

Family Relationships: A Sociological Investigation on I.T Workers

Sanchari De

Assistant Professor

Department Of Sociology

Vidyasagar University

Abstract

The nature of work has considerably changed over the past several decades in economically advanced societies due to technological progress and increasing employment in service sector. The advent of Information Technology and the eminence of knowledge based economy, enhanced job responsibilities; innovativeness to cope with the global challenges transpires rampant job stress among these IT workers. Such contemporary work culture, in the post-global scenario has led to an erosion of the attributes by which organizations have traditionally defined themselves, and is affecting the mental health and family relationships of these professionals (Kendall et al. 2000).

The objective of the study are, to access what kind of work-life stress do the IT workers go through due to the 24x7 work pattern with no fixed work schedule and constant work pressure; secondly, whether the work culture in I.T sector is affecting I.T workers in maintaining family relationships. A survey was conducted on a sample of 30 I.T professionals (both men and women) working in various reputed I.T companies in Kolkata, chosen sample was interviewed using an interview schedule for collecting data. Both empirical data and literature was used for qualitative analysis of the study.

The study revealed that majority of the respondents thought that working constantly under pressure for long hours, facing competition from co-workers, showing efficiency and innovativeness through their project-based work and job insecurity all led to mental pressure and stress; secondly, IT employees, both men and women, go through work-family conflict due to emotional spillover and crossover. This makes them less attentive and spends less time with their family and relatives, leading to sparse spousal interaction, social withdrawal and increase in anger and conflict, thus giving rise to fragile relations within family in this contemporary society.

Keywords: work-life stress, family relationships, work-family conflict, spillover, crossover

INTRODUCTION

In today's world economy, information technology has emerged as the dominant technology, affecting every conceivable aspect of our life on a global scale. Technological revolution resulted due to the deployment of computers and communication for accessing and processing data and information revolution brought major changes in the ways organizations operate and the nature of work and relationships amongst the organizations. Information technology refers to both the hardware and software that are used to store, retrieve, and manipulate information. So it is generating modern day industrial revolution leading to a paradigm differently termed the 'new' economy, the information economy or the digital economy. This digital economy, which plays a key role in the rise of an information or knowledge society, is significantly changing the way we live and work together and revolutionizing the way companies practiced business and organized themselves in a globalized way throughout worldwide (Kelkar, 2010).

This Information technology and its consequent work culture in the post-global scenario led to the erosion of the attributes by which organizations have traditionally defined themselves (Kendall et al. 2000). Sedentary rather than physically strenuous work is more dominant with jobs mainly confined to information processing, controlling and coordination; new quality management techniques implemented for efficient services; up-to-date information sharing with all concerned; constant competition among employees in fulfilling customer demands effectively within specific time; economic constraints making employees create more innovative, better quality products and faster deliveries in lower costs leading to work pressure; high pay with less job security; extended work schedule and highly mechanized work life transpires rampant job stress, affecting the mental health and family relationships of these IT workers.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of my study are:

1. To find out what causes work- life stress among IT workers while working regularly in their work environment.
2. To study whether and how the work culture in IT sector is affecting IT workers in maintaining their family relationships.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted on a sample of 30 I.T professionals (both men and women) working in various reputed I.T companies in Kolkata. The chosen sample was interviewed using an interview schedule for collecting data. Both empirical data and literature was used for qualitative analysis of the study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA), Information Technology is the study, design, development, implementation, support and management of computer-based information systems like software and hardware applications. When we combine computer and communication technologies together then the result is information technology or 'InfoTech'. Information technology is a general term that describes any technology that helps to produce, manipulate, store, communicate or disseminate information of all kinds.

Rahman & Kurien (2007) in "Blind Men & the Elephant" stated that I.T services have managed to create an increasingly automated world around us with efficient integration of digital information, technological support and computing in everyday life both at home and at work to such an extent that today we simply can not imagine our life without I.T services. I.T professionals perform a variety of duties that range from installing applications to designing complex computer networks and information databases. They deal with data management, networking, handling computer hardware, software designing as well as the management and administration of entire systems. Information technology is spreading and integrating with other technologies such as cell phones, televisions, automobiles etc creating the increase for the demand of such I.T jobs.

