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A comparative analysis of working environments of IT professionals in Kerala

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Abstract

The Information Technology (IT) sector has emerged as a major contributor to Kerala's socio-economic development. While Kerala's private IT industry has rapidly grown with technology parks, startups and global delivery centres, the public sector has also been enhancing IT adoption in governance and service delivery. This study compares IT professionals across these two distinct work environments to understand differences in demographics, job roles, work conditions, remuneration, career growth, motivation, challenges, and satisfaction. Kerala's IT professionals in both the public and private sectors play crucial roles in the state's digital ecosystem. While the private sector excels in innovation and financial incentives, the public sector provides job security and stable work environments. A balanced approach combining the strengths of both sectors could lead to an optimized professional experience.

Keywords: *Work environment, job satisfaction, work-life balance, public and private sector, health issues*

1. Introduction

India is the world's largest source of destination for the IT industry, and this has placed India at the top on the global map. The IT industry has helped India transform from a rural and agriculture-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. The flourishing Indian economy has contributed much to maintaining the IT sector's competitive nature in the global market. Also, IT has become a major reason for attracting foreign funds into the domestic market. Because of the increasing activities of high-quality nature in this sector, India became a home for IT professionals. Due to the cost-effective and efficient nature of Indian IT services, it becomes highly profitable for foreign companies to conduct their business in India. In the case of India, IT offers a lot of opportunities for its young population. The establishment of the Techno Park in Thiruvananthapuram has further escalated the growth of the IT industry. It is one of India's first Technology parks, and it is the largest IT park in Asia in terms of built-up area. It is home to 355 IT companies. It employs more than 47,100 IT professionals. Thiruvananthapuram, which contributes nearly 80 percent of the software exports from the state, is considered to be the Silicon Valley of Kerala. The city has huge prospects for the growth of the IT sector as it has recently been declared as a future 'smart city' by the Government of India. In this context, the researcher has selected Thiruvananthapuram as the area of the study.

2. Objectives

- To examine the socio- economic background of IT professionals in Thiruvananthapuram
- To analyse the satisfaction level of IT professionals in both the public and private sector in Thiruvananthapuram.

3. Data source and method

The collection of data from IT professionals was a difficult task. The researcher has decided to collect data from IT professionals working both in public and private sectors to understand whether significant differences exist in the quality of work depending on the nature of ownership. Collecting information from employees in the private sector was particularly difficult. The researcher approached many private firms to collect information. As the present study is based on the Decent Work framework, management of all private firms refused to

grant permission to meet their employees and conduct interviews. The researcher found it difficult to collect data from IT professionals working in the public sector, also because most of the institutions were reluctant to permit questions regarding Decent Work indicators, as they thought that it might affect their reputation. Therefore, the researcher is left with no other option than the snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which, when we get one respondent, the respondent gives information about other respondents, and it progresses as a chain. The process was completed until the survey was conducted among 150 employees from the public sector and 150 employees from the private sector. Therefore, the study is based on data collected from 300 IT professionals in the Thiruvananthapuram district. The majority of the respondents belonging to the public sector are working in institutions like Keltron, CDIT, Kerala State IT Mission, Information Kerala Mission, and respondents belonging to the private sector are working in various IT firms in and around Techno Park, Thiruvananthapuram. The study focuses on the dimensions of employment of IT employees based on the Decent Work Indicators. Each of these indicators, like rights at work, gender equity, social protection and promotion of social dialogue, is significantly relevant to the IT sector. The investigator adopted these indicators as the variables of the study.

