

Enhancing Women Safety in a Renowned IT/BPO Company

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Comments by Faculty

“When you reach, just send me a message or give me a missed call” – is the instruction for almost every woman going to work, gets from her parents, spouse or relatives at home. At a time when more and more women spend a considerable time outside their homes, safety becomes a pertinent and constant concern. Are education, employment, mobility and independence automatically translated to respect and safety for working women?

Recent data from the *National Sample Survey Office* surprisingly, showed a drop in the number of women in India’s workforce. According to the data, women’s labor force participation rate stood at 23% in 2011-12, a drop from 29% in 2004-05. In comparison, China’s rate is 68%. This may not directly signify the safety norms of the companies per se, but it is an indication that there is lesser number of working women in the quoted year, as compared to the previous years.

The safety of women at workplace is a topic that has been discussed often. Many companies have come up with guidelines within the organization for this purpose. The internship study looks into the women employee safety across Software industry. A NASSACOM directive and guidelines says that as part of the social responsibility it is necessary for all member companies of the software industry follow and put in place women employee safety norms. This report presents the first of the said company’s initiative in a process for developing strategic and standard measures to be followed to enhance women employee safety. The name of the software company under study for the summer project is camouflaged to maintain the confidentiality of the organization. The company will be referred to as *Company P* throughout the report from here on.

As a first step, a survey of women employees leaving work after 7PM from ITPL, in a campus of *Company P*, Bangalore was conducted and a statistically significant sample size data was tabulated on Microsoft Excel. Based on the responses to a simple questionnaire that captures the issues related to women employee safety, These were analyzed and the conclusions of the analysis are presented in the report and used to support proposed women employee safety measures.

Additionally a detailed bench mark study of the existing safety measures within *Company P* in comparison with *Company A*, *Company B* and *Company C* has been presented as a process of identifying the limitations that exist within the organizational framework that undermine women employee safety. Safety measures unique to various other similar businesses have been collected to have a better understanding of standard safety measures. On the basis of this, recommendations have been made for women safety measures to *Company P*.

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Introduction

The issue of women’s safety is indeed a global one, transcending borders and impacting people at all levels, including governments, policymakers, non-governmental organizations and citizens. In 2006, the United Nations Secretary General’s report In-depth Study of all Forms of Violence against Women emphasized that violence against women in the world constitutes a human rights violation, and continues to be an obstacle to reaching gender equality. Lack of safety and fear of crime have particular impacts on women and on their ability to take advantage of their right to be able to participate in and move around freely in society. Women’s activities are often limited as a consequence of insecurity and risk of violence (Urgo, 2009), inhibiting daily activities such as going to work, their ability to use certain public spaces, or to go out at night. It also affects their freedom to be financially independent, and all of this has implications for their children and families.

NASSCOM along with several women welfare organizations is working to enable the female citizens of India to live in an environment where they are free to fully exercise their rights. The fact that the NASSCOM has organized and hosted this important event attests to their appreciation of the particular security needs of women and girls, as well as their dedication to learning more about their needs in order to respond to them better.

Enhancing Women Safety in Company P IT/BPO Sector

The Indian IT-BPM sector is one of the largest employers in India with over 800,000 women employed across levels and has been driving the agenda of gender diversity across large and small companies.

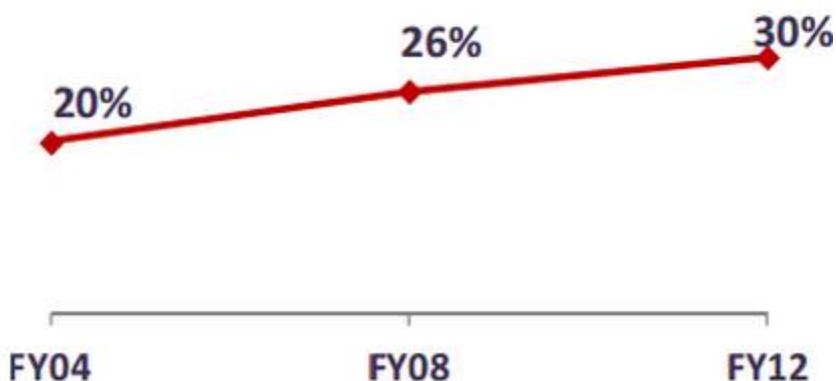


Figure 1 : Percentage of Women

The figure 1.0 shows the gender diversity workforce in Indian IT/BPO sector (Nasscom Women Safety report, 2013) for three different Financial Years.

