

Women at Workplace: Safety and Self Defence

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Abstract: All over the world, the women fought many battles for her equality and gradually she became successful in it. Today, shoulder to shoulder with men, she is contributing towards advancing the economy of the country and the nation. She is moving out of the houses and working successfully even in remote areas. But still, when we talk in today's perspective, we cannot say that women are completely safe. In such a situation, the technique of self defence can help us to a large extent because due to the fear of any accident, we cannot leave work, we have to leave the house, but how can we protect ourselves on our own, this topic will be highlighted with this paper.

Keywords: Women, Workplace, Harassment, Self Defence, Awareness

In the present scenario women are underestimated than men all over the world. Even she has to fight for equality. From ancient times to the present times, women have been subjected to atrocities on this basis. In western countries, women were seen as just one object of consumption. But in Indian history, women have been given the place of goddess, not only women were considered superior, but women were also given a high position in the society.

The women had the right to choose a suitable groom for her, the Indian women had the right to education and even we get examples related to women's debates from religious texts. But gradually the thinking towards women in the society changed. With the foreign invasions in India the thinking towards women took a new turn. Atrocities on women started increasing and gradually discrimination against women started spreading in the society. But still there have been such great heroines in Indian history those who recognized their power by forgetting social discrimination. And when the time came, the war was also conducted efficiently.

In India from the ancient time, women were made to practice fighting skills from childhood. On the basis of fighting skill, she not only protected herself when the time came rather, the women used to stand up for the defence of her country or society. But unfortunately, the contribution of many such women from the pages of history was either removed or not even recorded under a deliberate trick.

In order to make women feel that she is able, she is a weak woman who cannot do any work without a man, so a large number of conspiracy to hide the valour of women was done. Women and men are the two wings of a social bird. Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing in the same way society cannot move forward without the help of either men or women, for this both have to move forward together.

All over the world, the women fought many battles for her equality and gradually she became successful in it. Today, shoulder to shoulder with men, she is contributing towards advancing the economy of the country and the nation. She is moving out of the houses and working successfully even in remote areas.

Today the women of the 21st century are striving for women empowerment. But even today the attitude of the society towards women has not changed. There are many such mischievous elements always hovering around us, who commit a crime just on seeing the opportunity.

Create Awareness

Employees, both male and female, should be educated about behavioural ethics and developing the right culture that supports female safety. Women employees have to be constantly trained on the PoSH Act and made aware of its constituents, powers and jurisdictions. This will help them realize if they have been at the receiving end of inappropriate behaviour and get them to raise objections to the appropriate authority. Regular surveys should be conducted in the organization for female employees to provide their feedback on the working environment.

Enforce a Zero-tolerance Policy

An organization's reputation improves globally when it implements and enforces strict policies for its employees. It speaks a lot about the organization. A well-defined policy that mentions strong disciplinary action for anyone found guilty should be circulated organization-wide.

3. Promote a Spirit of Entrepreneurship and Openness among Women

Enforcing policies and educational sessions are beneficial, but, a process or a system that promotes power equality in the organization can be introduced through which the occurrence of negative incidents will be reduced. Assigning dynamic roles and projects to women where they get more responsibility, recognition and power can boost their confidence and status within the organization. Global women leaders around the world can be invited to speak at seminars to motivate women and make them aware of how much they can achieve personally and professionally.

4. Set up a Strong Internal Committee

A credible Internal Committee that investigates thoroughly and recommends strong action should be set up.

The IC should be perceived as fair by both male and female employees and it should also be free of any biases towards gender, seniority of the employee etc.

5. Incorporate Educational Programs for Male Employees

Policies and committees to increase women safety are effective, but absolute safety can be established in an organization only when the root of the problem is fixed. This can be executed by continuous sensitization and training for male employees on how to conduct themselves when working with their female counterparts. A demonstration program will help them understand as to what constitutes

as harassment so that there won't be any ambiguity as to what appropriate workplace behaviour is. It should be run half-yearly, quarterly or monthly as per need and demonstrate scenarios where their actions, words and behaviour can be corrected and improved. A list of Dos and Don'ts, program guides and tests should also be made available for all male employees. Many instances of sexual harassment actually occur because of a lack of understanding of what constitutes inappropriate behaviour. Good training & sensitization programs can significantly help in bringing down instances of sexual harassment.

6. Provide Equipment and Safety Aids for Women

Strict measures can be put in place to prevent any kind of violence or harassment of women. However, it is also recommended that women should be trained to protect themselves when such an incident occurs.

