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## Attitude of Professionals and Students towards Professional Dress Code, Tattoos and Body Piercing in the Corporate World

**Anurag Mishra**

MBA Student, KIIT School of Management, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

**Sasmita Mishra**

Assistant Professor, KIIT School of Management, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

### **Abstract:**

*This paper is all about dress code, hair style, piercing, workplace odour and tattoos. Workplace tattoo and dress code policies vary among and within industries. But with many companies stressing commitments to diversity, there has been less stereotypes on tattoos and dress code. Tattoo policies for blue-collar and art-related jobs aren't shocking, but the increasingly tolerant outlook of frontrunners in corporate and educational industries are more surprising. To gain an understanding about the above issues, 120 responses were collected from students who are going to join corporate soon and those who are already working in different industries. The responses were collected online and the prior permission was obtained before circulating the questionnaire. Some of the important findings of the study are: 1) the students who are going to join the corporate soon, think that tattoos and piercing are no longer a problem as far as placements are concerned; 2) most of the professionals think that tattoos do not lead to deviant workplace behaviour; 3) students feel that casual and semi casual dress code results in more productivity whereas professionals prefer formal dress code; 4) perfumes also play a very important role both in case of students as well as corporate. They think pleasant odour enhances productivity; 5) from this research we also get to know what are the preferred dress code both in case of professionals and students both in case of male and female. Hence, the overall trends shows there exists acceptance of informal dress, tattoos and body piercing. However, more empirical studies are required to understand the relationship of these factors on productivity.*

**Keywords:** Dress code, tattoos, body piercing, workplace odour, productivity

### **1. Introduction**

Personal appearance choices not only depend on an idea of individual existence, but also acknowledge dependence on the gaze of others for that existence to have meaning. Freedom of dressing thus contributes to open cultural confrontation—with others and with one- self. Similarly, body art or what we call tattoo is considered a taboo in many societies. People having tattoos or piercing are perceived as rebels and are not nurtured well by their parents. However, there is observable change in such perception. For example, US military has recently revised its tattoo policy (www.army.mil, 2015). Previously soldiers were not accepted if they had tattoos, but now only those tattoos are acceptable which are not visible after putting on their uniforms. On the other hand there is buzz about dress code as well. Big companies like Google believe that a person can wear anything they want to as it helps in increasing their productivity. Gradually companies like Yahoo and Facebook are also following the same trend.

Dress code policy of organisations has certain significance. Employers require employees to wear uniforms either to reflect company brand image before the clients or as a precautionary measure of safety. Mostly, employers take care of four areas of concerns while making dress code policies for their organisation such as: there should not be unlawful discrimination, there should be gender equality, adjustments have to be made for disabled persons and should take care of health and safety aspect (<http://www.acas.org.uk> 2015).

Dress codes belonging to certain professions bear their identity. For example, doctors, lawyers and police are identified by their dress codes. Studies also suggests that clothing shapes the perception and behaviour of others towards the wearer. For example, women wearing masculine formal dress are perceived more competent (Forsythe 1990) whereas, women wearing sexy dress are perceived to be less competent (Glick, Larsen, Johnson & Branstiter 2005). Also evidence suggests that clothing shapes the behaviour of the individual wearing them (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998).

Clothes have certain symbolic meaning (Eco 1979; Schier 1983) and when someone wears them the respective symbolic meaning is activated in his/her brain and the person behaves accordingly (Adam, Adam & Galinsky 2012). Hence, people have developed the concept of "weekend wear", "party wear" for different occasions to feel differently and act differently.

