

# Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace

## Executive Summary:

The problem of sexual harassment of women in the workplace is an age-old problem. With the entry of more women in the work force of a country due to severe economic constraints, the problem has increased.

The country has approximately 50 crore women, but ironically, there are no statutory laws on sexual harassment. Right now, the guidelines passed by the Supreme Court of India in "Vishakha and others VS State of Rajasthan", 1998 and the Apparel Export Promotion Council case are declared to be the law of the land and binding to all concerned until comprehensive legislation is enacted for the purpose. The Supreme Court formulated certain guidelines for WHWP. According to these guidelines, a Women's Complaints Committee should be constituted for all women working in government, semi-government, private, and public sectors. A woman should head this committee; have fifty percent of its member's women, and there should be involvement of an NGO. The constitution of such committees in all offices, universities, colleges and hospitals has been made mandatory. This empirical research was aimed at finding out the extent of sexual harassment at work and what kind of redress mechanism is available for the same.

## Contents of the paper.

Bhawaridevi, a social worker in Rajasthan Government's Women's Development programme faced repeated sexual harassment in 1997 for trying to prevent a child marriage in an upper caste household. Bhawaridevi became a rape victim while discharging her official duty. Thus it was sexual harassment at the workplace. The law here was helpless as there was no legal provision for punishment. Several Women's organizations joined hands together to file Public Interest Litigation against Rajasthan Government in the Supreme Court. This case is known as "Vishakha and others VS State of Rajasthan". The case focuses on the nature of sexual harassment, its type, extent, reactions and its effects on working women. It also included questions on legal awareness, grievance redress cell and training in self-defense.

## Approach to the contents of the paper.

An empirical study conducted at Nagpur with a non-probability, purposive sampling design, and total sample of 350 working women.

## Research method.

The city of Nagpur is the universe of the study. The universe refers to the workingwomen in Nagpur particularly engaged in clerical, nursing, executive, managerial and professional service occupations

and maidservants. Other University Women's Associations were to join in this research work. Their work of data analysis is still in progress and will be merged with this study at a later stage. Considering the research topic, the researchers resorted to non-probability, purposive sampling design. This purposive sample includes female employees of all categories that are I, II, III and IV. The total sample size is 350, out of which 128 are from the government sector and 222 from the private sector. Considering the specific objectives of the empirical study, the Interview Schedule was considered to be the best method for collecting reliable and factual information. The Interview Schedule was designed which included both open ended and close ended questions. After data collection, 350 interview schedules were coded. A master sheet was prepared. Statistical analyses of compiled data were done and simple tables and cross tables based on variables were prepared. Frequency and percentage were taken out.

#### Outcome of the research project.

The main purpose of this study was to understand the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace. A clear perspective emerges out of the research study that is that sexual harassment of working women does exist in our workplaces. Women working in the private sector are more vulnerable to sexual harassment due to lack of any redress mechanism. The study further shows that the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court of India have not been followed. Women's Complaints Committees have not been set up at most of the workplaces. Responses indicated that awareness of the laws and the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court of India is very poor. Educational awareness programmes are not conducted by the organized and unorganized sectors. 27.71% of workingwomen said that they themselves or their colleagues have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. 10.28% of the respondents in the age group 26-35 were frequently harassed. 19.42% of the workingwomen in the age group 36-45 were sometimes harassed. 13.42% in the annual income group Rs. 52,000/- to 92,000/- were frequently harassed. No penalty is given to the offender.

#### Suggestions.

1. In order to seek free information from respondents, there should be a change in nomenclature. It should be called Gender Harassment instead of sexual harassment.
2. 11.82% respondents said that women's organizations should provide this security.
3. 89.14% women felt that laws can do little unless present values change.
4. 35.14% graduate respondents felt that a separate court to deal with cases of sexual harassment in the workplace will make workingwomen more confident.
5. Most of the respondents opined that enhancement in moral strength of women is necessary.
6. Training in self-defense is desirable for all workingwomen.
7. A strong support system is necessary to lend moral support to victimized women.
8. More awareness of laws is necessary along with knowledge of rights.
9. Women's organizations and NGOs should play an active role in the redress of this problem.

10. More educational and awareness programmes should be organized by the work set up and NGOs.