Understanding the Problems and Challenges Faced by Female Sales Executives in the Retail Shopping Malls of Visakhapatnam: A Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the problems and challenges of female sales executives working in the retail shopping malls of Visakhapatnam. It is observed that the women who completed the intermediate and graduation programs join as sales executives in different shopping malls. They get a salary between Rs.10,000-Rs.20,000/- per month, plus incentives based on their performance. But it is noticed that the women working in the retail shopping malls face a few physical and psychological health problems due to stress in their job and long-standing. Sexual abuse, applying heavy makeup, and working on holidays and festival days are also challenges for them. This is a quantitative study conducted in Visakhapatnam City. This study adopted a descriptive research design and employed a purposive sampling method. The data were collected from 94 female sales executives through a structured interview schedule shared via Google Form and analysed through SPSS. The study found that the majority (97.9%) of the respondents work 9 hours a day. And 66 per cent stated that they have 4 leaves in a month. The majority (95.7%) of the respondents stated that they do not have membership in any association or union. It was found that out of 94 respondents, 63 respondents said that they have backaches due to spending more time standing in the malls, 84 respondents said that they have headaches due to working in the heavy lighting area, 74 respondents reported body overheating, 84 respondents reported that they are feeling stress due to targets. The majority, 97.9 per cent, said that make-up is compulsory. The study suggested that the management should initiate more incentives,

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salaries and basic facilities for female executives. They need more capacity-building programmes to improve their sales performance and job satisfaction.

Keywords: *retail shopping malls, sales executives, women in sales, management, Business*

INTRODUCTION

A young woman who sells goods, clothes, things, and other provisions in a retail shopping mall or a store is called a salesgirl. It has been noticed that many women working in this sector prefer to be called a saleswoman or a salesperson rather than a salesgirl (Collins, 2023). The companies named them sales executives, sales representatives. fitting experts etc. A sales executive helps a customer and makes transactions. They help customers find the right size, style and colour of a product. An important goal of a sales executive is to sell as much merchandise as possible for her company. The sales executive should have a good attitude, a smiling face, pleasant behaviour and cheerfully assist the customers. She must be able to answer all questions, concerns of customers and demonstrate the products. She must have knowledge about the types of customers and their behaviour which is more helpful to sell the products (Muhammad, 2020).

Many graduated women and below-graduated women give priority to work as sales executives because it is an organised job. Pratibha Goyal and Mini Goyal (2012) reported that shopping malls are new avenues for working women. Many job opportunities are available in this sector and they get jobs easily. They may get emotional support from their fellow workers because many women work in the shopping malls along with them. They get a salary between Rs.10,000-20,000 based on their experience. The companies provide capacity building on different aspects related to sales, marketing, organizational behaviour, consumer behaviour, types of customers etc. to improve the sales in the company. The company apply different strategies to get more work from these sales executives i.e. targets, incentives, 1+1 offers etc. It is observed that there are a few challenges associated with these jobs. Those are stigma towards the abilities of women, sexual abuse by colleagues, management of family and job at a time, and physical strain while working more time in the malls. They should be in makeup and should be in a standing position for a long time. The biggest challenges facing retail workers in the present days are the Digital revolution**,** Developing Technological Solutions, Employee Retention, Retaining customers, Growing Customer Expectations, Internal Communication and Modern online marketing. Due to these problems, the number

of customers is reducing to the shopping malls (Dhananjai Khairwal, 2022). The present study is conducted on sales executives/ sales representatives working in the different malls in Visakhapatnam to understand their problems and challenges in the shopping malls.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

K. Karthikeyan et al. (2012) conducted a study on the physical problems faced by retail mall employees in Bangalore. The study found that 39.3 per cent of the employees are affected by back pain. And 21 per cent of the employees are affected by headache or migraine problems. And 28 per cent of the respondents in their study said that they have restlessness, and 21.3 per cent of respondents said that they got hypertension due to their employment..

Alison Branley (2019) conducted a study on sexual abuse in retail shopping malls in Australia. The study found that female retail sales workers are less than 30 years old may be harassed more than older people. The study reported that female sales executives face sexual harassment from customers (36%), peers (27%), senior co-workers (12%) managers (12%) direct supervisors (11%) and business owners (3%). Most of the incidents were not reported.

