

"Understanding the Expectations of Women Professionals in Information Technology from their Organizations"

– A Research Initiative of Empowering Women in IT (eWIT)

Vijayalakshmi Rao*, Sumitra Seshan**

*President, eWIT, Director & COO, Scope e-Knowledge,
Scope Corporate HQ: Scope eKnowledge Center, II Floor, Temple Towers, Nandanam, 672 Anna Salai,
Chennai - 600 035, India. E-mail: viji@scopeknowledge.com

**General Secretary, eWIT, COO, Fifth Generation Technologies India, RR Tower IV, Ground Floor, Thiru-Vi-Ka
Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600032. E-mail: sseshan@fifthgentech.com

Empowering Women in IT (eWIT)

No. 6, Kalakshetra Avenue, 2nd Street, Tiruvanmiyur, Chennai - 600 041, INDIA. <http://www.ewit.co.in/>

Objective of the Study:

Empowering Women in IT (eWIT) as one of its key initiatives embarked on a study to understand and evaluate the Women-friendly policies/facilities that are currently in place in various organizations in the both Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) space and whether these facilities in fact meet the expectations of the women work force. The key findings of the study, in our opinion, will aid organizations in formulating strategies and policies that would cater to the needs of women workforce, thereby increasing the share and sustainability of women in these industries.

Methodology:

The research team of eWIT adopted a structured approach for this study, by designing a survey questionnaire with basic objectives of collecting information on various women-friendly policies/facilities that currently exist in organizations, and whether these policies match the needs of individuals.

The questionnaires were circulated to women employees of IT/ITES companies during the various events conducted by eWIT and the information thus gathered from 300 responses were collated and analyzed, the findings of which are summarized in the following sections. The 300 responses came from 61 IT/ITES companies based in Tamil Nadu. The study was conducted over the last one year.

Profiling of Participants:

Of the total respondents, almost 75% of the respondents (see Fig 1) belonged to IT companies and 20% belonged to the ITES segment.

