



# Mental Health and Stress among Call Center Employees

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## Abstract:

*The present study aimed to find out the stress and mental health among call center employees. For this a purpose a total of 100 employees were selected from two different call center i.e. Domestic (N=50) and International (N=50). The sample included both male and female employees in equal's number. Two scales namely life stress Scale and Mental Health Inventory were administered to all the subjects. Obtained scores were analyzed with help ANOVA and t-test. Results revealed that significant difference in stress and mental health observed with respect to both genders from domestic call center. Male employees from both the call center differed significantly on stress scores.*

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**Keyword:** Call Center, Stress, Mental Health

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## 1. Introduction

The Call Center community often defines itself as an industry, with numerous national and international call center. But there has some dispute amongst researchers as to whether it is appropriate to refer such things as the "call center industry". Bain and Taylor (1999) argue that it is more appropriate to use the term "sector" as call center are found across a wide range of industries and may be similar primarily in terms of their core technologies. Belt, Richardson and Webster (2000) agreed that call center is not an "industry" as the term generally defined, but rather represent certain ways of delivering various services using the telephone and computer technology across traditional industry boundaries.

National call center represents a unique management challenge. Forecasting staffing requirements, organizing sensible schedule, the environment in real-time, and in general, getting the right people in the right places at the right times. The international researchers have found between technologies used, work practices and key issues including monitoring, control, training and labor demographics for workers.

The basic reasons by which employees getting steers in their routine life is non-stop mobile calling, duty to make interaction with customer and complete the target within the time, threat of intensity; make the employees stressful and depressed. Dollard, doorman, Boyd, and Wine field (2003) assessed two unique stressors associated with the human service work i.e. emotional dissonance, the need to hide negative emotions and client related social stressors. The latter may have involved disproportionate customer expectations and verbally aggressive customers.

## 2. Nature of job

The primary source of stress reported is inherent to the nature of the job spending all day on the phone dealing with people one another, day is difficult. Many studies report agents as wanting to just get off the phones. Belt and colleagues (2000) note "agent in all three-sector financial service, IT and third-party service spoke of the phenomenon of "burnout" caused by the pressure of working exclusively 'on the phone'. In the same study, the author's mention that the issue of 'burnout' was also recognized by some managers. Knights and McCabe (2003) take a different approach to stress in the workplace. They note that although much organizational analysis and most of the call center literature tends to

conceptualize stress as an individual problem], it is actually located within “a framework that emphasizes the interrelationship between structural relations of power and the subjective interpretations and action of employees”

### **3. Quality/quantity conflict**

Call centers are rooted in contradictory tension and structural paradoxes, and confront a number of trades-offs on that basis. They set a context for attitudes towards the organization and can impose conflicting role requirements on agents. A core example is that of the pressure for quantity versus the aspiration for quality, the guiding logic of which is the conundrum of trying to get closer to the customer while reutilizing, centralizing, reducing costs and prescribing standards. Kaczynski and colleagues (2000) suggest that this dilemma is particularly difficult for front-line workers because they may be likely “to identify with embodied individual customers

### **4. Intensity**

The third central stressor in call center work is its intensity. As Bain (2001) argues “far from being either in terminal decline or on the wane, Taylorism in conjunction with a range of either control mechanisms is not only alive, well and deeply embedded in the call center labor process, but its malevolent influence appears to be spreading to previously uncharted territory

### **5. Mental Health**

There have been many attempts to describe mental health in ideal terms which have generally led to a list of qualities which characterize the mature, healthy, fully functioning, self-actualized individual. The study of the characteristics that make up mental health has been called positive psychology. This is evident that positive thinking is important in promoting health. Older men and women who expressed a positive outlook towards life were less likely to suffer heart attacks than those who expressed a negative outlook (Astin et al; (2001). The effects of positive thinking can even extend life. Analysis of brief autobiographies written more than 60 years ago by Catholic nuns when they were in their 20s suggests that those with a positive outlook live longer than nuns who wrote about their lives in more neutral terms (Danner, Snowdon & Frieson, 2001). However, it is concluded that positive attitude may be merely a result of good health. For a number of years, mental health professionals believed that seeking reality as accurately as possible was the best path to health. Researchers found that

### **6. Method Sample**

The sample of the present study consists of 100 employees working in two different call centers i.e. domestic (N=50) and International (N=50). The sample included both male and female employees in equal number.

### **7. Tools**

#### **7.1 Mental health inventory**

It was developed by Jadish and Shrivastava (1983) consists 55 items having six dimensions: positive self-evaluation, realistic perception, and integration of personality, autonomy, group-oriented attitudes, and environmental mastery. Reliability of the test is found at 0.75 level.