When the researcher considered different IT destinations in Kerala, it is found that Thiruvananthapuram has many peculiarities as compared to other IT destinations. Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala, is a well-known academic hub. The establishment of Techno Park has accelerated the growth of Thiruvananthapuram as an IT destination. Techno Park ranks first in the Information Technology parks in Asia in terms of total built up area. There are 470 IT firms in Techno Park like Oracle, Infosys, TCS etc which generate employment opportunities to more than 70,000 professionals. Thiruvananthapuram also ranks first in the number of work seekers in general and technical categories in 2016. The total number of work seekers in Thiruvananthapuram district is 5.2 lakhs, of which 3.2 lakhs are women and 1.96 lakhs are men. With the emergence of Techno Park and its recent expansion, IT has become major solution for the problem of unemployment in and around Thiruvananthapuram. Thiruvananthapuram, which contributes nearly 80 percent software exports from the state, is considered to be the Silicon Valley of Kerala. The city has huge prospects for the growth of IT sector as it has recently been declared as a future 'smart city'

by Government of India. In this context, the researcher has selected Thiruvananthapuram as the area of the study.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Social and economic background of the IT professionals in Kerala

Socio-economic features, along with the working and living environment, are the crucial contributory factors of physical and mental health of individuals. It throws light on parental education, parental occupation, family income and employees' background etc. This helps the researcher to analyze how much the professionals get support from family and how much they struggled to come into this position.

4.1.1 Gender- wise Classification of the IT Employees

Gender composition of the population is one of the primary demographic characteristics of human population. The population of Kerala is 3.34 crores, of which 1.60 crores were males and 1.74 crores are females. The sex ratio for Kerala is 1084 females per 1000 Males and in Thiruvananthapuram district, it is 1088.The study shows that the male employees dominate in this sector, which is quite different from the gender composition of Kerala (Table-1).

Table 1 : Gender- wise classification of the IT professionals

Gender	Public	Private	Total
Male	68 (45.30)	97 (64.70)	165 (55.00)
Female	82 (54.70)	53 (35.30)	135 (45.00)
Total	**150**	**150**	**300**

Source: Sample Survey
Note: Figures in brackets show percentages

Table 1 shows that out of the 300 professionals surveyed for the study, men outnumber women. Men form 55 percent of the sample whereas women form 45 per cent of the sample. But, there are differences between the gender composition in public and private firms. In public firms, women are greater than men and vice versa in private firms.

4.1.2 Age wise classification of professionals

Age has supreme importance in identifying an individual's ability to perform various tasks of life.The age of the IT professionals is important as it reflects their capacity to work. A peculiar feature of IT industry has been employment of a labour force from relatively younger age group (Table-2).

Table 2 : Age wise classification of professionals

Age Group	Public	Private	Total
20-30	59 (39.33)	126 (84.00)	185 (61.67)
30-40	74 (49.33)	22 (14.67)	96 (32.00)
40-50	11 (7.34)	2 (1.33)	13 (4.33)
Above 50	6 (4.00)	0 (0.00)	6 (2.00)
Total	**150 (100)**	**150 (100)**	**300 (100)**

Source: Sample Survey
Note: Figures in brackets show percentages

Table 2 shows the age- wise classification of professionals and it reveals that most of the professionals are in the age group of 20 to 30 years old. In public IT firms, the highest percentages of professionals are from the age group of 30 to 40 years but in private sector, majority of the sample (84percent) is in the age group of 20-30 years. This means that private sector needs young and fresh professionals than public sector. In public sector, there is age bar for working but in private even though there is no age limit, most of the respondents belong to the age group of 20-40. The study reveals that the IT sector is limited to young people.

4.1.3 Marital status of IT professionals

Marital status refers to whether an employee is single, married, divorced, widowed or separated. In IT sector, the professionals belong to the younger age groups and a large number of them are single.