Working at any hour of the day is the fundamental right of every women and all stakeholders should work together to create a conducive and secure (Women's Safety - A Global Concern, 2008) for women.

Many organizations in the city are ensuring that their women employees reach home safe and that they are capable of defending themselves in case they find themselves in a difficult situation.

Therefore, from arranging for transport along with guards and conducting self-defense workshops to distributing pepper sprays and allowing them no night shifts, employers are doing every bit to create a safe environment for women.

Objective of the Study

The study is focused on.

- Methods to improve safety of working women when they leave office after the regular working hours.
- Possible measures and discuss cause-effect analysis to enhance women employee safety.
- Bench mark/comparative analyses which will help the organization enhance women employee safety.
- Improving *Company P* transport with respect to its timings, facilities and other safety aspects so that female employees make optimum use of it instead of availing public transport when they leave offices late .
- Identifying the factors that make women employees feel safe or unsafe.
- Provide women employees with an insight on safety issues.
- Including women employees to improve their safety.
- Providing an overview and assessment of the survey.

Methodology

- The first step in this initiative was to conduct a feasibility survey.
- The survey was to be taken by all the female employees leaving the office premises after 7PM.
- The population size was around 1200. One week before the survey was rolled out, all the female employees who were leaving office late were requested to fill in their details in the register.
- HR team decided on a sample size of 600 (to get at least 50% response) and rolled out the survey.
- A ready-made questionnaire was put to use (Can be furnished upon request).

Limitations

There were certain limitations in the ready-made questionnaire. They are listed below:

- One of the options in the questionnaire for “Reason for not availing *COMPANY P* transport” was “Availability of cheaper mode of conveyance”- This option may also signify that the employee is staying close to the office. It does not capture the exact data if actually *COMPANY P* transport is expensive or not.
- Employee might feel safe using their own vehicle or commuting with a family member. This is not asked or captured in the questionnaire.
- Since there were no clear domain (IT, ITES, BPO) categories mentioned, no clear picture emerged on which sector is actually facing problems.
- Questionnaire mainly focuses on *COMPANY P* transport alone and not on the safety of employees within / outside the office premises.
- “Inconvenience in booking” for cabs was given as an option for a question. This can either mean the procedure to book a cab is tedious (problem with the portal or steps to book a cab) or the two hour prior booking period makes cabs unavailable most of the time.
- To summarize we observe few non-sampling errors like
 - Non-response error
- Failure to contact all members and incomplete responses
 - Design error
- Population specification error and selection error

The limitations of the study are:

- Not many open-ended suggestions are given by the employees.
- Few employees have mentioned “Mode of transport” as both “public transport and *COMPANY P* bus/cabs” This can either mean that there is a problem of insufficient coverage by *COMPANY P* buses or employees follow different timings every day/week.
- Many employees who do not use *COMPANY P* transport have still rated the service as “Good” but have not mentioned the reasons for not using the same.
- As the survey was done in one of the *COMPANY P* offices in ITPL, it is tough to interpret so as to how many employees use *COMPANY P* transport and how many use ITPL transport.
- This survey was rolled out in only one of the offices of *COMPANY P* (*COMPANY P*, Pioneer- ITPL)
- Sample size was decided as 600 keeping in mind at least 50% of the total population (1200). This does not represent the true population because if employees are working in shifts, their shifts could change every week/ fortnight. There might be new set of female employees in the next rotation of shift who work beyond 7 PM whose responses were not collected.

