

# Workplace Stress, Well-Being, and Quality of Work Life: A Study on BPO Employees

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## Abstract

In the global scenario, the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector is one of the fast growing sectors after the liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation, to increase job opportunities day by day. The present study examines the relationship between the workplace stress, well-being, and quality of life. It also aims to investigate the differences between day and night shift workers, males and females, and married and unmarried employees working in BPO sector with respect to experienced workplace stress, well-being and quality of life. In the present study, 120 employees were selected from the different business process companies. The analysis revealed that organisational role stress is significantly correlated with sociability. And, quality of work life was significantly correlated with well-being. However, the difference in gender was found on organisational role stress and some of its dimensions, as well as on quality of work life. Succinctly, married and unmarried employees differed on dimensions of well-being. As far as, shift timings are concerned, day shift employees were found to differ significantly from night shift employees on organisational role stress and its few dimensions, as well as on quality of work life. From the findings of the study, it has been understood that the gender differences, marital status difference, and difference in shift timings have made an impact on the variables such as workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being of BPO employees.

**Keywords:** Business Process Outsourcing, Workplace Stress, Well-being, Quality of Life, Employees

## Introduction

The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector is one of the fast growing sectors in the global scenario after the liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation in order to increase job opportunities. Even though, Indian BPO companies are focusing their attention towards training the employees still most of the employees are facing a lot of problems as they are working on continuous night shifts, which affect their biological balance. Apart from this, excessive workloads, unrealistic targets and pressure from customers are creating stress among the employees.

As per Kearney (2009), India is the leading country for offshore outsourcing, with a current BPO sector growth value of \$47bn. Hence, India's BPO sector has become one of the notable growth catalysts for the Indian economy. Moreover, India's BPO sector has made direct and indirect contributions to varying socio-economic parameters, employment, and standard of living. Furthermore, it has been suggested that America and Europe are the biggest consumers for the Indian outsourcing companies with 60% and 31% of BPO exports, respectively. All of these suggest the BPO industry has positively influenced the lives of Indians.

According to the World Bank 2004 quarterly report, India's BPO sector's gross domestic product (GDP) has risen steadily over the years, with an average share of 52% between 2000-2001 and 2005-2006. Besides the GDP, there is evidence to suggest that Indian's BPO industry and information technology (IT) have been the backbone for the growth of a new entrepreneurial class,

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and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) (Kumar & Joseph, 2005).

United Nations Educational Digest indicated that 3 million new graduates are produced by India's universities every year with around 16% focusing on subject of science and new technology. Also, evidence from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) 2009 report suggests that India's workforce and technological readiness are vital resources to its BPO industry.

BPO has several benefits for the organisation as well as employees, such as- it improves the overall productivity as well as employees become more efficient and productive, it helps organisation to focus on their core values, organisation can hire talented people for work on low salary, and outsourcing also helps organisation to improve its human resource.

Employees' well-being in an organisation depends on their quality of work life. Quality of work life has been defined as the workplace environments that promote and maintain employee satisfaction with an aim to improving working condition for employees. Major areas of quality of work life are working environment, chance of growth, fair compensation, job satisfaction, employee motivation, communication flow, and suitable work timing. If the employees' quality of work life is affected then it leads to stress. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is defined as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being". Employees are nowadays seen as facing job stress or role stress in the organisation. It occurs when the demands of the job exceed the capabilities, needs, or resources of the worker. There are various factors that can lead to job stress such as low salary, heavy workloads, unrealistic job expectations, and lack of opportunities for growth and advancement.

Stress is one of the major problems of working women in India. Many working women in India, especially those who are working mothers are stuck in stress and depression, forever trying to balance an ever-growing burden of professional responsibilities and personal commitments. There is an urgent need for them to overcome stress and beat the depression. The stress in elderly women can be reduced by sharing their personal works with the family members and official works with the subordinates at workplace. Long working hours induce stress in

married working women, such stress can be reduced by giving number of breaks between the working hours and providing some refreshment for overcoming physical and mental tiredness during working time. Also, shift timings can be framed to reduce the working hours. The married working women get trapped in stress by working out of compulsion to create a financial balance in the family. This type of stress can be dealt by providing the facility to work from home or by adopting flexible working hours.

Although there are various benefits of working in BPO as mentioned above, yet employees do face various problems which lead to stress and affect their well-being. So this current study is undertaken to examine the relationship between workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being among BPO employees. Moreover, it also takes into account difference on the basis of gender, marital status, and shift timing among these variables.

