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Dr. S. A. Sameera
Associate Professor & Head,
Faculty of Management studies
Nimra Institute of
Engineering & Technology,
Ongole, A.P.



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A Study on Gender Issues in the work place of Women Employees in BPO Sector , India.

Dr. S. A. Sameera*, Mr. Shakir Shaik

* Associate Professor & Head, Faculty of Management studies Nimra Institute of Engineering & Technology, Ongole, A.P.
Full time Research Scholar , Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, A.P.

ABSTRACT

Women have become equal participants in many respects at all levels of society. The future would see more women venturing into areas traditionally dominated by men. This will lead to income generation and greater sense of fulfillment among women. In almost all the countries, governments are providing special provisions for women's development and efforts are being made to extract maximum of their talent. In India, as during Veda and Upanishad periods, women are being accorded with respect and are facilitated in all spheres of life.

The BPO sector has opened up vast career opportunities for women, but at the same time employment in the sector has had an impact on women employees' lives. Several- young women BPO employees have had to relocate to outsourcing hubs and live independently. With the availability of higher disposable incomes, many women employees have reported lifestyle changes. Indeed, among financially independent women employees there has been a visible move towards consumerism.

The present paper discusses about the socio-economic characteristics of women employees of BPO sector. The paper aims to explore the impact of socio-economic characteristics of women employees in BPO sector. Finally an attempt is made to study the dimensions of gender issues in BPO sector.

Keywords: women employees, gender issues, bpo sector, socio-economic - characteristics

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1. Introduction

Women are participating in almost all spheres of the economic activity. From village to city, it can be seen that number of women workers and entrepreneurs contributing towards the national income of the country. The Government and Non-Government Organizations are also promoting self-employment among women and build women entrepreneurship. Meeting a longstanding demand for gender parity in the workforce, the Government of India approved an amendment in the Factories Act to allow women employees to work in night shifts also.

Since 1970s, the role of women in Indian society has undergone considerable change. Today women are becoming more aware of their personal needs and selves, and are demanding greater equality and status both within the home and outside. In the last decade, the increase in the number of women in paid labour force has been greater than 40 per cent. Yet, the discrimination continues. There are formidable barriers of entry of women into professional career. Those who do gain access are often segregated in female occupations, relegated to lower ranks in the organization, and barred from moving up the organizational hierarchy because the promotion criteria are such conditions that the average Indian women can not meet.

There are numerous instances of women not being promoted despite successful performance because, "she had the flexile timing" to balance work and family commitments. Marital status is still used to implicitly infer willingness to relocate and commitment to the organization. Professional women in India are still doing three jobs- office, housework and child care. Instead of getting credit for the additional burden, this is used for discrediting women as being less committed than men.

Women Employees in BPO Sector

Women are under-represented in the BPO sector. The major determinant of the adverse gender ratio appears to be the availability of female graduates. The official line of BPO sector is that their hiring and promotion practices are gender neutral, and that the proportion of women reflects the proportion of women graduates. However, married women with children may be discriminated against even at the hiring stage. Apart from the low gender ratio in BPO sector, women tend to be over-represented in the lower level jobs and under-represented in higher level and managerial jobs .

Socio –Economic characteristics:

The Socio – Economic characteristics of Women employee are Age, Education qualification, Job position , Monthly income, marital status and Family status of women employee.

Importance of Socio-Economic Characteristics:

In a constantly changing business environment, companies and individuals must be quicker and more flexible than before and they must also be able to manage changes in dynamic business environment and individuals' effort to adopt with dynamic working environments. Organizing work and working hours to support women employees' well-being requires management of time pressure, joint discussions on goals, work-life balance, security, support from members and socio economic status of the working community.

If individual flexibility is possible during times when flexibility is required for productive reasons, there is also less stress. The connection between business set up and social well-being is evident also after controlling of other important aspects of work and business entities. Therefore, in order to efficiently manage human resources in companies, it is crucial to know and understand the socio economic profile of the women employees.

Being used to describe business and socio economic characteristics of women employees are one of the most important psychosocial constructs influencing successful functioning and development of business. During recent years these constructs are attracting the interest for both – business organizations as well as women employees for improvement and optimal use of human resources.

Importance of understanding socio economic status of women employees is based on classical model in which behavior arises as the consequence of the interaction between an individual and her surroundings. Generally, it is considered that an individual reacts on the specific situation based on her personal perception of such a situation.

Working situation or business environment creates specific surroundings which restrict and influence behaviour of women employees and these situations are highly depending socio economic conditions of women employees. The combination of business environment and socio-economics of women employees will be resulting in commitment, effectiveness and satisfaction.

The socio economic features of women employees involving in the business activities would definitely influence the growth perspective of business activities. These features are very crucial for understanding the existing situations, facing the different kind of problems and also in decision making process.

Dimensions of gender issues in BPO Sector

Women, though have proved their versatility for ages and have donned the multiple facets simultaneously, be it of a loving and caring mother or daughter, a dutiful wife and a good manager of her life and family, they are still finding it

difficult to cross the boundaries of their home and make a place for themselves in the corporate world.

Despite their equal investment in education and commitment towards work and career, women employees are often compared and benchmarked against the performance criteria and attributes of their male counterparts. The situation worsens if the woman is carrying or has the childcare responsibilities, restraining their elevation in the corporate ladder. The selective perception carried worldwide, women may fall to adhere to important assignments due to their family commitments and maternity leaves challenge their professional existence and place them in a dubious situation.

The rise of women joining the national workforce continues to be of great interest to both organization and women themselves. Women's entry to the workforce has not been a smooth easy shift. The issue of gender discrimination in the professional world especially in Information Technology and Business Process Outsourcing sectors distinctly identifies the disparity and difficulties faced by women employees in establishing themselves on par with men employees.

Sometimes, it is the company norms and policies such as absence of adequate provisions for parental and childcare leaves and flexible working hours that forces women to leave jobs in the mid of their prospering career. Besides, the prevailing corporate culture, however, contemporary it claims to be still views male employees as most prominent contenders for managerial positions. Women are seldom seen occupying managerial position and sometimes are not even considered for such higher positions.

It is also known fact that a woman has to give more priority to her family commitments; this responsibility is often misinterpreted as her lack of dedication and sincerity in the eyes of superiors, subordinates and peers. Thus, she fails to receive any support and cooperation from them. A woman's career development is influenced more by other people's (mostly men) opinion of her abilities than by her actual abilities.

In the existing work culture, staying for long hours at office, taking work home, being always attentive at professional responsibilities, attending calls at odd hours are a few attributes that ensure high commitment on the part of women employees. The introduction of facilities like flexible working hours, work from home, part-time work, offering adequate number of paid monetary and flexible break times will not only improve the morale of women employees, but also enhance the corporate image of the company. The increased morale will lead to increased commitment and employee retention and will reduce the absenteeism and stress levels.

Conclusion

Gender issues in BPO sector need to be understood within the context of the distinctive work culture and system of management that have developed in this sector. BPO companies appear to have highly enlightened managements and HR executives and other top managers espouse all the politically correct ideas about having a gender neutral and women-friendly work place, providing equality of opportunity, non-discrimination on the basis of gender and so on. However, there is a gap between official company policy and actual practice and the experience of women- and this is true with regard not only to gender but also to broader employment and management issues.

To address the gender issues at work place of BPOs organizations, there is need to monitor and conduct continuous studies. Academicians also must turn their interest towards these areas. Though, there are few studies in these dimensions, still there are some gaps found in review of literature. Hence, the present study is undertaken to fill the research gaps and to provide new and additional information in the area of selected problems of women employees in BPO sector.

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