Table 3 : Distribution of the sample by marital status

Marital Status	Public	Private	Total
Single	41 (27.33)	107 (71.34)	148 (49.34)
Married	100 (66.67)	41 (27.33)	141 (47.00)
Widow(er)	4 (2.67)	0 (0)	4 (1.33)
Divorced	1 (0.66)	0 (0)	1 (0.33)
Separated	4 (2.67)	2 (1.33)	6 (2.00)
Total	**150 (100)**	**150 (100)**	**300 (100)**

Source: Sample Survey
Note: Figures in brackets show percentages

Table 3 reveals the number and proportion of employees on the basis of their marital status. Almost 50 percent of the sample respondents are single and 47 percent of IT professionals are married. It can be seen that in public sector, married people are more compared to those who are single. The public sector has 66.67 percent of the married professionals whereas the proportion of single employees is just 27.33 percent. In private, reverse is the case. Single professionals are greater (71.34 percent) compared to married ones (27.33 percent).

4.1.4 Religion wise distribution of IT professionals

The religious backgrounds of the IT professionals are shown in Table 4

As Table 4 shows, almost 70 percent of the professionals are Hindus. While Christians form 17.33 percent and Muslims form 13 percent of the sample. Representation of Christians and Muslims is higher in Private sector than in Private sector.

Table 4 : Religion wise Distribution of IT Professionals

Religious group	Nature of Firm		Total
	Public	Private	
Hindu	111 (74.00)	97 (64.67)	208 (69.34)
Christian	22 (14.67)	30 (20.00)	52 (17.33)
Muslim	17 (11.33)	22 (14.67)	39 (13.00)
Others (specify)	0 (0)	1 (0.66)	1 (0.33)
Total	**150 (100)**	**150 (100)**	**300 (100)**

Source: Sample Survey
Note: Figures in brackets show percentages

4.1.5 Social Class Categorization

In the primitive Indian society, occupation and income were caste based. Majority of people in the lower social strata still continue to be poor and under privileged. The SCs, STs and other Backward Communities (OBCs) are the socially and economically marginalized groups of Indian population suffering from the worst form of social exclusion (Table-5).

Table 5 : Number and Proportion of Employees by the nature of appointment

Social Group	Nature of Firm		Total
	Public	Private	
General	65 (43.34)	70 (46.67)	135 (45)
OBC	68 (45.33)	69 (46)	137 (45.67)
SC/ST	17 (11.33)	11 (7.33)	28 (9.33)
Total	150 (100)	150 (100)	300 (100)
Source: Sample Survey *Note: Figures in brackets show percentages*			

Based on Table 5, in terms of social groups, Other Backward Castes (OBC) are greater in number, though General category employees are close by. While OBC consists of 45.67 percent of the sample, the General Category accounts for 45 percentage- just a difference of 0.67 per cent. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) combined forms 9.33 percent of the sample. It may be seen that in private companies, both OBC and General are almost same in number. In both types of companies, SC/ST group comes at the bottom. Compared to Public sector, the share of SC/ST in Private sector is 7.33 percent which is not too low compared to Kerala statistics.

4.1.6 Employees by Place of Residence

Place of residence where an individual resides is an important indicator of a social position of a person. Rural-urban background of an employee is very important for the study. Generally in IT sector, most of the professionals are from urban background (Table-6).

Table 6 : Number and Proportion of Employees by the nature of appointment

Nature of Company	Residence	Total	Nature of Company
	Rural	Urban	
Public	87 (58)	63 (63)	150 (100)
Private	78 (52)	72 (48)	150 (100)
Total	165 (55)	135 (45)	300 (100)

Source: Sample Survey
Note: Figures in brackets show percentages

As per the Table 6, people who are from rural areas are greater than in the urban areas. Almost 55 per cent of the total respondents are from rural areas. This is true for both public and private companies. IT sector is considered to be urban biased, but this study shows that both in public and private sectors, more employees are from rural areas and this trend shows that there is no digital divide in the state and both rural and urban develop at the same time.

4.1.7 The Nature of School Education

There are higher number of schools in aided sector (55 percent) than the Government sector (36 percent) and only 9 percent in Unaided sector in Kerala (Economic Review, 2016). Now there is a change in the attitude of the people in Kerala, most of the people prefer aided or unaided schools. With the development of IT sector in Kerala, there is a structural change in the attitude of the people and most professionals are from aided/ unaided schools (Table-7).

