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# Sexual Harassment Act and its Awareness at Workplace: An Analysis

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#### Abstract:

Our society has witnessed the changes over centuries in the social customs and status of women in India, right from traditional thinking where the duty of a women is merely to assist her husband to efficiently perform his duties and to carry on pedigree by giving birth to children and to look after them, to the present era where women are independent in taking their decisions. All thanks to international labor organization for it who started the initiative to improve the plight of women and upliftment of the status of women today up to this level. At present, around 30% of women are working, which is though a less number but their increasing participation in workforce leads us to think about their safety and security at workplace. As article 14 and article 21 of Indian constitution provides fundamental right of gender equality and life with dignity to all. Government in order to ensure it has taken many steps like implementation of sexual harassment act, 2103 but still such cases of workplace sexual harassment at workplace are increasing, the problem here is of AWARENESS.

In the introductory section this paper aims to reveal the present status of women in our society and role of international labor organization in upliftment of their status and safety at workplace, the second part deals with government measures taken against sexual harassment at workplace, the third part deals with the employer's perception regarding sexual harassment act, fourth section deals with awareness level among employees regarding this act and in the fifth section the relation of education level and designation on awareness of women.

Keywords: Sexual harassment at workplace, International labor organization, Fundamental right.

## 1. Introduction

The modern senario of women employment at workplace has completely altered from that of earlier decades. Gone are the days when women were considered no match for all powerful men in the world. The male conquered world was always reluctant to even admit the fact that women were as good as men on parameters of hard work, intelligence quotient and leadership traits. But today women across the world have overcome all negative philosophies and have proved themselves beyond doubt in all spheres of life including the most complex and burdensome world of entrepreneurship like Kiran Mazumdar, Indra Nooyi etc. Today, we see women are earning handsome amount of money equalant to men but few decades back it was not a common practise. Entry of women into the professions like law and medicine was delayed in most countries due to women being denied entry to universities and qualification for degrees in 18<sup>th</sup> century. The situation started improving with many ILO reforms, the conventions and recommendations many of which are ratified by India.

Convention No.	Convention	Date	Status
C100	Equal remuneration,1951	30 <sup>th</sup> Nov 1954	In force
C111	Discrimination(Employment& Occupation), 1958	3th June 1960	In force
C004	Night work (women),1919	14 <sup>th</sup> July 1921	In force
C019	Equality of treatment (Accident Compensation), 1925	30 <sup>th</sup> Sep 1931	In force
C045	Underground work (women), 1935	25 <sup>th</sup> March 1938	In force
C089	Night work (women), 1948	27 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1950	In force
C118	Equality of treatment (Social Security), 1962	19 Aug 1964	In force

Table 1: Convention related to women: By ILO (International labor organization)

These above mentioned conventions regarding women have been ratified by India, which helped a lot in upliftment of status of women. Since then we can see a turning point in India's labor workforce participation.

According to a survey, The Globe: The Battle for female Talent in Emerging Markets, 2010, "42% of highly educated Indian women earn as much as or more than their spouses."

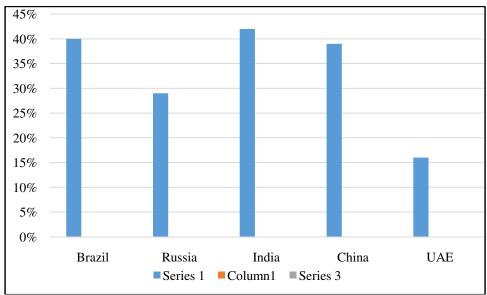


Figure 1: Percentage of Women Earning Equal or More than Their Spouse (The Globe: The battle for female talent in emerging markets, 2010)

The above bar chart shows us that how keenly women are competing with males and joining labor workplace. As according to the graph depicted above, 42% of Indian women are earning more or equal to their spouse. This shows active participation of women in workforce than earlier times.

Similarly, according to latest data, around 30% of women are working, which is though a less number but their increasing participation in workforce leads us to think upon their security and safety at workplace.