Corporate dress code policy is a major concern in recent years. Companies either maintain no guidelines at all or establish such rigid

policies that they almost appear to be elaborate pranks. And from employees' point of view, two opinions exist. Firstly, employees appreciate knowing what their organization considers appropriate work attire and secondly, employees believe that they are adults and capable of dressing appropriately for work without dress codes. This brings us to the question, Should organizations have dress code? Although in the beginning of the 20th century tattoos were not so acceptable for all, gradually, have become acceptable form of art and expression (Swanger, 2006). While society is becoming more liberal and expressive, and piercings and tattoos have become part of our mainstream culture. People consider tattoos as a form of self expression or expression of individuality (Atkinson & Young 2001; Jefferys 2000). At the same time some employers are still having a tough time wrapping their heads around body art in the workplace because of low level of acceptance of people towards this (Ligos 2001; Miller, Nicols, & Eure 2009). However, different media are reflecting the changing mindset of people towards tattoos and body piercing. For example, the picture below is the story of a doctor reported in Tattoo artist magazine. This person who belongs to the most noble profession, amazingly explains his love for tattoos so beautifully. Though prejudices are changing and people are becoming more accepting, there are still many areas where having tattoos is not deemed as acceptable or appropriate. Hence, our research question is to what extent tattoos have been accepted in the corporate world?

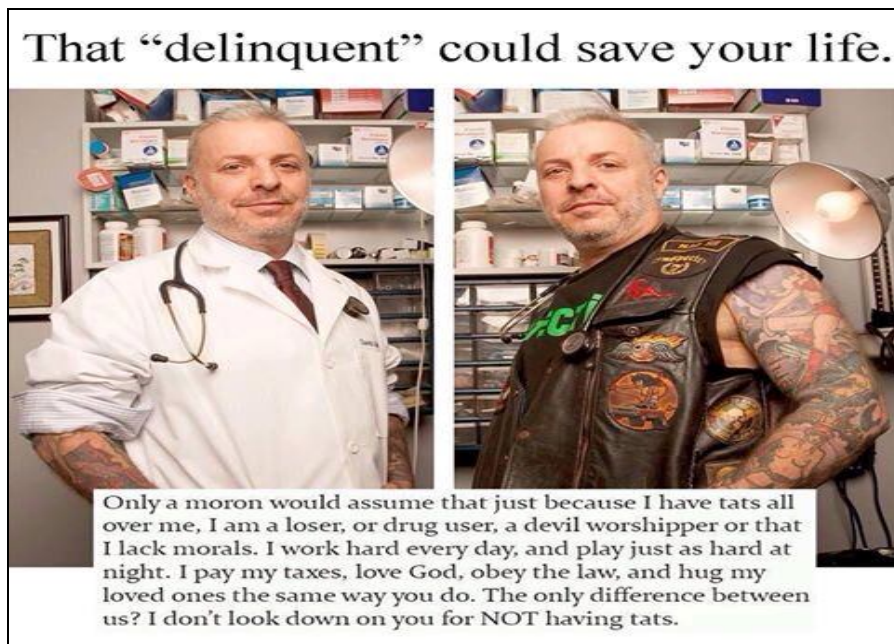


Figure 1: Tattoo Artist Magazine

Another aspect of workplace that may affect the behaviour and productivity of people is workplace odour/fragrance. Odours/fragrance do affect the mood of people (Amodio 1998) and hence may have differential impact on the behaviour and productivity of people. To cite one example, Liljenquist, Zhong, & Galinsky (2010) have observed that clean scents increase the tendency to reciprocate trust and to offer charitable help. Some fragrance/odours have natural tendency to elicit certain moods (Hunter 1995) whereas, some influence the moods based on the previous experience (Kirk-Smith & Booth, 1987). Hence, here we have tried to understand whether workplace odour is matter of concern for people?, do perfume and work place odour influence productivity?

## 2. Objective of the Study

- To find out how important is dress code in different organisations.
- To know the employees perception towards the various given factors.
- Importance of workplace odour and perfume.
- To see whether there is a change in trend of tattoos and dress code.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Sample

The respondents of this study were selected through a snowball sampling method. Half of the respondents were professionals and other halves were MBA/Engineering final year students. Their age ranged from 21-35 years. There was significant representation of male and female respondents in both professional and student's category.

Category	Response received	% of response to total response
Professionals (Male)	48	82.75
Professionals (Female)	10	17.24
Students (Male)	39	62.90
Students (Female)	23	37.09

Table 1: Sample profile

### 3.2. Data Collection

A survey questionnaire was prepared to obtain the opinion of MBA students and professionals on the informal dress code in offices, having tattoos on the body and body piercing. Although they were asked about the effect of grooming and use of perfumes, and workplace odour on workplace environment.

