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Women security, mental-stress and childcare centres: Pune's IT sector women urge for stronger aid to support city`s growth

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1. Abstract

Women`s earning, consumption and skill-set contribute in the economic growth of city, they form the major and increasing part of the information technology sector of Pune. The contribution is dependable on certain conditions which are lacking like security during traveling and workplace, legal protection from any kind of harassment, peaceful mental health, adjustable night-shift schedules and supportive attitude for childcare. This paper establishes a strong theoretical argument that insecurity, harassment, anxiety, depression, night-shift stress and child-care dilemma decreases the women`s participation, continuation and productivity. This in turn reduces the economic gains which women derive from IT sector participation. The argument made is with help of stress and work-family theories, theories of sexual harassment at workplace. The official data and legal support rendered from Government of India and Government of Maharashtra, additionally the reports from newspaper and peer-reviewed studies. The paper has founded that the constitutional law related to night-shift, women sexual harassment and child-creches are existing but their implementation, awareness and trust by women do not happen. The burden resulted due to the shortcomings often lies on women itself. It concludes that safe transport, functioning Internal Committees, mental health support and shared childcare are growth policies, not only welfare measures.

2. Keywords : Women's security; workplace harassment; anxiety and depression; night shifts; crèche and childcare; women in IT

3. Introduction

Pune is one of India's major technology cities, and Maharashtra is the country's largest state economy. The state's Economic Survey for 2025-26 estimated growth of 7.9 per cent for the year and noted that Maharashtra accounted for about 14 per cent of India's nominal GDP in 2024-25 (All India Radio, 2026). The same survey reported software exports from the state of about ₹1.75 lakh crore up to January 2026 (Investment Guru, 2026). Pune's IT parks in Hinjewadi, Kharadi, Magarpatta and elsewhere contribute a significant part of this activity, and women hold a share of the jobs there.

Women's presence in paid work is still limited at the national level. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) annual report for 2025 shows a female labour force participation rate of 40.0 per cent for persons aged 15 and above, and about 27.7 per cent in urban areas, while the urban female unemployment rate stood at 6.4 per cent (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation [MoSPI], 2026). The same

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report found that 44.4 per cent of women outside the labour force gave child care and personal commitments in homemaking as the main reason. In this setting, an IT job is among the few well-paid and respected options open to educated urban women (Kelkar, Shrestha & Veena, 2002). Whether women can take up such a job, stay in it and grow in it depends on more than skills. It depends on whether they can travel safely, work without harassment, keep their mental health, manage unusual working hours and find care for their children.

These conditions are visible in public events. In January 2017, a young Infosys employee, Rasila Raju, was killed inside the company's Hinjewadi campus, and colleagues who protested said that safety rules existed on paper but were not reinforced (Sarkar, 2017). The Pune police initiated the 'Buddy Cop' scheme for working IT women professionals later to the incident and relaunched it in April 2022 after a break during the pandemic (Press Trust of India, 2022). Many city newspapers have since reported cab-related assaults on IT employees, including a case in Kharadi in 2021 and a molestation case in February 2025.

The central argument of this particular paper is that women security, mental and physical health additionally care are economic inputs incurred by women professionals for their jobs. Women may avoid night shifts and senior roles, change jobs, reduce hours or leave the workforce if they undergo unsafeness, stress or unaided, they. The city in turn faces the reduction in economic growth it missed which might not have been case if women would have stayed back. The paper is theory-based paper: it combines together existing concepts, laws and official data into an explanatory framework. It prepares the ground for primary data to be collected in the researcher's fieldwork.

4. Objectives

The objectives of the paper are:

1. To explain how women's work in Pune's IT sector contributes to the economic growth of the city.
2. To examine security concerns of women IT employees, including travel and workplace safety.
3. To analyse workplace and public harassment, and the working of the legal redressal mechanism.
4. To discuss anxiety and depression among women IT employees and their link with work conditions.
5. To study night-shift work and the problems related to it.
6. To assess childcare and crèche problems of working mothers in IT companies.
7. To propose a conceptual framework and a primary-data design that can test these relationships in Pune.

