

# Women Security Concerns: Kerala Tech Parks and Prevailing Quandaries

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## Abstract

*Increasing tensions on the safety concerns of women in India has spread the thoughts of insecurity even at the working spaces leading to a conclusion that it isn't safe for women to be at their office premises during irregular shifts. Tech employees face the issue of being at changing shift periods depending on the nature of their work. This qualitative research paper examines the security concerns of women during their work atmospheres and transportation to the tech parks. It discusses the existing quandaries and subsequent measures taken in the light of increasing safety issues and attacks against women. The study also highlights the infrastructural negligence towards handling security issues and in building a safe zone for working women at tech companies situated in the selected IT parks. This descriptive study on the details of the issues of safety and security of women in the tech parks would provide insight to researchers in understanding the current situation of women who work as tech employees in Kerala.*

**Keywords:** *information technology, Kerala, protection, security, tech-parks, women.*

## Introduction

Recent reports from India do not satisfy one to accept that women in the country are safe at their work and office atmospheres. An increasing number of sexual violence, harassment, trafficking and rapes on women have created a general notion that public places and even private office spaces are not safe for the particular gender. The lacks of proper enforcement of laws against such attacks in the workplace by the respective governments have made the situations even worse. There has been an increased rate of reporting sexual abuses from different parts of the country as an influence from the global movement of #MeToo. Though it helped to expose the critical situations of the gender, the stigma and fear of retribution continue at various informal sectors. In 2013, the Government of India introduced Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act which is commonly known as POSH Act. But, in several cases, the authorities fail to promote, establish and monitor complaints to take necessary actions against the abusers. Though routinely crime statistics present the report that women experience a lower rate of victimisation than men, they face higher levels of fear of crime than men (Hale, 1996). Due to the proper lack of security and enforcement of laws, they are mostly under threat of getting attacked at the unanticipated moments. This fear that pursues the women gender has led to the introduction of several restrictions on the freedoms that would have been enjoyed

otherwise. The scenario of under-reporting of rapes across the world and the fear of sexual assault of women elucidate the reason why the crimes against the particular gender are not much reported directly proportional to the actual crime rates against them (Vera-Grey & Kelly, 2020). This qualitative research paper examines the working situation and safety of women in the tech companies of the major tech parks in Kerala. The security and safety measures introduced by the authorities and government of Kerala are also discussed through a descriptive method by gathering details and updates about improving women's work atmospheres from research articles and newspaper reports. The insights of the research would help to understand a holistic nature of developments in the tech parks focusing on the security and safety of the employees, especially the women employees who are continuously under the fear of proper security and safety at their work atmospheres.

There have been certain previous studies on the safety and security issues of women at workplaces. The researches conducted from different parts of the world and also from the different parts of the country would help in understanding the background details of the issue. Swanberg et. al. (2007) discusses the association between disclosure of victimisation, workplace support and current employment status. Through cross-tabulation and ANOVA procedures, they indicate that disclosure and workplace support is associated with employment. Holmes and Flood (2013) examine that men's violence against women is a widespread social problem which requires urgent action. The needs for a change of social and structural conditions at the root of the violence at workplaces are highlighted. Goel (2018) gathers shreds of evidence of sexist attitudes in multiple forms that include the crude biases against women in workplaces or first-generation bias and the subtle and invisible second-generation bias. The article focuses on recommending improving the behavioural dynamics of the organisations. Anilkumar (2017) reports the negligence of many companies in Info park in Kerala to take the safety of their women employees seriously. With the help of conducting interviews, he discusses the issues of depending on Uber and Ola for drop services. Nithya (2013) discusses the forms and types of violence against women who are subject to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture. Chandrika (1998) identifies that 95% of the women experience sexual harassment at the workplace in Kerala. Rajesh & Manoj (2015) projects the problems of women employees in the industrial sector of the northern regions of Kerala state. The paper draws attention to the injustice, imbalance and increased anxiety and depression in the women employees at their workplace. Kumari (2004) discusses the key socio-economic pointers contributing to women's status, safety and security that highlights the problems and issues faced by urban working women in India. She utilises interviews, discussions and questionnaires for effective elicitation of data from the respondents based in Rourkela city. Deepak (2016) examines the recently constituted Act, Amendments and relevant cases regarding gender sensitization, zero tolerance towards sexual harassment that would lead to the healthy, positive and free work environment for women.

The paper highlights the issue of sexual harassment at workplaces in India. Patel (2014) considers sexual harassment at workplaces as one of the central concerns of the women's movement in India since the 1980s. The paper projects certain important acts and

amendments that safeguard the needs of the women community in the country. It points to Article 19 (1) (g) of the Constitution of India, especially in the light of articles 14, 15, and 21 that ensures safeguard against all forms of discrimination. McLaughlin et. al. (2017) conducts a mixed-methods study to examine whether sexual harassment and subsequent career disruption affect women's careers. They conduct interviews and conducts surveys from the Youth Development Study to identify the effect of sexual harassment for women in their early career. The results of the study were that the sexual harassment increases financial stress, evoke job change tendencies, and alter women's career attainment. These previous researches related to the situation of women employees in the country gives an idea about the current status of safety and security issues at workplaces and beyond. In the case of the division according to public and private sectors in the State, the participation of women in the public sector has not yet reached 40% of the total share when compared to men. As per the statistical report of 2018, there are 12.37 lakh people in the organised sector, in which 5.9 lakh are in the public and 6.78 lakh in the private sector. Out of these, only 1.92 lakh are women that come to only 34.34% of the total. On the same account, women employees in the private sector are about 3.4 lakh which is 50.1%, slightly more than that of the male employee population (*The Hindu*, 2019).