Nature of School Education	Nature of Ownership		Total
	Public	Private	
Government	77 (51.33)	38 (25.33)	115 (38.33)
Aided	70 (46.67)	108 (72)	178 (59.33)
Unaided	3 (2)	4 (2.67)	7 (2.34)
Total	150 (100)	150 (100)	300 (100)

Source: Sample Survey, 2016
Note: Figures in brackets shows percentages

It can be seen that in the public sector, people who are educated in Government schools account for the significant majority. But in the case of private sector, people who are educated in Aided schools claim a majority. In the public sector, 51.33 percent of the employees are educated in Government schools, 46.67 percent are from aided schools, and just 2 per cent from private schools. As in the case of private sector, 72 percent of employees are from the aided sector, 25.33 per cent from the government sector, and 2.67 per cent from the unaided. It is clear from the Table 4.10 that in both categories, the proportion of unaided school-educated people is very minimal.

4.1.8 Determinants of promotion

Mode of appointment can be divided into Permanent and Contract.

Table 8 : Number and Proportion of Employees by the nature of appointment

Mode of Appointment	**Nature of Firm**		**Total**
	Public	**Private**	
Permanent	36 (24.00)	46 (30.67)	82 (27.33)
Contract	114 (76.00)	104 (69.33)	218 (72.67)
Total	150 (100)	150 (100)	300 (100)

Source: Sample Survey, 2016
Note: Figures in brackets shows percentages

Table 8 shows another peculiar feature of IT sector employment in India. It may be seen that in both public and private firms majority are employed on contract basis. The proportion of employees on contract basis is higher in public sector firms as compared to the private sector firms.76 percent is the value for public whereas the corresponding value for private is 69.33 percent. On the overall, contractual professionals account for 72.67 percent of the sample.

4.1.9 Education and Employment

Education and employment are closely related. The respondents had different educational qualifications and are employed in different categories of job in the IT sector.The study included IT employees from different organisational levels. The respondents were not limited

to subordinate staff alone; managerial employees were also included in the sample. The participants consisted of trainees,programmer, Analysts,technical analysts,and project head.Including employees from varied job positions helped capture differences in work responsibilities, working hours, decision-making roles, and work-life balance experiences across organisational hierarchies (Table 9).

Table 9

Cross Tab between Education and Employment

Education	**Employment**								
	Trainee	Programmer	IT Analyst	Network Engineer	Technical Analyst	Technical Asst	Project Head	Software Eng	Project developer
Diploma	18.47	18.47	7.76		36.27		11.27		
BA/ B Sc/ B Com	26.88	22.08	4.38	4.38	36.88			7.38	
B Tech	12.60	30.8	10.8	9.00	26.20		4.4	6.2	
MA/ M Sc/ M Com	30.56	16.38	6.88	11.52	21.02		6.82	6.82	
MBA		18.91	9.82	14.42	32.62	9.81	14.42		
MCA/ M Sc Computer Science	6.24	24.73	13.93	11.43	13.63	4.73	20.63	4.73	
M.Tech	7.143	7.143		7.141	12.143	17.141	42.14	7.141	

Source: Sample Survey

As shown in the above Table, almost 37percent of Graduates are employed as Technical Analyst and a few are working as either Trainees or Programmers. Almost 31 percent of the B Tech holders are working as Programmers and 26 percent are working as Technical Analysts. The analysis shows that B Tech holders are employed in almost all categories of IT field. Most of the professionals with an M Tech degree (42 percent) are working as Project Head. The study revealed that even though engineers and M CA holders are employed in all strata of IT field, majority of people with M Tech or additional qualifications are employed as Project heads. Result suggests that even though IT sector offers employment opportunities to all categories of educated people, highly qualified people are also engaged in lower strata of job hierarchy. The study revealed that most of the surveyed professionals are from younger age group.