Analysis - Interpretation from the Data



Figure 2 : No. of employees extending their shift under each category.

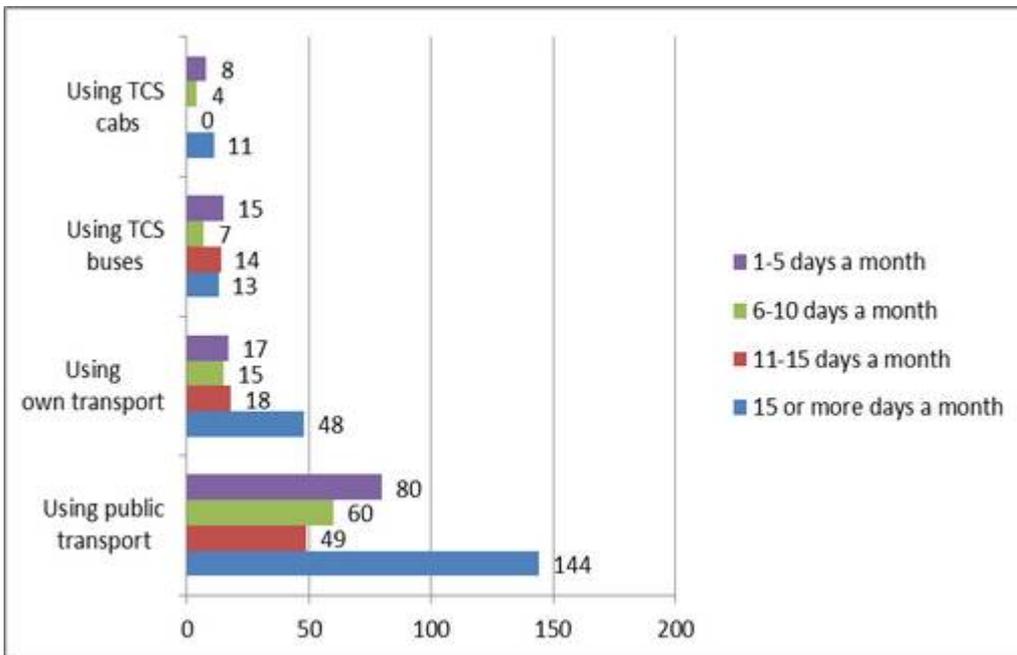


Figure 3 : Type of Transportation Used By Employees To Commute To/Fro Office

