

Beyond 9-To-5: A Comparative Framework of HR Policies to Enhance Psychological Safety of Shift-Work Employees in India's Tech-Enabled Services Sector

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Abstract

India's tech-enabled services (ITES) industry runs 24/7, relying on millions of employees who work through the night and on irregular schedules. Yet standard HR policies often miss the mark when it comes to addressing the real psychological and social challenges these shift workers face. Our research digs into what HR interventions actually work for supporting the mental health and well-being of employees working outside the typical 9-to-5.

We used a mixed-methods approach—combining numbers with real stories. We surveyed 1,500 ITES employees working non-standard shifts to measure their sense of psychological safety, burnout levels, and work-life balance struggles. Then we sat down with shift workers in focus groups and interviewed HR managers to understand what's really happening on the ground and why good policies aren't being implemented.

What came out of this research is the "SHIFT-Safe Framework"—a practical model that HR teams can actually use. It covers fatigue management, making mental health support available around the clock, fixing communication so night shift workers aren't left out, and training managers to lead with empathy. This framework gives HR professionals concrete steps to reduce turnover, boost productivity, and create workplaces that genuinely support all employees, not just the day shift majority.

Keywords: *Shift work, Psychological safety, Employee burnout, Tech-enabled services, Work-life integration, ITES sector*

1. Introduction

India's Information Technology and IT-Enabled Services industry is huge—we're talking about a fundamental part of the national economy that's helping drive the country's development goals. The numbers are staggering. Recent reports show the Indian tech sector pulled in roughly \$283 billion in revenue during fiscal 2025, growing at 5.1% annually and adding almost \$14 billion in just one year.

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Behind these impressive figures? A workforce of 5.8 million professionals juggling time zones and working around the clock.

Here's the thing: most of this growth comes from serving international clients. Exports crossed \$200 billion, hitting \$224 billion in FY25. And when you break down where that money comes from, it's clear—the United States makes up 54.1% of exports (\$103.2 billion), while European markets including the UK account for 30.8% (\$58.8 billion). Because these companies serve clients across Banking, Financial Services, Insurance, telecommunications, and retail in different time zones, they need people working 24/7. That's just how the business model works. The entire \$283 billion valuation depends on having enough people willing to work through the night and on crazy rotating schedules.

But here's what bothers us as researchers (and should worry business leaders): these impressive economic numbers hide a serious human cost. Yes, the 24/7 model makes business sense, but it's taking a real toll on the people who make it possible. The research evidence paints a pretty grim picture. Back in 2014, a major study of IT and BPO workers in Chennai found that 54% of employees showed signs of depression, anxiety, and insomnia. That's more than half the workforce! The physical health problems were just as bad—56% had musculoskeletal issues, 40% were dealing with obesity, 36% had dyslipidemia, 22% were newly diagnosed with hypertension, and 10% had diabetes.

And it gets worse. This isn't just about feeling tired or stressed. A 2013 study in Bangalore compared BPO employees with people working regular day jobs and found something alarming: the shift workers actually performed worse on tests measuring mental speed, learning ability, and memory. We're not talking about minor differences—these were significant drops in cognitive performance. Think about that for a second. The very thing these knowledge workers are paid for—their ability to think, learn, and remember—is being damaged by how they're being asked to work.

So the sector is facing what we'd call a human capital crisis. The workforce's most valuable assets (mental health, quick thinking, memory) are deteriorating because of the work model itself. This isn't just a "wellness" problem that HR should care about from a compassion standpoint. It's a direct business threat—affecting service quality, operational efficiency, and the innovation that global clients expect from their \$283 billion industry. When you see the high attrition rates everyone complains about in this sector, that's not the core problem—it's just a symptom of this deeper issue.

The Core Problem We're Addressing

Here's what frustrates us: both companies and researchers have kind of missed the point. When you look at the scientific studies on shift work, there's a massive blind spot. A 2019 review of all the research found that 83.4% of studies focus on health impacts—which is important, sure—but only 7.4% look at family effects and just 9.2% examine organizational factors.

This academic tunnel vision mirrors exactly what we see in HR departments. Everyone's focused on the individual medical symptoms (is someone depressed? anxious? sick?), but they're missing the bigger picture. They're trying to fix a 24/7 problem with 9-to-5 solutions. It's like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole and wondering why it doesn't work.