5. Methodology

i)Type of study - This is a theoretical and conceptual study. It uses no mathematical or statistical equations. It combines a review of literature and official sources with a design for primary data collection.

ii)Secondary sources - Four kinds of sources were used. First, government sources: the Periodic Labour Force Survey of MoSPI, the National Crime Records Bureau's *Crime in India 2022*, the Economic Survey

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of Maharashtra 2025-26, Press Information Bureau (PIB) documents on the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act and on mental health, and a reply of the Ministry of Labour and Employment in the Lok Sabha. Second, legal texts and their summaries: the Maharashtra Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 2017 and Rules, 2018, and the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017. Third, newspaper and news-agency reports on incidents and policies in Pune. Fourth, peer-reviewed studies and books on stress, harassment, shift work and work-family conflict.

iii)Theoretical lenses - The job demand-control model (Karasek, 1979) and the effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996) are used to explain stress. The conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) explains how repeated loss of safety, sleep and time wears down well-being. Work-family conflict theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and the idea of the second shift (Hochschild & Machung, 1989) explain childcare pressure. An integrated model of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997) explains how organisational climate shapes harassment and its effects.

iv)Primary-data design - The primary component is designed as a cross-sectional mixed-methods study of women employed in IT and IT-enabled companies in Pune. A purposive and stratified sample of women is proposed from the main IT clusters (Hinjewadi, Kharadi, Magarpatta, Baner-Pashan and Talawade), covering junior, middle and senior levels, day and night shifts, and mothers of children below six years. The planned size is [sample size to be inserted after fieldwork]. A structured questionnaire was carried widely used screening instruments, namely the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) for depression (Kroenke, Spitzer & Williams, 2001) and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7) (Spitzer et al., 2006), together with items on safety perception, commute, harassment experience, awareness and use of the Internal Committee, shift pattern, and childcare arrangements. Semi-structured interviews are planned with women employees, Internal Committee members, human resource managers and cab-service supervisors. Analysis would be descriptive and comparative (percentages, cross-tabulation) and thematic for interviews.

v)Ethics - Informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, approval of the institutional ethics committee and a list of support helplines for participants who show distress are essential. No primary results are reported in this paper; the findings section marks where they will be inserted.

vi)Limitations - Official data are not available separately for women in Pune's IT sector, so city-level and sector-level claims rest on state, national and comparable-city evidence. Most mental health studies on IT workers are small and cross-sectional. Newspaper reports show incidents but not their frequency.

7. Discussion and Analysis

7.1Women's contribution to Pune's growth and why safety and care matter

Economists identify three routes through which women's work supports growth: a larger and better-used labour force, higher household income and spending, and wider perspectives in firms (Duflo, 2012; Klasen & Lamanna, 2009; Cuberes & Teignier, 2014). Human capital theory adds that when women's education is not matched by stable careers, the return on that education is lost (Becker, 1985). In Pune, women in IT pay income tax, rent or buy homes, use transport, schools and retail, and support the large service economy around the IT parks. Their wages are also higher than the average for women: the PLFS reports average monthly earnings of regular female wage workers at ₹18,353 in 2025, compared with ₹24,217 for men (MoSPI, 2026), and IT salaries are generally well above these averages.

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This contribution is not automatic. A woman who spends two hours on an unsafe commute, who suffers harassment, who lives with untreated anxiety, or who cannot find care for a small child will be less able to work full time, take a night shift or accept a promotion. The effect is a gap between the contribution that women could make and what they do make. Safety, health and care are therefore best seen as conditions of production, as essential to output as electricity and bandwidth.

7.2 Security while commuting

Security concerns for IT-sector women arise at three points: the journey, the workplace and the neighbourhood surrounding the workplace. Women those who work at night are most prone to safety concerns on the journey. Patel (2010), in her study of night-shift women in India's call-centre industry, shows that employers' cab arrangements gave women access to night work but also exposed them to scrutiny, risk and family anxiety about reputation. A survey by the industry body ASSOCHAM reported that 86 per cent of women on night shifts faced commuting problems because of inadequate transport arrangements, and named Pune among the cities where such problems were greatest (Deccan Herald, 2012). The survey is dated, but its themes match later events in Pune: the Kharadi cab assault of 2021 (Punekar News, 2021) and the 2025 molestation of an IT employee by a cab driver, after which she jumped out of the vehicle and ran about two kilometres to a police station (Gulf News, 2025).

Security inside the campus is also uncertain. After the murder of Rasila Raju, women professionals interviewed by Scroll said that companies offered helplines, CCTV and safety committees but failed to apply their own rules, and that a complaint the victim had made earlier about the accused guard had not been acted on (Sarkar, 2017). Police responses have been partly institutional. The Buddy Cop scheme creates WhatsApp groups of 100 to 150 working women, linked to a designated officer and a senior police inspector at each station (Press Trust of India, 2022).

