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Addressing Sexual Harassment at the Workplace: A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract

Sexual harassment in the workplace is still a major obstacle to achieving gender equality and hinders women's ability to work in a safe and dignified manner and to their full potential all over the world. This article looks at the problem from conceptual, legal, and institutional points of view. The discussion is set within the wider context of gender and gender equality, after which it looks at the definitions, forms, and causes of sexual harassment. The key international and national responses are examined, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the ILO Convention concerning Discrimination (in Employment and Occupation) (1958), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979). The analysis then moves on to India, following the evolution of its legal framework from the Vishaka guidelines (1997) to the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. The paper describes the mechanisms set up by the Act, such as the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) and the Local Complaints Committee (LCC), and sets out the responsibilities given to employers, the government, employees, and trade unions. It also looks at the psychological, physical, social and organizational effects of harassment, as well as recent statistical trends. The conclusion considers ways of creating more gender-sensitive and inclusive workplaces and makes recommendations for improving the mechanisms for prevention, reporting and redressal.

Keywords: *sexual harassment, workplace, gender equality, Vishaka guidelines, POSH Act 2013, Internal Complaints Committee, gender mainstreaming*

Introduction

It is essential that workplaces should be safe since this contributes to personal dignity and development. Yet sexual harassment is still a common problem for women in both formal and informal types of employment and is frequently not reported all over the world. The consequences of this are adverse effects on women's health, their career advancement, and their relationships at work. In order to deal with this issue, it is necessary to understand its origins, the legal definitions involved, and the preventive measures that are available. The present paper looks at these areas, points out the relevant laws in India and elsewhere, describes the procedures for handling complaints, and makes clear the roles of the main stakeholders.

The conceptual framework: gender and gender equality

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2003) states that gender is a social construct and should be distinguished from biological sex. It includes the roles, responsibilities and the expectations that are placed on women and men in both the private and public spheres. These roles show that there are different interests and needs, even within the same household, and are determined by social conventions and hierarchies. Women and men are not uniform groups; factors such as age, social status and ethnicity also affect gender roles, which change over time.

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When it comes to employment, gender equality means that both women and men have equal rights regardless of their sex. It is not necessary for there to be identical outcomes, but gender equality should lead to similar results. In practice, this involves paying men and women the same amount for work of equal value, removing the obstacles which prevent women from taking part in the workforce, giving them equal access to all occupations, industries and leadership roles, and eliminating any discrimination on the grounds of gender or because of caregiving responsibilities.

Women have historically been the victims of discrimination, which has resulted in them having a lower status and thus making them susceptible to abuse and violence. When justice is promoted, women are able to gain independence, take equal part in financial matters, get access to education and leadership positions, and live without suffering violence. Companies that focus on gender equality are more successful at attracting and keeping talented people, in addition to improving their performance and increasing their competitiveness.

Defining Sexual Harassment

1 What Constitutes Harassment

In ordinary terms, harassment refers to behaviour that causes someone to feel troubled, worried or distressed, making them feel undermined and demoralised. It includes a wide range of examples: on one end it involves a single suggestive comment or an unwelcome touch; on the other end it involves either attempted or actual sexual assault.

2 The legal definition of sexual harassment

The term "sexual harassment" was first used in a legal context in order to address and prevent discrimination against women in the workplace, the definition of which continues to change. According to the definition provided by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of the United States of America, sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual character when such advances or conduct results in the person being affected in their work, interferes with their work, or creates an atmosphere that is intimidating, insulting or unpleasant.

It is therefore possible to draw several conclusions: the person who is being harassed and the harasser may be of any gender and it is not necessary for them to be of different genders. The harasser might be a manager, an agent of the employer, a manager from a different department, a co-worker, or any other individual not connected with the organisation, while the victim can be any person who has been harmed by the actions of the harasser. The harassment will still be regarded as existing even if the victim obtains no monetary advantage.

3 Sexual harassment within the Indian context

In India the term used colloquially for sexual harassment is "eve-teasing", this referring to unwelcome sexual gestures or behaviour, either direct or indirect, including comments with a sexual connotation. It is considered a breach of the fundamental rights to gender equality and to life with dignity as guaranteed by the Constitution, and is covered by provisions such as Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code which makes it a crime to use criminal force with the intention of outrageing a woman's modesty.

The different types and forms of sexual harassment in the workplace

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 sets out the situations in which behaviour relating to employment can be considered as sexual harassment; such situations involve either an implied or an explicit promise of favourable treatment, a threat of adverse treatment, or a threat with regard to a woman's current or future employment which is likely to affect her health or safety.

