IMPACT OF REGENERATIVE ENVIRONMENT : SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORK-PLACE
(A Study conducted in the city of Bhopal, India)

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment at work-place is in direct violation of fundamental rights given in Part – III of the Constitution of India. Despite the guidelines and norms issued by the Supreme Court of India on the writ petition filed by Vishakha and others against the State of Rajasthan and others, sexual harassment of women at work – place continues. Keeping in mind this burning issue, a study was conducted amongst a group of female government employees in the city of Bhopal to find out the awareness level of women regarding sexual harassment at work-place. Conclusions were drawn by using questionnaire method, observation method and interactive method.

Key Words : NGO’s, Pornography, Harassment, Exploitation, Work Environment

INTRODUCTION

Gender issues come to the fore- front in the latter half of the twentieth century. With more and more women stepping out of their homes in search of livelihood, a new type of social evil, that of sexual harassment at workplace has emerged, which is in direct violation of the fundamental rights given in Part III of the Constitution of India\textsuperscript{1}. A social worker in a village of Rajasthan was subjected to harassment, which culminated in gang rape\textsuperscript{2}. Some social activities and NGO’s brought this to the notice of the Supreme Court of India. The Supreme Court in its landmark decision delivered on 13-08-1997, on the writ petition of Vishakha and others Vs. State of Rajasthan and others issued guidelines and norms for due observance at all work-places till such a time a legislation is made.

The Supreme Court defined sexual harassment, which includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour (whether directly or indirectly or by implication) as:

(a) Physical contact and advances;
(b) A demand or request for sexual favours;
(c) Sexually- coloured remarks ;
(d) Showing pornography;
(e) Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature\textsuperscript{3}.

The Supreme Court has also laid down that “a complaints committee be formed at work-places for the redressal of grievances of women”\textsuperscript{4}. This committee should be headed by a woman and not less than half of its members should be women.

PURPOSE AND METHODS

The purpose of this research paper is to find out the awareness of women regarding sexual harassment. Besides, this study will also

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find out about the treatment meted out to women at work-places and their awareness to combat this gender bias. For this purpose a group of sixty working-women from government offices in Bhopal was selected. They were in the age-group of thirty to fifty-five years with work experience of ten years or more. They were given a questionnaire with “Yes,” “No” and “Can’t say” options. There is a limitation in this method as there is a possibility of responses not being totally honest because people do not tend to commit themselves in writing. Though assured of confidentiality, the respondents were hesitant to record their responses. Hence, observation and interaction methods were also used to draw conclusions. The data was recorded using nominal scale and percentage derived.

RESULTS
The findings presented a picture about the awareness of respondents regarding sexual harassment in work environment.

Table 1 shows the responses about the work environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Safe work environment ?</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Meaning of sexual harassment ?</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the above table indicates, 88 percent of the women (53 women out of 60 women) felt that they worked in safe environment whereas only 12 percent women (7 women) felt that their work environment was hostile. The study also shows that 100 percent women know the meaning of sexual harassment.

Table 2. Records the Responses Regarding Objectionable Verbal and Non-Verbal Conduct of Sexual Nature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Display of obscene photographs by colleagues</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Subjected to remarks on dresses</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Objectionable verbal conduct</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above, 100 percent women also said that they were never shown pornography by their male colleagues. 88 percent women (53 women) were subjected to remarks about their dresses whereas 12 percent (7 women) did not receive any such comment. When asked about objectionable verbal conduct 78 percent women (47 women) answered in the negative whilst 22 percent of the women (13 women) responded in the affirmative. The responses regarding opportunities at work-place were also recorded. 15 percent (9 women) were denied promotion due to their sex whereas 85 percent women (51 women) said that no such thing has happened to them. 45 percent of the women (27 women) suffered mental torture at work-place whereas 55 percent of the women (33 women) had no such experience. Questions about the awareness regarding the law against sexual exploitation at work-place were also asked (Table 3 records the responses).

Table 3. Total Number of Respondents – 60

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Awareness of law regarding sexual harassment at work-place?</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that 57 percent respondents (34 women) had the knowledge about the law which protects women at work-place whereas 43 percent (26 women) were ignorant of the fact. When asked whether a complaints committee exists at their work-place. The responses were as follows:

Table 4. Total Number of Respondents – 60

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Can’t Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Existence of complaints committee</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67 percent of the women (40 women) said that there was a complaints committee at their work-place; 13 percent (8 women) said that there was no such committee and 20 percent women (12 women) said that they did
not know whether a complaints committee exists at their work-place.

As the questionnaire method has its limitations, observation method was also used. Later, an interactive session with the respondents was also held. The picture which emerged from observation and interaction is that most of the respondents were hesitant to record their responses honestly, especially in questions regarding safe work environment and questions about misbehaviour. In the interactive session that ensued it was found that most of the women have been subjected to remarks about their dress. Their male colleagues cracked obscene jokes and had touched them without any reason. There is awareness about sexual harassment at work-place but in some offices there is no complaints committee or if there is a committee it is defunct. Women are hesitant to report cases of sexual harassment owing to the social stigma attached to it. If women take initiative to report against misconduct they are not encouraged and are asked to withdraw their cases due to the laid-back attitude of the officials. Moreover, the situation acquires a grave proportion because this study was conducted amongst government servants.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is a grim fact that despite the guidelines and norms issued by the Supreme Court of India in 1997, no legislation has been made by the Parliament till date. There is an urgent need for such a law. Besides, women should be encouraged to report indecent behaviour but care should be taken that there is no misuse of this right by women.

REFERENCES