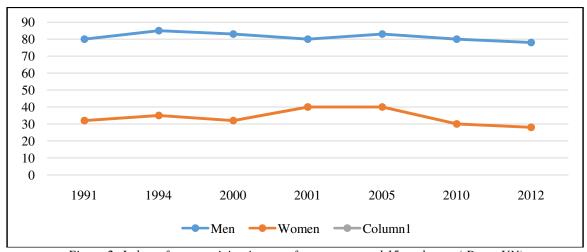


Figure 2: Labour force participation rate for persons aged 15+, by sex ( Data: UN)

The above graph shows the participation of women in workforce. It is evident from these facts that women have come out of their houses in19th century and competed with men for work. But at the same time, it cannot be ignored that from few years the participation of women is continuously decreasing as it can be seen in the above graph. As compared to other countries the participation of women in labor work force is very less, as India is placed 11<sup>th</sup> from bottom in female labor force participation (ILO, 2012). According to World Economic Forum, India ranked 124 out of 136. Dr. Man Mohan Singh said on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb 2012 that women is one of the most under-utilized resource in our country. If female workforce participation rate increases, India can certainly increase its GDP. There may be many reasons behind decreasing workforce participation rate of women like increased attendance in higher education, higher household income etc. (kapsos, Steven et al., 2014) but here we need to emphasis on the fact that the concern for safety and insecurity of women regarding sexual harassment at workplace is also considered to be one of the reasons behind it. Survey conducted in 2014 by Nimbuzz reveals, "Indian women don't feel safe at their workplace." The survey, Pulse of the Nation, discloses that 47% of women feel their top issue at work is sexual harassment vis-à-vis inequality in pay and unequal opportunities." The report also reveals that even men feel that for women, sexual harassment at workplace is most common problem, as "51% of

male colleagues feel that their female colleagues have faced sexual harassment in one way or the other", according to the same survey.

As a survey on "Gender Dimensions at Work and Employment-A Case of Sexual Harassment" was released by V VGiri National Labour Institute. According to this survey, in 2016, nine of ten married women are harassed in NCR workplaces.

According to Supreme Court of India, it includes such unwelcome sexually determined behavior as: a) physical contact and advances; b) a demand or request for sexual favors; c) sexually colored remarks; d) showing pornography; e) any other unwelcome physical verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual harassment.

# 2. Legal Measures against Sexual Harassment at Workplace

It cannot be said that government turned a blind eye towards this issue. There are the landmark judgments of the court that motivated women to register complaints as compared to earlier (anshularbaz, 2011). Like the apparel Export Promotion Council vs. A.K Chopra, Mrs. Rupan Deol Bajaj vs. Kanwar Pal Singh Gill and the path breaking case Vishaka& others vs. State of Rajasthan & others. When fuming workers group Vishaka supported Bhanwari Devi and filled a litigation in Supreme Court of India. Then it was realized that there should be some domestic law to protect women at workplace, which lead to the vishaka guidelines 1997. Cases like this, violate Right to equality and shows gender discrimination to great extent. Due to many flaws in these guidelines, need was felt for addition of more clauses in it. As sexual harassment violates fundamental right under article 14 and 15 of Indian constitution, therefore to curb it sexual harassment at workplace (Prevention, prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 came into being, in which Verma committee played a key role, to protect women against sexual harassment at workplaces as to encourage women to participate in labor workforce. The act adopted the definition of sexual harassment from Vishaka judgment as discussed above. Further, this act includes key points like constitution of internal complaint committee, complaint procedure, time within which action is to be taken, right of aggrieved to conceal identity, claim compensation etc.

As sexual harassment against a women is a criminal act and Indian penal code,1860 also deals with certain sections against harassment and punishment for the same i.e.

- > Sec 294: Obscene acts and songs If any obscene act is done it public or any song with objectionable words is sung in public place with an imprisonment which may extend to 3 months or a fine or both.
- Sec 354: Assault or criminal force to women with intent to outrage her modesty If anyone assaults a women or uses criminal force with the intent to outrage her modesty he may be punished with an imprisonment which may extend to 2 years or a fine or both.
- Sec 509: Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a women Whosoever utters objectionable words, gestures heard or noticed by a women so as to insult her shall be punished for a term which may extend to 1 year or fine or both.