The study observed a higher proportion of young professionals in the private IT sector. This trend can be understood in the context of the rapid expansion of the IT industry, which largely recruits fresh graduates and young skilled workers with technical expertise and adaptability to changing technologies. Existing literature also supports this pattern, highlighting that the private IT sector generally prefers younger employees due to factors such as flexibility, technological adaptability, longer working hours, and lower organisational costs associated with entry-level recruitment.

4.1.10 Experience of IT Professionals

Work experience is an important factor in determining the employability of people. As the IT industry is a newly emerging industry, it has a comparatively younger workforce than other industries. As the respondents belong to younger age, their experience is comparatively low. Work experience profile of professionals from the collected data is presented in Table 10.

Table 10 : Experience of the IT Professionals

Experience (Years)	Public	Private	Total
Less than 1 year	16.43	32.66	24.54
1-5 Years	42.14	52.67	47.41
6 - 10 years	26.43	12.67	19.55
11-15 years	13.57	0.67	7.12
16 & above	1.43	1.33	1.38
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: Sample Survey

Table 10 reveals that the most of the IT professionals (47.41 percent) are of 1-5 years of experience (42.14 percentage in private sector and 52.67 percent in private sector). In private sector, 85.34 percent of professionals have less than 5 years of experience, whereas 14.26 percent of professionals have more than 6 years of experience in that particular sector. But in public sector 41.43 percent of professionals have more than 6 years of work experience.

4.1.11 Monthly Income of the Professionals

Data collected from a sample of 300 IT professionals showed that most of the sample respondents received an income of less than 20,000. In Public sector, nearly 87% of persons received an income below Rs.40,000 per month and in Private sector, it is 84%. Evidence from the sample respondents suggests that, in terms of the first component (income of employees) of adequate earning and productive work, employment in IT exhibiting a deficit

in Decent Work. Other components are related to whether individuals have a chance for self-development in work and get income through training and up gradation of technical skills (Table -11).

Table 11 - Monthly Income of the Professionals

Income Level	Public	Cumulative frequency	Private	Cumulative frequency	Total
Less than 20000	85 (56.66)	85 (56.66)	60 (40.00)	60 (40.00)	145 (48.33)
20001-40000	46 (30.67)	131 (87.33)	66 (44.00)	126 (84.00)	257 (85.67)
40001-60000	12 (8.00)	143 (95.33)	16 (11.00)	142 (95.00)	285 (95.00)
60001-80000	4 (2.67)	147 (98.00)	1 (0.67)	143 (95.67)	290 (96.67)
80001-100000	2 (1.33)	149 (99.33)	4 (2.50)	147 (98.17)	296 (98.67)
Above 100000	1 (0.67)	150 (100)	3 (1.83)	150 (100)	300 (100)

Source: Sample Survey

Note: Figures in brackets show percentages

4.1. Effect of Longer Working hours

The average hours spent by IT employees may vary in both sectors. In private IT sector employees work longer hours than in Public. In private, employees spent an average 9.12 hours per day while in public, it was comparatively lower i.e., 7.71 hours. Average hours of work per day for the sample of 300 IT professionals is 8.41 hrs which exceeds the working norm of 8 hours. Employment in IT sector is in the form of project completion which is time bound and since majority of the market is US based, the nature of work requires different time zones and to make both the parties constantly in touch with each other, 'flexi time work ' was introduced in IT sector. Often project deadlines cause work pressures and professionals overstay in office to complete the work. Thus long working hours, overstays, weekend works, work on religious or public holidays are common in this sector. Reasons for overstay can be due to voluntary reasons or involuntary reasons. Personal interest, ambition, or dedications are the voluntary reasons for longer working hours. Involuntary reasons are deadline pressures, extra income or directions from team leaders etc.

Even though, the reasons for overtime work are more or less same for public and private employees, its effect varies remarkably between these two groups of work force. The effects of overwork in IT sector are shown in Table 12.

