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.).The respondents were asked to give their rating on a five point rating scale. The reliability of the scale was 0.79

### **Intent to Leave**

Intent to Leave was assessed using Comprehensive Workplace Scale by Tate

et al (1997). It consisted of two items and the ratings were given on a five point scale (1 = very often, 2 = fairly often, 3 = sometimes, 4 = occasionally, 5 = rarely or never). The sample item is “How often do you think of leaving your present job?” The reliability of the scale was 0.75.

### Descriptive Statistics

The data were analyzed using SPSS (version 20). The inter-correlations between variables and the mean, standard deviation and Cronbach’s alpha for each variable are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Scale Correlation Matrix**

|            | Mean | SD    | GSP      | JS       | ST       | OC      | IL     |
|------------|------|-------|----------|----------|----------|---------|--------|
| <b>GSP</b> | 3.37 | 0.626 | (0.56)   |          |          |         |        |
| <b>JS</b>  | 3.60 | 0.617 | 0.279**  | (0.79)   |          |         |        |
| <b>ST</b>  | 0.93 | 0.989 | -0.249** | -0.486** | (0.79)   |         |        |
| <b>OC</b>  | 3.74 | 0.566 | 0.256**  | 0.569**  | -0.523** | (0.79)  |        |
| <b>IL</b>  | 2.43 | 1.182 | -0.127*  | -0.407** | 0.420**  | 0.415** | (0.75) |

Note: N = 302. Cronbach’s alpha is in parentheses along the diagonal

\* =  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.01$

GSP = Gender Sensitive Practices, JS = Job Satisfaction, ST = Stress, OC = Organizational Commitment, IL = Intent to Leave

### Test of the Proposed Model

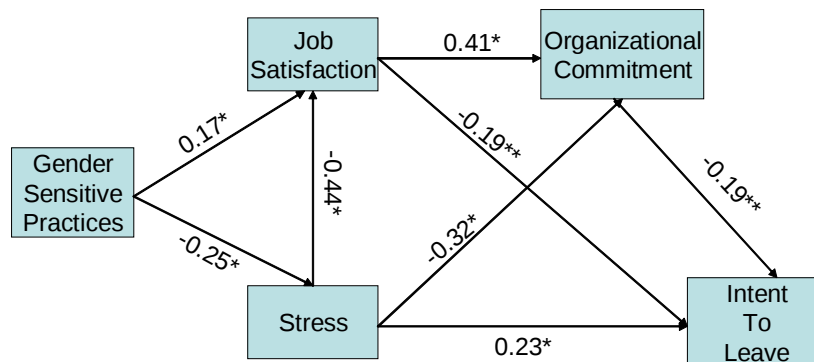
We used AMOS (version 16) to test the hypotheses in our proposed model. We assessed the model fit using the Chi-square ratio and the conventional indices: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). In general, a non-significant Chi-square ratio with value less than 4.0, RMSEA less than 0.08 and GFI, AGFI, IFI and CFI values greater than 0.90 indicate a good fit of the data to the proposed model (Bollen, 1989).

As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), an appropriate method for causal model testing using latent variables is the two-step procedure for testing structural equation models. The first

step in this analysis is a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the proposed dimensionality through the fit of individual items to their respective scales. The item-scale fit indices-  $X^2/df = 2.810$ , GFI = 0.836, AGFI = 0.799, IFI = 0.785, CFI = 0.782, RMSEA = 0.078 indicate a satisfactory fit of the data to a five factor model.

The second step in the Anderson and Gerbing (1988) procedure is to test the fully specified model. The hypothesized model fit indices-  $X^2/df = 1.251$ , GFI = 0.997, AGFI = 0.975, IFI = 0.999, CFI = 0.999, RMSEA = 0.029 indicate a good fit of the data to the specified model and is shown in fig. 2. Further, all hypothesized path coefficients are significant and in the direction hypothesized. Model fit and significant path coefficients offer support for the effects as forwarded by hypotheses 1 and 2.