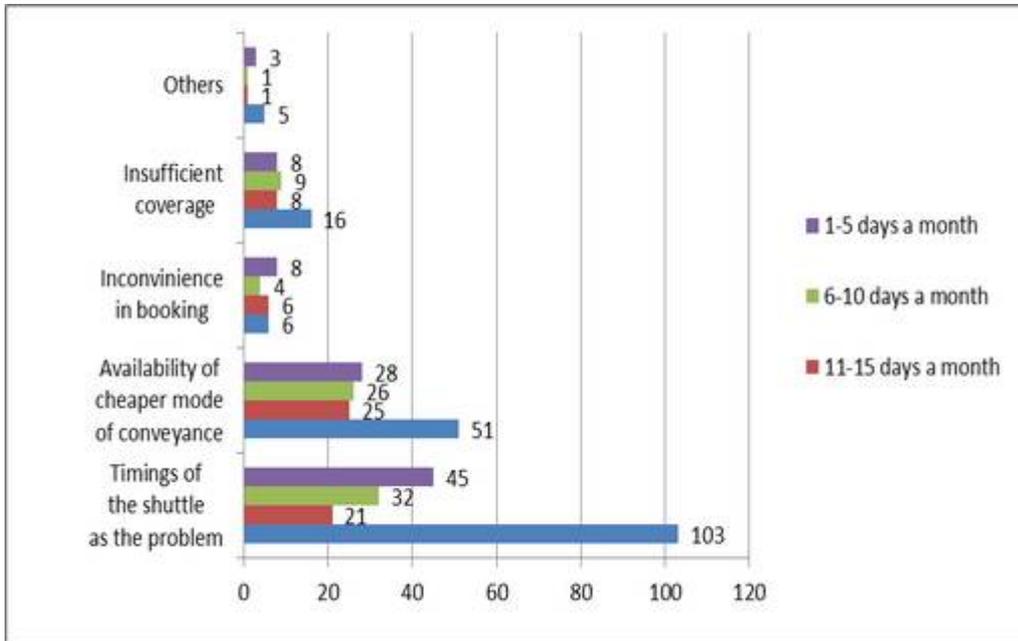


Figure 4 : The Reasons for not Availing Company P Transport

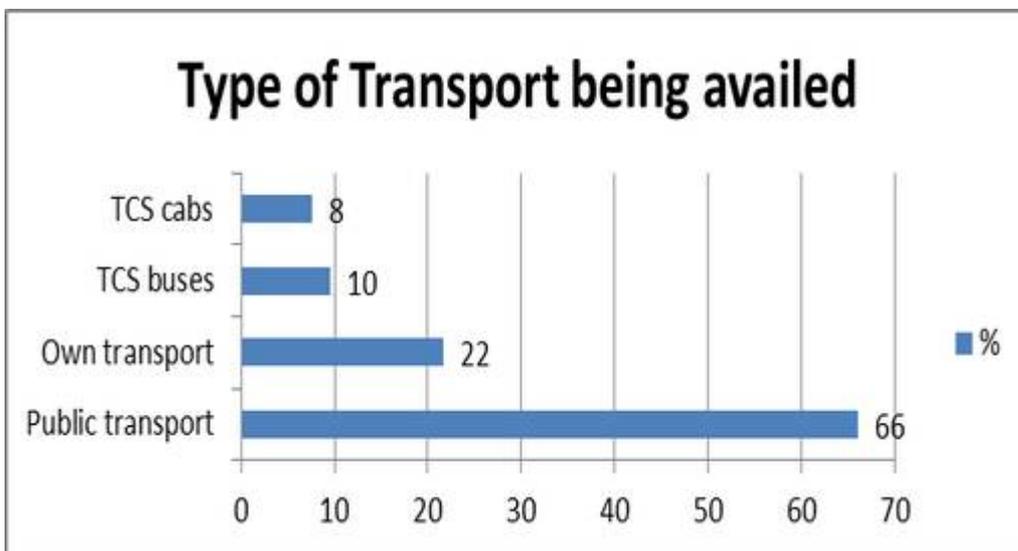


Figure 5 : The Type of Transport being Availed (in %)