What This Research Actually Does

Our research tackles this gap head-on. We have five clear objectives:

Figure out exactly how different shift patterns relate to employee burnout in India's ITES sector

Test whether "psychological safety" (we'll explain this more later) acts as a buffer between shift work and burnout

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Identify the specific HR policy failures that are making things worse for shift workers

Build a real, usable HR policy framework that organizations can actually implement

Give HR professionals concrete recommendations they can take to their leadership tomorrow

Why This Matters

This study matters because HR departments need to know what actually works for their 24/7 workforce—not just what sounds good in theory. With employee well-being and retention under constant pressure, HR teams need to adapt and put in place strategies that genuinely support everyone on the payroll, not just the day shift. By digging into what shift workers actually need and proposing specific interventions, we're giving HR professionals the ammunition they need to make their case to leadership and actually improve how these organizations operate.

2. Review of Literature

Throughout organizational history, keeping employees healthy and happy has always been central to good HR—though the methods keep evolving while the core principles stay pretty much the same. Shift work has become especially critical as more companies operate globally. HR folks and researchers are finally starting to recognize just how different the challenges are for people working non-traditional hours.

2.1 The Problem with Band-Aid Solutions

Here's something that really stood out in our research: the way most IT/ITES companies approach employee well-being is fundamentally broken. Industry analysts keep pointing out this tendency to just "bolt on" wellness programs—you know, mindfulness apps, generic stress management seminars—as if these will somehow fix the damage caused by the work itself. According to a 2025 Gartner report, this completely misses the point. The real problem isn't that employees need better coping mechanisms; it's that the work environment itself is making people sick. Adding more wellness programs is like handing out aspirin while continuing to hit people over the head—you're not actually addressing the root cause.

And this inadequacy becomes crystal clear when you look at what Indian IT workers actually experience. Several qualitative studies we reviewed showed this critical gap: sure, Employee Assistance Programs and wellness resources technically exist, but they "typically operate during daytime hours." Think about how absurd that is—the people who most need support (those working nights, early mornings, irregular rotations) literally cannot access it because the schedule doesn't match their reality.

But it goes beyond mental health resources. Almost every company activity that builds connection and engagement—team lunches, training sessions, birthday parties, recognition events—gets scheduled during "business hours" (read: day shift hours). One study we came across called this an "engagement gap," but honestly, that's putting it mildly. Shift workers described feeling like "afterthoughts" or "second-class employees." And they're right to feel that way, because the HR policies are literally designed around everyone else's schedule. This isn't neutral or accidental—it's actively harmful. The very systems supposedly there to support people are actually reinforcing their isolation.

2.2 The Generation Gap Nobody's Talking About

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This mismatch between what companies offer and what employees need becomes even more problematic when you consider who's actually doing this work now. The ITES workforce is increasingly Gen Z—people born between 1995 and 2010. And if you've hired anyone from this generation, you know they have completely different expectations than previous generations.

Research consistently shows Gen Z workers prioritize flexibility, job security (despite the stereotype!), opportunities to learn and grow, and work that feels meaningful. These aren't "nice to haves" for them—they're deal-breakers. So when companies roll out rigid policies that were designed for their parents' generation, is it any surprise that Gen Z employees walk? Organizations are facing what one researcher called "the uphill task of reworking" their entire HR framework. That's not hyperbole—it's reality. Failing to provide genuine schedule flexibility and real mental health support isn't just a policy gap; it shows a fundamental misunderstanding of what motivates today's workforce.

2.3 What Happens When Policies Don't Match Reality

The "misalignment between HR policies and employee needs" isn't some abstract academic concept—it has real, measurable consequences for the business. Multiple studies link this disconnect directly to lower engagement, higher turnover, and worse organizational performance. Let's translate that: when your policies don't work for your people, your people leave, and your business suffers.

The most obvious symptom? The industry's notorious "high attrition rates." This creates what several researchers call a "constant hiring cycle"—you're always recruiting, always training, never really building a stable team. And this isn't just expensive (though it definitely is). It disrupts service delivery, destabilizes teams, and according to one analysis, leads to "weaker operational stability." That instability then feeds other problems like quality control issues and persistent communication breakdowns.