Moskowitz (2007) in Encyclopedia of Social Psychology Vol.2 states that stress occurs when an individual perceives that the demands from the environment, exceeds his or her capabilities and resources to respond to the situation.

Belisle (2003) proposed that stress is tension from extraordinary demands, constraints or opportunities and answers the question how technology affects stress. Companies utilize various types of technology and technical software. In this context Wilianson in his article "Workplace Depression Blamed on IT Stress" says that technology designed to help people work efficiently is now forcing employees into a state of 'digital depression'. He also refers to a study done by Dr. Peter Honey in which Honey states that employees do not feel they can escape anymore. Within a company, employees and subcontractors utilize cell phones, pagers, pocket digital assistance for messages and emails. As such employees are rarely unavailable and it is common to be interrupted during one's lunch break. This inability to 'escape' may cause stress. Anne Mulcahy, chairman & CEO of Xerox Corporation identifies another factor regarding technology that may increase stress. In an article published in Business Wire, Mulcahy states "Technology has overwhelmed us with documents. They are hidden and often misunderstood aspect of business cost, productivity and infrastructure". Within the company, the production of documents is an ongoing process. Once created, originals, copies and computer files must be properly filed and stored which makes for more work that can create stress. Another

technological factor that can cause stress is computers and computer software. Several upgrades to the computer network and software systems are implemented within companies but uneven technological upgrades in workstations have increased stress due to slow computer response time. Employees relying more and more on the technology offered by computers, coordination of computer support has become another factor increasing stress among some employees.

In the article “Stress Management in Information Technology” (2008), as computer capacities and innovations increase, its influence will continue to grow at an ever increasing rate in the coming years. While there are many advantages of having on-demand information, one of the unwanted aspects of information technology is the stress that comes with it called ‘technology stress’. The types of stress that IT brings are 1) in the workplace the major cause of stress is the rapid change in technology. A software package which is used as the operating system for all computers of the company, releases three or four updates a year. Each time the employees have to either learn about the new updates or feel like they are falling behind. This leads to pressure on them and feel that their ability to do the job may be impacted by the change leading to the feeling that their job security is at risk. Another form of stress in working environments might be described as technoangst. People do not communicate and interact with colleagues as they used to. IT has changed the structure of the organization. Now emails are sent to a work colleague just 5 metres away when he could have been called over making them feel alienated. Technophobic employees with no proper computer training could feel concerned about their chances of getting future employment. Working in IT calls for a high degree of accuracy over a long period of time. A small lapse could lead to bad information being used to make a poor decision. This outcome can create stress on the employees responsible and be disastrous for the company. We now live in an information age so IT is here to stay. This brings extra pressure on IT employees to adapt to these improved technological changes within the organization sector.

Bhatt & Verma (2008), in the article “A Study of General Role Stress among IT/ITes Professionals in India” studied 120 IT/ITes professionals of age group 22-28 years and stated that IT/ITes industry in India brought a new work environment and sea changes in the employment trends. Service providers characterized this sector by adhering to strict deadlines set by their customers, working in different time zones, interdependency in teams, multitasking, increased interaction with offshore clients and extended work hours. IT/ITes professionals are constantly under pressure to deliver the services efficiently as well as to remain cost effective. The customer expectations in terms of skills required for processing jobs keeps changing and forces professionals to upgrade/adapt very fast to their demands. At times IT/ITes professionals are forced to change the entire paradigms amidst constant uncertainty and high risk. These working conditions lead to high stress in the professionals leading to growing attrition rate prevalent in this sector.