Women have to be trained to immediately escalate any uncomfortable situation that they may find themselves in. Further, provide counselling sessions, life-coaching workshops specially structured for women in the organization's monthly regime. This can provide sensitive women with the confidence to speak up. Today's world is accustomed to the term Sexual harassment. Sexual Harassment can be identified as a behaviour. It can in general terms be defined as an unwelcome behaviour of sexual nature. Sexual harassment at workplace is a universal problem in the world whether it be a developed nation or a developing nation or an underdeveloped nation, atrocities and cruelties against women is common everywhere. It is a problem giving negative effect on both men and women. It is seen to be happening more with women gender as they are considered to be the most vulnerable section of the society these days. Sexual harassment therefore is a serious problem in the workplace and it has become one of those issues that receive a lot of negative attention.

What Is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment has been identified as a term which is difficult to define as it involves a range of behaviours. Efforts have been made at both national and international levels to define this term effectively. Often, the term is subjected to different interpretations. Some believe that it is better not to mingle with female colleagues so that one does not get embroiled in a sexual harassment complaint. The reality of sexual harassment incidents at the workplace is that there is more to worry about under-reporting, than people misusing the law.

Sexual Harassment includes many things:

1. Actual or attempted rape or sexual assault.
2. Unwanted deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering or pinching.
3. Unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or questions.
4. Whistling at someone.
5. Kissing sounds, howling and smacking lips.
6. Touching an employee's clothing, hair or body.
7. Touching or rubbing oneself sexually around another person.

Indian Constitution On Sexual Harassment-

Sexual harassment clearly violates the fundamental rights of a women to Equality under Article 14[2] and Article 15[3], her right to life under Article 21[4], and her right to practice any profession and carry on any occupation, trade or business[5], which includes a Right to safe environment free from sexual harassment. The Sexual Harassment At Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition And Redressal) Act, 2013-

The Sexual Harassment Act (Hereby called as an 'Act') was finally enacted in the year 2013 for the prevention of sexual harassment against women at workplace in the whole of India. The main objective of the act was protection of Women, prevention and redressal of sexual harassment complaints. Sexual harassment includes any one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behaviour (whether directly or by implication) namely:

1. Physical contact and advances; or
2. A demand or request for sexual favours; or
3. Making sexually colored remarks; or
4. Showing pornography; or
5. Any other unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature¹.

Why is Self-Defense Important?

- 1. Safety: The primary importance of self-defence is for women to be able to protect themselves against anything that's unacceptable in terms of social conduct.
- 2. Confidence: There is nothing more empowering than having the confidence to analyse a dangerous situation and take actions to overcome them effectively.
- 3. Empowerment: It empowers women to lead a healthy and fulfilling life by encouraging them to deal with stressful and dangerous situations independently.
- 4. Discipline: It teaches discipline which transfers over to all other areas of life. It helps women be calmer, understanding, flexible, gain body and mind control, be more responsive than reactive, more observant, and achieve cognitive awareness.
- 5. Reduces Dependency: Just because you're a woman, you shouldn't be asked to travel with a companion! That's what learning self-defense does – it makes you independent, helping you protect yourself in every situation.
- 6. Health and Fitness: Self-Defense programs are also a fun way of exercising and building a healthy body, thereby improving physical and mental health.

- 7. Reduces Discrimination/Sexism: Crimes against women can be curbed in a significant way when women are empowered to fight back against any discrimination and sexism.

Simple Techniques of Self-Defense

Memorize vulnerable spots to attack – it doesn't matter how big or strong the attacker is, these vulnerable spots are their weak points –

- Eyes
- Nose
- Ears
- Throat
- Knee
- Groin

1. Palm Strike:

If close to the attacker, a palm strike can be the best option for inflicting damage and getting away. Strike the assailant's nose or chin with the heel of your hand. Aim upward so that you're striking the bottom of his nose or chin. Breaking the nose in this way will be extremely painful for the attacker and will give you plenty of time to escape.

2. Kick the Groin:

A strike at the groin can end a fight immediately. Stand firm in the direction of the attacker with your dominant leg (the one you'll use to kick) behind you. Then with all the speed and power, engaging your hip muscles and quads, kick your leg straight out, leaning slightly behind to ensure a balance. If the attacker is closer, you can use your knee to attack the groin.

3. Ear Slap:

Retaining a surprise element is key to successfully tackling the attacker with a ringing ear slap! When confronted, open your palms at the side of your waist and distract the offender with a question like 'What do you want?' or 'What did I do?'. Then in a swift move, cup your hand and slam your palms into the opponent's ears. A well-placed ear slap is sufficient to knock out or disorient the attacker, giving you time to choose between fight or flight.

4. Wrist Release:

When an attacker grabs your wrist and tries to drag you, don't resist the grip. Rather, you can break away from the hold in one simple movement: Step aside from the line of attack and trap the attacker's hand by a rotational switch placing your fingers over his wrist, locking the wrist, and then twisting the opponent's arm, followed by an elbow spiral. The movement requires no power on your part. You don't have to be stronger than your attacker.

