



HARASSMENT OF WOMEN IN WORK PLACE AND THEIR EMPOWERMENT: A PREVENTIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

Rapid growth of science, technology, several socio-political movements, modernization and similar developments expedite the opportunities to prove Indian women capable of discharging the responsibilities assigned to them on par with men. Therefore, the role of women has changed and now women are independent, they are not only the housekeeper but can also run the houses solely. But with the development of the nation and the high rise of women, many problems are faced by them at the workplace which is not acceptable. Such unacceptable behavior in the workplace is detrimental to the economy and the progress of nation. Sexual harassment is regarded as verbal or physical behavior towards an individual without their consent, including sexual remarks, offers, and insults or displaying visual sexual content. This problem affects both the physical performance and mental health of the working women. The present study based on secondary literature source and tries to envisage the reasons behind the exploitation of working women in their work place simultaneously to explore the preventive approach of their empowerment.

Keywords: *Women harassment, Preventive approach, Mental health*

Introduction

Since time immemorial women are endowed with the power of creation. She is the sole identity of beauty, responsibility again after dignity also. It is the universal truth that she is an active part of the society and must be treated as men.

Study of the history of human society reveals that there is most of the society around the world where women enjoyed absolute equality on par with men. But in the rapid growth of science, technology, several socio-political movements, modernization and similar developments have changed the approach of people towards women to a certain extent. As a result, Indian women can grab the opportunities extended to them have proved that they are capable of discharging the responsibilities assigned to them on par with men.

Therefore the role of women has changed and now women are independent, they are not only the housekeeper but can also run the houses solely. But with the development of the nation and the high rise of women, many problems are faced by them at the workplace which is not acceptable. Such unacceptable behavior in the workplace is detrimental to the economy and the progress of nation. Sexual

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harassment is regarded as verbal or physical behavior towards an individual without their consent, including sexual remarks, offers, and insults or displaying visual sexual content. According to Wasilwa (2012), sexual harassment can be best described as unsolicited acts (which include physical, verbal and non-verbal acts) of sexual nature affecting women and men's dignity at work. This problem affects both the physical performance and mental health (Collins, 2010) and the mental health of the employee (Wasilwa, 2012). There are several negative effects of sexual harassment: illnesses, lack of commitment, absences, low quality performance, and resignation (William, 2012). Both male and female employees who have experienced sexual harassment feel negative emotions such as embarrassment, shame, and depression, and a decrease in their self-esteem, job satisfaction and safety.

Types of Harassment: Harassment comes in many types, which are discussed below:

Verbal Harassment: Verbal harassment refers to an abusive behavior that includes hateful speeches or comments that are related to sex, race, religion, cast, origin or creed. In a verbal abuse, inapt words are used to hurt or humiliate another person.

Bullying: Bullying is a complex phenomenon of unwanted, offensive and malicious behavior which undermines an individual through persistent negative attacks. There is typically a very rational abuse of position or power that can manifest itself in physical, verbal or non-verbal forms.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual assault may be physical, ranging from unwanted touching, rape, to any kind of indecent assault. Sexual harassment mostly carries with it threats of employment reprisals if such advances are refused. Sexual harassment has been defined by the federal government and courts as "illegal employment discrimination" (Barron's Business Dictionary). In Sexual Harassment include: Unnecessary and unwelcomed touching, Request for sex, Sex related talks and jokes, Intimidating behaviors such as demanding sex in return for promotions at workplaces, sexually explicit pictures, Sexually explicit physical contact, Sexually explicit emails or messages, Intrusive questions about a person's bodily parts.

Racial Harassment: Racial harassment can be defined as hostility towards people on the basis of their race, national or ethnic origin.

Review of Literature

In various researches (Charney & Russell, 1994; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Marin & Guadagno, 1999) it was suggested that a majority of those exposed to sexual harassment are women and such attitudes were practiced by men against women that the harassers are men and those targeted in sexual harassment are most generally women (Ryan & Kenig, 1991). Additionally, considering the working environment, sexual harassment does not only take place among colleagues within an organization but can also be committed by customers towards the employees of an organization (Hughes & Tadic, 1998). Researches reveal that women that are exposed to sexual harassment and the men that commit harassment do not have any characteristics that can be generalized. The profession, age, socio-economic level and physical features are not indicative of their being exposed to sexual harassment (Palum et al., quoted in Bakirci, 2000). However, several factors make it easier for the harassers to take action. Divorced women or women living alone, women that are economically weak and women that are not experienced in working life, women that are underpaid, undereducated or women that work in temporary jobs and women that work in organizations that men are dominant in number or in jobs that are considered traditionally as "men's jobs" are targeted more frequently by sexual harassment (Fain & Anderton, 1987; Gutek & Dunwoody, 1987).