### 4. Results

Mostly the youngsters have been found to be more inclined towards tattoos and body piercing. They are the people who belong to generation Y. Hence, their opinions were collected related on above issues. The table 1 and 2 presents the data obtained on various issues. It was found that in case of professionals and students one thing is very much noticeable that maximum of them think that tattoo and piercing do not reduce chance of getting a job and even they are not linked with deviant workplace behaviour. Again when comparing the data of professionals and students maximum of them accrue to the fact that workplace odour and fragrance/perfume have importance in workplace and colleges. But, it is quite notable that in case of professionals major chunk i.e. 64%, of people think that keeping perfumes, scented lotions, hair sprays, air fresheners or keeping fragment food items at work desk do not affect productivity, but if we see the data given by students major chunk i.e. 63% people say that it does. There is a notable difference between professionals and students when we compare what dress they wear when they go to work or colleges. But with the gradual change in the dress policies in corporate it seems students who mostly prefer casual and semi casual would not have a tough time when they join the corporate houses.

Questions	Yes (Y)	No (N)	Percentage
Can piercing/tattoo reduce the chance of getting a job?	8	50	14% (Y) 86% (N)
When you first meet a person, does dress code have any impact on you?	48	10	83% (Y) 17% (N)
Does dress code affect your work efficiency?	20	38	34% (Y) 66% (N)
Does workplace odour and fragrance/perfume have any importance in workplace?	32	26	55% (Y) 45% (N)
Do perfumes, scented lotions, hair sprays, air fresheners or keeping fragment food items at work desk affect the productivity?	21	37	36% (Y) 64% (N)
Are tattoos linked with deviant workplace behaviour?	10	48	17% (Y) 83% (N)
• What do you usually wear while going to Office?			7% Casual 7% anything I want 86% formals
• A bearded boss who wore a T-shirt would get more respect or a clean shaven one who wore shirt and tie?			84% clean shaven shirt and tie 16% bearded and t-shirt
• How do you perceive the personality of an employee with body piercing or tattoo?			14% freedom loving 26% easy going 60% careless

Table 2: Opinion of professionals towards dress codes, workplace odours, tattoos and body piercing

Questions	Yes (Y)	No (N)	Percentage
Can piercing/tattoo hurt the chance of getting a job?	8	54	13% (Y) 87% (N)
When you first meet a person, does dress code have any impact on you?	9	53	15% (Y) 85% (N)
Does dress code affect your work efficiency?	13	49	21% (Y) 79% (N)
Does workplace odour and fragrance/perfume have any importance in workplace?	48	14	77% (Y) 23% (N)
Do perfumes, scented lotions, hair sprays, air fresheners or keeping fragment food items at work desk affect the productivity?	39	23	63% (Y) 37% (N)
Are tattoos linked with deviant workplace behaviour?	7	55	11% (Y) 89% (N)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you usually wear while going to college?</li> </ul>			31% Casual 51% anything I want 18% formals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A bearded professor who wore a T-shirt would get more respect or a clean shaven one who wore shirt tie?</li> </ul>			34% clean shaven shirt and tie 66% bearded and t-shirt
How do you perceive the personality of an employee with body piercing or tattoo?			52% easy going 34% freedom loving 14% careless

Table 3: Opinion of students towards dress codes, workplace odours, tattoos and body piercing

#### 4.1. Acceptance Level of Informal Dressing and Grooming

To identify and evaluate the acceptance level of the various attributes that constitutes informal and tattoo culture in corporate world, a five point rating scale was used. Where, the ratings ranged from "Strongly Disagree=1", "Disagree=2", "Neutral=3", "Agree=4" and "Strongly Agree=5". The weight of the response is multiplied by the number of corresponding response in order to calculate the final scores of all features. The various attributes identified and used as scale items were acceptance of Flip flops/chapalls/other shoes, Low cut top, or tanks with deep arm holes, Holes in Jeans or pants, Short skirts, Extremely tall high heeled shoes, Visible piercing other than ear, Tongue piercing, Visible tattoos and Unusual hair colour/styles among both professionals and college going students. The scores of this scale have been calculated and interpreted below.