1 The idea of 'workplace'

The Act adopts a broad interpretation of what constitutes a workplace and covers any department, organisation, enterprise, establishment, undertaking or office in the public sector, regardless of whether it is wholly or partly financed, owned or controlled by the government. It also applies to private sector organisations, ventures, enterprises, institutions and non-governmental organisations which are involved in commercial, professional, vocational or service activities. This includes sports institutes, stadiums and sports complexes, as well as any residential facilities used for training. Any place an employee goes as a result of or in the course of her employment is included, together with the transport provided by the employer. In the case of domestic workers, their place of work is the dwelling or house in which they work.

2 What Constitutes a 'Woman' Under the Act

The Act guarantees all women the right to a safe and secure place of work, no matter what their age, employment status or terms of engagement. It provides protection for women who are employed directly or through a contractor, with or without the principal employer being aware of it, whether they are working for payment, as volunteers, or in a situation where the employment relationship is implied rather than stated.

3 Types of harassing behaviour

Sexual harassment can happen in many different ways, some of the offences being serious ones such

as rape and sexual assault, while in the course of ordinary interactions others may appear innocuous, for instance a comment, a joke, or a hand on the shoulder. It is usual to split these behaviours into three main groups. Physical behaviour includes violence, rape, and any unwanted touching like patting, kissing, stroking, grabbing, pinching or hugging, as well as blocking someone's way. Verbal behaviour comprises making comments on a worker's appearance, age or private life, making sexually suggestive remarks or telling sexually toned stories, giving repeated unwanted invitations, making sex-based jokes, and spreading rumours or lies. Non-verbal behaviour involves showing sexually explicit material, making suggestive gestures, staring, and sending unwanted messages, texts or emails.

The literature identifies a number of clear patterns within these categories. Quid pro quo harassment happens when decisions about hiring, promotion, pay, shifts, assignments or performance appraisals are based on sexual favours, especially those offered by someone in a position of authority. A woman who refuses such requests may discover that she is dismissed from her job or is denied the benefits that she has earned.

A workplace becomes hostile when the behaviour in question is both unwanted and unpleasant, whether it is of a physical, verbal, or non-verbal nature, and causes discomfort for an employee. Typical examples are obscene displays, offensive graffiti, and a continual stream of explicit jokes which are heard by colleagues.

What is known as psychological harassment involves persistent hostile behaviour—this can be physical, verbal, or suggestive—which damages a person's dignity and psychological integrity. Employers have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to prevent it and to act quickly when the issue arises.

Cyber harassment or cyberbullying has become increasingly common. It consists of sending threatening or obscene emails, encouraging people to send the victim a large number of unwanted messages, making negative comments about someone on public online forums, and creating web content which gives the victim a bad reputation.

The reasons why sexual harassment occurs

Sexual harassment cannot be explained by a single cause; it arises from a complex mix of social, cultural and structural factors, most of which are related to the existing attitudes regarding power and gender.

1 Socialisation

The way in which men and women are brought up to view themselves and one another determines the way in which they act. In certain cultural environments, discrimination according to gender, religion or way of life is so normal that harassing behaviour is regarded as ordinary or acceptable. Men who have been brought up with strict, "macho" ideas may carry these attitudes into the workplace and deal with their colleagues in that way. As for some women, they have been taught to believe that pleaseing men is essential to who they are, which makes it more difficult for them to notice inappropriate behaviour at work, never mind resist it.

2 Power Dynamics

A number of men feel threatened when women move up the career ladder and become more independent and assertive in their working lives, while those who obtain a position of authority come to regard the subordination of women as a bonus of their role, power, or title.

3 Moral values, personal circumstances and cultural differences

Changes in social and moral standards, along with pressure in marriages or relationships, can make people emotionally vulnerable at work. In a society that is rapidly changing, the different cultural expectations as to what is acceptable make it unclear what counts amounts as harassment.

4 Credibility and Victim-Blaming

People who make complaints are frequently dismissed, particularly when the person they are accusing is senior or highly regarded. There is a hesitation to believe that someone who is respected could act in this manner, and a tendency to regard the behaviour as insignificant. Both of these factors prevent women from coming forward and protect the harassers from being punished.