Attributes such as competitiveness, assertiveness and power, that are naturally associated with the male gender, does not draw so much attention although they are expressed in remarks and jokes connoting sexuality (Gutek, 1989). The socio-cultural standpoint, on the other hand, suggests that sexual harassment results from gender inequality fostered by the patriarchal system. This viewpoint regards sexual harassment as a consequence of men's powers coming out of their personal and socio-cultural positions as

well as considering sexual harassment as an instrument used by men in order to sustain their economic and political domination over women. Accordingly, sexual harassment results from the social inequalities of the distribution of power and status differences among genders (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2004:89).

Workplace sexual harassment not only creates an insecure and hostile working environment for women but also impedes their ability to deliver in today's computing world. Apart from interfering with their performance at work, it also adversely affects their social and economic growth and puts them through physical and emotional suffering. No matter how big or small the sexual harassment incident is, it requires employer or employee to respond appropriately. Sexual favor has become something exchangeable for a higher position. Most of the victims have quit their current job due to serious sexual harassment in the workplace. It also leads to low productivity, change of careers, low job satisfaction and emotional trauma (Aloka, 2009). The effects of falling victim may last many years (Berdahl and Moore, 2006). A study discovered that sexual harassment reduced work-efforts, stopped the completion of tasks causing victims to be less productive. Victims also tend to become more anti-social, affecting their work relations (Estes and Wang, 2008). If the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace is being ignored, the company's image will suffer as well. But there some cases the victims blamed themselves instead of the other party, causing them to be discharged (Goba-Malinga, 2011). Victims are often dissatisfied in keeping their jobs (Barker, 2017) showcase high levels of absenteeism and sometimes voluntarily leave the company, increasing the turnover rate (Sims, Drasgow and Fitzgerald, 2005; McLaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone, 2017). This is due to the lack of job satisfaction that takes place as a result of such incidents (Lim, Cortina and Magley, 2008). A research by Antecol and Cobb-Clark (2006) also implied that victims of sexual harassment are more likely to leave the organization due to job satisfaction. In fact, a study showed that around 2.8 million people have resigned from their organization due to the occurrence of sexual harassment. Major causes include the build-up of stress, illnesses and injuries resulting from it, leading to problems and destabilization in the organizational environment (Hutagalung and Ishak, 2012).

It is perceived that sexual harassment has a psychological and physical impact on employees (Campbell et al., 2008; Einarsen and Nielsen, 2014; Krieger et al., 2008). However, it depends on its intensity. The probable consequences of sexual harassment are thus considered. Hence, multiple cases that discuss individuals who refuse to acknowledge that have been wounded in some way or another or they have been a target of by sexual harassment. Individuals may worry that others will not be convinced by their rendition of what happen (Campbell, Dworkin and Cabral, 2009).

Consequences of Emotional and Psychological

A study by Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers (2009) showed victim involvement in sexual harassment and the impact of those experiences in workplace in several different ways. Victims expressed feeling upset, threatened, frustrated and numerous other negative feelings. Additional research also produced similar findings identifying added negative feelings in both genders, including self-blame, humiliation, decreased self-esteem, loss of self-confidence and damage to interpersonal relations (Lim, Cortina and Magley, 2008). In the Bryant-Davis, Chung and Tillman (2009) study 45% of the harassed women felt mistrust and 30% feel anger. Feelings of helplessness and insecurity were reported by 1 of 10 respondents. The Chechak and Csiernik (2014) study reported that 10% of the employees complained about depression and nervousness together with 15% shown distrustfulness. The negative psychological issue of sexual assault has been widely studied. First is lower self esteem. Research describe that self-esteem is a crucial aspect of one's well-being (Shannon, Rospenda and Richman, 2007). Research also indicated a connection between sexual violence with reduced self-esteem (Gruber and Fineran, 2008). Gruber (2008) found that victims of harassment reported reduced self-esteem as compared to non-victims. However, a study by Einarsen and Nielsen (2014), discussed that employees in big companies exposed to strong sexual violence in the past often blamed themselves, causing lower self-esteem.

Secondly, depression is a frequent experience amongst victims of sexual harassment (Campbell et al., 2008). Some victims were twice more likely to be diagnosed with depression than victims of physical

violence (Bryant-Davis, Chung and Tillman, 2009). An additional study reported that 30% individuals with previous trauma had major depression (Stockdale, Logan and Weston, 2009).