S. Jayasree (2020) conducted a study to understand the working conditions of women employees in textile shops in Kollam, Kerala. The study found that the working conditions of female workers are very poor. They regularly work 9-12 hours every day in retail shopping malls. About 38 per cent of the respondents in this study reported that there is no toilet facility at their workplace. The study reported that about 64% of the respondents in this study are not satisfied with the benefits provided by the textile shops. These women work for their livelihoods and sustain society. The study found that 93 per cent of the respondents suffer with Back pain and other health problems.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Employment is very important for every individual. It provides income and time engagement and promotes social relationships. Nowadays, many family members are encouraging women to perform their jobs. There are many jobs available in the shopping malls of cities. The women, who have the educational qualification of graduation and below graduation, are joining as sales executives in the shopping malls. It is understood in the review of literature that women in retail shopping malls are facing many challenges in their jobs. They face physical health problems and sexual abuse and they have to work without basic facilities. Very few studies were conducted on this topic and those studies were conducted

in the metropolitan cities. With this background, the present study is proposed to understand the problems and challenges of female sales executives working in the retail shopping malls of Visakhapatnam.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the socio-economic and demographic profile of the female sales executives working in the shopping malls of Visakhapatnam.
2. To study the problems and challenges of female sales executives working in the shopping malls of Visakhapatnam.
3. To provide the appropriate suggestions to promote the quality of life of female sales executives working in the shopping malls of Visakhapatnam.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research setting of the present study is Visakhapatnam City, Andhra Pradesh. Visakhapatnam city is one of the important cities and economic capital of Andhra Pradesh. There are many shopping malls available for all types of people. This is a quantitative study that adopted a descriptive research design to describe the challenges and problems of female sales executives. The study selected a purposive sampling method and selected 94 respondents from various malls located in the Siripuram, Jagadamba and Dwarakanagar areas of Visakhapatnam. The data were collected through a pre-tested, structured questionnaire that was shared via Google form. The data were analysed with the help of the MS Excel 2010 version and the SPSS trial version.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data collected from 94 respondents was analyzed, tabulated and presented below.

The majority of the respondents in this study are in the 20-30 years age group. The mean age of the respondents is 27.2.

The majority 38.3 per cent of the respondents have completed their 10th grade, while 34.0 per cent of the respondents have completed their intermediate and 23.4 per cent of the respondents have completed their graduation.

The majority (59.6%) of the respondents belongs to the backward caste community,

followed by 36.2 per cent of the respondents from the scheduled caste community.

It is found that 31.9 per cent of the respondents had 3-4 years of job experience, 23.4 per cent of the respondents have 7-8 years of job experience and 19.1 per cent of the respondents have 9-10 years of job experience

It is found that 34.0 per cent of the respondents' salary is between 13-14 thousand rupees per month, and 21.3 per cent of the respondents stated that their salary is about 15-16 thousand. Very few respondents are receiving above Rs.20,000/-. A study of Tan Teck Hong and Waheed Amna (2011) reported that hygiene factors, basic facilities in the mall and salary give more satisfaction to the sales executives. The study said that the sales executives give more priority to their salary. The marital status of the respondents is presented in the below table:

Table No: 1
Distribution of the respondents by their marital status

S.No	Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
1	Married	60	63.8
2	Unmarried	32	34.0
3	Divorced	2	2.1
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 53.702		Df: 2	Significance: 0.00

It was found that the majority 63.8 per cent of the respondents in this study are married, while 34.0 per cent of the respondents in this study are unmarried. And 55.3 per cent of the respondents in this study have no children, while 27.7 per cent of the respondents have two children and only 17.0 per cent of the respondents have one child.

The shopping malls give different role titles to the women working in the retail shopping malls like sales executives, sales managers, and fitting experts. The table below presents the job roles of the respondents:

Table No: 2
Distribution of the respondents by their job role

S.No	Job Role	Frequency	Percentage
1	Sales Executive	72	76.6
2	Manager/Team Leader/ Supervisor	6	6.4

3	Fitting Expert	10	10.6
4	Personal Shoppers	6	6.4
Total		94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 133.915		Df: 3	Significance: 0.00

It is found that the majority (76.6%) of the respondents stated that the job title is sales executive and 10.6 per cent of the respondents said that their job title is fitting expert.