Table 12 - Effects of Overstay (percentage)

Effects of Overstay	Nature of Ownership		
	Public	**Private**	**Over all**
Deterioration in physical and mental health	52.56	56.18	54.37
Disturbance in work-life balance	26.46	27.06	26.76
Reduced productivity	14.86	8.08	11.47
Excessive work pressures	6.12	8.68	7.4
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: Sample Survey

It is clear from Table 12 that deterioration in physical and mental health is the major effect of overstaying in office. Almost 55 percent of employees suffer from this problem. This is higher in the private sector (56.18%) than the corresponding value in public sector (52.56%). Apart from the deterioration in physical and mental health, disturbance in work-life balance is another major issue in IT sector. The harmful effects of overtime work are more evident in the case of private employees as compared to public employees.

4.1.13 Work Life Balance

Work-life balance has become a serious issue. There is a drastic change in the nature of work and work environment, and this creates an imbalance in work-life. This leads to dissatisfaction and disappointment among employees, and it will negatively affect their mental and physical well-being as well as their career development. Since the employees have to work for long hours at the workplace, they get less time to spend with their families. Due to these imbalances, most highly qualified women quit their jobs after starting a family.

4.1.13.1 Details of Work-life Balance

Work-life balance denotes the maintenance of perfect balance between individual life and professional life that may lead to job satisfaction and excellence in job (Table-13).

Table13 - Work life balance (Percentage)

Work Life Balance	**Public**			**Private**			**Over all**
Longer working hours and flexi time work	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
	26.61	32.09	58.70	41.01	22.41	63.41	90.41
Health problems due to nature of work	42.44	51.18	93.62	39.07	21.35	60.42	123.83
Absence of workers Union	15.33	18.48	33.81	58.35	31.88	90.23	78.93
Night Shifts	8.16	9.84	18.00	24.77	13.53	38.30	37.15
Lack of socializing with relatives, friends etc.	19.97	24.09	44.06	55.95	30.57	86.52	87,32
Lack of recreations	17.94	21.63	39.57	56.93	31.11	88.04	63.81