Thirdly, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Encountering violence can have harmful effects on victim's health (Stockdale, Logan and Weston, 2009). Victims with histories of being a sexual harassment victim have depression and significantly elevated levels of PTSD (Einarsen and Nielsen, 2014). Fourthly, victims have high chances of conducting substance abuse. Campbell (2008) has reported that PTSD functions as a mediator which abuse compromises victim's physical health through their physiological impacts. By understanding the bio-psychological mechanisms by which PTSD affects health expands on this discussion (Stockdale, Logan and Weston, 2009), and evidence points towards hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis. The stress triggers both a chronic and acute stress response, which levels up negative feedback in the HPA axis, reducing cortisol levels, leading to deregulation of the HPA and hormonal disruption (Krieger et al., 2008). Lastly, suicidal tendencies, which range from infrequent to extreme thoughts of death (Einarsen and Nielsen, 2014; Lim, Cortina and Magley, 2008). A study in USA discussed that victims had a highest risk of suicide after exposure to sexual harassment (Gruber and Fineran, 2008). Additional consequences of sexual harassment included muscle pains, headaches, exhaustion, nausea, sleeping disruptions and headaches (Street, 2008; Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers, 2009).

Other research found harassment affects the private lives of workers. In the Lim (2008) study, 8% of victims disliked sexual activities in their private lives. In Shannon (2007), 65% of the victims reported an unfavorable effect on relationships with friends and family. Of the victims, 25% had tensions in their private relationships, 15% felt antagonism towards others, 5% withdrew themselves, 13% emotional disinterest from close friends, and 7% feared physical touch.

A survey in Campbell and Wasco (2005) found that 17% of workers viewed sexual harassment as a 'major problem', almost 6 of 10 workers considered it to be a 'less important problem', whereas just 1% do not considered it as a problem at all. Psychological and physical effects of sexual harassment harmfully affect organizational culture (Bryant Davis, Chung and Tillman, 2009; Lim, Cortina and Magley, 2008) by creating a stressful environment for all workers. Studies have shown that such occurrences affect all employees (Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers, 2009). Victims may believe that organizations do not care about them, building negative assumptions towards organizational behaviours and norms related to justice and fairness (Campbell, Dworkin and Cabral, 2009). The result can be a loss of confidence and loyalty to the organization and management, reducing productivity and increasing absenteeism. Furthermore, a study by Stockdale (2009) found that harassment negative view towards workplace relationships. The examination of any objection did not only carry a financial cost, but also lead to divisions between workers (Chechak and Csiernik, 2014). In succession, all workplaces have difficulties with growing psychosomatic problems amongst workers, such as sleep problems, headaches and gastric problems. In addition, the frequency of harassment seemed to be an indicator of turnover rates of victims (Shannon, Rospenda and Richman, 2007).

Several policies with the intent of tackling sexual harassment in the workplace have and continue to be laid down despite their effectiveness being based on a countries culture, norms and values (Aloka, 2009). Many victims of sexual harassment remain silent, only a fraction acts against the perpetrators (Hall et al, 2018). Although, a survey had revealed that this culture of silence was changing and that there is an increase in the number of formal reports. The figures increased from 16% of victims, to 20%; still a small fraction of the total number of victims although it indicates a positive change in culture (Birinxhikaj and Guggisberg, 2017). Though, research has shown that reporting the incident often does not lead to it being solved. Only 45% of those 20% of who made a report indicated that it ended the harassment, and out of those 45%, only 74% were satisfied with the results of their complaints. Also, 29% of victims had faced re-victimization and demotion because of complaining. This is one of the main reasons why 4 of 5 of such cases remain unreported. Others include the fear of losing one's job, revictimization and the subjugation to embarrassing investigations (Birinxhikaj and Guggisberg, 2017). Hence measures need to

be put in place to rectify this situation. Both governments and organizations have a role to play in efforts to tackle this to ensure the well-being of its citizens and employees (Coyle and Sumida, 2005).

A safe workplace is, therefore, a woman's legal right. It is a form of gender discrimination which violates a woman's fundamental right to equality and right to life, mentioned under Article 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India. That's why India's legislation took a significant step and introduced The Sexual harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressed) Act 2013 enacted by the Ministry of women and child development in 2013 as the statute aims at providing every woman (irrespective of her age or employment status) a safe, secure and dignified working environment.