The employees work 8-12 hours a day. The meaning of working hours is the period during which the employee will be available in the workplace and contribute his service. The short breaks are also provided to the employee (International Labour Organisation, 2022). The table below presents the daily working hours of the respondents:

Table No: 3
Distribution of the respondents by their Daily Working Hours

S.No	Daily Working Hours	Frequency	Percentage
1	9 Hours	92	97.9
2	12 Hours	2	2.1
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 86.170		Df: 1	Significance: 0.000

The table reveals that the majority (97.9%) of the respondents' daily working hours are 9, and 2.1 per cent of the respondents stated that they work 12 hours. It is understood that, according to the new laws on labor, the working hours for a day are increased from 8 to 12 hours while the weekly hours of work are 48 hours (Balwinder Kaur, 2023). It is observed that employees working in the organized sector get two leaves excluding the main public holidays. But it is very difficult in retail shopping malls. There is more business in holidays and weekends (Faizan Haidar & Sagar Malviya, 2022). The leaves information of the respondents is presented in the following table:

Table No: 4
Distribution of the respondents by their Leaves per Month

S.No	Leaves per Month	Frequency	Percentage
1	1 Day	2	2.1
2	2 Day	2	2.1
3	3 Days	26	27.7

4	4 Days	62	66.0
5	5.00	2	2.1
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 147.064		Df: 4	Significance: 0.000

As per the data in the table, the majority (66%) of the respondents stated that they get 4 earned leaves in a month, followed by 27.7 per cent stated that they get three earned leaves per month. According to the Factories Act 1948, workers who have worked a minimum of 240 days over the course of a year are eligible for 12 earned leaves (Skuad, 2023). It is found that the majority (63.8%) of the respondents stated that there is paid leaves for pregnant women in their organization, while 36.2 per cent stated that they do not have paid leaves in their organizations. The leave time for pregnant women is between 3-4 months.

Table No: 5
Distribution of the respondents by their weekly off day

4 Days	Weekly off Day	Frequency	Percentage
1	Sunday	2	2.1
2	Monday	8	8.5
3	Tuesday	26	27.7
4	Wednesday	20	21.3
5	Thursday	34	36.2
6	Friday	4	4.3
Total		94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 53.830		Df: 5	Significance: 0.000

The data in the table show that 36.2 per cent stated that their weekly off is Thursday, 27.7 per cent of respondents stated that their weekly off is Tuesday and 21.3 per cent of the respondents stated that their weekly off is Wednesday. It is understood that the shopping malls in a city work all days of the week. The sales executives select one day in week for their holiday. It is called weekly off.

Table No: 6
Distribution of the respondents by their lunch breaks time

S.No	Lunch Break Time	Frequency	Percentage
1	30 Minutes	2	2.1
2	45 Minutes	10	10.6

3	1 Hour	82	87.2
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 123.915		Df: 2	Significance: 0.000

The data in the above table revealed that the majority (87.2%) of the respondents stated that the lunch break time for the respondents is 1 hour, while 10.6 per cent of the respondents stated that the break time is 45 minutes. It is understood that it is a good time for the taking lunch and chitchat with their friends. A few executives take a rest during this time.

It is understood that a labor union is an organization formed by workers, employees in a trade, industry or company for the welfare and benefits of workers and employees. With this type of organization they start bargaining to increase their wages and other benefits. They submit the representations to the concerned authorities regularly (Michael J Boyle & Vikki Velasquez, 2022). The table below presents the participation of the employees in the union:

Table No: 7
Distribution of the respondents by having a membership in a union

S.No	Have a Union	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	4	4.3
2	No	90	95.7
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 78.681		Df: 1	Significance: 0.000

The data in the above table show that the majority (95.7%) of the respondents stated that they do not have membership in any association, while 4.3 per cent of the respondents have membership in the association. The association is a local association, not a registered trade union. Due to more turnover in these shopping malls, the associations are not strengthened. The cross table below presents the association between caste and membership in a union:

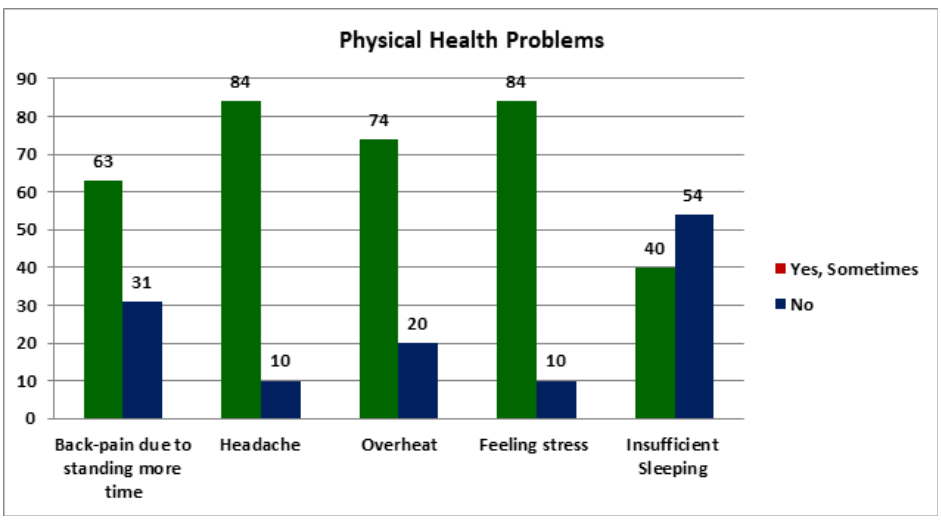
Table No: 8
Distribution of the respondents by their Caste and membership in a Union

Caste	Have a Union		Total
	Yes	No	
SC	4	30	34
ST	0	4	4

BC	0	56	56
Total	4	90	94
Pearson Chi-Square: 7.373(a)		Df: 2	Significance: 0.025

The analysis of the data on caste and having a membership in a union is cross-tabulated and the result shows that there is an association between the two variables, as it is evident that the scheduled caste people have a membership in the union. It may be a reason that the scheduled caste people are working collectively with the spirit of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and it is proved with the significance of 0.025.

Figure: 1
Distribution of the respondents by their physical health problems due to their job



The data in the above figure show that out of 94 respondents, 63 respondents said that they have back pain due to standing more time in the malls, 84 respondents said that they have headaches due to working in the the heavy lighting area, 74 respondents reported overheating, 84 respondents reported that they are feeling stressed and 40 respondents stated that they have insufficient sleep due to the heavy workload in the malls. The study is in line with the study of K. Karthikeyan et al. (2012) who reported that 39.3 per cent of the employees are affected by back or spine pain and 21per cent of the employees are affected by headache or migraine problems. But it is a little bit high among the respondents of this study.

When we visit the malls, we see the sales executives with more makeup. Most of the time, makeup brings a good appearance and beauty to the face. They are different makeup

products are available in the market and they used cosmetics in the makeup products. The below table presents whether makeup is compulsory while they are on duty:

Table: 9
Distribution of the respondents by their answers to the question is makeup is compulsory

S. No	Makeup Compulsory	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	92	97.9
2	No	2	2.1
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 86.170		Df: 1	Significance: 0.000

The numbers in the above table show that the majority (97.9%) of the respondents stated that the makeup is compulsory in their job. Most of the time, they do makeup in the washrooms or the waiting room.

Table No: 10
Distribution of the respondents by their Age and Makeup is compulsory

Age	Makeup Compulsory		Total
	Yes	No	
20-23	20	0	20
24-27	32	0	32
28-31	26	0	26
32 -36	14	2	16
Total	92	2	94
Pearson Chi-Square: 9.962(a)		Df: 3	Significance: 0.019

The analysis of the data on age and makeup being compulsory is cross-tabulated and the result shows that there is an association between the two variables, as it is evident that the respondents who are older are not going with makeup and all other age groups are compulsorily applying makeup and it is proved with the significance at 0.019.

Table No: 11
Distribution of the respondents by their job role and makeup is compulsory

Job Role	Makeup Compulsory		Total
	Yes	No	

Sales Executive	72	0	72
Manager/Team Leader/ Supervisor	4	2	6
Fitting Expert	10	0	10
Personal Shoppers	6	0	6
Total	92	2	94
Pearson Chi-Square: 29.971(a)		Df: 3	Significance: 0.000

The analysis of the data on job roles and makeup being compulsory are cross-tabulated and the result shows that there is an association between the two variables, as it is evident that the makeup is not compulsory and there is flexibility for the managers/team leaders, but the makeup is compulsory for all sales executives, and it is proved with the significance at 0.000.

According to Sharma (2022), sexual abuse in the workplace means any male person in the office trying to get physical contact; a demand or request for sexual favors; making sexually coloured remarks; showing indulging pornography; any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature comes under sexual abuse (Sharma, 2022). The women working in retail shopping malls may face sexual abuse from their colleagues, management and customers. The table belowpresents whether they faced sexual abuse or not.