So, we can say that at present domestic law is there to tackle such cases of sexual harassment at workplace. But all this seems to have a marginal impact on their participation. The question is in spite of the measures taken up by government why we fail to protect ourselves from harassment at workplace.

According to survey of times of India in 2012, it was revealed that 7 out of 10 women have been harassed in one or other way and 70% of men said they have themselves seen a women being harassed and only 5% of them register a complaint against such cases. This shows that harassment at workplace still plays an evil role which needs to be tackled for the growth of our economy. Though, it cannot be said that its implementation is not to be questioned but the severe problem which lies here is of AWARENESS. Despite of women being well educated and occupying good designations they are not aware about their fundamental rights and this is where the problem lies and need to be resolved. First we need to know about our own rights before blaming government for not taking appropriate measures for the same.

"Blame doesn't empower you. It keeps you stuck in a place you don't want to be because you don't want to make the temporary, but painful decision, to be responsible for the outcome of your own life's happiness."

- Shannon L. Alde

#### 3. Employer's Perspective Regarding Sexual Harassment Act

It is equally important to know about the employer's perception regarding sexual harassment at workplace because they are the one who have to actually implement the laws in their organizations. According to the statistics and surveys it has been found that though government has made it mandatory to implement sexual harassment act at their workplace, many of the private organizations are violating it by its non-implementation even if they are aware of its penal consequences.

A survey by Economic Times in 2015 showed that 97% of organizations are not aware of the law, its implementation and its consequences. Likewise, a survey conducted by EY Fraud Investigation & Dispute Services titled 'Reining in sexual harassment at the workplace.' of 120 senior executives across multi-national and Indian companies provided further details regarding employer's awareness of the Act. The survey found that thirty-five percent of respondents were unaware of the criminal penalties for noncompliance of the law relating to how internal complaint committees should be constituted (International labor and employment law committee Newsletter). These facts show us the ground reality of situation as to how employers themselves are not aware of the laws and their implementation and even where employers are aware about it they are reluctant to give a thought to it and try to escape from its implementation until and unless someone questions them. "It has been pointed out, that in light of the increased number of complaints since the passing of this Act, the employers feel discouraged from hiring women all together. More and more employers not prefer the unnecessary risk of any such allegations and would in fact hire a male employee. This could result a great step backward in providing equal opportunity to women, ultimately hurting them in a perverse manner." (Research paper on critical analysis of sexual harassment act: Gujarat National Law University). In contrast, in government organizations where the laws are implemented as per the

rules mandated by government but are not known to the employees, neither any efforts are made to make employees aware of it i.e. the work is only for the sake of paper work and no intentions to improve the actual situation.

A survey in India stated that the biggest problem was not merely poor policies but lack of trained human power to handle cases of workplace sexual harassment due to absence of commitment of industry heads to accord due importance to issues of workplace sexual harassment in their organizational agendas (Sharma, 2010). NCW data of 2015 shows that the overall awareness among Indian companies of how to handle sexual harassment cases at workplace is very poor. Workplace will become safe for women only when employers not only articulate policies on sexual harassment but rather implement them in letter and spirit with an aim to prevent and address sexual harassment.

# 4. Awareness Regarding Sexual Harassment Act

It's time to ponder that government has introduced many legal provisions to curb sexual harassment at workplace right from Vishaka guidelines to sexual harassment act at workplace, 2013 but still there is no improvement in the cases against sexual harassment at workplace. Instead the statistics shows us that this crime has been increasing day by day.

According to data compiled by National commission for women, there is a noticeable rise in sexual harassment at workplace.