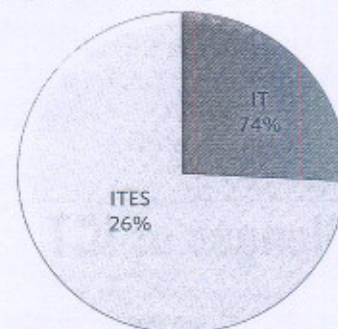


Fig. 1: Distribution based on Type of companies

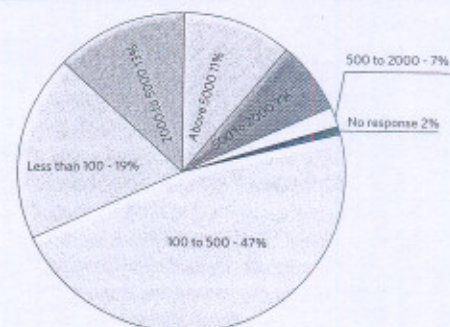


Fig. 2: Distribution based on Size of companies

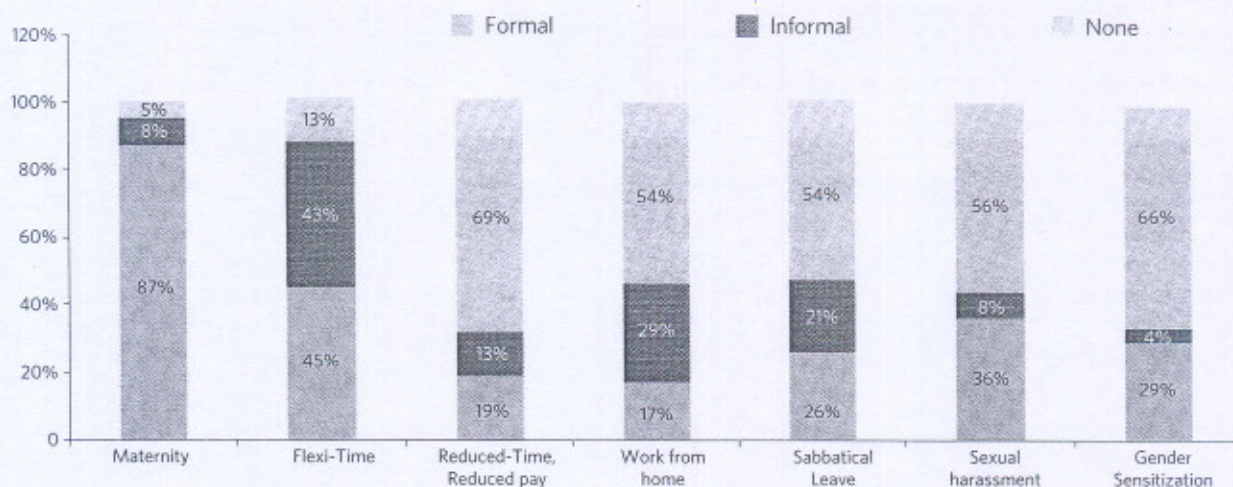


Fig. 3 : Data on Women-Friendly Policies in IT/ITES companies as perceived by women employees

Also, 47% of the respondents were from companies that have employee size in the range of 100 to 500, while 19% of them were from small companies that had less than 100 employees and only 11% from large organizations that employ more than 5000 employees (see Fig 2 for the segmentation based on Size of Companies).

Key Findings:

(i) Women-Friendly practices/policies:

- Among the various women specific policies such as Maternity Leave, Flexi-Time, Reduced-Time, Reduced Pay, Work from Home, Sabbatical Leave, Sexual Harassment, and Gender Sensitization, Maternity Policy has been more or less formally implemented in almost all of the organizations. It was found that some policies exist in an informal manner, that is, while they may have management approval,

they are not formally documented and communicated to employees. It is also possible that such women-friendly measures are offered on a case-to-case basis.

- Next to Maternity, Flexi-time as a policy has been formally implemented in at least 45% of the organizations. However almost in equal percentage terms (43%), the policy is practiced informally; it is to be noted that the percentage of informal implementation is quite high (59%) as far as ITES companies are concerned.
- The least implemented policy across the various organizations is the concept of 'Reduced-Time, Reduced Pay'. While 42% of ITES seems to have this policy implemented either formally or informally, this is not so prevalent in the IT segment.
- Formal 'Gender Sensitization' as a

policy is almost non-existent in the ITES segment, whereas at least 35% of the IT companies seem to have a formal practice/policy in place.

What women want?

- Based on Order of Priority, Work from Home and Flexi-time were the first two choices in terms of policies, that women wanted implemented in their work place. (the provision of Maternity Leave as a policy was taken for granted, while indicating this order of priority)

Type of policy	IT %	ITES %	Total %
Work from Home	40%	64%	45%
Flexi timing	37%	29%	35%
Day care / Creche facilities	23%	7%	20%

Facilities currently available in IT & ITES companies (%)