#### 4.2. Computation of Ideal and Least Score

In order to calculate Ideal scores each category respondents numbers are multiplied with (5) as well as with total number of factors. In the same way, for calculating least scores each category respondents numbers are multiplied with (1) as well as with total number of factors identified in questionnaires.

Category	Equation	Ideal Score	Equation	Least Score
Professional (Male)	$48*9*5$	2160	$48*9*1$	432
Professional (Female)	$10*9*5$	450	$10*9*1$	90
Student (Male)	$39*9*5$	1755	$39*9*1$	351
Student(Female)	$23*9*5$	1035	$23*9*1$	207

Table 4: Ideal and least scores calculation

The table 5 contains the finding of the study, which is formed on the basis of factors containing in the questionnaires (the back end calculations are given in annexure A-D). It is found that the ideal scores for Professionals male and female, Students male and female are 2160, 450, 1755 and 1035 respectively and on the other hand, the total score for these are 1540, 289, 1189 and 661 respectively, the higher percentage of total score to ideal score is in case of male professionals with 71.2% percent and lower with female participant of students. In all the cases the perception level is more than 61% and in no case it is in negative. This implies that there is high level of acceptance for informal dresses in workplace/college among professionals and students. As a point of validation, we have also collected opinion of two tattoo experts (see Annexure-E). They opine that people from different profession are now showing inclination towards tattoos.

The sample of our study belong to generation Y who are characterised by fearlessness, fun loving, and do-or-die attitude (Martin 2005). Hence, it is not surprising that the generation is inclined towards the "tattoo and piercing culture".

Factors	Aggregate Score			
	Professional		Students	
	M	F	M	F
Flip flops/chapalls/other shoes.	170	37	116	62
Low cut top, or tanks with deep arm holes.	196	33	142	85
Holes in Jeans or pants	151	38	130	71
Short skirts.	213	31	161	80
Extremely tall high heeled shoes.	113	21	122	64
Visible piercing other than ear.	176	19	136	64
Tongue piercing.	192	45	157	84
Visible tattoos.	153	29	114	76
Unusual hair colour/styles.	176	36	341	75
Total Score	1540 (71.2%)	289 (64.2%)	1189 (67.7%)	661 (63.38%)
Ideal Score	2160	450	1755	1035
Least Score	432	90	351	207

Table 5: Aggregate Score of Professionals and Students  
Source: Annexure A, B, C and D

#### 4.3. Discussion, Implications and Future Direction

Although the study had certain limitations such as small sample size, and restricted to private companies only, the findings provide some insight into the changing values of the recent generation. Referring to all the above data, it can be concluded that there is a notable difference in some areas. But, at the same time, we can also see that the students are more open and more informed towards the tattoo culture including piercing and dress code. Since, values and attitudes of employees determine their workplace performance considerably; organisations should be considerate towards the changing values of this generation and bring some flexibilities to the dress code norms.

This is a descriptive study that provides the opinion of generation Y towards informal dress culture in the organisation. Further studies can be conducted to understand the intricacies of value clash. In other words, what happens to a person who strongly holds the "tattoo and piercing culture" values and works in a very strong formal culture? Studies can also focus on how these values are related to productivity?

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**ANNEXURE****Annexure-A**

Factors	Response of Professionals					
	(Male)					
	S.D	D	NEU	A	S.A	Score
Flip flops/chapalls/other shoes.	5	4	3	2	1	170
Low cut top, or tanks with deep arm holes.	20	15	10	2	1	196
Holes in Jeans or pants.	15	12	6	7	8	151
Short skirts.	29	12	6	1	0	213
Extremely tall high heeled shoes.	4	10	5	9	20	113
Visible piercing other than ear.	21	11	2	3	10	176
Tongue piercing.	18	20	5	2	3	192
Visible tattoos.	10	21	0	2	15	153
Unusual hair colour/styles.	10	22	8	6	2	176

Table 6: Calculation showing total score of each factor taken for professionals (Male)

