

## A Study on Health Status of Female Employees Working in Call Centre

Shivani Sharma\*, Vandana Bharti\*\*

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### Abstract

The advancement in technologies and machineries which have made the living more easy, on the contrary have caused people to be less active and follow a sedentary lifestyle. Call centers have emerged as the most sought after workplace for Indian women in recent times. Due to intensive work pressure, requiring high levels of concentration, the performance of employees deteriorates, also performing one type of activity throughout the day. Long hours of work, permanent night shifts, incredibly high work targets, and health problems are major issues. 75% of women working in a call centers have direct effect on their health as working night shifts was upsetting their biological clock. In this study 300 call centre female employees were selected randomly for the purpose through medical assistance in the form of physical health check up camp arranged in the vicinity of call centre. The information related to their health was collected through a questionnaire and physical screening. Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequencies and % were used to describe the association of the variables. The study revealed that majority of females possess normal blood pressure (77.3%), the problem of vision was higher in number (50%) as compare to hearing and earache problem i.e. (32.3% & 17.7%). It was found that the prevalence of bone problems was also higher i.e. (82%) in females which included shoulder joint pain, wrist joint, and neck-back pain. The acidity rate was slightly higher i.e. 44% whereas constipation problem was not much common in females (29%). Majority of the respondents reported of occupational stress and lack of sleep respectively, (63% and 53.3%). Social health was also affected in fifty per cent of the females (51.3%) and irregularity of menstrual cycles also reported in maximum number of females (79.3%).

**Keywords:** Call centre; Health Problems.

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### Introduction

With the help of technology, activities are no longer confined to a particular place or time, a phenomenon that is clearly illustrated by call centers (Ccs). The use of call centers by the business community has already become a common phenomenon in both developed and developing countries. In recent years, the call centre industry has experienced a phenomenal growth worldwide (AS. Saber, *et al*, 2004). The call centre industry is one of the most rapidly growing in the developed world today (Staples, Dalrymple &

Phipps, 2001). Business processing outsourcing organizations commonly known as call centre, work when rest of the India sleeps. There is a graveyard shift starting at 4 am. Working in such shifts has started showing hazardous results on the health of Indian youth. (K.Tamizharasi *et al.*, 2012) According to a survey of 100 women, the average age group of women working in call centre is 18-30 yrs, which include those who are just school pass, graduates and even housewives. Hence, call centers have emerged as the most sought after workplace for Indian women in recent times. Due to intensive work pressure, requiring high levels of concentration, the performance of employees deteriorates, also performing one type of activity throughout the day. A call centre or center is a centralized office used for the purpose of receiving and transmitting a large volume of requests by telephone. Long hours of work, permanent night shifts, incredible high work targets, and health problems have become a major issue. The employees often complaint of headaches, stomach related problems, eye and head strain, muscular

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**Author's affiliation:** \*Research Scholar, \*\*Assistant Professor, Home Science, Govt. Maharani Laxmi Bai Girls PG College. Fort Indore- 452 006 (M.P.).

**Corresponding Author: Shivani Sharma**, C-639, Sushantlok, Gurgaon- 122000, Near Blossom Play, School (Haryana).

E-mail: [ssharma319@rediffmail.com](mailto:ssharma319@rediffmail.com)

skeletal problems, menstrual irregularity. The Hindu Business Line report (2013) evaluated that balanced lifestyle is very tedious and the survey found 36% respondents were obese, 21% suffered from depression and 12% had high blood pressure. Gupta, (2013) reported that along with other problems amongst women working in BPO, higher percentage suffered from high blood pressure. One of the potential hazards reported by call handlers due to prolonged use of handsets, intense use of computers and continuous use of handling calls, they face ear, eyes and vocal problems. Pandey & Bali, (2011) observed that 30-40 per cent of the employees working in call centers complaint of eye problems. There is soreness, dryness, blurred vision, light sensitivity, headache and croakiness of voice, irritating cough, poor visual power. The cumulative effect of odd working hours and stressful environment leads to vision problem (dry, itchy throat, hoarseness, cracking, cough etc.), eye strain and pain along with hearing problem (ear pain, ringing in ear) (Ofreneo, *et al.* 2007). Kunhe, *et al.* (2012), findings revealed that musculoskeletal disorders involving the neck, upper back, lower back, right shoulder, upper right arm, hand and wrist have been reported among Filipino shift workers in several researchers. R. Naveen, *et al.* (2012), conducted a study on call handlers in call centers situated in and find out that the majority of the respondents (50%) had some problems related to their vocal health, 22 (12.5%) complained of problems related to their ears and 126 (71.6%) of the respondents had musculoskeletal pain and the commonest region being the neck and the back. Many of the shift workers digestive disorders may be attributed to both the irregularity of meal timings and poor quality of the food consumed like increased consumption of pre packed foods with preference to salty meals and little preference to vegetables, increased consumption of caffeinated drinks and alcohol, increased smoking, short sleeping hours and little physical exercise. (Suwazono, *et al.*, 2003). Banu, P. *et al.* (2014), reported in their study that 31.3% of respondents working in BPO sector suffered from menstrual disorder due to stress. The night work, high pressure and social alienation leads to high levels of stress among the women and therefore, in order to continue working in the call centers the women need to cope up with the stress and get constant parental support revealed in a study conducted by Gupta (2013). Ho, Ples, *et al.* (2007), also conducted a study to investigate common work-related health complaints and assessed problems relating with the complaints of call centers in Quezon City, Philippines. The survey was conducted in 96 call centers selected randomly. There were more female participants (53%) than male (47%) in the study.