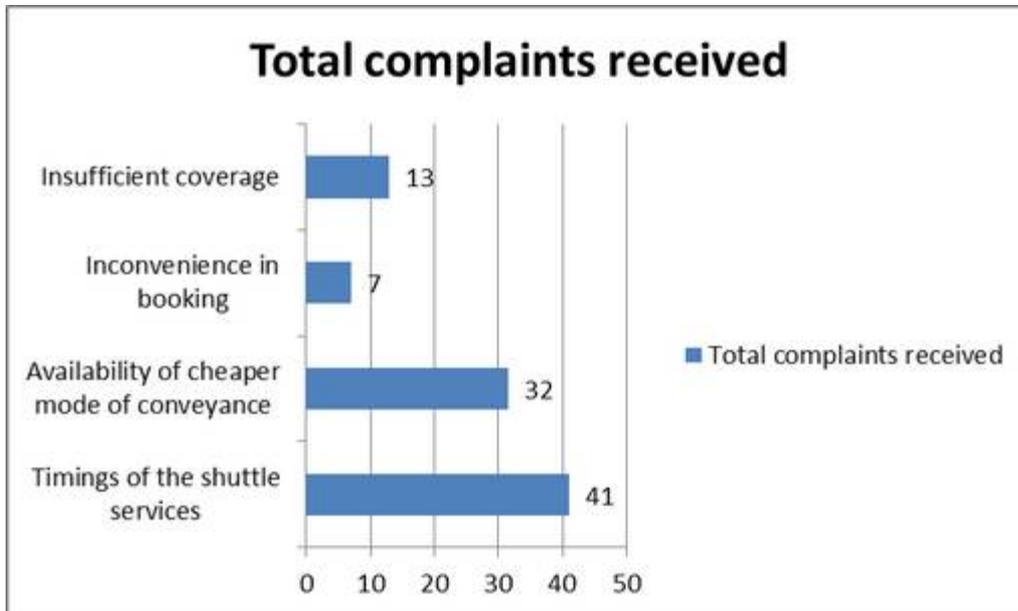


Figure 6: The Number Of Complaints Received Against Each Parameter (in%)

Univariate Analysis

- Total sample size of 535 responses has been captured
- In total just 13% of the employees who responded for the survey use *COMPANY P* transportation facilities (both buses and cabs)
- Out of 535, 51 of them are found to be using *COMPANY P* buses as their mode of transportation which comes up to just 9.5 %
- Employees have agreed upon the *COMPANY P* bus facility being “Good”
- But the problem, if any, they are facing with the *COMPANY P* buses is that, employees feel that the timings can be improvised or revised and the rates could be made slightly economical
- There are 41 female employees using *COMPANY P* cab services which accounts to 7.6%
- The service being provided to employees is mostly rated as “Good”
- Few of them believe that the cab facility should be made available starting from 8 PM rather than 10 PM.

Bi-Variate Analysis

- 149 employees who use “Public transport” have complained about the “timing of the shuttle” and 106 have mentioned of “availability of cheaper mode of conveyance” for not using *COMPANY P* transport. This can mean that these set of employees are residing close to the office premises and they do not follow one particular log in / log out timings.

Few employees who use “Public transport” and “*COMPANY P*” buses have complained about the “timings of the shuttle services” and “insufficient coverage”. This can mean that these employees do not extend beyond their regular hours for most of the days in a month due to which they are able to board *COMPANY P* buses but at the same time they are using public transport because of the insufficient coverage i.e. *COMPANY P* buses go only up to a certain point after which they have to make their own arrangements to go till their respective areas.

OR

The above can be interpreted as the employees do not maintain one constant shift every week due to which for few days they are able to board *COMPANY P* buses and the rest of the days *COMPANY P* buses are not available when they log out at their respective shift timings i.e. these employees work for more number of days beyond their regular shift timings

- 5 employees who use *COMPANY P* cabs regularly have still complained of “inconvenience in booking” the cabs

This can either mean the procedure to book a cab is tedious (problem with the portal or steps to book a cab) or the two hour prior booking period makes cabs unavailable most of the time.

- 14 Employees who are using “*COMPANY P* buses” and have still complained of the “availability of cheaper mode of conveyance” are most probably using the ITPL transport, not the actual *COMPANY P* buses. Not much can be commented about their shift timings as ITPL transport is available at very regular timing.
- There are 144 employees who extend their shift beyond 15 days / month and use public transport which means that they log out only after 8-8.30 PM till 9 PM after both *COMPANY P* / ITPL bus facilities stop and these employees either stay close to the office to use public transport or they do not want to wait for cabs which will start only at 10 PM
- Most of the 116 employees who use their own transport have complained of the “availability of cheaper mode of conveyance”. This could mean that these employees stay nearby
- 12% of the employees have complained of *COMPANY P* transport having “Insufficient coverage”. This could mean that the employees are staying nearby and as there are no *COMPANY P* buses for shorter distances, they can't avail the same

OR

it could also mean that the buses are not available for that area where the employee is staying (Recently one of the *COMPANY P* bus routes covering Vijaynagar was pulled out as there were very few employees travelling in that route)

Benchmark Study

Benchmarking is the process of comparing one's business processes and performance metrics to industry bests or best practices from other industries. Benchmarking here was a very an important step to perform for the following reasons.