Objectives:

- To find out the reasons of harassment of women in their workplace
- To explore the preventive approach of the empowerment of working women

Methods: The present study based on secondary literature source.

Analysis and Interpretation

Reasons of harassment of working women

To prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, it's important to understand the key underlying drivers of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a social problem. Stopping it is not just about altering the behavior of individuals; we need to change the culture and environment of workplaces in which it occurs. To prevent sexual harassment from happening in the first place, we must recognize the systemic and contextual issues that drive these behaviors. Primary prevention is all about addressing the root causes (or drivers) of sexual harassment. Power relates to the possession of control, authority, or influence over others; it has many dimensions. The concept of power, and specifically, the misuse of power, is central to understanding the causes of sexual harassment. In the workplace, power dynamics are commonly thought to be associated with an individual's seniority, age or value to a business. For instance, a harasser might be in a position of power due to being the owner of a business, a valued customer of a business, a direct supervisor of a person harassed, or in a position to influence that person's future career prospects.

Gender inequality is a key driver, or underlying cause, of workplace sexual harassment. Other forms of discrimination and disadvantage create power imbalances in the workplace which can intensify an individual's experience of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is recognized at an international level as a form of violence against women, with many of the same underlying drivers as other forms of violence against women. Gender inequality occurs when power, opportunities and resources are not shared equally between men and women in society and when women are not valued and respected as much as men.

Gender inequality is also created by attitudes, norms and behaviors that suggest that heterosexuality is the normal or preferred sexual orientation and that people's preferred gender identity is the one they are born with. These norms, attitudes and behaviors have an impact on how people understand binary gender roles and gendered norms in society. There are other aspects of the social context that are also relevant to an understanding of violence against women.

Understanding sexual harassment as driven by gender inequality also recognizes that men and people with diverse gender identities and expressions also experience and are affected by sexual harassment. The 2018 National Survey clearly showed that sexual harassment is an issue for men as well as women. However, women were more likely than men to have been sexually harassed in the workplace in the previous five years (39% of women compared with 26% of men). When looking at victims of sexual harassment overall, women made up almost three in five (58%) of victims of workplace sexual harassment in the past five years. The survey confirmed all previous research in finding that the majority of workplace sexual harassment is perpetrated by men. 79% of victims of workplace sexual harassment were sexually harassed by one or more male perpetrators.

The biological models of women harassment suggest that sexual behavior is simply a natural extension of human sexuality. Its assumptions include a natural, mutual attraction between men and women, a stronger male sex drive, and men in the role of sexual initiators (Tangri et.al, 1982). The Evolutionary Adaptation Model is explicated by Studdand Gattiker (1991) who presented the proposition that because reproduction entails different cause/benefit calculi for women and men, there are different reproductive strategies and psychological mechanisms to support them. Specifically, men should aggressively compete for access to sexually receptive women of reproductive age, establish long term mate ship, in which confidence of paternity is maximized and expand parental investment to increase the success of offspring produced. Tangri et al (1982) were the first to suggest in “Organizational Model of women harassment” that sexual harassment is a result of aspects of the workplace infrastructure, which provide opportunities for harassment. According to them, powerful women may harass sub-ordinate men, and such occurrences are rare to find only because women are generally employed in sub-ordinate positions (Gutek & Morasch, 1982). Sex role spill over is defined as the Carryover into workplace of gender based expectations for behavior that is irrelevant or inappropriate to work. Workplace dispute resolution model gives a sociological perspective on sexual harassment (Opatow, 1990). Thus, Vaux (1993) see sexual harassment as: “An instance of Moral exclusion, whereby members of a relatively powerful group conduct their lives in their own interest, sometimes at the expense of a relatively less powerful group, in such a way that any harm is denied, diminished or justified (Lach, & Gwartney, 1993). The Illinois model Hurt (2000) posits that the experience of sexual harassment is a workplace stress, whose antecedents and outcomes are to be explored with organizational and its environmental context, as other organizational stressor Fitzgerald et.al., (1995) the four-factor model developed by Hausen M. (1998) to identify the risk factors of sexual harassment. Such a multifaceted approach is necessary in view of the socio-cultural differences among the three main ethnic groups – Malays, Chinese, Indians/others – of Malaysian workers. For example, certain forms of sexual behavior may be considered harassment by one group, but non-offensive by another less conservative group. Women harassment may also depend upon her dressing style. Moreover, factors such as, sex ratios, availability of workspace and sexist attitudes, which constitute the working environment of an organization, also have a strong impact on the rate of occurrences of sexual harassment in a particular workspace.