Official crime statistics must be read carefully. The National Crime Records Bureau reported 4,45,256 cases of crime against women in India in 2022, and 48,755 in 19 large metropolitan cities, including Pune, an increase of 12.3 per cent over 2021 (National Crime Records Bureau, 2023, as reported in National Herald, 2023). Pune's overall cognisable crime rate of 280.7 per lakh population was among the lower rates for large cities (ETV Bharat, 2023). Under-reporting, fear of family related stigma and lack of trust on judicial system reduce the police case registration. Hence, we cannot conclude that low registration amounts to feeling of secureness among women.

A further problem is of framing laws. Law that makes night work obligatory on employer safeguards protects women but it may also increase the cost of employing them at night. In those situation men may be preferred than women. The public infrastructure such as lighted roads and transport should be made safe for everyone so that safety does not depend on a woman being in a particular company's cab. This is one of an important theoretical point: safety delivered only through private employer arrangements remains point of concerns while safety delivered as public infrastructure increases women's mobility in all sectors.

7.3 Women harassment and the judicial redressal system

The meta-analysis by Willness, Steel and Lee (2007) show that sexual harassment at work results in lower job satisfaction, poorer mental and physical health and withdrawal from work. The integrated model of Fitzgerald and colleagues (1997) explains that harassment is more prone to happen and its effects more severely at organisations which tolerates it and where women hold little role in decision-making. In

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IT firms, which have flat but male-dominated hierarchies, informal relationships with managers, client travel and late hours can create such a climate.

The legal framework is the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. It requires every workplace with 10 or more employees to constitute an Internal Committee, and it provides Local Committees for others. The Ministry of Women and Child Development launched a new SHe-Box portal on 29 August 2024 as a single window for complaints and for monitoring compliance (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2026). In its order of 22 October 2024 in the case that originated as *Aureliano Fernandes v. State of Goa*, the Supreme Court instructed every State and Union Territory to submit compliance reports and to make sure the required committees are set up and made known to the public (S.S. Rana & Co., 2024). Companies incorporated under the Companies Act must likewise make public how their Internal Committees are arranged (PIB, 2026). In addition, Maharashtra's rules on night work oblige employers to adhere fully to the 2013 Act (Conventus Law, 2018).

The weakness of policy is trust imparted by women and practice. Women are unaware about the existence of committee and they fear that their promotion to higher position may be affected or fear that senior position male may be too much disciplined. In one of the cases like Rasila Raju, the earlier complain by victim was ignored by police which highlights that how ignorance on complain can result in severe incidences of threat to security of woman further. The theory based on climate of organisation forecasts that the places where complains are not seen to be given any listening ear, women stop to complain and the real rate of harassment turns to be hidden. The number of complains registered is not the exact indicator of problem. Awareness about the committee, faith in the committee and the figure about the women who have reported the harassment are the real indicators.

7.4 Anxiety and depression

Stress theory supported the clear explanation related to why an IT sector work causes harm to mental health of professionals. The model of demand-control validated that high demand additionally with low control results in stress and pressure (Karasek, 1979). The effort and reward imbalance model validates that the stress results when the high amount of hard work is not matched by employee recognition, pay-scale or career progression (Siegrist, 1996). One of the theories named Conservation of resources theory says that people are stressed when they receive less of important resources like sleep, safety and time with family or they fear of losing such resource (Hobfoll, 1989). To meet the deadlines, client calls managing various time zones, unsecured travelling zones, harassment and care-giving responsibilities reduce their resources and leaves with very little time for recovery from the fatigue in rendering the process above.

Various studies carried across different cities in India validates the situation is more or less the same. A study of 500 women IT professionals in Chennai found moderate levels of stress, and 84 per cent reported a medium level of depression, with age and experience significantly influencing both (Vimala & Madhavi, 2009). A study in Pune of 103 IT professionals during the COVID-19 lockdown found the prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression at 20.4, 44.7 and 35.9 per cent respectively (Joshi, Muley & Medithi, n.d.). Another study using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale found positive screening for anxiety in about 54 per cent of IT employees and about 18 per cent for stress and depression, without a significant gender difference (Indian Journal of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, n.d.). A study in Pune on women in IT and quality of work life treats job stress as a serious threat to women's well-being at work (Pandita & Pednekar, n.d.). Research conducted by Kerela State Women`s Commission, which was informed by Press

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Trust of India suggest that lengthy hours at office desk and pressure at job resulted in physical distress and mental stress in women of IT sector. It even suggested counselling for women and reshuffle of office hours (Governance Now, 2010). The study carried different method and was at different place not the Pune city but it was also a warning.