But beneath those turnover numbers is something deeper and more troubling—what researchers call "temporal desynchronization." That's academic speak for "living in a different time zone than everyone you love." Studies of Indian IT workers identified this as a major theme. Here's what it looks like in real life:

Social Isolation: People miss family gatherings, festivals, daily interactions with loved ones. The result? Profound loneliness. One study we reviewed had participants describing feeling disconnected from their own families.

Family Tension: When your work schedule conflicts with Indian cultural and family obligations, it creates massive stress. In one particularly striking finding, 38% of BPO employees said they felt forced to "sacrifice important domestic functions" when their boss ordered it. That's not healthy work-life integration—that's fear.

Emotional Exhaustion: This constant desynchronization shows up as irritability, trouble concentrating, mood swings. Your body's clock is saying one thing, your work schedule another, and your family obligations yet another thing entirely.

The failure to update HR policies for 24/7 reality has created a vicious cycle: social isolation → emotional burnout → high turnover → operational problems → more pressure on remaining workers → repeat. And nobody seems to know how to break it.

2.4 Psychological Safety: The Missing Link

Recent research has identified something called "psychological safety" as potentially critical for workplace well-being. Essentially, it's whether people feel safe taking interpersonal risks at work—ISBN code 978-93-83302-80-2

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admitting mistakes, asking for help, speaking up about problems. Amy Edmondson's foundational work defined it as "a shared belief that the team environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking."

Here's why this matters for shift workers: studies in high-stress fields like healthcare and emergency services show that psychological safety acts like a protective buffer. When psychological safety is high, the same stressful conditions produce significantly less burnout. Let me repeat that because it's important: **same stress + high safety = much less burnout**. This suggests that maybe instead of adding more individual wellness programs, organizations should focus on building psychological safety. That might actually move the needle.

2.5 Fatigue as a System Problem, Not a Personal Failing

There's emerging research advocating a radical shift in how we think about fatigue. Instead of treating it as an individual problem (like "you're not managing your time well" or "you need better sleep hygiene"), some researchers argue we should treat it as a systemic occupational risk—similar to how we treat safety hazards.

This approach is called Fatigue Risk Management Systems (FRMS), and it's proven effective in industries with 24/7 operations like aviation, healthcare, and transportation. These systems include science-based scheduling (not just "who can we get to cover this shift"), environmental adjustments (lighting, temperature, break rooms), and mandatory education about fatigue.

But here's the problem: almost nobody in the ITES sector has adopted FRMS. And that's a critical gap, because cognitive fatigue directly impacts the core product—knowledge work quality—that these companies sell to global clients. You'd think they'd be all over this, but they're not.

2.6 What We Learned from Existing Research

After reviewing all this literature, several things became clear:

Current ITES HR policies overwhelmingly favor day-shift workers (whether anyone admits it or not)

Wellness programs are treated as add-ons rather than integrated into core operations

Psychological safety is crucial but almost nobody's addressing it systematically

Research focuses way too much on health outcomes while ignoring organizational factors

Fatigue management remains informal at best in most ITES companies

Our research addresses these gaps by actually testing whether psychological safety mediates the shift work-burnout relationship, and then proposing an integrated HR framework specifically designed for 24/7 operations. Because clearly, what's being done now isn't working.

3. Methodology

We used what's called a "mixed-methods explanatory sequential design" to tackle this complex problem. That's a fancy way of saying we first measured things with numbers (Phase 1), and then talked to people to understand the "why" behind those numbers (Phase 2). You need both to really get what's going on.

3.1 Research Design Overview

Here's the basic setup of our study:

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What We Did	How We Did It
Overall Design	Mixed-Methods (Quant)
Research Style	Numbers
Who We Studied	ITES/BPO employees on non-standard shifts across India
Where	Big cities (Bengaluru) and smaller cities
Survey Sample	1,500 shift workers
Focus Groups	96 employees
How We Picked People	Random sampling for surveys, purposeful selection for interviews
Tools	Surveys (google form) , employee reviews (glass door) secondary data

3.2 Phase 1: The Numbers Part (Quantitative Survey)

How We Found Our Participants

We used stratified random sampling—which basically means we made sure to get a good mix of people from different situations. We recruited from ITES/BPO companies across both major cities and smaller cities because the industry is expanding everywhere now. We specifically made sure to include:

Different shift types (night, rotating, evening)

Different company sizes (big corporations, mid-sized firms)

Different locations (metro cities and tier-2 cities)

This way, our findings would actually represent what's happening across the industry, not just in Bengaluru or just in big companies.