Year	Cases
2011	170
2012	167
2013	249
2014	526

Table 2: Cases regarding sexual harassment at workplace (National commission for women, 2014)

Even after implementation of the act why such cases are sharply increasing instead of decreasing? It makes us think whether the law is too lenient that accused don't think twice before committing a crime or the problem lies in the AWARENESS level of people working in an organization. Many employees working in the organization never question their employers that whether there organization has an internal complaint committee to deal with such cases or does our company abide by rules and regulation regarding sexual harassment at workplace mandatory by the government. Many studies reveal that aggrieved women are not aware about their rights like right to conceal their identity, claim compensation. Government has made provisions to stop such harassment at workplace but who is to be blamed here when people themselves are not aware about their rights. Besides this, a study done in 2011 about gender differences in perception of workplace sexual harassment among future professionals claim that there is difference among awareness level regarding sexual harassment among males and females. According to this research paper Gender differences in perception of workplace sexual harassment among future professionals, men lack awareness than females. (Amitav Banerjee, Bhavana Sharma)

From this it can be well imagined if men themselves don't know what constitutes sexual harassment and its consequences how they will be able to differentiate between right and wrong. According to tribune, on 23th march, on a day before Holi festival, Mumbai police said that whosoever puts water balloon on women on streets, it will be considered as harassment, but it cannot be said how many people actually knew it before throwing water balloons that it comes under harassment. If they would know about it, they would have given it a thought at least once before doing so. Therefore it is of utmost importance to know at least what sexual harassment constitutes.

A survey, Sexual harassment Awareness in Indian Factories, conducted by ELEVATE group on 600 workers and managers over five Indian factories in 2014, showed following results.

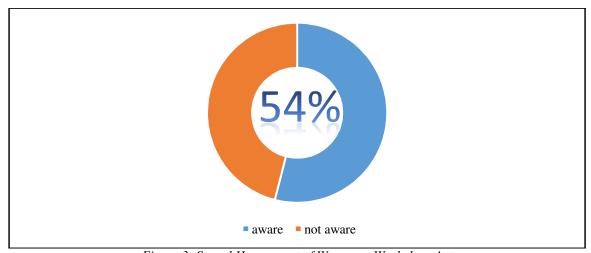


Figure 3: Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act

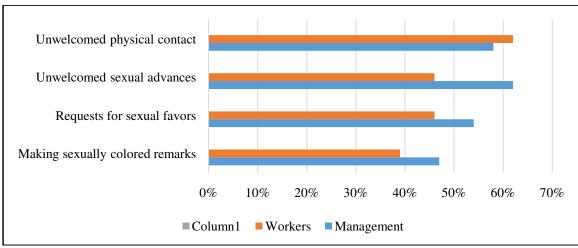


Figure 4: Situation Qualify as Sexual Harassment (By workers and Management)

The above diagrams shows that even after the implementation of act, the awareness level among factory workers and managers about the act is 54% only. Moreover both workers and managers are not aware of the fact as to which incidents can be considered as sexual harassment and which can't. So, first of all it's important for us to know as to what constitutes sexual harassment.

According to sexual harassment at workplace report by NCW, there is following code of conduct for workplace. Sexual harassment will include such unwelcome sexually determined behavior by any person either individually or in association with other persons or by any person in authority whether directly or by implication such as:-

- i. Eve-teasing
- ii. Unsavory remarks
- iii. Jokes causing or likely to cause awkwardness or embarrassment
- iv. Innuendos and taunts
- v. Gender based insults or sexist remarks
- vi. Unwelcome sexual overtone in any manner such as over telephone (obnoxious telephone calls) and the like
- vii. Touching or bruising against any part of the body and the like
- viii. Displaying pornographic or other offensive or derogatory pictures, cartoons, pamphlets or sayings.
- ix. Forcible physical touch or molestation
- x. Physical confinement against one's will and any other act likely to violate one privacy and includes any act or conduct by a person in authority and belonging to one sex which denies or would deny equal opportunity in pursuit of career development or otherwise making the environment at the work place hostile or intimidating to person belonging to the other sex, only on the ground of sex.