5 Groups that are at greater risk

Certain women are more at risk than others; this applies to those who run households and rely on their jobs for financial support, to women who are divorced, widowed, or separated and may therefore be more psychologically vulnerable, to women who are shy or insecure or who have limited knowledge of their rights, and to women working in sales or in roles that involve direct contact with clients, since they might feel pressured to tolerate inappropriate requests in order to keep the business going.

The effect of sexual harassment

The damage caused by sexual harassment does not remain confined to one aspect of a woman's life; it affects her physical and mental health, her relationships, and her work.

1 Emotional Impact

A great many of the victims blame themselves and feel guilty. It is common for them to experience distress, denial, depression, anxiety, isolation and humiliation. All these factors have a depressing effect on morale and interfere with performance.

2 Physical Impact

As Ragini (2001) points out, victims frequently experience headaches, stomach troubles, and disruptions to their sleep and eating.

3 Social Impact

Research carried out in 2005 shows that harassment can cause victims to pull away from their friends and family, make it difficult for them to cope in social situations and lead them to isolate themselves. In some cases people resort to alcohol or other drugs in an attempt to cope, and this in turn has an impact on their work. Frequent reports include a sense of powerlessness, lost trust, feelings of betrayal and difficulty in achieving intimacy.

4 Organisational Impact

A negative work environment damages job satisfaction and motivation. The stress, insomnia and depression that come about as a result of harassment have a detrimental effect on employees' performance and prevent them from gaining promotions or accessing support networks. Organisations also suffer consequences, since decisions may become biased, for instance when individuals are hired or promoted in order to ensure that a victim complies, and absenteeism increases as employees attempt to avoid any further interaction with the harasser. Other signs to watch for are increasing criticism and the tendency to shift the blame, being excluded from group activities, having responsibilities taken away, work being assigned in an unfair manner, being repeatedly targeted, and resources being withheld as a method of control.

The legal and policy framework

1 International Legislative Frameworks

Several international conventions provide the foundation for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. According to Articles 1, 2 and 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), all individuals have the same rights and freedoms as each other and are equally protected against discrimination. The ILO Convention concerning Discrimination (in Employment and Occupation) (1958) states that a person should not be discriminated against in regard to employment for various reasons, including gender, religion and ideology. In 2003 the ILO Committee of Experts decided that sexual harassment amounts to a form of gender discrimination. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) mandates that all states eliminate gender inequality between women and men in the workplace as is stated in Article 11.

Other ILO instruments are built upon this foundation. The 1985 Resolution on Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women in Employment proposed that social protection should be extended to cover reproductive hazards and sexual harassment. The 2010 Recommendation on HIV and the World of Work called for measures to be taken in the workplace in order to reduce the transmission of HIV and its effects, including actions aimed at preventing and banning violence and harassment. The Domestic Workers Convention (2011) requires that member states shall ensure that domestic workers are effectively protected against all forms of abuse, harassment and violence.

2 The national (Indian) legal system

Women still encounter risks to their safety and to their rights whether at home or at work, which is why strong national policies are necessary. India has dealt with these matters by passing a number of important laws over the years.

In 1993 India agreed to ratify CEDAW by promising to incorporate gender equality into its laws, to establish tribunals and other institutions for the purpose of protecting women against discrimination, and to cease discriminatory actions on the part of individuals, organisations, and businesses.

The Constitution contains a number of suitable safeguards; Article 14 guarantees that all people are equal before the law and that no one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of religion, sex or place of residence for both men and women. Article 39 obliges the State to secure for all people means of livelihood and Article 42 requires that people should have the right to work and that this right shall be exercised in such a way as to be fair and just as well as to allow for a decent standard of living. Finally, Article 51A lays upon every citizen the duty of giving up any practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women.

The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act of 1986 renders it a criminal offence to display women in an indecent manner in books, photographs, paintings and similar forms of material, and furthermore, Section 7 holds companies liable, for instance if they allow obscene material to be shown in their premises, the minimum sentence in such cases also being two years.

The Information Technology Act of 2000 also provides extra safeguards; according to Section 67 a person who publishes or transmits obscene material in electronic form may be sentenced to imprisonment for a period of up to five years and made liable to a fine of up to one lakh rupees on a first conviction. With regard to breaches of confidentiality and privacy, Section 72 provides for a sentence of up to two years' imprisonment, a fine of up to one lakh rupees, or both, where there is an unauthorised disclosure of electronic records.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012 states that all children under the age of eighteen must be protected from sexual assault and harassment; this covers acts such as being forced to show one's body or continually following or watching a child, and the penalties involved can amount to three years' imprisonment.

