

A Study of Understanding of Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Prohibition And Redressal) Act 2013 Amongst Working Women in Ahmedabad District.

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Abstract:

Women are the backbone of our society and play a massive role in shaping the future of any nation. They face alarming levels of violence every day. Globally, one in three women experiences abuse and harassment. To fight this, India introduced The sexual harassment of women at work place (prevention, prohibition and redressal) Act 2013. to protect women in all jobs, including interns and domestic helpers. Government of India has introduced SHE BOX portal as one stop solution for all questions and queries regarding sexual harassment. The total number of registered companies on SHE BOX portal are 1,81,936 and in that 1,05,936 are government organizations. Whereas only 75,984 are private companies.

This research paper explores women's views, interpretations and understanding of sexual harassment of woman at workplace across the public, private, and unorganized sectors. Different workplaces bring different challenges, but women in unorganized jobs are by far the most vulnerable, mostly because they do not know their legal rights. This topic is rarely talked about openly. By shedding light on it, this study aims to build real awareness and serve as a useful resource for students, teachers, and professionals working to make workplaces safer.

Key words: Internal committee, POSH, Sexual Harassment, Women

Introduction:

Sexual violence and misconduct targeting women are deeply rooted societal issues that continue to escalate, affecting victims of all age groups, from infants to working professionals. Crucially, perpetrators are frequently individuals familiar to the victims. Recognizing this global crisis, the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference categorized violence against women as a direct violation of fundamental human rights that severely hinders social progress, equality, and peace.

In India, the fight against workplace harassment gained momentum following the tragic 1992 case of Bhanwari Devi, a social worker in Rajasthan. After she intervened to stop the child marriage of an infant, the aggrieved family members retaliated. Local authorities dismissed her complaints, and she was subsequently gang-raped. This injustice prompted the NGO Vishaka and various women's rights organizations to file a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court, demanding that a harassment-free workplace be recognized as a core constitutional right.

This legal battle resulted in the historic *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997) ruling. Relying on constitutional protections of equality and life (Articles 14, 19, and 21), the Supreme Court instituted the "Vishaka Guidelines" to protect employees until formal laws were enacted. Decades later, this led to the passage of "The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013." Today, legal remedies are divided into two distinct spaces:

- **Professional Settings:** The POSH Act 2013 Act protects all female workforce participants, including full-time staff, daily wage earners, interns, and domestic helpers in public or private sectors.

- **Domestic and Public Spaces:** Incidents occurring at home or in public are prosecuted under criminal laws, specifically section 75 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Despite these legal frameworks, societal pressures cause many women to normalize harassment as an unavoidable aspect of daily life.

Meaning and concept of sexual harassment:

As per the section 2 (n) of “The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 the term “sexual harassment” includes any one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behaviour (whether directly or by implication) namely: - physical contact and advances, demand or request for sexual favours, To make sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature. Most of the women in India avoid speaking against sexual harassment. They feel like there is something wrong in them if they become victims of sexual harassment. In many research studies in India, it is found that most of the offenders are known to the victims of sexual harassment. Under section 4 of “The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. The formation of Internal Committee -IC is compulsory in all organizations whether public or private sectors.

Subject selection:

In organizations various policies are framed, conveyed and implemented properly but implementation part in “sexual harassment” is still seems deficient in many organizations. This subject is still underrated and not ethically permissible by the society to be discussed in public. The purpose behind selecting this subject is to study the understanding and interpretations of women regarding sexual harassment and their experiences and observations at their workplace. It was one of the major objectives to study the implementation of “The Sexual harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. It was also aimed to know the role of employers in implementing the policy of “Sexual Harassment” at workplace.

Objectives of the research

1. To study awareness of “Sexual harassment” of women at workplace.
2. To investigate the attitude of women towards “Sexual harassment”.
3. To examine the support system in an organization for redressal of “Sexual harassment” issues.
4. To study the work culture which encourages women for more participation.

Sample selection: Snow ball sampling technique was used in this research. The subject sexual harassment is very sensitive, hence snow ball technique was found appropriate to get more respondents.

Sample size: The total number of respondents were sixty, in which fifty respondents were from organized sector which includes public and private sector and ten respondents were from unorganized sector. Majority of the respondents were above 20 years and below 40years of age.

Research method: Survey method was conducted to collect the data.