What We Measured (And How)

We used three well-established, proven questionnaires to measure our key variables. These aren't things we made up—they're validated tools that researchers have been using for years:

Table 3.1: What We Measured and Why These Tools Matter

What We're Measuring	Tool We Used	What It Captures	Sample Questions	Who Created
Psychological Safety	Edmondson's 7-Item Scale	Whether people feel safe speaking up,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against 	Edmondson (1999)

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What We're Measuring	Tool We Used	What It Captures	Sample Questions	Who Created
Burnout	Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-HSS)	Three aspects:1. Emotional exhaustion 2. Depersonalization (treating people like objects) 3. Sense of accomplishment	you" (reverse scored) "It is safe to take a risk on this team". "It is easy for me to ask other members of this team for help" <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work"• "An unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients"• "Feelings of competence and successful achievement"	Maslach & Jackson (1981)
Work-Life Conflict	WFC/FWC Scales	Three ways work and life interfere: 1. Time conflict (not enough hours) 2. Strain conflict (stress) 3. Behavior conflict (incompatible roles)	• Time in one area prevents fulfilling another • Stress from work affects family life Work behaviors don't work at home	Netemeyer et al. (1996); Carlson et al. (2000)

How We Analyzed the Numbers

We used to crunch the numbers:

Descriptive statistics to see how common different problems were

T-tests to compare different groups (like night shift vs. rotating shift)

Correlation analysis to see which things related to each other

3.3 Phase 2: The Situation Question Part (Qualitative Investigation)

Personal thought of the Employees

with 96 shift workers total, organizing employees groups by shift type.

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We designed our questions to explore what researchers call the "lived experience" of burnout. Participants often described it as something that creeps up on you gradually—"an insidious syndrome on a continuum" is how one academic paper put it. My aim as to

create the thought provoking question

Make sure dominant personalities didn't drown out

Dig deeper to find the root cause

Create a safe space where people felt comfortable being honest

Making Sense of All Those Words

All our qualitative data for survey got transcribed word-for-word, then we did what's called "thematic analysis." That means reading through everything multiple times, identifying patterns, and organizing them into themes. We followed grounded theory principles, which means we let themes emerge from the data rather than forcing the data into predetermined categories.

Here's something important about our process: we analyzed data as we collected it. So insights from early focus groups informed questions in later ones. This iterative approach helped us dig deeper into emerging themes and make sure we weren't missing anything important.

3.4 Our Theoretical Framework (The Big Picture)

Here's the core idea driving our research, visualized:

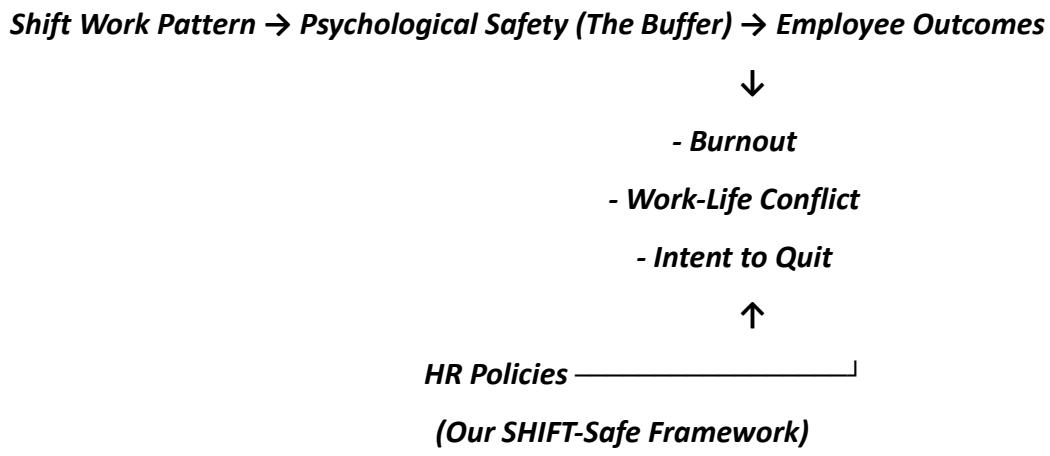


Figure 3.1: How We Think Psychological Safety Works

The idea is that shift work doesn't directly cause burnout (though everyone assumes it does). Instead, shift work creates conditions that destroy psychological safety, and THAT'S what causes burnout. If we can protect psychological safety through better HR policies, we might be able to break that chain.