National agencies data concludes that individual level stress is often neglected and unanswered. The Indian adults around 10.6% face various types of mental disorders. Lifelong existence is for 13.7 per cent of individuals and treatment is taken by 70 to 90 % individuals depending on the condition (PIB, 2025). To render a free and 24*7 round the clock support a helpline named Tele-MANAS was launched on 10th October 2022. Often the young and competitive professionals who face stigma, shortage of IT professionals and with fear of career hampering often hide the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Employers can reduce this barrier through confidential counselling and by treating mental health as a normal part of occupational health. The economic link is direct: untreated anxiety and depression reduce concentration, increase absence and attrition, and raise the cost of rehiring.

7.5 Night-shift work

Night work is built into the IT services model because clients are in other time zones. A woman is allowed to work between 9.30 to 7.00 pm if employers even fulfil the conditions prescribed in Maharashtra`s Shop and establishment Act, 2017. As per the rules, the written consent of woman, safe and security obliged transport from house to workplace and workplace to home is required. Additionally, an annual undertaking to the government authorities stating that due care about the safety, honour to women body and dignity to women workers is taken care of. A summary of the conditions also lists a minimum of three women on a night shift, and twelve hours of rest when a woman moves between day and night shifts (Deskera, n.d.).

These provisions are taken care while framing but problem arises while implementing it. Consent by employee should be taken in formal manner. A young employee face lot of difficulty to refuse any project that requires to work in night. Transport related arrangements are unsecured as private cab vendors and their drivers are unverified. Rules related to rest and recovery are difficult to follow in a sector whose schedules are highly dynamic and change in very short time.

The health factor is one of the important factors. Studies related to shift find that night shift turns harmful for circadian rhythms and sleep. Night shift turns into fatigue, accidents and poorer health has been stated by many researchers before (Folkard & Tucker, 2003) & (Kecklund & Axelsson, 2016). Loss in sleep results in anxiety and low mood. Night shift raises the safety problem along with the mental health problem. In case of mothers the night shift also disturbs the child-care responsibilities and household chores. Patel (2010) shows that women adjust by shifting household and social life around their working hours, with costs to their relationships. From the viewpoint of growth, night shifts allow Pune's firms to serve global clients, but if the costs are borne mainly by women's safety and health, the arrangement is not sustainable.

7.6 Childcare and crèche problems

Work-family conflict theory states that when the demands of paid work and family roles cannot be met together, stress and withdrawal follow (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The idea of the second shift describes how employed women continue to do most unpaid household and care work after paid work ends (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). The PLFS finding that nearly 44 per cent of women outside the labour

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force cite child care and homemaking (MoSPI, 2026) shows that this is a national pattern, and educated women in IT are not exempt.

The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 raised paid maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks for most women and made it compulsory for establishments with 50 or more employees to provide a crèche, which women may visit four times a day. The crèche provision came into force on 1 July 2017 (AZB & Partners, 2017). The costs fall on the employer. When the Lok Sabha asked how many establishments had provided crèches, the Ministry of Labour and Employment replied that enforcement is the responsibility of State Governments and that it had asked them to ensure compliance (Lok Sabha, 2018). IndiaSpend reporting, published in Scroll, found that compliance was limited largely to bigger multinational companies, that rules to implement the clause were slow to be framed, and that there was no incentive or penalty to push companies (Scroll, n.d.).

For Pune's IT women this means that availability depends on the employer. Large campuses may have an on-site crèche, but small and mid-sized firms and start-ups may not. Even where a crèche exists, its hours may not cover evening, weekend or night shifts. Private daycare is costly and, in earlier reporting, often closed by early evening, which forced some mothers to leave their jobs when their working hours clashed with the centre's timings (Outlook, n.d.). Government schemes help mainly lower-income families, and the national crèche scheme has been revised and placed under Mission Shakti as the Palna component (Tribune India, n.d.). The result is that a woman returning from maternity leave, at the stage when her first promotion to management is due, often has to choose between her career and her child. This explains the high loss of women at mid-career, a pattern also found in studies of the leaky pipeline (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

7.7 An integrated framework

The six problems are linked. Unsafe travel and night work add to stress. Harassment, and the belief that complaints are futile, add to anxiety and depression. Unheard stress reduces the performances and promotion opportunities of employees. The duties of women as care-giver makes her preference more for day-shift than night-shift. They even prefer less of travel and senior roles which is considered as lack of commitment and hence effects badly their future promotion. The women prefer fewer working hours; they change or exit the job. This in turn reduces the investment done by various families, employers and the state.