Table 1 :

Benchmarking of Company P on Various Parameters with 3 other Companies

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company P
Lady associates working beyond 8 PM	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Work from home option	No	Yes	No	No
Self defence workshop	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Education on Smartphone apps	Yes	Yes	No	No
Portal for sexual harassment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
E-learning module on sexual harassment	Yes	Yes	No	No
Activities to create awareness about safety aspects of women	Yes	No	Yes	No
Buses for general shift	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Buses for shorter distances at cheaper costs	Yes	No	No	No
As and when cab services	Yes	No	Yes	No
Cab services at free of cost beyond general shift	No	Yes	Yes	No
Specific cab slots	Yes	No	No	Yes
Security guard if the female employee is alone in the cab	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Real time monitoring of cabs/GPS installed in cabs	Yes	Yes	No	No
Screening of drivers on frequent basis	Yes	No	No	No
Pepper spray initiative	Yes	No	No	No
Female employees Employee care centers to stay back for free of cost beyond 8 PM	No	No	Yes	No
Security guards keeping track of employee details leaving beyond 8 PM	Yes	No	Yes	No
Cab services from	9PM	Late night/early morning shift	8:30PM	10PM
Bus/cab rates	High	Free	Low	High(ITPB)
Confirms safe arrival of female associates post late night shifts / early morning shifts	Yes	No	No	No

- **Philips:** Confirms safe arrival of employees post late night shifts
- **Wipro / Dell:** Vehicle tracking system
- **Intel:** Sounds a bugle for all women employees to leave office by 7:30 PM
- **ICICI/Dell:** GPS and single press button facility in phones to send distress call to at least 10 contacts
- **Max Healthcare:** No late night / early morning shifts for women
- **Yebhi.Com:** First preference to women in parking areas so that they do not park their vehicles in aloof areas of the campus
- **Raychem RPG:** 'Cobra'- an instant spray which injures the attacker is provided to the associates
- **Cairn:** Tracks all its vehicles real time. Women employees who are dropped last are provided with emergency helpline numbers of internal security officers

Recommendations

- Buses for shorter distances could be planned at a reasonable rates to cover more areas.
- Frequency of *COMPANY P* buses could be increased. (Buses from 5PM to 8 PM)
- "As and when cab services" could be introduced.
- Cab services can start at least from 9 PM onwards and not from 10 PM which is very late.
- Definitely reduce the cost of ITPL transport. 2284/- per month is very expensive.
- "Women empowerment" initiatives could be taken up. Tips like use of safety pins and pepper sprays can be briefed to the employees with such an initiative.
- *COMPANY P* can take up pepper spray initiative like that of HCL .
- Education on Smartphone apps like "Nirbhaya, Fightback, Sentinel, Circle of 6" etc can be provided to the employees through frequent mail chains.
- More initiatives on women safety (London Photographers' Branch) inside and outside the offices premises could be taken up- like sending out mails on basic self defense strategies etc on frequent basis. Conduct events and rallies on " women's day " against misfortunate incidents.
- Confirm safe arrival of female employees at home/offices post late night .
- In the long run *COMPANY P* could implement GPS in cabs for more safety.
- Real time monitoring of cabs could be started in the long run.

- Work from home option could be permitted.
- Conduct self-defense workshop more often so that female associates can take it up at their convenient timings