Table No: 12
Distribution of the respondents by their answers about sexual abuse

S. No	Sexual Abuse	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	2	2.1
2	No	92	97.9
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 86.170		Df: 1	Significance: 0.000

The numbers in the above table show that the majority (97.9%) of the respondents stated that they have not faced any sexual abuse in their malls and 2.1 per cent of the respondents said that they faced sexual abuse in the mall. The study is in contrast with the study by Alison Branley (2019) reported that about 50 per cent of the young retail workers are sexually harassed, on average, seven times a year in Australia. That much sexual abuse is not found in this study.

Table No: 13
Distribution of the respondents by their answers about the women's protection committee

S. No	Women Protection Committee	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	18	19.1
2	No	76	80.9
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 35.787		Df: 1	Significance: 0.000

The information in the above table present that the majority (80.9%) of the respondents stated that there is no women's protection committee in the shopping malls and 19.1 per cent of the respondents stated that they do have a women's protection committee. The table below presents the salary discrimination between male and female employees:

Table No: 14
Distribution of the respondents by their answers to salary discrimination

S. No	Male Sales boys getting more salary	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	16	17.0
2	No	78	83.0
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 40894		Df: 1	Significance: 0.00

The numbers in the above table revealed that the majority (83.0%) of the respondents stated that there is no variation in the salary of males and females, while 17 per cent of the respondents stated that there is a variation in salary between males and females.

Table No: 15
Distribution of the respondents by the help of their co-workers

S. No	Co-worker Help	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	72	76.6
2	No	22	23.4
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square: 26.596		Df: 1	Significance: 0.000

The data in the above table revealed that the majority (76.6%) of the respondents stated that their co-workers help them when they are not feeling well, while 23.4 per cent of

the respondents stated that their co-workers are not helping them.

Jennifer Herrity (2023) said that job security is the assurance to an employee that they can continue working in their current job for a long time. It means the company continuously provides the salary and other benefits to the employee. They may not remove the employee without proper proof. The following table presents the job security of the respondents in their organization.

Table No: 16
Distribution of the respondents by their job security

S. No	Job Security	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	88	93.6
2	No, Depends on Performance	6	6.4
	Total	94	100.0
Pearson Chi-square value: 71.532		Df: 1	Significance: 0.00

The data in the table above revealed that the majority (93.6%) of the respondents stated that they have job security, while 6.4 per cent of the respondents stated that it depends on their job performance. It may be a reason that the respondents have good experience in sales and the companies are not interested in losing these experienced persons. The study is in line with the study of (Berry et al., 2020) who reported that job safety is important for employees and the fear of permanent job loss creates disturbance among female sales executives.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The rewards, incentives and salaries should be increased for the female sales executives working in the retail shopping malls. These increase work performance and job satisfaction.

2. Basic facilities like drinking water, washrooms and waiting rooms should be available at the workplace for the sales executives to maintain the health and hygiene of the employees.

3. Gender discrimination in pay should not be entertained. Equal pay for equal work should be promoted.

4. Government should encourage female sales executives to be entrepreneurs and

promote them as social entrepreneurs. The welfare programmes of the government should be reached to them.

5. Women's protection committees and sexual abuse committees should be formed and strengthened to protect women from sexual abuse in the workplace.

6. The management of shopping malls should help the executives by providing house rent allowance, bonuses and PFs.

7. The women working in this sector are vulnerable to the new virus-like Corona. Appropriate health care support should be provided by the mall management.

8. There is a need to provide capacity building on various new issues in the contemporary world which helps them to perform well in sales.

9. Job security provides mental peace and promotes committed work among employees. The study suggested that the management should provide job security based on their performance.

10. The management should initiate the women's protection committee in the shopping malls to protect the employees from various challenges.

11. Social workers may apply social work methods i.e. casework, and group work with stressed female sales executives to restore the equilibrium (Abraham, M, 2022).

12. Employees need job satisfaction. If they are happy with their jobs, they perform better on their responsibilities. The management, managers and other higher authorities should promote job satisfaction among the female sales executives.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted to understand the problems and challenges of female sales executives working in the shopping malls of Visakhapatnam. It is understood that many women in Visakhapatnam are working as sales executives in different shopping malls. The major challenges faced by female sales executives are physical health problems, psychological problems, stress and pressure related to their monthly targets etc. The employees spending more time on makeup are creating problems in the future. There is sexual abuse in the shopping malls and the majority of the shopping malls are not having a women's protection committee. The shopping malls work 365 days a year and leave very little to the employees. The study suggested that the management should initiate more incentives, salaries and basic

facilities for the female executives.

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