From the above data we can very well make it out that people are themselves not aware of sexual harassment even after all measures taken by government. But at the same time it doesn't mean that it is not the duty of both government as well as employers to create awareness among people and make them aware of their rights as they can't be set free of their duties. Even according to the act, it is mandatory for employers to paste posters and undertake awareness programs regarding it at workplace. On the other hand government should ensure its proper implementation because just passing of act in the parliament won't solve the purpose. On the contrary, there are few studies which argue that the reporting of sexual harassment cases increased in India because of awareness of employees after the act. But it's a question of further research as merely reporting such incident doesn't not imply awareness regarding act. It can be understood with the example of RTI. Today most of us are aware of this term and uses it in day to day life but how many people actually knows the procedure right from writing an application to hearing of court. What most of the people will know is: in order to get some confidential information u can file an RTI. The same is the case here, just filing a case against sexual harassment doesn't necessarily imply she is aware about the whole act as to what are her rights and the time within which she can seek answer of enquiry etc., if this would be the case the aggrieved women would not have left job after the incident and would have demanded transfer or other provisions mentioned in the act or if the accused would have been punished properly such cases would not have increased sharply. As according to survey, in Maharashtra, by Times of India "Conviction is only 5% of sexual harassment cases."

Studies which argue about increased awareness after implementation of the act need to ponder as to if this is the case why even after 3 years of the enforcement of act till now also we are talking about awareness part of sexual harassment act at workplace,2013. "Seminar on Sexual harassment at workplace act, 2013" was conducted in Mumbai on 25<sup>th</sup> march 2016 for awareness of hoteliers and restaurateurs by hotel and restaurant association of western India.

Another example about lack of awareness till now is "Know the sexual harassment laws to keep yourself safe at the workplace" (Odette Katraki, June 12, 2016)

#### 5. Correlation of Awareness with Education Level and Designation of Women

We might have heard many people saying that the one with high education level, good designation does not face sexual harassment as they are more aware of their rights. But many surveys and researchers have found that there is no significant correlation between

awareness regarding sexual harassment and education level of women. According to the Huffington post in association with Times of India group, 19<sup>th</sup> Feb 2015, even educated women aren't protected as 45% of women being harassed according to the survey have bachelor degree, 29% college education, 19% graduate degree. It is further presumed that educated women usually report harassment but according to this survey itself, only 29% of women report such cases. Apart from this report, a research conducted, Factors Influencing Sexual Harassment in the Malaysian Workplace Faculty of Business and Accounting, University Malaya, concludes that there is no significant difference between awareness and education level of females. If there would be much impact of education level and designation of a female worker on awareness regarding sexual harassment and its provisions, cases like TarunTejpal harassment case where a young female colleague was sexually harassed and because of ignorance of the rights, statements like- it's an internal matter, were released by the management. If the young women being harassed at her workplace would have questioned regarding the constitution of committee to deal with sexual harassment, she could have handled it more strongly by reporting it at the very first time and perhaps the incident could be avoided "Over 71% of girl students of Punjab University who participated in survey said that they have faced sexual harassment" according to the report of Times of India (March 5,2015). In 2016 PhD scholars accused their guides of sexually harassing them. Further, a PhD scholar was sexually harassed by professor of Sambalpur University inside law department. (Ramanuj, 2015). Likewise in 2015, St Stephen's PhD student accuses professors of sexually harassing her.

According to THE HINDU, "JNU top on list of sexual harassment cases". The situation can be judged by having a look on the following graph.

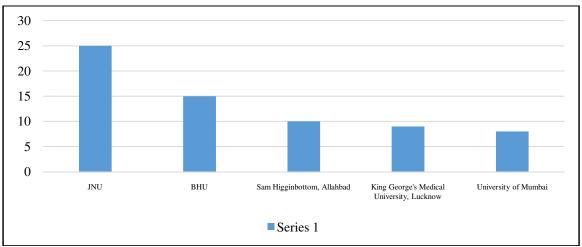


Figure 5: Sexual harassment cases reported in 2014-2015 in higher institutions Source: THE HINDU, December 15, 2015

The above graph shows clearly that the prestigious institute Jawaharlal Nehru University tops the list of sexual harassment with 25 cases being reported every year followed by Banaras Hindu University. According to report submitted by HRD minister JNU tops the list with maximum cases of sexual harassment cases in university and 295 cases of sexual harassment have been reported during 2014-2015.