#### **7.2 Life stress scale**

It was developed by Aggrawal and Naidu (1986) and consists of 30 items describing undesirable experiences and events likely to occur in the lives of people. The reliability of the scale was 0.88.

**Results and Interpretation**  
**The dollar**

Call Center	Stress	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	1	137.4	14.4	5.33**
	2	118.2	12.2	
Female	1	136.3	21.2	0.16
	2	137.1	13.2	
Male	1	137.4	14.4	1.34
Female	1	136.3	21.2	
Male	2	137.1	13.3	5.26**
Female	2	118.2	12.1	
<b>Mental Health</b>				
Male	1	147.3	6.91	1.7
	2	118.2	6.89	
Female	1	143.3	11.6	0.69
	2	142.1	13.9	
Male	1	143.3	13.09	0.69
Female	1	142.1	13.9	
Male	2	150.6	6.39	2.81**
Female	2	142.1	13.9	

The Obtained scores of this 2x2 factorial study were analyzed with the help of ANOVA and t-test to see the significance of difference among various groups. ANOVA revealed the main effects of call center employees on stress scores was significant,  $F(1) = 8.55$ ;  $p < .004$ . the main effect of gender was highly significant  $F(1) = 8.01$ ;  $p < .005$ . The interaction of call center and gender also showed high significant values as  $F(2) = 10.1$ ;  $p < .002$ . However, the results indicated that employees working in two different call centers differed significantly. As regards to gender male and female differed with each other on stress scores.

ANOVA showing the main effect of call center employees on mental health scores was NS  $F(1) = 263$ . The main effect of gender indicated significant difference  $F(1) = 9.06$ ;  $p < .003$ . the interaction of call center and gender was no significant  $F(1) = 1.15$ . On the basis of above results it was found that employees from two different call centers namely domestic and international did not differ significantly on mental health scores.

Results obtained by t-test, showed that male employees from domestic and international call center differed significantly with one another on stress scores as the  $(t = 5.33, p < .01)$ . Interview conducted personally on employees revealed that international call center employees have more work stress as compare to domestic one. This is due to heavy work load, no limited time for social interaction and completion of work.

**Table 2: Mean, SD and t-ratio of employees from Domestic and International on different dimensions of mental health scores (male=50 and female=50)**

Call Center	Mental Health	Mean	SD	t-value
1	Positive self evaluation	27.6	4.14	1.01
		28.5	3.81	0.86
1	Realistic perception	19.7	2.43	1.12
		20.1	2.22	1.97
1	Integration of Personality	16.5	1.71	3.04
		16	2	0.76

\*\*p<0.01

\*p<0.05

International = 1 Domestic = 2

The work culture is more strict and systematic as compared to domestic one. Our study is in accordance with the previous study by Norman et al. (2004) who conducted a cross-sectional baseline survey, which was part of a prospective cohort study. Fifty-seven call center workers were compared with a reference group of 1,459 professional computer users from other occupations. A questionnaire covered physical and psychosocial working conditions and symptoms during the last month. Structured observations in accordance with an ergonomic checklist were used to assess workstation design during the subject's ordinary work.

The call center group had worked for a shorter time in their present tasks and spent longer continuous time in front of the computer than the reference group. There were deficiencies in workspace, keyboard-and input device placement. The subjects reported poor support from their immediate supervisor, low control and limited opportunities to influence their work. A higher proportion of the call center group reported muscular skeletal symptoms. Results revealed that male and female from international call center didn't show any significant difference, this is due to the fact that the nature of work is similar for both male and female employees in international call centers. As regards to stress scores of women employees from two call centers didn't show any significant difference as their mean scores are 136.3 and 137.7 respectively whereas male and female from domestic call center differed significantly ( $t=5.26$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Responses collected on the basis of interview indicated that in domestic call centers field work is mostly done by the male employees which indicate less anxiety and stress among female employees from domestic call center didn't show any significant difference with their international counterparts irrespective of their sex. Male and female subjects from domestic call center differed significantly with each other. Responses collected on the basis of the basis of interview indicated that working condition and deadline is same for both male and female employees in international call center. On different dimensions of mental health like positive self evaluation, realistic perception, integration of personality, measures of autonomy, and environmental mastery employees from international call center didn't differ significantly with their domestic counterparts. They differed significantly on group-oriented attitude. Obtained data revealed that employees from different call center have the same criteria to measure the self. They are aware towards themselves and real world and conscious about their autonomy. Regarding group-oriented attitude international employees are having individualistic approach as compared to domestic one who believed in teamwork and have positive towards group-oriented attitude.

The overall results of the present study suggest the need for stress management programs for reducing the stress and developing positive thinking among young employees working in call centers.

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