Among female and male respondents, only 37.3 % and 51% were working at night, respectively. Most of these respondents who had work-related health complaints were females (84%) compared with males (78 %). The majority of call centre agents employed during the night (69%) and day (64.8 %) admitted that they are stressed from their work. work stress was significantly related to workers sleep irritability ( $R = 0.328$ ) and insomnia ( $R = 0.24$ ;  $P < 0.03$ ). Other reasons recognized by respondents in relation to the sleep problem (51%), insufficient exercise (41%) and poor diet and eating habits (24%) Common complaints presented by respondents were eye strain (35 %), cough (29 %), worsening of eyesight (26 %) and back pain (26%). The result of the study suggests that sleep problems and stress are relatively common among call center agents working in shifts.

## Materials and Methods

The study was conducted on 300 young female employees (18-37yrs) working in a call centre. The subjects were selected from 'Genpact' a call centre located in Gurgaon (Haryana). The subjects were selected through purposive sampling method. The employees were screened for health problems such as blood pressure level, vision problem, throat problems, ear ache, stress, musculoskeletal health, menstrual irregularity, gastro-intestinal problems and social health or interaction with the family. The information related to their demographic and work profile was collected using a questionnaire and physical health through interview method and health check up. The Blood pressure measurement was taken using an automatic blood pressure monitor device. Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequencies and % were used to study the variables.

## Results and Discussion

In this study the response rate was 100%. The results and analysis of the subjects are as follows:

### Demographic profile

The age of all 300 female subjects were obtained with a span of 18-37 years with a mean of  $23.46 \pm 3.88$  years. Major part belonged to age group of 18-23 years and 23-28 years respectively (47.7% and 39.3%). Most of the females were single/ unmarried (64.4%) and rest married (35.3%). The maximum strength of the employees (65%) possess masters degree and rest

were graduates (19%), under graduates (9%) and high school 7.%.

### Work profile

In this study 86 females (28.7%) had work experience of minimum six months and 92(30.7%) females had experience of an year, 65(21.7%) reported to be working with the company for about two to three years and 67(22.3%) with an experience of an year or two. The total number of breaks while on shift was around 2 to 3 for a span of twenty minutes. 170(56.7%) females worked for five days a week and rest six to seven days i.e. 110 & 20(36.7% & 6.6%) respectively. It was observed that 81 (66%) females were on morning duty and 84 evening shifts (28%) and 69(23%) doing night shifts and 66(22%) day duty.

### Health status

The mentioned below variables were studied to assess their health status. And the following data was revealed :

- (i) *Blood pressure*: The immense job pressure and curiosity to meet the targets either lead to high blood pressure or low blood pressure. The data revealed that majority of respondents had normal blood pressure (77.3%) and the percentage of females with low blood pressure was 16% whereas the percentage was very low for those possessing high blood pressure i.e., 6.7%. Similar findings revealed in a study conducted by Banu P. *et al.*,(2014), in his study stated that blood pressure is directly proportional to work stress. BPO employees always have heavy work load and more work pressure and therefore 50.7% of respondents are having high blood pressure, the study revealed.
- (ii) *Hearing, vocal and vision problem*: Long sitting hours with repeated calling, use of headset and visual display unit had effected the employees immensely. Pandey & Bali, (2011) in their study observed that 30-40 per cent of the employees working in call centers complaint of eye problems. There is soreness, dryness, blurred vision, light