### Women Education and Employment in Kerala

With the infrastructural development and inclusivity patterns followed by the government of Kerala in providing education for every category, the number of educated women population in Kerala is higher than that of the country. The female work participation rate in rural areas in Kerala during 2011-12 was 22.1 with that of men at 56.5. The rate in Kerala which is 19.1 is slightly higher than the all-India average which happens to be 14.7 (Varma, 2017). The social indicators of women participation are higher but workforce participation is less in the case of women. There is a high acute competition with men in the state which has a high female literacy rate, low maternal and infant mortality rates compared to other states in India. There are a good number of women who are employed in different sectors out of which the IT sector has even a good number of participation of women. In recent years, there have been initiatives from the side of tech companies to increase the number of women employees focused on closing the gender gap. When Infosys tries to boost the women employees' participation in the total workforce at 36 percent, Accenture includes 1,70,000 women that are more than 40% of its global workforce. Capgemini allowed 36% of women in support functions and over 32% of women in technology roles (Sen, 2018). Due to the change in mindsets of employers in support of gender equality and inclusion, the recruitments and campus selections provide a better opportunity to the women population that have been trained to work in the IT sector. It also provides better financial stability at an early age which helps them to get settled soon without having much trouble in finding a suitable job.

The gender diversity agenda has been taken seriously by leading companies like Tata Consultancy Services, SAP Labs India, AMD, Texas Instruments, Cognizant, Mindtree and Mphasis that also provides upskilling and leadership programmes for the flexibility at work (Verma, 2020). With more support for infrastructural developments and security

concerns from the governments, the companies are interested to employ more women candidates as part of their gender diversity agenda and women empowerment.

### Women at Risk in the Tech-Workspaces

The important factor to help increase the involvement and participation of women in various sectors of work is to provide safety and security that does not get negotiated at any circumstances. If there would be proper implementation of the existing laws and amendments in making it stronger, the sexual harassments and other troubles at workplaces for women could be controlled that would help them to feel free out of the tensions and fear regarding safety and security. The increasing number of crime reports regarding rapes and sexual abuses against women in different parts of the country has made women believe the reality of their situation even within the boundaries of their workspace. A recent report in The New Indian Express informs about the misbehaviour from an auto-rickshaw driver with a woman employee in the premises of Infopark in Kochi. The vehicle could not be traced by the police CCTV cameras as they were not working (“Bad roads, women’s safety a concern for Infopark staff”, 2020). Similar issues were reported by different employees related to online cab service misbehaviours and attempts of molestations. *The New Indian Express* reports the situation of one of the top leading tech parks in Kerala that “Working women in the city, especially those working in firms at Infopark, are regular commuters of online cabs and they often fall prey to the cruelty of the drivers. Employees of Infopark firms said lack of proper infrastructure, including enough streetlights, CCTV cameras and proper patrolling on and near the tech campus” (Arun & Gautham, 2020). In a tech park with more number of employees working in the atmosphere of several companies together according to their shift schedules, the need for proper security services is essential. When it comes to the case of women security, there must be uninterrupted security service either from private agencies or from the side of the government as these tech parks are the prestigious projects supported by the State government. Inadequate street lights, security cameras have increased chances of anti-social activities (Suresh, 2020) around the premises of the tech parks during the night time when employees including women are supposed to arrive and depart as part of their work.

As a measure to ensure safety and security of women employees in and around the premises of tech parks such as Info Park, Technoparks, Kinfra and Cyber parks, police patrolling including pink police have been conducted and the transportation has been undertaken through the strict monitoring of the respective companies. The comprehensive survey had been conducted by the Technopark police to understand the safety issues of women working there. “The larger aim is to identify issues being faced by women and redress it through infrastructural arrangements and increased police patrolling” (“Surveillance to enhance the safety of women in Technopark”, 2019). The availability of pink rooms for tech women employees was another strategy to reduce violence against women who do not have the facility to reach their home on time. A group forum called Prathidhwani has been set up to share information to Technopark employees relating to such issues and their solutions. Apart from the pink patrol, “The companies are asked to provide drop facility to women

working during odd hours. Women security staff are also deployed on the campus and it would be extended to third-phases too” (Raghunath, 2017).

## Conclusion

From the above discussion on the present condition of women employees at tech parks in Kerala, it is evident that there have to be more vigilant and effective measures to ensure their safety and security. Though there have been efforts from private companies and government, certain factors such as inadequate infrastructure, the gap in communication and untimely actions from authorities give rise to an unexpected threat to women employees leading to attacks and abuse. This happens inside and outside the tech park premises mostly during the off times and night shifts when there would be very fewer people in and around such area that make it lively. Special police stations, security alert systems and awareness classes are provided to employees to prevent sexual harassment, abuses and molestations against women.

With the recent incidents related to women safety raised questions regarding women safety and security, there have been special care and attempt to ensure protection to women employees at areas near to the tech parks under the control and support of the government of Kerala. Therefore, the insights of the paper can be used to identify the current situation of women employees in the tech parks in Kerala and the measures taken by government officials against such acts.

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