Source:Sample Survey

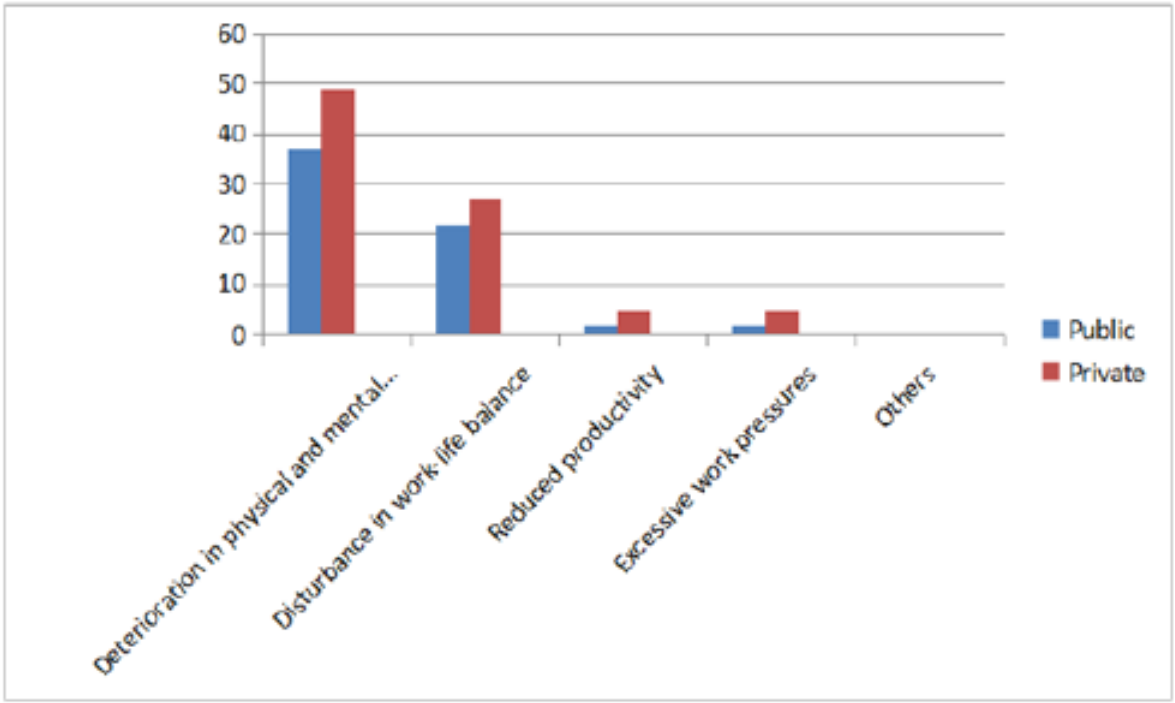
Table 13 shows the work-life balance of IT professionals. It is important to note that more than 60 percent of IT professionals reported that they have health problems due to the nature of work and they also have long working hours and flexible work time. Also, they are of the opinion that lack of socialization and recreation, and the absence of a trade union, also affect their work-life balance. 93.62 percent of persons have some health problems due to the nature of work in the public sector, whereas the corresponding figure in the private sector is 60.42 percent. This is due to the reason that the majority of professionals in the public sector are in the age group of above 30 years. Almost 80 percent of the respondents opined that there is discrimination in the workplace. The proportion of people who said 'yes' to discrimination in the workplace. While 60.7 per cent of employees in private firms said they face discrimination, in the public sector, it is 19.1 per cent. The study revealed that married employees may experience higher work-family conflict than unmarried employees. Employees from nuclear families may face different pressures compared to joint-family households. Work-life balance is not merely an individual issue but is deeply connected to gender roles, family structures, workplace culture, and social expectations. Unequal division of labour increases stress levels among women employees and affects their work-life balance. Working mothers often face additional pressures related to childcare, elder care, and family

expectations, making it difficult to balance professional and personal responsibilities effectively. The social reproduction of labour perspective highlights how unpaid domestic responsibilities disproportionately affect women professionals, contributing to higher stress levels and greater work-life challenges compared to men.

4.1.13.2 Effect of Longer Working hours

According to the IT professionals in the sample, long working hours lead to deterioration in their physical and mental health and disturbances in work-life balance. Even though, the reasons for overtime work are more or less same for public and private employees, their effect varies remarkably between these two groups of work force. The harmful effects of overtime work are more evident in the case of private employees as compared to public employees. Almost half of the private employees suffer from deterioration of physical and mental health as against 37 percent in the case of public employees. The problem of work life balance is the second major effect of long work duration and its extent is more or less same among public and private employee categories. The effect of longer working hours is explained in Figure-1.

Figure 1 : Effects of Overstay



Source: Sample Survey

Conclusion

Different types of health problems, slow career progress, inadequate earnings, no overtime remuneration are the basic problems faced by the most of the workers in public sector. But in private sector, the problems can be categorized as long working hours, inadequate earnings, monotonous work, tight deadlines, job stress, too much work pressure, work life imbalance, job insecurity and health problems . It can be found in the light of this study that all the problems listed above are due to the lack of decency in IT sector. Since IT industry is an emerging promising industry, many youngsters are attracted to this sector. Hence, it is mandatory to provide good working conditions for the promising youth to save them from over exploitation and insecurity. It is also the responsibility of the State to ensure the basic rights for our young generation. This necessitates the urgent implementation of these indicators in this sector. In this context, this study has proven itself as an immensely significant one. Even though, many employees are working on contract basis, public IT sector is comparatively better than private IT sector in the analysis based on Decent Work.

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