Wethington's article 'Job Stress, Relationship Effects' in Encyclopedia of Human Relationships Vol. 2 (2009), states that research on the impact of job stress on family relationships is exemplified by work-family conflict and there exist considerable evidence that effects of job stress is not only significant for women but equally for men's relationships. Since 1980, researchers have paid increasing attention to how the contagion of stress from the workplace to personal relationships may reduce wellbeing and it can be classified into 2 types- work spillover and work crossover. Work spillover is when job stress crosses boundary from work into another area of life. It can be either behavioral (paying less attention to spouse or children) or affective (feeling more impatient with them). Work crossover occurs when stressors experienced at workplace have an impact on the behavior or mood of a significant other person like on spouse or child. Research has also established that men are contributing more time to household work and to childcare and a more contemporary view on work-family conflict is that it is experienced when household breadwinners do not have enough time to fulfill their joint work and family commitments so men as well as women experiences its effects. The studies of job stress spill over and cross over have been greatly influenced by stress exposure theories, emphasizing not only exposure to job demands, but also situational and personal factors that influence how workers perceive and cope with those demands. Empirical findings state firstly, that chronic job stress is believed to cause fatigue, exhaustion, anger or withdrawal from household responsibilities and relationships affecting both men and women but differ in the impact. Women are more likely to take preventive actions against bringing job stress home than men by working fewer hours or avoiding demanding jobs. While men are more likely than women to expect family members to adjust to their job stress. Secondly, interpersonal conflict at work, job insecurity, lack of control over work demands and insufficient rewards relative to efforts can affect a worker's family. Daily job stressors of all types are associated with marital arguments and withdrawal, decreasing time spent with children thus affecting the quality of relationships negatively.

Zvonkovic & Peters's article on 'Employment Effects on Relationships' in Encyclopedia of Human Relationships Vol. 1 (2009), states that how employment affects relationships varies in respect to working hours, occupational prestige, physical location and other conditions of work place including supervision, flexibility and financial remuneration and what type of relationship (romantic, parental) taken into consideration. Rosabeth Moss Kanter tried to analyze how work employment affects family life. Firstly, work absorbs a person's time and attention even when they are at home. Absorbing occupations make demands on relationship partners making them unavailable to spouse or children or can even prevent the formation of satisfying relationships. Secondly, negative emotional spillover addresses how emotional experiences at work can be carried into the worker's after-work relationships. Stress at work has been associated with men's withdrawal from spousal interaction creating conflict in relationships. Thirdly, energy deficit refers to situations when work becomes boring or monotonous experience, leading the worker to feel lazy and depleted which in turn can result in not engaging oneself with others at home.

Coursolle & Sweeney in their article 'Work-Family Conflict' in Encyclopedia of Human Relationships Vol. 3 (2009), stated that work-family conflict is experienced because of incompatibility between the demands of work and family roles and is associated with individual level outcomes including reduced life satisfaction, reduced marital quality and emotional distress. Work-family conflict arises when the demands of work and family roles are perceived as interfering with one another. This concept originated from Robert L Kahn's theory of inter-role conflict and William J Goode's theory of role strain. A number of specific characteristics of work roles are associated with elevated perceptions of work-family conflict. For e.g. non-standard or inflexible work schedules, job stress, lack of autonomy or time pressure on the job, work role ambiguity and job dissatisfaction are generally associated with higher levels of work-family conflict. Some studies also find job insecurity, job involvement (viewing one's job as central to one's identity) and the number of hours worked per week is positively associated with work-family conflict.

Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) identified 3 potential sources of work-family conflict: 1) Time-based conflict stemming from the idea that resources of time and attention are finite, such that participation in one role limits the time and attention that can be devoted to another role. Work-family conflict results when these resources are insufficient to meet the demands of both work and family roles. 2) Strain based conflict arises when symptoms of stress associated with performance in one role (e.g. Tension, anxiety, fatigue) interferes with performance of the other. 3) Behavior based conflict occurs when behavior required in one role is incompatible with those required in another role (for e.g. aggressiveness and independence may be necessary for success at work, whereas nurturance and warmth may be expected at home).