**Table 1:** Health status of female employees working in call centre

Variables	No. of respondents(n=300)	
	f	%
<b>Blood pressure</b>		
High( 140/90 mm Hg )	20	6.7
Normal( 120/80mm Hg )	232	77.3
Low( 90/60 mm Hg )	48	16
Hoarse Voice	97	32.3
Vision problem	150	50
Ear ache	53	17.7
<b>Musculoskeletal problems</b>		
Shoulder joint	101	33.6
Wrist joint	35	11.7
Neck and back pain	110	36.7
None	54	18
<b>Acidity problem</b>		
Yes	132	44
No	168	56
<b>Change in bowel movements / constipation</b>		
Yes	87	29
No	213	71
<b>Occupational stress</b>		
Yes	189	63
No	111	37
<b>Lack of sleep</b>		
Yes	160	53.3
No	140	46.7
<b>Social health /interaction with family</b>		
Yes	154	51.3
Yes	146	48.7
No		
<b>Irregularity of Menstrual Cycle</b>		
Yes	238	79.3
No	62	20.7

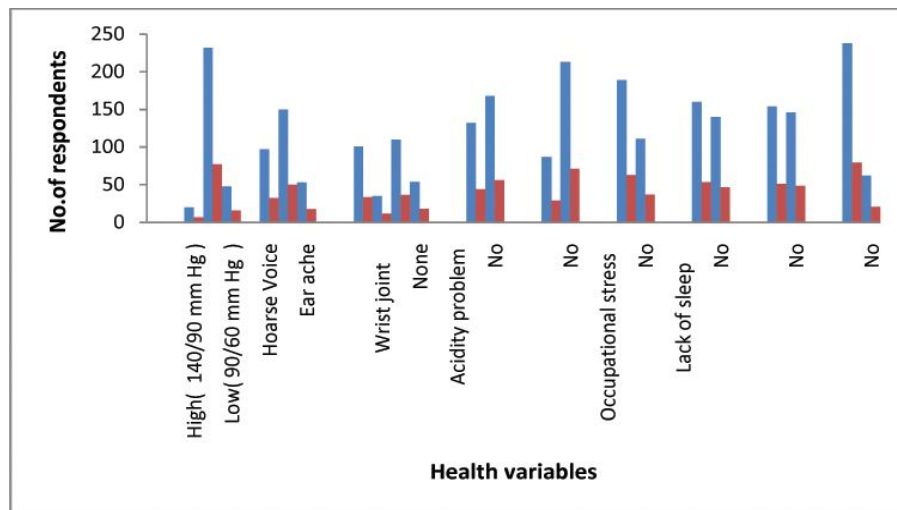
sensitivity, headache and croakiness of voice, irritating cough, poor visual power. Similarly in the present study it was found that majority of the respondent's complaint of vision problem (50%) and hoarse voice (32.3%), whereas the percentage was low for ear ache problem i.e. (17.7%).

- (iii) *Musculoskeletal health*: The problems related to bones were most prevalent. 33.6% and 36.7% complaint of shoulder pain and neck & back pain. Pain in wrist joint was less common i.e. 11.7%. Kunhe, *et al.* (2012), findings also revealed the musculoskeletal disorders involving the neck, upper back, lower back, right shoulder, upper right arm, hand and wrist have among Filipino shift workers in several researches.
- (iv) *Acidity problem and constipation*: Irregular eating pattern and wrong food habits along with their shift duty lead to acidity problem in many of the respondents. 44% of the total respondent's complaint of acidity. 29% faced difficulty in passing motion or were most of the time constipated. The most common complaints are

disturbance of appetite, irregular bowel movements and constipation, abdominal pain, flatulence and few may develop serious problems like chronic gastritis, gastro duodenitis and peptic ulcers (Giovanni, *et al.*, 2014).

- (v) *Occupational Stress*: Job pressure to meet the daily targets and satisfy the customers on call caused occupational stress. This was relevant in majority of the females (63%) in the females studied. The scenario was same for the females facing lack of sleep (53.3%) for those working in call centre. The odd working hours along with dual burden of work and family leads to high level of stress among women employees (Wilson *et al.* 2007).
- (vi) *Social health*: It was found that hectic schedule and no time for sleep and changing shifts have affected their social life. Most of the females (51.3%) reported to have lack of interaction with their family members or others.
- (vii) *Menstrual problem*: Irregularity in menstrual cycles was found in majority of the females i.e. 79.3%.

Fig 1: Showing health status of females working in call centre



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