

Factors Determining the Vulnerability to Occupational Health Risk and Safety of Call Center Agents in the Philippines

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Abstract : The business process outsourcing (BPO) in the Philippines is expanding rapidly attracting more than 2% of total employment. Currently, the BPO industry is confronted with several issues pertaining to sustainable productivity such as meeting the staffing gap, high rate of employees' turnover and workforce retention, and the occupational health and safety (OHS) of call center agents. We conducted a survey of OHS programs and health concerns among call center agents in the Philippines and determined the sociocultural factors that affect the vulnerability of call center agents to occupational health risks and hazards. The majority of the agents affirmed that OHS are implemented and OHS orientation and emergency procedures were conducted at employment initiations, perceived favorable and convenient working environment except for occasional noise disturbances and acoustic shock, visual, and voice fatigues. Male agents can easily adjust to the demands and changes in their work environment and flexible work schedules than female agents. Female agents have a higher tendency to be pressured and humiliated by low work performance, experience a higher incidence of emotional abuse, psychological abuse, and experience more physical stress than male agents. The majority of the call center agents had a night-shift schedule and regardless of other factors, night shift work brings higher stress to agents. While working in a call center, higher incidence of headaches and insomnia, burnout, suppressed anger, anxiety, and depressions were experienced by female, younger (21-25 years old) and those at night shift than their counterpart. Most common musculoskeletal disorders include body pain in the neck, shoulders and back; and hand and wrist disorders and these are commonly experienced by female and younger workers. About 30% experienced symptoms of cardiovascular and gastrointestinal disorders and weakened immune systems. Overall, these findings have shown the variable vulnerability by a different subpopulation of call center agents and are important in the occupational health risk prevention and management towards a sustainable human resource for BPO industry in the Philippines.

Keywords : business process outsourcing industry, health risk of call center agents, socio-cultural determinants, Philippines

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