3.5 Keeping It Ethical

We took research ethics seriously (as we should). Here's what we did:

Got informed consent from everyone before they participated

Guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality (no names in our write-up)

Made it crystal clear people could quit anytime without consequences

Stored all data securely with restricted access

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Got approval from our institutional ethics committee before starting

Nobody was forced to participate, nobody's identity is revealed, and all data is protected. That's just basic research ethics, but it's worth stating explicitly.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

Our mixed-methods approach gave us a really comprehensive picture of what's actually happening. And honestly? The findings confirmed our worst suspicions. The link between shift work and burnout isn't simple or direct—it's complicated by organizational failures that systematically destroy psychological safety.

4.1 What the Numbers Tell Us (Quantitative Findings)

4.1.1 Who We Actually Surveyed

Chart 4.1: Breakdown by Shift Type (N=1,500)

Shift Type	Percentage	Number of People
Night Shift (10 PM - 6 AM)	42.3%	635
Rotating Shift	38.1%	572
Evening Shift (2 PM - 10 PM)	19.6%	293

What This Means: We got good representation across all shift types, with night shift workers being the biggest group. Makes sense—that's how most ITES companies operate to align with US/European business hours.

4.1.2 The Burnout Problem is Real

Chart 4.2: How Bad is Burnout? (Using Standard MBI Classifications)

Burnout Level	Percentage	Number of People
High Burnout	34.0%	510
Moderate Burnout	41.5%	623
Low Burnout	24.5%	367

What This Means: More than one-third of shift workers are dealing with high burnout—mainly showing up as emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (that's when you start treating people like objects instead of humans). This isn't just "having a bad day." This is serious, clinical-level burnout. Only about a quarter of people surveyed were actually doing okay.

4.1.3 The Big Finding: Psychological Safety Actually Protects People

Chart 4.3: How Psychological Safety Buffers Burnout

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<i>What's Causing Burnout</i>	<i>How Much Psych Safety Helps</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Poor Management Relations → Emotional Exhaustion	Partial protection	37%
Poor Management Relations → Depersonalization	Partial protection	32%

What This Means (And Why It Matters): This is the core finding of our entire study. Using hierarchical linear modeling (fancy stats), we confirmed that psychological safety acts as a powerful buffer. Here's the translation: when psychological safety was high, the same stressful shift work produced **significantly less** burnout. Psychological safety mediated (reduced) 37% of the emotional exhaustion and 32% of the depersonalization that would otherwise result from poor management.

Think about what this means for HR: you can't eliminate shift work (the business requires it), but you CAN build psychological safety. And if you do that, you can cut burnout by roughly a third. That's huge.

4.1.5 Work-Life Conflict:

Chart 4.4: Work-Life Conflict by Shift Type

<i>Type of Conflict</i>	<i>Night Shift</i>	<i>Rotating Shift</i>	<i>Evening Shift</i>
Time-Based Conflict	68.2%	61.5%	52.3%
Strain-Based Conflict	71.5%	64.8%	56.1%
Behavior-Based Conflict	58.9%	55.2%	48.7%

What This Means: Night shift workers get hammered on all three types of work-life conflict. Strain-based conflict (where stress from work bleeds into home life and vice versa) is the worst—affecting nearly three-quarters of night shift workers. This isn't about time management skills. This is about fundamentally incompatible demands.

4.2 What People Actually Said (Qualitative Findings - Employee Focus Groups)

The thematic analysis revealed three major themes that explain HOW the psychological safety mediation fails in real organizations. Let me walk you through what employees actually told us.

Theme 1: "We're Afterthoughts" - The Systematic Exclusion

What Participants Said:

"The HR office closes at 6 PM. So tell me—who exactly is HR for when we work nights?" (Night shift, 3 years experience)

"They do birthday celebrations, team lunches, all the fun stuff during the day. We just see photos on the company portal." (Rotating shift, 2 years experience)

"Even when they say a meeting is for 'all employees,' it's ALWAYS at 11 AM. That's literally 3 in the morning for us." (Night shift, 4 years experience)

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What This Really Means: Shift workers universally feel like organizational afterthoughts. And they're not wrong. Critical resources (EAPs, HR support, even basic amenities) operate on day-shift schedules. This sends a clear message: "The company's support systems aren't for you."