Fig. 2 Hypothesized Model with Path Coefficients



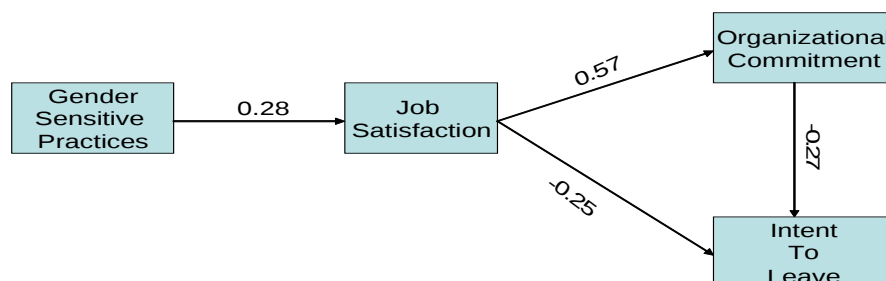
### Alternative Models

Alternative models were estimated to determine the plausibility of other theoretical models as previously proposed. Two competing models were examined. In both cases, the hypothesized model as presented in fig. 1 was modified by either adding or subtracting a path as noted below.

Prior researches (Baltes et al, 1999; Grover and Crooker, 1995; Scandura and Lankau, 1997) report a direct relationship between family

friendly policies, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intention to leave. We also proposed a direct relationship between family friendly policies, job satisfaction and intention to leave. These relationships (model 1) were tested by modifying the hypothesized model. Model 1 ( $X^2/df = 2.337$ ,  $GFI = 0.992$ ,  $AGFI = 0.962$ ,  $IFI = 0.988$ ,  $CFI = 0.988$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.067$ ) provided an adequate fit to the data and all path coefficients remained significant (Fig. 3). However, the hypothesized model appears to be the more parsimonious explanation of the data.

Fig. 3 Path Coefficients for Model 1

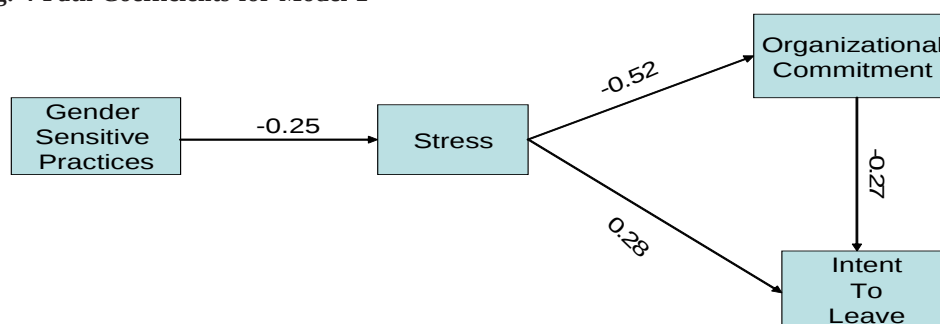


**There is also considerable empirical research that emphasizes the relationship between gender sensitive practices and stress.**

There is also considerable empirical research that emphasizes the relationship between gender sensitive practices and stress (Almer & Kaplan, 2002). One of our proposes was to build on this find-

ing by proposing that gender sensitive practices reduce stress which has a positive impact on organizational commitment and hence reduces intention to leave. We tested this contention (model 2) by modifying the hypothesized model. Model 2 ( $X^2/df = 3.581$ , GFI = 0.988, AGFI = 0.942, CFI = 0.973, IFI = 0.974, RMSEA = 0.093) provided an adequate fit to the data except for the value of RMSEA (Fig. 4).

**Fig. 4 Path Coefficients for Model 2**



Comparing the three models, the hypothesized model appears to be the best

fitting and most parsimonious. Model comparisons are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2 Model Comparison**

| Model        | $X^2/df$ | GFI   | AGFI  | CFI   | IFI   | RMSEA |
|--------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Hypothesized | 1.251    | 0.997 | 0.975 | 0.999 | 0.999 | 0.029 |
| Model 1      | 2.337    | 0.992 | 0.962 | 0.988 | 0.988 | 0.067 |
| Model 2      | 3.581    | 0.988 | 0.942 | 0.973 | 0.974 | 0.093 |