Key research interpretations:

This research paper focuses on workplace sexual harassment awareness, experiences, reporting tendencies, and institutional redressal mechanisms in various organizations. The data reveals a highly literate demographic with a strong foundational awareness of the concept of sexual harassment. Even though people are highly aware of workplace harassment, it still happens far too often. The most common problems are unwanted touching and forced physical advances. Right after that, verbal harassment is a major issue. This includes people making dirty jokes, using sexual remarks, and demanding sexual favors. Finally, written harassment and forcing employees to look at pornography happen less often, but they are still very serious parts of this widespread problem.

When analyzing reporting behaviors and support structures, a distinct psychological pattern emerges. Victims demonstrate a strong preference for seeking informal support networks over formal or familial ones, leaning heavily on friends for emotional disclosure. Confiding in colleagues or immediate family members is less common, while spouses are the least preferred confidants. This hesitation to engage in wider disclosure is deeply rooted in structural and social anxieties. The primary deterrent to open reporting is the fear of losing social prestige and damaging one's societal image, career-related anxieties etc. Specifically the threat of career stagnation or professional retaliation and the fear of ongoing mental or emotional abuse by the perpetrator severely hinder formal reporting. Institutional mechanisms designed to combat this issue show a clear gap between policy existence and actual efficacy. While a clear majority of respondents are aware of the Internal Committee (IC) and confirm its physical presence within their organizations, a significant institutional deficit remains.

Majority of the respondents were satisfied with the working of their internal committees. IC's role is very crucial in organizations as they have to implement POSH policy effectively in organization and keep on working continuously to make the organization safe work place for every women in the organization. More than half of the respondents have replied that their organization regularly organizes training programs on POSH.

The supreme court of India recently has given directives on strict POSH compliance. The court mandated nationwide compliance survey. SHE BOX portal registration mandated by Government of India. It is necessary for all organizations to consider POSH compliance as ethical responsibility and should take proactive steps to keep the workplace safe for all female employees.

Major findings:

1. In this research around 68% of respondents have responded that they have not faced sexual harassment.
2. 68% of the respondents have accepted that women keep such harassment secret because of social prestige followed by fear of career stagnation and mental and physical abuse at workplace.
3. More than 83% of the respondents were educated, in which 63% were post graduate and above and around 20% of women were graduate.
4. Majority of the respondents were working in private sector followed by government sector and unorganized sector. So the responses received on the subject "sexual harassment" might present the situation of private sector.
5. More than 86% of the respondents have responded that they are aware of the term "sexual harassment"
6. Around 88% of the respondents have replied that they consider physical contact and advances as "sexual harassment" which means that majority of the respondents are not aware about the different types of "sexual harassment" covered under "The Sexual harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.
7. More than 55% of respondents have faced physical contact and advances in their professional life.
8. Around 50% of the respondents preferred to discuss such issues with their friends followed by family and colleagues.
9. Around 86% of the respondents have replied that, women should raise their voice against "sexual harassment"
10. Around 60% of the respondents who are working in private jobs or public sector jobs and they were aware about Internal Committee and 40% of the respondents who were working in unorganized sector or self-employed were not aware about Internal Committee OR Local Committee.
11. Around 63% of the respondents were having IC in their respective organizations. Around 37% of the respondents have replied they don't have IC/LC these respondents are from unorganized sector.
12. Around 56% of the respondents have replied that their organization organizes awareness programs regarding sexual harassment whereas around 44% of the respondents have replied that their organization does not conduct awareness programs.
13. More than 55% of the respondents believe that strong and effective sexual harassment policy plays an important role in preventing sexual harassment at work place.

Conclusion:

This study highlights a critical paradox in workplace harassment reporting. While 68% of respondents denied experiencing sexual harassment, an identical 68% acknowledged that victims maintain secrecy to protect their social prestige. This correlation strongly suggests that fear of stigma or identity exposure may artificially suppress self-reported victimization rates.

A stark disparity emerges between employment sectors. For the ten respondents representing the unorganized sector, the environment is significantly more precarious due to a total lack of formal institutional channels. While organized workers benefit from structured complaint mechanisms, the Local Committees (LCs) legally mandated by the POSH Act for the unorganized sector remain largely non-existent. Furthermore, the data reveals a gap in legal literacy. Over 80% of women recognized physical advances as harassment, yet lacked awareness regarding other prohibited non-physical behaviors. Crucially, over 55% reported experiencing unwelcome physical touch during their careers. Globally, WHO estimates indicate 30% of women endure lifetime violence, while the Indian Bar Association reports that 70% of workplace harassment remains unreported. Positively, most respondents agreed women must speak out, emphasizing that women seek fundamental gender equality rather than extraordinary societal status.

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