## Review of Literature

This chapter discusses the researches in the area of organisational stress, well-being and quality of life in light of demographic differences. The review is presented below.

Latha and Panchanatham (2010) focused on identifying the problems of employees in call centers and their stress level. The findings suggested that 8% employees have low level of stress, 80% have medium level, and 12% have high level of stress. It was also noted that job feedback, workload, and promotion opportunities create high level of stress for majority of call center employees. Other factors like working conditions, job security, workplace politics, job satisfaction, and changes taking place in the workplace are a source of medium stress for the respondents.

Srimathi and Kumar (2010) focused on the stages of well-being among 325 working women employees in altered occupations - companies, hospitals, banks, educational institutions and call centers/ BPOs were casually selected. It was found that women workers working in companies had least psychological well-being, followed by women working in health organisations.

Malhotra and Chadha (2012) found that job satisfaction is the reason for higher stress among the employees. It was also suggested from the result that salary, job task, colleagues, sense of purpose, career path opportunity,

work environment, autonomy, and workload are the major variables to introduce the stress among the employees.

Aziz (2013) carried out a study to know the factors causing stress in BPO employees. They found that major factors that lead to stress in BPO employees are monitoring of employees, angry customers, changing identity, performance metrics, and night shift.

Burra and Chirayath (2013) focused on influence of the demographic variables on quality of work life of BPO employees and investigated the relationship between quality of work life and some demographic characteristics among them. The result indicated significant relationship between gender & quality of work-life and income & quality of work-life. No significant relationship was found between age & quality of work life and work experience & quality of work life.

Jain, Giga, and Cooper (2013) conducted a study to investigate the mediating impact of organisational commitment on the relationship between organisational stressors and employee health and well-being. They found that both employee commitment to their organisation and their perception of the organisation commitment have an influence on stressors and employees health and well-being.

Shilpa, Ali, Sathyanaryana and Rani (2013) identified the problems in the BPO sector and the level of stress among the employees, to determine the cause and perception of the employees about their work life. They found that change in the salary will lead to change in performance, increase in the workload will increase the blood pressure of employees, and late night shifts will increase heart decease of employees. It was also noted that there was significance relationship between the employee performance and salary, job task, work environment, colleagues, late night shifts, targets, autonomy, and work load.

Banu and Gomathi (2014) focused on understanding the demographic profile and the various physical problems faced by women employees in BPO industry. They found that women employees face many problems like physical, psychological, and discrimination at work which affect their work and family. These problems are caused by long working hours, irregular shifts, high targets, insufficient holidays, mental pressure, etc.

Tamizharasi and Rani (2014) investigated the relationship between work stress and job performance on BPO employees. They found that salary, job task, colleagues, work environment, autonomy and workload are the major variables to introduce the stress among the employees.

## Methodology

### Problem of the Study

The present study is designed to examine the relationship between the workplace stress, well-being, and quality of life. The study also aims to investigate the differences between day and night shift workers, males and females, and married and unmarried employees working in BPO sector with respect to experienced workplace stress, well-being, and quality of life.

### Rationale of the Study

As Kearney (2009) report indicates, India is the leading country for offshore outsourcing, with a current BPO sector growth value of \$47bn. As we know that BPO has both the shifts. So, the current study focuses on investigating the organisational role stress, quality of work life, and well-being among BPO employees.

### Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to examine the relationship between the workplace stress, well-being, and quality of life. The study also aims to investigate the differences between day and night shift workers, males and females, and married and unmarried employees working in BPO sector with respect to experienced workplace stress, well-being and quality of life. The other objectives of the study are:

(1A) to examine if there is a significant relationship among workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being of the employees of BPO.

(2A) to examine if there is a significant difference between males and females workers in their experiences of workplace stress.

(2B) to examine if there is a significant difference between males and females workers in their experiences of quality of work life.

(2C) to examine if there is a significant difference between males and females workers in their experiences of well-being.

(3A) to examine if there is a significant difference between married and unmarried workers in their experiences of workplace stress.

(3B) to examine if there is a significant difference between married and unmarried workers in their experiences of quality of work life.

(3C) to examine if there is a significant difference between married and unmarried workers in their experiences of well-being.

(4A) to examine if there is a significant difference between day and night shift workers in their experiences of workplace stress.

(4B) to examine if there is a significant difference between day and night shift workers in their experiences of quality of work life.

(4C) to examine if there is a significant difference between day and night shift workers in their experiences of well-being.

## Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant relationship between workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being of the employees of BPO.
2. There will be a significant difference on workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being among male and female employees.
3. There will be a significant difference on workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being among married and unmarried employees.
4. There will be a significant difference on workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being among day and night shift employees.

## Sample for the Study

The sample of the study comprised 120 BPO employees. The sample was collected from three select BPO companies. In this study,

60 employees are from day shifts and 60 from the night shifts.

- day/ male/ married are 15 employees.
- day/ male/ unmarried are 15 employees.
- day/ female/ married are 15 employees.
- day/ female/ unmarried are 15 employees.
- night/ male/ married are 15 employees.
- night/ male/ unmarried are 15 employees.
- night/ female/ married are 15 employees.
- night/ female/ unmarried are 15 employees.

## Tools Used for the Study

The variables were assessed using the following scales:

### Organisational Role Stress (Pareek, 1983)

This scale provide total scores as well as the scores on ten components/ factors which are intra-role distance, role stagnation, role expectations conflicts, role erosion, role overload, role isolation, personal inadequacy, self-role distance, role ambiguity, and resource inadequacy. Organisational role stress (ORS) is a 5 point rating scale, indicating how true a particular statement is for the role. Responses are to be given on a separate answer sheet. ORS scale has 50 items (statements). The score of each role stress may range from 0 to 20 and the total organisational role stress score may range from 0-200.

### Well-being Scale (Friedman, 1994)

The scale was developed serendipitously out of an exploratory research project originally designed to discover the bi-polar adjectives that could measure the “agreeability” subscales for the 5-factor inventory. The five core personality factors are generally considered to be emotional stability/neuroticism, extroversion/introversion, openness/closed, agreeable/disagreeable, and conscientiousness/undependable. The Friedman well-being scale has an average Cronbach alpha reliability score of .94 over a number of studies. The test-retest reliability is .85 at 3 weeks, .81 at 5 weeks, .81 at 10 weeks, and .81 at 13 weeks for a clinical population and .73 at 4 weeks for a college population.

**Employee Quality of Work Life (Karl Albrecht International, n.d.)**

This is a combination of experience factors perceived and interpreted by members of the organisation that shape their attitudes towards their jobs, their bosses, the executives, and the overall enterprise as a place to work. This survey has a series of questions that relate to your experiences as a working member of your organisation. There are 46 questions in the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale ranges from .81-.83.

**Statistical Design**

In this research, data will be analysed by SPSS 16 and Pearson product moment correlation will be used to examine organisational role stress, employee well-being,

and employee quality of work life. Student’s t-test will be used to examine the difference between males/females, married/unmarried, and day/night shifts in organisations.

**Findings of the Study**

Table 1 shows that organisational role stress is correlated positively and significantly with sociability ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ). This implies that participants with higher organisational role stress were also higher in their sociability. Employee quality of work life was correlated positively and significantly with well-being ( $r = .21, p < .05$ ), sociability ( $r = .24, p < .01$ ), self-esteem ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ), and emotional stability ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ). These results indicate that the higher quality of work life of the employees is related to higher self-esteem, well-being, sociability, and emotional stability.

**Table 1: Correlations**

Variables	ORS	EQWL	FWBC	FSOC	FSES	FJOV	FES	FHAPPY
ORS								
EQWL								
FWBC		.21*						
FSOC	.19*	.24**	.78**					
FSES		.19*	.73**	.53**				
FJOV			.83**	.70**	.46**			
FES		.20*	.93**	.67**	.66**	.73**		
FHAPPY			.61**	.45**	.42**	.43**	.54**	

\*\* .  $p < .01$ , \* .  $p < .05$

ORS-Organisational Role Stress, EQWL-Employee Quality Work Life, FWBC-Freedman Well-being, FSOC-Sociability, FSES-Self-esteem/ Self-confidence, FJOV-Jovial, FES-Emotional Stability, FHAPPY-Happiness

Table 2 shows the t test and significant value on the basis of which it is evident from the result that male and female employees significantly differ on role erosion ( $t = -.24, p = .015$ ), role inadequacy ( $t = -2.8, p = .00$ ), total ORS ( $t = -2.39, p = .018$ ) dimensions of ORS, and employee quality work life ( $t = 2.09, p = .039$ ).

**Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t Values of Male and Female Employees**

Variables	ORS	EQWL	FWBC	FSOC	FSES	FJOV	FES	FHAPPY
ORS								
EQWL								
FWBC		.21*						
FSOC	.19*	.24**	.78**					
FSES		.19*	.73**	.53**				
FJOV			.83**	.70**	.46**			
FES		.20*	.93**	.67**	.66**	.73**		
FHAPPY			.61**	.45**	.42**	.43**	.54**	

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

RE- Role Erosion, RIN-Role Inadequacy, ORS- Organisational Role Stress, EWQOL- Employee Quality Work Life

employees significantly differ on well-being ( $t = 3.48, p = .00$ ), sociability ( $t = 2.75, p = .00$ ), jovial ( $t = 4.70, p = .00$ ), emotional stability ( $t = 2.61, p = .01$ ), and happy ( $t = 2.61, p = .01$ ) dimensions of well-being.

Table 3 shows the t test and significant value on the basis of which it is evident that married and unmarried

**Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t Values of Married and Unmarried Employees**

	Marital Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	Sig(2-tailed)
FWBC	Married	60	53.60	9.86	3.48**	.00
	Unmarried	60	47.55	9.14	3.48**	.00
FSOC	Married	60	53.11	10.63	2.75**	.00
	Unmarried	60	47.58	11.35	2.75**	.00
FJOV	Married	60	61.23	11.19	4.70**	.00
	Unmarried	60	51.38	11.72	4.70**	.00
FES	Married	60	53.10	11.50	2.61**	.01
	Unmarried	60	48.05	9.57	2.61**	.01
FHAPPY	Married	60	54.33	16.91	2.61**	.01
	Unmarried	60	45.66	19.34	2.61**	.01

\*\*  $p < .01$

FWBC- Well-being, FSOC- Sociability, FJOV- Jovial, FES- Emotional Stability, FHAPPY- Happiness

Table 4 shows the t test and significance value on the basis of which it can be noted that day and night shift employees differ significantly on role expectation conflict ( $t = 3.89,$

$p = .00$ ), role erosion ( $t = 2.83, p = .05$ ), role overload ( $t = 2.74, p = .00$ ), role isolation ( $t = 2.14, p = .03$ ), personal inadequacy ( $t = 2.11, p = .03$ ), role inadequacy dimensions of ORS ( $t = 1.97, p = .05$ ), ORS ( $t = 5.85, p = .00$ ), and employee quality work life ( $t = 2.99, p = .003$ ).

**Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t Values of Night and Day Shift Employees**

						Sig(2-tailed)
REC	Day	60	10.50	2.88	3.89**	.00
	Night	60	8.51	2.69	3.89**	.00
RE	Day	60	10.66	3.50	2.83**	.00
	Night	60	9.06	2.60	2.83**	.00
RO	Day	60	10.11	3.56	2.74**	.00
	Night	60	8.53	2.69	2.74**	.00
RI	Day	60	9.45	3.38	2.14*	.03
	Night	60	8.21	2.89	2.14*	.03
PI	Day	60	10.38	3.34	2.11*	.03
	Night	60	9.26	2.36	2.11*	.03
RIN	Day	60	9.65	3.56	1.97*	.05
	Night	60	8.60	2.06	1.97*	.05
TOTAL_ORS	Day	60	101.3	13.19	5.85**	.00
	Night	60	90.13	6.61	5.85**	.00
EWQOL	Day	60	124.7	17.11	2.99**	.00
	Night	60	115.8	15.68	2.99**	.00

\*  $p < .05, ** p < .01$

REC- Role Expectation Conflict, RE- Role Erosion, RO- Role Overload, RI- Role Isolation, RIN- Role Inadequacy, ORS- Organisational Role Stress, and EWQOL- Employee Quality Work Life

## Discussion

The analysis reveals that the first hypothesis i.e. “There will be a significant relationship between workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being of the employees of BPO” is partially proven, as evident from the results of Table 1. Table 1 shows that there is positive correlation between organisational role stress and sociability which implies that people with more stress are more sociable and vice-versa. As social support is a buffer against stress this pattern in the results could be observed because people with more role stress may be trying to manage their stress levels by reaching out to others and acquiring social support. The findings also revealed that there is positive relationship between employee quality of life and well-being, self-esteem, sociability, and emotional stability, thus throwing light on the importance of a good quality of work life and its implications for the well-being and positive self-evaluation of the employees. The organisations should strive towards enhancing the quality of work life of their employees to promote to better well-being and ultimately better satisfaction with job. It is not only a personal prerogative of the employee but the duty of the organisations to look after the well-being of their employees.