Model 1: GSP – JS – OC – IL

Model 2: GSP – Stress – OC – IL

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between gender sensitive practices, job satisfaction and stress among women employees of call centers. It was hypothesized that those who enjoy the benefits of gender sensitive practices would be perceived to have

higher job satisfaction and lower levels of stress. The results of this study provide support for this hypothesis. The results reveal two broad trends. First, presence and effective execution of gender sensitive practices have an impact on the job satisfaction of women employees which leads to higher organizational commitment and hence reduces intention to

leave the job. This finding is consistent with prior research (Baltes et al., 1999; Pierce & Newstrom, 1980). They concluded that flexible work schedules make it easier for employees to balance work and family responsibilities resulting in an increase in job satisfaction. This in turn decreases absenteeism and turnover (Pierce, Newstrom, Dunham & Barber, 1989). Though Baltes et al (1999) did not include organizational commitment as an outcome in their meta-analysis, consistent with the stated expectations, some other researches have found that organizational commitment is positively affected when there is a flexible work schedule (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Scandura & Lankau, 1997). Similarly, Park & Kim (2001) conjectured the positive influence of family friendly policies on job satisfaction and organizational commitment in South Korea.

The second finding of the study relates gender sensitive practices with stress, organizational commitment and intention to leave. The finding suggests a negative relationship between gender sensitive practices and stress which in turn lead to a decrease in organizational commitment and an increase in intention to leave. This finding also finds support from prior researches. Almer & Kaplan (2002) reported that employees working a flexible arrangement experienced lower levels of stress and burnout. Similarly, Galinsky, Bond & Friedman (1996) found that employees feel less stressed when they have control over their schedule.

Many researches associate flexible work schedules with decrease in work –

family conflict (Meyer, 1997; Hill et al, 2001). Supporting this conviction, Burke (2000) concluded that organizations have developed ‘family – friendly policies’ to support work-personal life balance and to ensure that they remain attractive to workers. This standpoint enables us to take another perspective towards the findings of the study. The relationship between gender sensitive practices, job satisfaction and stress can also be seen in the light of balancing work and domestic responsibilities. The repetitive and intense (Bain & Taylor, 2000; Rose, 2002; Taylor et al, 2003) and closely monitored environment of call centers has been associated with higher anxiety and depression, lower job satisfaction, lower general mental and physical health and employee withdrawal (Deery et al., 2002; Holman, 2002). In such an environment, the presence and effective implementation of gender sensitive practices can provide a sigh of relief to the women employees who can better balance their work and home responsibilities and hence feel less stressed and satisfied with their jobs. This is supported by literature which postulates that effective coping responses to work – family conflict can eliminate or reduce both job-related and home distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

### **Limitations & Future Research**

Though this study provides useful insights into the studied relationships, the results may be viewed in the light of possible limitations. One limitation of the study is the use of some self-report measures. Obtaining data from other re-

sources could enhance the generalizability of the findings. Thus, inclusion of longitudinal studies and other ratings of behavior and attitude will provide support for current findings. All the data collected through self-reports is likely to be influenced by social desirability response bias. Although this bias cannot be ruled out, some researches have shown that social desirability may not be a source of bias in measuring organizational perceptions (Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992; Spector, 1987).

The hierarchical level of the participants could be another limitation of the study. Most of the participants (75.3 %) in our sample belong to lower managerial positions and also majority of the respondents are unmarried (77.4 %). Their understanding of gender sensitive practices and perception towards their benefits might be different from the perception of married women employees and from those in the middle and senior management positions. Hence, there could be variability in the responses.

### **Practical Consideration**

Since women form the major portion of the workforce of call centers, using their skills and talent is a major task confronting these organizations. For this, they have to not only focus on the HR systems, but also have to understand and respond to the social and psychological processes that make these systems effective or otherwise.

Our findings suggest that since gender sensitive practices have a positive

impact on job satisfaction, the HR department needs to make additional efforts towards the formulation of family-friendly policies as these practices might provide the crucial advantage of retaining call center employees which is another major issue facing call centers. The effective and fair gender sensitive practices can compensate the otherwise stressful environment of call centers. The results have implications for organizational commitment also. The satisfied and stress-free stay of women employees in the call centers will have a positive impact on organizational commitment also and thus, will reduce intention to leave the organization.

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