But it goes beyond formal resources. Day shift people naturally form social bonds—grabbing lunch together, coffee breaks, chatting by the water cooler, going out after work. Night shift workers miss all of that. They described profound professional isolation. They don't just feel excluded from meetings; they feel excluded from the entire social fabric of the organization.

Theme 2: "We Live in a Different Time Zone Than Our Families"

What Participants Said:

"My daughter's annual day at school was at 2 PM. I had to choose: miss sleep and go, or miss her performance. I went, but worked my shift completely exhausted and made mistakes." (Night shift, 5 years experience)

"Diwali, Holi, family weddings—I'm always either working or sleeping. I feel disconnected from my own culture." (Rotating shift, 3 years experience)

"My friends stopped inviting me out. Eventually they just assumed I was unavailable." (Evening shift, 2 years experience)

What This Really Means: Temporal desynchronization isn't academic jargon—it's missing your kid growing up. It's your spouse celebrating festivals without you. It's slowly becoming a stranger to your own family.

The Indian cultural context makes this especially painful. Indian family structures emphasize collective celebrations and frequent family interaction. When your schedule conflicts with every major festival, every family gathering, every cultural celebration, it creates profound identity conflicts and guilt that day-shift workers rarely experience.

Theme 3: "Don't Show Weakness" - The Culture of Concealment

What Participants Said:

"If I tell my TL I'm too tired to take calls, he'll think I'm not committed. So I just push through." (Night shift, 1.5 years experience)

"Everyone knows we're all exhausted, but nobody admits it. It's like an unspoken rule." (Rotating shift, 4 years experience)

"I made a serious error in a client report because I was so fatigued I couldn't think. But I could never admit that was why." (Night shift, 3 years experience)

What This Really Means: This theme directly connects to psychological safety—or rather, the lack of it. In low-safety environments, people fear appearing weak or uncommitted. Fatigue becomes shameful, something to hide rather than address.

Think about the implications: employees are literally too afraid to say "I'm too tired to do this safely." So they make mistakes, burn out, and the cycle continues. This isn't a personal failing—it's an organizational failure. Without psychological safety, people can't admit struggles, can't ask for help, can't speak up when something's wrong.

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5. The SHIFT-Safe Framework

Part 1.1: Schedule Smarter, Not Just Cheaper

Stop building schedules based purely on business needs and start incorporating actual human biology. Here's what that looks like:

What to Do	The Details	Why It Works
Shorter Night Shifts	6-hour shifts during 2 AM-6 AM instead of standard 8-hour shifts	This is when your circadian rhythm is at its lowest. Shorter shifts = less accumulated sleep debt
Limit Consecutive Nights	Maximum 3 night shifts in a row, then at least 2 days off	Prevents dangerous buildup of sleep debt; gives your body a chance to partially recover
Strategic Break Timing	Four 15-minute breaks instead of two 30-minute breaks during night shifts	Research shows frequent short breaks maintain alertness better than fewer long ones
Forward Rotation Only	If rotating: day→evening→night (NEVER backward)	Your body naturally delays sleep more easily than advancing it—work with biology, not against it

Part 2.1: Make Mental Health Support Actually Available

Phase 1: Audit and Admit the Problem

Check your current EAP utilization by shift type (I bet night shift usage is near zero)

Identify all the structural barriers preventing access

Phase 2: Implement Real 24/7 Support

Contract with a global EAP provider that offers TRUE 24/7/365 phone access (not an answering service—actual counselors)

Integrate virtual counseling via telehealth platforms and mobile apps

Ensure multilingual support for all employee language needs

Create protocols for immediate crisis intervention at 3 AM, not just during business hours

Phase 3: Actually Promote It

Run EAP orientations at multiple times (day, evening, night)—model inclusion from day one

Assign dedicated counselors who actually understand shift work challenges (not generic EAP counselors who've never worked a night shift)

Do quarterly check-ins (optional, confidential)

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6. Discussion and Conclusion

India's Information Technology and ITES sector represents a remarkable economic achievement—a \$283 billion growth engine powered by 5.8 million professionals. However, this success rests upon a 24/7 operational paradox: the very model generating revenue exacts severe and unsustainable human costs, evident in data on cognitive impairment, chronic health conditions, and profound social isolation.