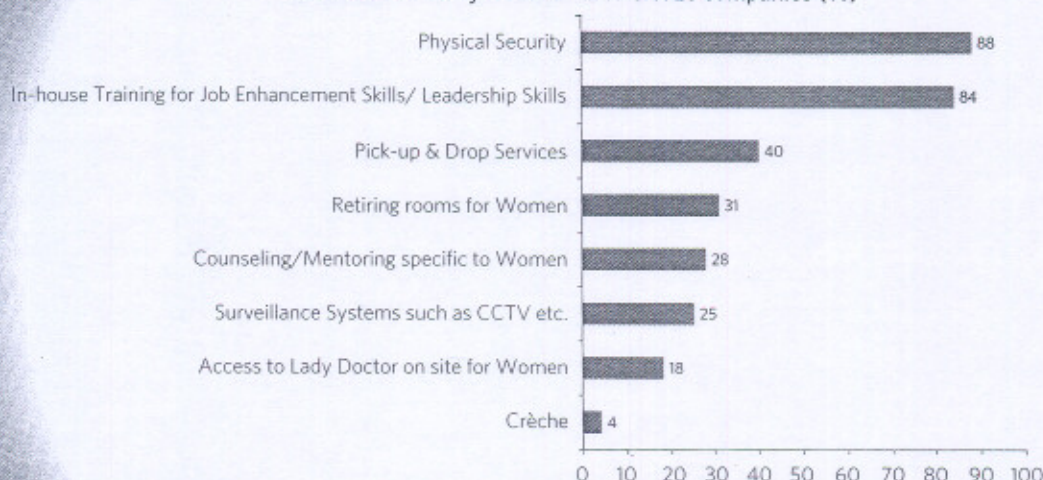


Fig. 4 : Facilities currently available in IT & ITES companies as indicated by women employees

(ii) Facilities currently available:
What companies offer?

- From the above, we can see that approximately 90% of the companies do have physical security but only 25% of the organizations have implemented other security measures such as surveillance cameras etc.
- A very high percentage of the organizations do have In-house training programs specifically catering to needs of women employees; also Pick-up & Drop services seem to be a common facility that most of the IT companies provide.

What women want?

- Facilities that women would like in their Order of Priority are (i) Retiring Rooms

for Women (ii) Crèche facilities (iii) Access to In-house Lady Doctor (iv) Pick-up & Drop facilities. However at present only a meager 4% of the Organizations offer Crèche facilities.

Type of facilities	IT %	ITES %	Total %
Retiring room	38%	43%	39%
Lady Doctor	20%	24%	21%
Pick-up & Drop facility	15%	17%	15%
Crèche Facilities	27%	17%	24%

- On probing, it was found that women want a place where they can take a short break to relax while at work, either because of the stressful nature of the job or at times when they face

regular/occasional medical problems. For similar reasons, access to a Lady Doctor was sought for.

Conclusion:

The study highlights the fact that there are gaps in what women professionals would like their organizations to provide and what is currently being offered by the companies. The other interesting aspect is the fact that although many organizations do have certain women-friendly practices, they do not have these policies and practices structured within their corporate HR policies. This in turn opens up a new thrust area for eWIT - namely act as a third-party agent that can help companies formalize and implement such women-friendly policies within their organizations.

About the Authors

Vijayalakshmi Rao

A postgraduate in Management from Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, Vijayalakshmi (Viji) has almost 27 years of experience in Knowledge Management and consulting. She is in charge of all project execution and oversees the Human Resource Function in Scope. She has consulted with several leading public and private organizations in the engineering, health care, supply chain & logistics and IT domains. She has worked in the Marketing & Corporate Planning functions for TI Cycles of India, a part of the Murugappa Group, S.B. Billimoria & Co. (now Ernst & Young India) and was formerly Executive Assistant to Chairman and part of the core turnover strategy team at Steel Authority of India Ltd., India's largest and one of the world's leading steel companies.

Sumitra Seshan

Result driven executive with 15 years of experience leading business and marketing strategy, operations, market and business analysis function. Follows a collaborative style of leadership with emphasis on team work and performance.

As Chief Operations Officer of Fifth Generation Technologies India (P) Ltd., responsible for strategic and tactical planning and operations of the company. Has professional experience in analyzing Business Processes and Identifying IT strategies/solutions to provide a competitive edge, improve the operating efficiency thereby enabling the clients to increase their value and reduce their costs. Has a Masters Degree in Business Administration from Rotman School of Management, Toronto, Canada and a Bachelors in Engineering from Bharathiyar University.

"In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock."

— Thomas Jefferson

"The brain is a wonderful organ; it starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get into the office."

Robert Frost