Safety tips to avoid a confrontation:

1. Stay in well-lit areas. If you park during the daytime, consider what the area will look like when you return at night. Make sure there is ample lighting.
2. It is handy to attach a whistle to your keychain to frighten potential attackers and get help quickly.
3. Make sure your cell phone is charged for emergency calls.
4. See who's at the door before you open it. Look through a window or a keyhole to make sure it's safe.
5. Wear your jacket over your purse, so your valuables are less exposed.ⁱⁱ

Notable Organizations and Movements Started by Women

1. Blank Noise:

The best self-defense strategies and techniques work equally well for men and women, but let's face it: Women really need them because they're assaulted more often than men. Statistics indicate that one in three women will be the victim of some type of violent attack in her lifetime. Women also endure more incidents of verbal and sexual harassment. Although most women's self-defense courses focus on skills for quickly and efficiently destroying an attacker, self-defense training also should include methods for preventing a confrontation from turning physical in the first place. Learning how to steer away from a threat may not sound as exciting as ripping out an attacker's heart, but as they say in every beginner's class, evading an attack is almost always superior to blocking an attack.

1. TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

Too many women enrol in a self-defense class after they've been assaulted. When they recount the incident, they often say the same thing: "I had this bad feeling, but I told myself not to be paranoid," or "I knew I shouldn't have gone, but I didn't want to hurt his feelings."

If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't safe — that's the bottom line. Many women have been conditioned to ignore the little voice that tells them trouble is coming. Your instinct is the best detector of danger. The next time you hear that little voice, listen to what it's saying.

2. PRACTICE TARGET DENIAL

Don't make yourself an accessible target. The outcome of a battle is often determined before the first blow is struck. When you have the opportunity to escape from a situation before it turns bad, take it.

If an approaching person gives you the creeps, walk to the other side of the street. If an elevator door opens and the guy standing inside makes the hair on the back of your neck stand up, wait for the next elevator. Those actions aren't cowardly; rather, they're a smart way to eliminate danger.

3. PRESENT YOURSELF WITH CONFIDENCE

Be aware of the message your body sends to those around you. Like animals, human predators target those they consider the weakest or most vulnerable. Attackers search for women who appear frightened, confused or distracted. They look for women who walk with their head down and their hands stuffed in their pockets, or perhaps one who's overburdened with packages or distracted by children.

Remember that attackers do not want to bait a fight; they want an easy mark. By walking with confidence and awareness — looking around and keeping your head up and shoulders back — you'll dramatically reduce the likelihood of becoming a target in the first place.

4. SET STRONG VERBAL BOUNDARIES

Good verbal skills are an effective self-defense tool, one you're likely to use more frequently and successfully than any physical technique. When a predator engages you in conversation, he's actually "interviewing" you to see if you'll make a good victim. An experienced attacker is practiced at using his words to freeze you with fear, thus reducing the chance that you'll try to defend yourself.

Although an aggressive verbal confrontation can be terrifying, you have to be strong enough to show the attacker he's picked the wrong victim. If you stand tall, remain calm and respond confidently and assertively, you'll probably "fail" his interview. The power of your voice alone can cause him to seek an easier target.

5. MAINTAIN A NON-CONFRONTATIONAL STANCE

In a self-defense situation, one of your secret weapons is the element of surprise. Most predators feel confident that you won't defend yourself, and you should capitalize on that misconception. If you assume a martial arts stance, it immediately tells the attacker that you know how to fight. In response, he's likely to be more aggressive.

Instead, use a confident, relaxed stance in which your hips and shoulders are forward, your arms are bent, and your hands are up and open. This conciliatory posture may mislead the attacker into thinking you're willing to comply. If it becomes necessary for you to strike, he probably won't be prepared for it.

6. KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE

Everyone has a comfort zone or personal space. When an aggressor enters that zone, you're uncomfortable because you know you'd need that space if you had to fight back. When you're in an adrenalized state, you need a quarter of a second to react to an assault. This "reactionary gap" should be anticipated when you think about your comfort zone.

You should try to maintain approximately one to one-and-a-half arm lengths between yourself and the aggressor. If he starts closing in, you need to use verbal boundaries. If he still doesn't back off, it's time to get physical.

7. USE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

Most predators assume you cannot defend yourself. Therefore, you should take advantage of the element of surprise. If you're engaged in a conversation, you have the opportunity to use verbal skills and a non-confrontational stance to entice the aggressor into dropping his guard. If you're grabbed from behind, you must respond immediately. In either case, putting up a fight can surprise him and increase your chance of landing the first blow.