So it is a myth that educated women are not sexually harassed at their workplaces. It is a wrong perception among people that only illiterate and low status women in society are being harassed at workplace. The statements like as she is an educated working women in some good organization so she must know about such things, are often heard but merely education level and designation of a women on workplace does not imply she is safe at workplace as is assumed that she must about it in detailed manner. "Myths about workplace harassment" (Aparna V. Singh) talks about 4 myths at workplace out of which the two concerned talks about, I am safe at workplace as I am educated and as I am senior enough I won't be trapped in it. According to an article "Awareness campaign on sexual harassment at workplace" (Shilpy Arora, April22,2016)said it is not necessary and our misconception that educated working women must be aware about the act. As, today, no one is immune from sexual harassment at workplace, it has crossed all barriers and can be seen in each and every sector.

In nifty 46 companies report 415 cases of sexual harassment (Kiran, september23, 2015)

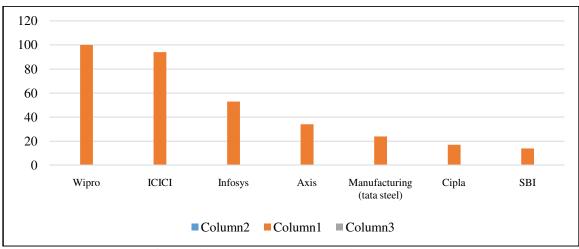


Figure 6: Sexual harassment cases at workplace in nifty companies

This shows the real picture of the current situation, as the renowned organized also like Wipro tops the list of cases against sexual harassment at workplace followed by leading bank ICICI which is one more proof against the myth that educated women are not harassed at workplace.

Even a women living in rural area can protect herself and fight for her if she is aware of her rights and the same way a well educated women living in urban area can feel helpless and cannot fight against the system if she is unaware of her rights. So, it's high time now to stop blaming others and first of all pull up our own socks and take a vow that at least we will keep ourselves updated with rights and privileges available to us, of whose ignorance others take benefit and the accused are escaped and set free because of the power they hold.

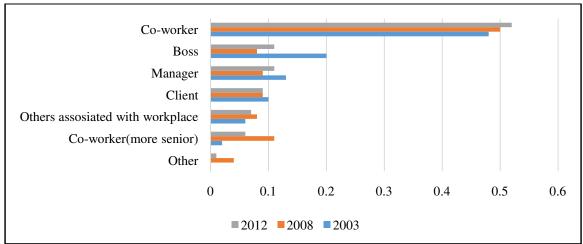


Figure 7: Relationship of harasser to target (humanrights.gov.au)

The above graph shows the relationship of accused with the victim at workplace and shows that most of the times (more than 50%)coworkers are the culprit for sexual harassment at workplace with their percentage of cases increasing year by year.

Apart from the above issue, it should not be ignored that nowadays even men are being sexually harassed at workplace which is not accepted by our society. According to a survey, by times of India, in 2015, study showed that 78% were reported against males by females but 11% of such cases were also reported by males against females. "Sexual harassment of male a reality, but remains a taboo" according to survey conducted by The Indian Express. So, this is a question of further research.

#### 6 Conclusion

Sexual harassment at workplace is a big question mark on dignity of employees working in the organization. Today employees are no longer treated as machines with no human values. They are treated as human capital who brings their knowledge and skills to the organization. So, its responsibility of employers to provide then safe and healthy work environment, where they can put in their maximum effort for their as well as their organization's growth. Companies like reliance industries, HDFC, L&T, and ONGC etc. should be the benchmark for other organizations in this case as not even a single incident of sexual harassment at workplace has been reported in these organizations. If such kind of incidents at workplace are not taken care of women will keep on quitting workforce which will affect our country's GDP. Even women who have achieved success in their respective field finds is to be a major issue and

are themselves victim of it. Indra Nooyi CEO of PepsiCo said in an interview "I hate being called sweetie or honey" and she also said that she feels offended when called by such names as we should be treated as executives and with dignity at workplace.

So, it is high time to stop being coward and depend on others and be aware of your rights and then to put the foot down to improve the situation.

The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance

-Nathaniel Branden: The ultimate value of life depends upon awareness and the power of contemplation rather than upon mere survival

-Aristotle

Awareness is the enemy of sanity, for once you hear the screaming, it never stops.

- Emilie Autumn

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