Kahn and Byosiere (1992), subsumed the behavioral responses to job stress into five broad categories: 1) degradation/disruption of the work role itself (job performance, errors); 2) aggressive behavior at work (purposeful damage, spreading rumours); 3) flight from the job (absenteeism, turnover, early retirement); 4) degradation/disruption of other life roles (marriage, friendships) and 5) self-damaging behaviors (consumption of drug, alcohol, smoking).

Repetti & Wang in their article 'Work-Family Spillover' in Encyclopedia of Human Relationships Vol. 3 (2009) stated that chronic job stress affects family relationships through a negative impact on individual wellbeing. The subjective experience of job stress has been associated with self-reports of personal distress, such as depression that have then been linked to poorer marital and parent-child relations. One facet of job stress is the social climate or quality of social relationships at work. Individuals, who experience a non-cohesive or conflicting work atmosphere, seem to have more negative interaction with their family members (e.g. less affectionate and more angry easily). Couples, who report negative and unsupportive relationships at work, also experience more marital tension and arguments. Another aspect of job stress is time pressure and work overload which leads to feeling overwhelmed by and conflicted about their

work and family roles with greater marital tension and poorer marital adjustments. Focusing exclusively on the effects of short-term variations in experiences at work, work-to-family effects fall in 2 categories: 1) social withdrawal and 2) increase in anger and conflict. These consequences of job stress are found in studies using objective measure of daily job stressors. The social withdrawal response to job stress consists of short term decrease in the employed individual's usual level of social engagement at home. Like, coming home after a stressful day at work, he or she might speak less, express less positive and negative emotion, and be less interested and less involved in social interactions. The second type of response is when after more difficult or stressful days, the employed individual may express for anger and be more critical than usual. Researchers believe that job stressors leave cognitive, affective and physiological residue such that the employees' thoughts, feelings and biology are changed in the short-term by his or her experiences at work. Like, the employed person may return home at the end of the day preoccupied with worries about an impending deadline at work, or with lingering feelings of anger and physiological arousal because of an argument with a co-worker. The term spillover is the experience of a mood or a biological response in one setting that originated in a different setting. Negative mood and arousal caused by stressors experienced at work sometimes do persist when the employed person returns home and evidence suggests that those spillover effects account for some of the increase in anger and conflict.

DATA ANALYSIS

1.1 AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

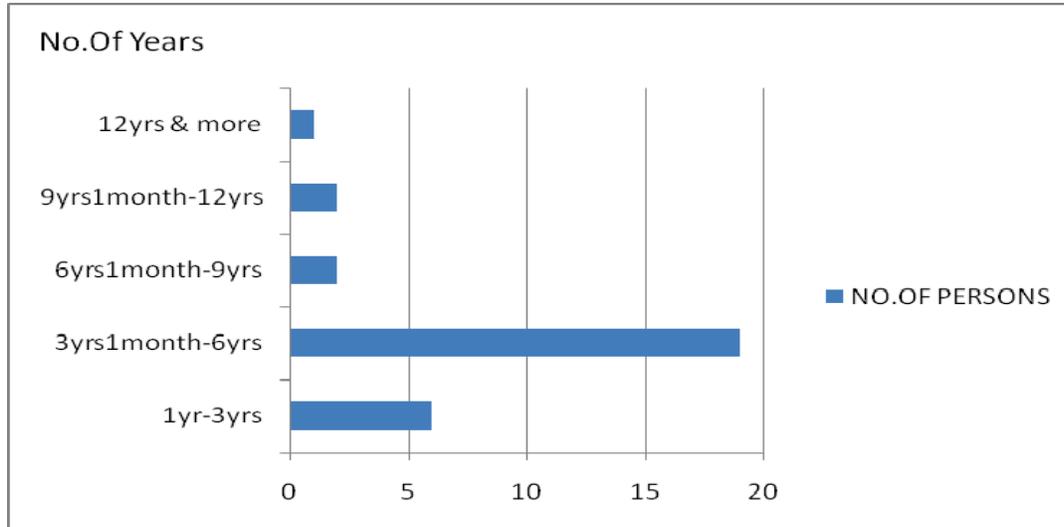
AGE-GROUP	NO.OF PERSONS	%
21-30	24	80%
31-40	6	20%
TOTAL	30	100%

Table No. 1.1 AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS depicts the % of I.T employees falling under the age-group of 21-30 years and 31-40 years. From the analysis of the table we get that, out of 30 respondents, 80% of the employees fall under the age-group of 21-30 years while 20% of the respondents fall under the age-group of 31-40 years. Hence majority of the I.T employees are in the age-group of 21-30 years.