8. KEEP YOUR TECHNIQUES SIMPLE

One of the main effects of an adrenaline release is the loss of fine motor skills. That means simple gestures such as unlacing your fingers or pulling your hands out of your pockets can become much more challenging. And the odds of your executing a beautiful joint lock or high kick rapidly dwindle.

No matter which martial art you practice, learn techniques that are basic and stick with them in a self-defense scenario. I recommend the following:

- Heel-palm strike. Hitting with an open hand reduces the chance that you'll injure your hand and enables you to more easily attack from a non-confrontational stance in which you're holding your hands up and open while you set verbal boundaries. Then, if your attacker steps into your comfort zone — bang! — he gets it right in the face.
- Eye strike. The eye strike can be used in a standing or prone position. Often, simply driving your fingers toward your assailant's eyes will cause him to recoil. Even if you don't make contact, it creates space to set up a more devastating blow.
- Knee strike. This technique is recommended over any type of standing kick because it is easy to use and can be delivered while you stay centered and close to the ground — which is crucial when you're adrenalized. A knee to the groin can end a fight immediately.

9. DON'T PANIC IF YOU'RE KNOCKED DOWN

More often than not, women end up on the ground when they're assaulted. The good news is that most assailants are not skilled ground fighters; they're bullies who are used to knocking women down and forcing them to comply. Remember that the heel-palm strike and eye strike work well on the ground. It's a good idea to have a few kicks that work there, as well.

In particular, the side thrust kick functions in a variety of scenarios. If you're on the ground and your assailant is standing, it gives you an advantage because your legs are longer than his arms. That means he'll have to expose his body to your kick if he wants to reach you.

Knee strikes also function effectively on the ground. While you struggle with your attacker, he probably won't protect his groin. Once you see an opening, get close enough to strike upward into his crotch.

10. FOLLOW THROUGH

The fight isn't over until the threat no longer exists. Therefore, you must be 110-percent committed to the battle. If you fight back and then pause, you give up the initial advantage you gained from using the element of surprise.

Once your opponent knows you can fight, it becomes more difficult for you to prevail. To survive, you must continue your barrage until it's safe to stop striking and escape.ⁱⁱⁱ

Self-defence, especially for women, is of utmost importance in the kind of the world we live in today. Women, usually referred as the weaker sex, are considered easier targets. In a country like India where the cases of gender violence are on rise, out of which many go unreported, self-defence for women has become a necessity more than ever.

Society's Approach Towards Crime Against Women

Rape, molestation, kidnapping and murder are the most common forms of crime against women in India. The women in India are also vulnerable to acid attacks and eve-teasing. The mindset of the people, including the victim and the spectator, is to ignore and just let it go. But, what we, as the responsible citizens of an independent country, fail to realise is that these instances of harassment can flare up into other bigger heinous crimes against women. And that is when the importance of learning self-defence techniques for women is felt.

Various studies have shown that the criminals tend to choose their targets when they (the potential victim) are unaware of the surroundings. Hence, it is time that each woman became vigilant and totally aware of the surroundings.

The women should be aware of the strategies to be adopted under different adverse circumstances. For example, if you're alone at home during such an attack, you should hurriedly run to kitchen to find chili powder and knives to use them as weapons.

Here is the list of possible measures that women should take to safely steer away from danger:

1. Note down the number of the cab when travelling alone.
2. Enrol themselves for self-defence classes and learn several techniques to physically fight the attacker.
3. Opt for trainings in basic karate, kickboxing, Israeli krav-maga, and traditional stick fighting (using lathi).

Institutes in India Developing Awareness for Self-defence Among Women

Several institutes like DARE (Defence against rape and eve teasers) by Institute of Martial Science in Mumbai, Smile Foundation and Blank Noise work towards women self-defense awareness. Stressful situations evoke a fight, flight or freeze response. Self-defence skills prepare you to fight rather than freeze and such organisations are the place to learn how to put up an impressive fight against the attacker. Most of these organisations host workshops, road events and demonstrations to increase awareness about street violence.

Some Quick Tips & Tricks for Self-defence

Pretend to be submissive at first and fight back when the attacker is off-guard. Stay fit enough to run fast. Keep a check when walking on the road to avoid groping or chain-snatching from behind. Keep your purse to your front and walk paying full attention around. Try avoiding high-heeled footwear when you have to walk a long distance and in unknown territories. Say out 'STOP' in a loud and aggressive voice when need be but avoid using swear words or threats. Though the self-defence training might not be easily available everywhere, women can make up for this by being updated about the gender violence issues across newspapers, television and magazines. Also, the women in smaller cities can learn self-defence techniques from websites which have proper training content and tutorials.^{iv}

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