3 The Vishaka Judgment

In 1992 Bhanwari Devi, a woman who was employed with the Rajasthan government's rural development programme, was the victim of an attack after she had attempted to prevent a child marriage in her region. The case brought to light the risks that working women have to face and showed that there was an urgent need for workplace protection. A public interest petition was filed and the Supreme Court ruled that sexual harassment in the course of employment constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights (*Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, 1997).

On 13 August 1997 the Court delivered its decision and established the Vishaka Guidelines. Since the case was concerned with equality, the Court defined the duties which had to be taken preventive measures. In the absence of a particular law, the guidelines were to apply to all places of work. Responsibility for promoting equality was assigned to the State, employers and institutions, and a system was set up which included accountability, awareness and committees for handling complaints with the help of an external expert.

Act 2013 on the Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women in the Workplace

The Act was passed by the Lok Sabha on 3 September 2012 and by the Rajya Sabha on 26 February 2013; it came into effect on 9 December 2013, sixteen years after the Vishaka decision. It provides a clear definition of what constitutes sexual harassment in the workplace and establishes an official procedure for dealing with complaints. The definition of an "aggrieved woman" is broad enough to cover all women in every occupation and form of employment. It is necessary to have a committee system for investigating complaints and requires all employers to set up an Internal Complaints Committee. The committees are given the powers of a civil court when it comes to collecting evidence, and employers who fail to comply will be liable to fines of up to ₹50,000.

The Code of Criminal Procedure of 1860

Behaviour in violation of the POSH Act may also be a criminal offence. For example, section 354 of the Indian Penal Code provides for a penalty consisting of a term of up to five years' simple or rigorous imprisonment together with a fine for assault or the use of criminal force with the intention of outraging a woman's modesty.

Act 1946 on Industrial Employment (Standing Orders)

The law in question mandates that employers who have 100 or more workers shall specify and make public the standard conditions of employment, including wage rates, shifts, attendance, leave and holidays. Although it does not deal directly with harassment, it does contribute to a stable and accountable system for prevention and redressal.

1 Complaints Committees

The principle of natural justice requires that anyone making binding decisions about another person should do so in a fair and reasonable way; the POSH Act mandates that organisations set up complaints committees to deal with cases of sexual harassment, and at least half of the members of each of these committees must be women.

In each organisation there is established an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC). The committee is chaired by a woman who holds a senior position or, in the case where no such woman is available, by one who has been nominated from another office. It also has at least two members who are committed to the cause of women or who have knowledge of or experience in social work, and one member coming from a non-governmental organisation or association.

In every district the Local Complaints Committee (LCC) is established by the District Officer; its main purpose is to give women who are in the unorganised sector or who live in areas with fewer than ten employees a means by which to file complaints and to allow complaints to be made against employers as well. The committee is headed by a well-known woman in the field of social work and includes a woman who works in the area, two members coming from non-governmental organisations, and one member who is ex-officio from the district's social welfare or women and child development office. 8.2 The role of complaints committee members

As stated in the instructions given by the Supreme Court, complaints committees have two primary functions: preventing harassment and dealing with complaints in the workplace. The Act of 2013 mandates that they must investigate complaints within strict time limits, ensure that the inquiry remains confidential, arrange for counselling and other forms of support, and produce an annual report for the relevant government department.

3 Complaint Procedure

The Act outlines a five-stage procedure which begins with the filing of a complaint: a woman who has experienced the incident may submit a written complaint to either the ICC or the LCC within three

months of the event, along with six copies and any relevant documents. If she is unable to file due to physical or mental incapacity, then her legal heir or a relative can file it on her behalf provided that she gives her written consent.

The following stage is that of the inquiry, at which the committee examines the issue and gives both sides the opportunity to put forward their views, the entire process being finished within 90 days; in the case of a domestic worker, the LCC must pass the complaint on to the police within seven days.

The third step is for the report to be produced. Once the allegations have been proven, the committee shall submit its report to the employer within ten days of completing the inquiry and will recommend some form of action, this ranging from a written apology or a warning to the decision not to promote, dismissal, or compulsory counselling.

The employer has to act on the recommendations within 60 days, otherwise a fine may be imposed and if non-compliance continues it could result in the employer losing its licence.

There is also the possibility of appealing. If the woman is dissatisfied with the recommendation or if the employer fails to act on it, she can appeal to a court in the way provided for in the relevant service rules.