**Annexure-B**

Factors	Response of Professionals					
	(Female)					
	S.D	D	NEU	A	S.A	Score
Flip flops/chapalls/other shoes.	5	4	3	2	1	37
Low cut top, or tanks with deep arm holes.	3	2	2	1	2	33
Holes in Jeans or pants.	5	2	1	0	2	38
Short skirts.	2	2	3	1	2	31
Extremely tall high heeled shoes.	1	2	0	1	6	21
Visible piercing other than ear.	1	0	1	4	3	19
Tongue piercing.	6	3	1	0	0	45
Visible tattoos.	1	2	3	3	1	29
Unusual hair colour/styles.	3	3	2	1	1	36

Table 7: Calculation showing total score of each factor taken for professionals (Female)

**Annexure-C**

Factors	Response of Students					
	(Male)					
	S.D	D	NEU	A	S.A	Score
Flip flops/chapalls/other shoes.	5	4	3	2	1	116
Low cut top, or tanks with deep arm holes.	15	11	4	2	7	142
Holes in Jeans or pants.	12	9	7	2	9	130
Short skirts.	21	9	2	7	0	161
Extremely tall high heeled shoes.	7	8	11	9	4	122
Visible piercing other than ear.	11	7	12	8	1	136
Tongue piercing.	24	5	2	3	5	157
Visible tattoos.	7	9	4	12	7	114
Unusual hair colour/styles.	4	9	7	15	4	111

Table 8: Calculation showing total score of each factor taken for students. (Male)

**Annexure-D**

Factors	Response of Students (Female)					
	S.D	D	NEU	A	S.A	Score
	5	4	3	2	1	
Flip flops/chapalls/other shoes.	4	2	5	7	5	62
Low cut top, or tanks with deep arm holes.	7	9	3	1	3	85
Holes in Jeans or pants.	3	9	1	8	1	71
Short skirts.	9	4	1	7	2	80
Extremely tall high heeled shoes.	3	6	2	7	5	64
Visible piercing other than ear.	2	7	3	7	3	64
Tongue piercing.	11	5	0	2	5	84
Visible tattoos.	5	7	3	6	2	76
Unusual hair colour/styles.	7	5	2	5	4	75

*Table 9: Calculation showing total score of each factor taken for professionals (Female)*

**Annexure-E**

**Expert’s speak**

Name: Niloy Das  
 Profession: Tattoo Artist  
 Studio: Lizard skin, Kolkata

Niloy is considered as one of the best tattoo artist in India. He has travelled various parts of India and abroad as well. He took up tattooing in 2010 as a part timer but professionally from September 2012. He was associated with fine arts since childhood days and always wanted to do something different and hence he took up tattooing as a profession and now his studio Lizard Skin, Kolkata has around 200-230 clients per month. When I asked him about his views on whether corporates should change their tattoo and piercing policies as they are becoming very common these days, this is what he had to say:

“See it is only in India and few other countries who has this view towards tattoos. I believe what’s wrong in decorating our body the way we want. We buy gold that looks beautiful and a status symbol so why not art? That is the most beautiful thing we can actually create. But yes not 100% of our population likes the form not even 100% people in western countries like tattoos. The problem is the percentage here is much higher than other countries which takes tattoos a mode of body beautification. But corporate world has a feeling that what the client may think when he sees an officer with a tattoo, my answer is if the client is educated enough and has an open mind, the client will praise your tattoo. Orthodox minded client will just keep shut. I can show many government officials as well as president who has tattoos. As simple as that.”



Name: Om Acharya  
 Profession: Tattoo Artist  
 Studio: Skivas, Bhubaneshwar

Om is considered as the best tattoo artist in Orissa. He is into this profession for the past 4 years now and has a huge client base starting from doctors, army personal, teachers and employees of both government and private sector. He started his career as a game developer and then his passion for body art made him take up tattooing professionally. When I asked him about his views on the changing trend of this form of art and its acceptance in the corporate world this is what he had to say:

“When I stated tattooing four years back, people here did not know much about the tattoo culture. But gradually things changed when celebrities from Ollywood started getting inked at Skivas followed by doctors and even people from civil services. Companies are accepting this trend and I believe after 3-4 years from now, an employee having a tattoo or a piercing will not be a major concern. Art should be accepted by all, and I’m sure it will.”