1.2 WORK EXPERIENCE OF THE RESPONDENTS

NO.OF YEARS	NO.OF PERSONS	%
1yr-3yrs	6	20%
3yrs1month-6yrs	19	63.33%
6yrs1month-9yrs	2	6.67%
9yrs1month-12yrs	2	6.67%

12yrs & more	1	3.33%
TOTAL	30	100%



This Bar graph on WORK EXPERIENCE OF THE RESPONDENTS depicts the % of I.T professionals who have maximum years of work experience. We analyze that out of 30 respondents, 63.33% have work experience of 3years1month-6years, 20% have work experience of 1year-3years, and 6.67% of respondents have work experience of 6years1month-9years and 9years1month-12years followed by 3.33% of the employees having work experience of 12years and more. Hence majority of the I.T employees have work experience of 3years1month-6years.

2. When the respondents were asked about their work life. Most of the I.T professionals (13 out of 30 respondents) enjoy their work life and finds it to be a good learning experience even though there are lean and peak periods according to work pressure. 6 out of 30 respondents state that they have a hectic work life because of constantly meeting and negotiating with clients. Some of the respondents find their work to be challenging, interesting and very flexible in nature. Respondent 7 sometimes feels really energetic and enthusiastic about his work, but sometimes he does it because he has to do it depending on the work he is given to do. While respondent 26 and 30 are moderately satisfied with their work life.

3. Majority of the I.T professionals (10 out of 30 respondents) stated that sometimes they feel work pressure mainly at peak times during submission of a project or as a developer during the designing phase of the project. 9 respondents claim that work pressure always exists in private sector and that there is no leisure time during work. 6 out of 30 respondents state that there is tremendous work pressure and that when necessary they have to work whole night in front of the computer. Respondent 1 and 5 are of the opinion that there is enough breathing space and

nominal work pressure. While respondents 7 and 28 does not feel any work pressure. And Resp19 says there is work pressure but she can deal with it.

4. Most of the I.T professionals (9 out of 30 respondents) think that work pressure is mainly due to timely completion of work, sticking to tough deadlines and fulfillment of targets. 8 respondents were of the view that it varies with project based work especially in the initial phase and at the end of the project. Few of the respondents say that they do not feel any work pressure. While 3 respondents think it to be a mundane affair which increases during year-end. Respondent 9 and 12 states that work pressure is due to high-handedness of the team leader and that they are always answerable to the boss. Respondent 15 says work pressure is due to showing efficiency in work constantly while respondent 23 takes it as a challenge and thinks that it gets the best out of him so he does not complain about it. According to respondent 25 it is mostly due to balancing work at home and at workplace. And respondent 26 thinks it is due to less no. of working hands which makes her do multitasks within a fixed time frame.

5. WORK-RELATED STRESS AMONG RESPONDENTS

WORK-RELATED STRESS	NO.OF PERSONS	%
YES	15	50%
NO	3	10%
SOMETIMES	12	40%
TOTAL	30	100%

Majority of the I.T professionals (15 out of 30 respondents) feel work-related stress regarding completion of projects, long hours of work, change in the biological clock, no fixed weekly holidays, disproportionate distribution of work or too much work for less no. of employees. 12 out of 30 respondents sometimes feel work-related stress mainly regarding meeting deadlines, submitting projects, peer pressure at workplace, lagging behind colleagues and competition between co-workers or doing double labour at home and at office. While 3 respondents do not feel work-related stress at all.