**Table 2:
Recommendations, Challenges and ROI Made for Company P**

Recommendation	Challenges	ROI
<p>INTRODUCING GPS IN CABS FOR REAL TIME MONITORING OF CABS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Escalated costs means less demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cost of development of technology or purchase of technology in-turn affects cab fare for employees ● for GPS monitored cabs- cab fare escalation ● Time taken to scale the technology across the organization ● Reliability of the technology and further improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● B2B procurement with a small profit margin ● In-house development of technology TATA Indicom satellites could increase telecom customer base. ● Successfully implemented and scaled product can be sold to other businesses as Company P will be pioneers in GPS monitoring system.
<p>INTRODUCTION OF BUSES FOR SHORTER DISTANCES AT LESSER COST</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Existing well fragmented public transport system which offers better costs, luxury, frequency and flexibility of transportation for shorter distances of office commute. ● Cost of subsidy on the cab fare has to be borne by the company or the employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cabs returning back could serve as auxiliary public transport system which could mean some money in return to the company. ● Cabs returning could be used to deliver FMCG and supplies, newspapers etc...
<p>WORK FROM HOME OPTION FOR FEMALE EMPLOYEES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Uninterrupted house hold power supply and internet connectivity. ● Cost of additional workstations and internet ● Smooth execution of tasks is a challenge because of restricted face to face interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduced commute time could be exchanged for working hours. ● Tata Indicom could provide secure and fast internet; Additional revenue for TATA group. ● Use of employees personal computers could mean less systems for procurement for Company P

<p>INTRODUCING WORKSHOP ON SELF DEFENCE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allotting time for such training during business hours affects project billability ● Persuading people to attend workshop during non-business hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased confidence of women employees to work late night shifts means more off-shore project hours which brings down project costs
<p>CAR POOL PORTAL ON <i>Company P</i> NETWORK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dependency on colleagues offers less flexibility of start and end time of work ● Availability of pool car for all destinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A small fee to use the portal is additional revenue for <i>Company P</i>. ● A smart phone app to access car pool portal on the go could be sold to other companies in ITPL

Other Forms of ROI The Company is Benefitted of

- In the long run, such actions of employee concern add on to the goodwill of the company.
- Less attrition of female employees owing to the “ Feel Safe “ factor which adds to the job satisfaction as a hygiene factor and not a motivator

- Can become a deciding factor during campus placements where students and their parents can see *COMPANY P* as a “women friendly” company with no Gender Bias.
- Can prevent unforeseen instances arising out of negligence
- Better to be alert that saves cost on such sensitive issues.
- *COMPANY P* male associates would tend to bring their spouses to the company and getting a family in a company ensures more retainer ship.
- *COMPANY P* has a culture mix of people from all around the country. Word of mouth publicity of any such activity at minimal cost would be a brilliant branding exercise. It would certainly add to the credibility factor.
- Media would portray company as a “women friendly “ company. Can have impact in many areas right from choosing *COMPANY P* to choosing a project with second shift (helps RMG), work assignments abroad.

Conclusion

The Women safety Initiative was presented to the HR Leadership team of *COMPANY P* on 30th April 2013. The team was given an overview about the initiatives taken and benchmark study done.

Short Term Implementations

- Mailer Campaign on Women’s Safety
 - To create more awareness on how to deal with sexual harassment at work place
 - This will deal with educating women on how to use safety pins and pepper sprays
 - Also try and portray *COMPANY P* as a women friendly company during on campus placements
- Follow-up with Safety Sessions/ workshops/ surveys
 - Self-defense workshops will be included as a part of Initial Learning Program (Training phase for freshers)
- Checking on how many are using *COMPANY P* transport and if not analyzing the reasons for not using it through frequent surveys
- Launch of Women safety team and group ID for more women empowerment activities
- Provide education on Smartphone apps like “Nirbhaya, Fightback, Sentinel, Circle of 6”
- Having a discussion with the ITPL transport officials to reduce the cost of ITPL transport which is currently 2284/- per month

- As this survey was conducted in just one of the *COMPANY P* offices, it will now be rolled out at all other Bangalore *COMPANY P* offices as it received good response from the employees with few changes in the questionnaire
- *COMPANY P* has started to provide free transport to female employees leaving office after 8 PM
- Start confirming safe arrival of female employees after they reach home late in the night using *COMPANY P* cabs

Long Term Implementations

- Examining the feasibility of introducing buses for shorter distances at reasonable rates.
- Work from home option for female employees esp. for mothers having small children
- As and when cab services could be introduced in case of any emergencies

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