Working women empowerment through a preventive approach

Mental health in all stages of life plays an effective and important role in national and ideal goals of every society. This is especially important for women who make up half of the population and are important members of their families during financial austerity periods. In this regard, changes in social attitudes are one of the methods for improving the mental health of women and reduce their mental problems and are one of the important steps in their empowerment which is a social and multifactorial phenomenon related to factors such as human rights, education, social and financial participation, security, lack of discrimination, equal opportunities, responsibilities, roles and lifestyles and physical, mental, and financial conditions of women. Various studies and theories have introduced various factors and stages for the empowerment of women, for example, Longew proposed five stages of welfare, access, knowledge, participation, and control. Kayanighalesard and Arsalanbod in their study stated that empowerment of women is an attempt for improving their financial, cultural, and social standing of women. They also emphasized the role of factors such as education, expanded medical insurance, and creation of household jobs in this empowerment. In another study, Zadeh *et al.* investigated empowerment of women on four financial, social, political, and mental aspects. In a longitudinal study on 539 Egyptian women, the results showed that single women attempt to gain social support and empowerment by taking advantage of education and financial activities before marriage. The study on 200 female students in Lahore also showed that educational content, participation, and fanatical opportunities accessible to women affects their empowerment process. A study in Italy showed that empowerment of women is significantly related to social norms about culture, women's roles in society and especially religious culture. Another longitudinal study on married women showed the role of financial empowerment, and women's decision-making power in households and a study in England showed that promotion of gender equality is one of the methods for the empowerment of women and

improving their mental health. Scientific studies also show that women's mental health is endangered when they are faced with gender discrimination such as non equal access to education, society and employment. Empowerment of women also shows its effect during accidents and disasters because it is related to discrimination against women often in the name of religion, tradition, and social norms and regulations. Therefore working women should realize self empowerment is necessary for the present decades. Otherwise they will exploit in various ways in different sector. There are some ways to empower own self are discussed in below.

Understanding the Importance of Mental Health

Mental health is just as important as physical health in maintaining overall well-being, yet it is often overlooked. Poor mental health can negatively impact daily functioning, relationships, and overall quality of life. For women, prioritizing mental health can lead to increased self-confidence, improved decision-making, and a greater sense of control over their lives.

Identifying Stressors and Triggers

The first step in promoting mental health is identifying the stressors and triggers that contribute to feelings of overwhelm, anxiety, or depression. By recognizing these sources of stress, women can begin to develop coping strategies and make necessary adjustments to minimize their impact on mental well-being.

Establishing Healthy Boundaries

Learning to set healthy boundaries is crucial for maintaining mental health and reducing stress. This may involve saying “no” to additional responsibilities, delegating tasks at work or home, or limiting exposure to toxic relationships. Establishing boundaries allows women to protect their mental well-being and create space for self-care and personal growth.

Prioritizing Self-Care Activities

Self-care is an essential component of mental wellness, yet it is often neglected by busy women. Incorporating self-care activities into daily routines can help alleviate stress and improve overall mental health. Examples of self-care activities include taking a relaxing bath, reading a book, engaging in hobbies, or practicing mindfulness meditation. The key is to find activities that bring joy, relaxation, and a sense of accomplishment.

Building a Support Network

Having a strong support network is vital for mental health and resilience. Women should cultivate relationships with friends, family members, and colleagues who provide encouragement, understanding, and empathy. Additionally, participating in support groups or connecting with others who share similar experiences can offer valuable insights and coping strategies.

Seeking Professional Help

In some cases, women may benefit from seeking professional help to address mental health concerns. Therapists and counselors can provide guidance on coping strategies, help identify underlying issues, and offer support through challenging times. Early intervention can prevent mental health issues from escalating and provide women with the tools they need to thrive.

Embracing Personal Growth and Empowerment

Promoting mental health and self-care is an ongoing journey of personal growth and empowerment. By prioritizing mental wellness, establishing healthy boundaries, and nurturing a supportive network, women

can develop the resilience and strength needed to navigate life's challenges successfully. Remember, investing in mental health is an investment in oneself – and a powerful step toward a happier, healthier, and more empowered life.

Conclusion

Empowerment is one of the key factors for determining the success of development in the status & position of female human in the society. But, if women community think just that being highly educated and employed is the indicators of empowerment, it is a myth. Empowering women doesn't mean empowered by formal education only. When working women feel empowered, they feel better able to manage their workload, which can result in lower stress and anxiety. So it is the need of the present hour to grow up mentally strong of all working women by ignoring all harassment spontaneously.

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