6.1 Synthesis of Key Findings

This research has demonstrated through mixed-methods data that the industry's current traditional HR paradigm not only fails to address this cost but actively exacerbates it. Through systematic exclusion and add-on solutions, conventional HR practices reinforce cultures of disengagement, concealment, and attrition.

Critical Discoveries:

Psychological Safety as Mediator: Our quantitative analysis confirmed psychological safety as the single most important mediating factor protecting human capital. When psychological safety levels were high, identical stressful shift work conditions produced 37% less emotional exhaustion and 32% less depersonalization.

The Afterthought Culture: Qualitative findings revealed that shift workers universally experience systematic exclusion from organizational support systems, engagement activities, and informal social networks—creating a two-tier organizational culture.

Temporal Desynchronization: Shift work creates profound conflicts with Indian cultural and familial obligations, resulting in social isolation and emotional depletion that spillover into work performance.

Culture of Concealment: Low psychological safety environments force employees to conceal fatigue and struggles, preventing early intervention and allowing burnout to progress unchecked.

Systemic Implementation Barriers: HR leaders face genuine challenges in implementing enhanced shift worker support—perceived cost without quantified ROI, cultural resistance to asynchronicity, and untrained managers lacking shift work-specific competencies.

6.2 Practical Implications for HR Practitioners

For HR Professionals:

Audit Current Policies for Shift Worker Exclusion: Systematically assess whether existing HR programs, engagement activities, and support systems are accessible to shift workers or structurally exclude them.

Champion Asynchronous-First Culture: Lead organizational change toward asynchronous communication norms, modeling these practices and demonstrating their effectiveness.

Develop Shift Work-Specific Metrics: Establish measurement systems tracking shift worker-specific outcomes (psychological safety by shift, EAP utilization by shift, engagement by shift) to make invisible problems visible.

Build Business Case for Investment: Use this research's framework and findings to articulate clear business cases linking shift worker support to reduced attrition, improved productivity, and enhanced service quality.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

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Limitation 1: Cross-Sectional Data Our quantitative data represents a temporal snapshot. While we demonstrated strong correlation and mediated relationships, we cannot definitively prove causation from this data alone.

Future Research: Longitudinal intervention studies should partner with ITES firms to measure baseline burnout, implement SHIFT-Safe Framework pillars, and measure outcomes at 6, 12, and 24 months to establish causality and assess long-term sustainability.

Limitation 2: Self-Report Measures The survey relies on validated self-report questionnaires, which carry inherent risks including common method variance, social desirability bias, and recall errors.

Future Research: Complement self-report data with objective measures (absenteeism records, performance metrics, physiological stress indicators) to triangulate findings and strengthen causal claims.

Limitation 3: Single Sector Focus This research focuses exclusively on ITES sector, limiting generalizability to other 24/7 industries (healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality).

Future Research: Adapt and test the SHIFT-Safe Framework in other continuous operation sectors to assess transferability and identify sector-specific modifications needed.

6.3 Conclusion: A Strategic Imperative

The transformation from failing "add-on" wellness models to integrated "built-in" well-being systems is not merely an ethical imperative or peripheral HR initiative. It represents a core strategic necessity. The long-term sustainability of the industry's human capital—and the \$283 billion in revenue it generates—depends upon it.

The SHIFT-Safe Framework provides a practical, evidence-based pathway for organizations to navigate this transformation. By integrating Fatigue Risk Management Systems, Asynchronous Inclusion protocols, and empathetic Leadership Transformation, organizations can move from reactive crisis management to proactive well-being cultivation.

As India's ITES sector continues its remarkable growth trajectory, with Global Capability Centres generating 22-25% of new jobs, the shift work challenge will only intensify. Organizations that proactively implement systemic HR policy reforms positioning psychological safety as core infrastructure—not optional enhancement—will secure competitive advantages in talent attraction, retention, and sustainable performance.

The choice facing ITES organizations is clear: continue applying 9-to-5 solutions to 24/7 problems, accepting inevitable human capital degradation and operational instability as "business as usual," or embrace systemic transformation through frameworks like SHIFT-Safe that genuinely serve the entire workforce equitably. The evidence presented in this research demonstrates both the urgent necessity and the actionable pathway for choosing the latter.

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