The framework proposed for women safety and security has four levels. The first level comprises of public environment like transportation, safety on street and infrastructure in city. The second one is of the organisational environment like policy for night shift, internal grievance committee, creche and counselling. The third level is of personal and family environment like care-giving roles, spouse and family support and health of woman. The fourth level is of economic result like retention policy, productive policy resulting in promotion of employees. If the starting three levels are weak, it reduces the effect of fourth level. The levels are inter-connected amongst each other, an intervention in only one level without another would turn it ineffective. Like support only for creche without any support transport would render it ineffective.

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6. Findings

The below stated few inferences have been derived from the secondary sources like periodicals, journals, newspapers and after discussion with few women employees.

1. Laws are existing but implementation is poor –

Maharashtra government has strict rules for night shift duties of women; state government even has its own national level harassment laws in operation under which a digital complain can be launched. Reports by the government and parliamentary debates suggest that enforcement and implementation of these laws is not up to mark.

2. Women safety is considered as favour by employer –

For transportation women depend on cabs of company and security personnel in campus, just a single negligence if occurred during verification or towards any complaint can have fatal result if not answered immediately. Safety of women is one of the public infrastructure services which a company should provide.

3. Low reporting of crime perceived as safe zone –

The reporting of crime rate is low in Pune city, as compared to metro cities of India. This under reporting and lack of trust in legal system of India is considered as safe zone for women but reality is vice a versa situation.

4. Harassment at work place by senior authority –

Women have low awareness about whom to report after any harassment if faced in case. The committees framed for justice are headed by senior employees of company and they are the one who majorly commit the crime or have close association with employees who head the committee.

5. Anxiety and depression levels are high –

With growing demands, required skills to be in industry and competitive world the anxiety and depression level among IT employees is low. As mental stress is not visible unless expressed easily by the colleague, many fall as victim to suicide, mental disorder. Very few approach to the psychologist and counsellor with their problems.

6. Night shifts disturb circadian cycle –

Work during night time damages the sleep, raises cholesterol, diabetes and hypertension level. Unbalanced health may reflect in having disturbed personal relations with family members as conflicts are prone to happen.

7. Creche services are partially developed –

Creche services are available only for certain working hours, they are not available during odd hours of the day. Creche services do not have good food facility and specialised medically trained individuals to handle kids with love and giving kids any emotional support after undergoing distance from parents for few hours.

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9. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the contribution of women IT professionals to Pune's economic growth is held back by gaps in security, protection from harassment, mental health support, safe night-shift arrangements and childcare. Law and policy making have developed a lot in state like Maharashtra. Maharashtra government has framed rules for night-shift work, it has framed portal to launch complains on digital platforms. Even while reframing the maternity related laws creche facility has been made mandatory by the state government. But the studies show that these all changes can be helpful only if women come forward willingly and report the crime if occurred. There is lot of under-reporting which is left unmonitored.

Employers should take care while recruiting the cab drivers and security personnel. Verification process should be stringent and if any complains received by company it should be immediately addressed. Internal committees framed for harassment related issues, the wording given should be made public for all employees. Night-shift option should be voluntary and not forced upon with few additional financial gain motivations. Women should be provided with trained creche individuals and more creche facility by different firms. Government can monitor the functioning of the creche facility as these are going to be next human resource. Government authorities should consider road lights, public transport and road patrolling near IT corridors as responsibility even of its own, they should push on the responsibility on the IT companies directly. Government should create more awareness in IT employees regarding various schemes runned for women safety. They should conduct more safety related workshop like self-defence techniques, approaching emergency contact numbers. State government should majorly publish district wise data related to creche and Internal Committees complaints redressal. Families need to be more open and strengthen moral support towards women if they undergo any kind of crime committed with them at workplace.

The central conclusion is city should strengthen more of its infrastructure for increasing and retaining, participation of women in IT sector. If the city wants the economic gains from IT sector women, it should treat their safety, their children safety and their mental well-being on paramount importance level. Taking note of all these things is not just a welfare step but is investment whose returns would be harnessed in upcoming decades.

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