Second hypothesis i.e. “There will be a significant difference on workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being among male and female employees” is partially proven, as it is evident from the result in Table 2. The findings suggest that female workers have more organisational role stress than the male workers. It is because female workers have workload not only at office but at home as well, pressure of timings, and sexual harassment issue. Our result is similar to the findings of Shilpa *et al.* (2013), they found that females have more stress. The responsibility of BPO companies is that they must take proper initiative to reduce the stress level among the employees by adapting some of the technique like muscle relaxation, bio feedback, meditation, cognitive restructuring, time management, employee assistance programme, and wellness programme.

Third hypothesis i.e. “There will be a significant difference on workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being among married and unmarried employees” is partially proven, as per the results in Table 3. Married employees were significantly higher in their well-being levels, sociability, jovialness, happiness and self-esteem as compared to unmarried employees. It suggests that married employees and unmarried employees do not differ significantly on organisational role stress and quality of life whereas significant difference was found among them in well-being.

Fourth hypothesis i.e. “There will be a significant difference on workplace stress, quality of work life, and well-being among day and night shift employees” is partially proven, as per the results in Table IV. The findings suggest that day shift workers were significantly higher in their experience of role expectation conflict, role erosion, role overload, role isolation, personal inadequacy, resource inadequacy, and total organisational stress as compared to night shift workers. The possible reasons for the difference could be day workers have full supervision, work overload, monitoring of employees, angry customers, changing identity, and performance metrics. Our finding is contrary to the findings of the study done by Sugumar, Kumara, Raj, and Xavier (2013) which found that the stress in day shift workers and night shift workers is equal. This is because of work timing, workload, repetitive nature of work, insufficient breaks during work and insufficient holidays.

Our findings also suggest that the day shift workers also reported significantly higher employee work quality of life as compared to the night shift workers. The reason can be because they have better opportunities and chances of learning new things. It suggests that there is no difference between the well-being of day shift and night shift employees.

## Conclusion

The present study has highlighted the various factors that cause stress for BPO employees. Women were significantly higher as compared to male employees in role erosion, resource inadequacy and total organisational stress. Women participants were significantly lower in employee work quality of life as compared to male participants. Married employees were significantly higher in their well-being levels, sociability, jovialness,

happiness, and self-esteem as compared to unmarried employees. Day shift workers were significantly higher in their experience of role expectation conflict, role erosion, role overload, role isolation, personal inadequacy, resource inadequacy, and total organisational stress as compared to night shift workers. Despite this, the day shift workers also reported significantly higher employee work quality of life as compared to the night shift workers. There was positive and significant correlation observed between organisational role stress and personality. Employee quality of work life correlated significantly and positively with well-being, self-esteem, emotional stability and sociability.

## Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions for Further Research

### Implications

There are gender differences found in terms of role stresses so further investigation can be done into the factors that make women more susceptible to role stresses.

The type of role stress women are more susceptible to and the reasons behind it can serve as important information that can guide stress management programmes for women to make them more happy and satisfied and efficient in the organisation.

Since married employees had a better well-being as compared to unmarried employees, further investigation can be done to understand the reasons behind this pattern.

Surprisingly the day shift workers experienced more stress as compared to night shift workers. The possible explanation behind such findings need to be explored through qualitative studies.

### Limitations

- The research has been restricted to BPOs in Gurgaon.
- The sample size is not sufficient.
- These results cannot be generalised to other industries and other cities.
- Findings are based on respondents self-reports which may be biased.
- The sampling method was non-random in nature and hence generalisations cannot be made.

- The length of the questionnaire and unfamiliarity of the difficult words made many respondents disinterested and bored with the process and hence that affected their responses.
- There was time constraint for the study as it had to be finished within a stipulated period.
- The grapevine by the respondents who had done the questionnaires had it that the filling the questionnaires was a time consuming and an arduous task.

### Suggestions for Further Research

It is expected that adherence to certain suggestions as enumerated below could make useful contributions to generalisations of results and could add more useful and accurate information to the body of research already done in this area.

- The sample size could be increased.
- Interviews may be carried out to validate the results of investigation.
- Standard Hindi translations of English questionnaires with easy language could be used.
- In-depth and focused group discussions can be used to investigate the reasons for perceived and experienced role stress.
- It is important to check the percentage of the alcohol/ drugs taken by the employees during stress.
- Other variables like experience and managerial levels can be studied with respect to stress, well-being, and quality of work life.

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