6. Most of the I.T employees (22 out of 30 respondents) get opportunity to learn in office specially while dealing with clients, consulting with colleagues/project managers and through self learning, during various kinds training and development programmes and seminars, by reading online journals and visiting software sites because otherwise they will lag behind on up-to-date information and knowledge when in competition with other colleagues. Some of the

employees say that there is sufficient opportunity depending on projects and it is upon the employee to find time and learn as much as possible. While few other respondents say that there is not much opportunity to learn either due to huge work pressure or monotonously doing the same work.

7. Majority of the I.T professionals are little dissatisfied with their salary, moderately satisfied with the type of work they do in office, satisfied with their co-workers, moderately satisfied with the supervision and satisfied with other perks and facilities they get in their office.

8. Most of the I.T employees do not get much time to spend with their family after coming back home from office and wants more time either for their own selves for balancing home and work effectively and for studies and self improvement or to spend more time with their child and spouse. On weekends or on other holidays also sometimes they have to take client calls or work on computers. While there are some employees who spend approximately 6 to 7 hours with their family after coming back home from office or during holidays and are content with it.

9. Most of the I.T professionals miss their family or social life due to work responsibility either because of odd working hours, staying away from home town or due to time constraints. Some of the respondents miss family or social life at times mainly during peak work load while few employees do not miss at all because they either give priority to their family on weekends or can strike a balance between work and family.

10. Majority of the I.T professionals think that their work does interfere with their family-related activities due to too much of work pressure and working for long hours and they try to balance it out somehow. While some of the respondents say that work does not interfere with their family-related activities since they manages time and maintains a balance between the two. And respondent 14 is not sure as he does not do any family related activities.

11. Majority of the I.T professionals feel that there has been a change in social interaction with their relatives from earlier due to many factors like living in nuclear family, staying away from the home town, increase of responsibilities due to marriage, time constraints leading to prioritization of maintaining relations according to their own need and will, other options for entertainment and excessive work pressure. While some of the respondents do not feel any change in social interaction with their relatives from earlier because either they live in joint families or they balance their work and personal space or that it is only necessary to stand by the relatives during crisis and not otherwise meeting and chatting.

12. Most of the I.T professionals (14 out of 30 respondents) feel agitated at times due to work life pressure, normal office situation and mundane life hassles. Some of the respondents do not feel agitated at home due to work life pressure because they try to balance and keep themselves mentally calm. While few of the employees say that even if they feel agitated due to work-life pressure they do not show it at home. And respondent 24 and 26 feels agitated at home a lot.

13. Majority of the I.T professionals think that stress does results in ignoring their social life since being stressed out the whole week, they try to avoid occasions on weekends and take rest at home. Some of the employees think that stress does not result in ignoring their social life because they more or less try to balance both social and work life. Respondent 16 said that his social life is not much affected but it also depends on avoidable or unavoidable situations. Like if there is a marriage and he needs to attend it then he will have to even if he is stressed. Respondent 21 tries to be more involved in social life to de- stress himself.

MAIN FINDINGS

Thus on the basis of literature review and data analysis, the study revealed that

1) Majority of the IT workers thought that working constantly under pressure for long hours, facing competition from co-workers, showing efficiency and innovativeness through their project-based work and job insecurity all led to mental pressure and stress. Work- related stress does make them ignore and avoid their social life to some extent. Being stressed out the whole week, they tend to avoid occasions on weekend and feel like taking rest in their house.

2) Most of the respondents find time constraint and excessive work pressure as two major issues, leading them to prioritize in maintaining relations according to their own need and will. IT employees, both men and women, go through work-family conflict due to emotional spillover and crossover. This makes them less attentive and spends less time with their family and relatives, leading to sparse spousal interaction, social withdrawal and increase in anger and conflict.

CONCLUSION

Thus it is of sociological significance to note that all these work related issues which are specific to I.T sector job culture is creating an impact on the way these I.T employees are maintaining their family and social relationships, giving rise to fragile relations within family in this contemporary society.

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