4 The standards to be used in evaluating complaints

Various standards used in assessing complaints include the reasonable woman standard, according to which behaviour amounts to harassment if a reasonable woman in a similar situation would regard it as such; this standard is intended to ensure that the decisions are not influenced by a mainly male perspective. The principle of intent versus impact places greater emphasis on the effect of the behaviour on the victim than on the intention of the person who carried it out, and as a result it has led to a number of decisions being made in favour of the complainants.

An approach based on section 2(d) of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, holds that decisions should be based not only on direct evidence but also on the broader social context of the violation. Moreover, since the majority of such incidents take place in private, without witnesses and with only limited direct evidence, a decision may be in favour of the complainant if it can be shown that the incident was very likely to have occurred.

The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders

1 Employer

It is the employer's duty—whatever their position may be, whether they are the head of the department or the person in charge—to take the primary responsibility, which includes regularly educating all the staff on the matter of harassment, drawing up an anti-harassment policy with the contribution of employees, management and the unions, ensuring that everyone understands and complies with the policy, giving prompt attention to complaints while supporting those who have been affected, and also regularly reviewing the policy.

2 Appropriate Government

If the central government, a government administering a union territory or a state government sets up, owns or controls a workplace, it must publicise the Act, draw up rules for its implementation, prepare training for LCC members, keep an eye on how the Act is put into practice, and ensure that reports are submitted on time; it should cooperate with NGOs in order to promote awareness, keep records of the cases handled by the ICCs, and have the power to authorise inspections of both the records and the workplaces.

4 Labour Commissioner

The Ministry of Labour and Employment is in charge of matters concerning wages, working conditions, women's employment and social security. The Labour Commissioners are responsible for enforcing labour laws in order to promote the welfare of workers (for instance, by observing the provision under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 of separate washing facilities and restrooms for women), can be appointed as conciliation authorities, and also carry out research into the socio-economic conditions of women workers.

5 Employees

Employees also have important responsibilities. They must know what the organisation's policy is, honestly consider their own attitudes and behaviour, be watchful for any conduct that could count as harassment, and never treat harassment as a joke. Where possible, they should raise any concerns they have and make an effort to resolve them. They should keep thorough records of incidents and should support colleagues who are harassed or who witness harassment. They should file complaints, establish committees made up of both employee and union representatives, and use surveys to find out how widespread the problem is.

7 Role of Men and Women in Prevention

Men have an important part in prevention. They can speak out against sexism, refuse to join in sexist jokes, treat women colleagues with the same respect they would show members of their own family, show restraint witMen play an important role in prevention. They can speak out against sexism, avoid sexist jokes, treat women colleagues with respect, be careful with alcohol and other substances, hold their peers accountable, and

openly support efforts to stop harassment and violence.far stronger. Confiding in a trusted colleague, family member or union representative is better than staying silent, and having a witness present, where possible, adds protection. Incidents should be formally reported to the appropriate person or committee, and where no policy exists, women can press for one. If physical assault has occurred, a medical examination should be sought, as it may be needed in any later legal proceedings.

Prevalence: A Statistical Overview

A 2023 study from the United States gives a sense of how widespread workplace harassment remains. Just over half of respondents (52 per cent) said they had experienced or witnessed harassment at work, and 40 per cent reported experiencing sexual harassment specifically. Roughly 80 per cent of incidents took place in an office setting, and 83 per cent of transgender respondents reported some form of harassment.

Incidence fell with age: 28 per cent among 18–34-year-olds, 22 per cent among 35–44-year-olds, 13 per cent among 45–54-year-olds, and 10 per cent among those aged 55 and over. Perhaps most telling, 57 per cent of those harassed left their jobs as a result, and 76 per cent never reported what had happened.

Comparisons across countries place India highest in workplace harassment prevalence, at around 26 per cent, followed by China (18 per cent), Saudi Arabia (16 per cent) and South Africa (10 per cent). Norway, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, by contrast, are recognised for strong workplace management practices and correspondingly lower reported prevalence.

Strategies for Building a Sustainable, Inclusive Workplace

1 Gender Sensitisation

Gender sensitisation helps staff see gender discrimination for what it is and work to eliminate it. The result is a safer, more supportive environment in which harassment is less likely to take root.

2 Awareness of Anti-Harassment Mechanisms

A functioning complaints committee and a clear anti-harassment policy Having an active complaints committee and a clear anti-harassment policy shows that the organization is serious about stopping harassment. These also tell employees what behaviour is expected at work.he relevant anti-discrimination laws and should put structured training in place so that employees understand the organisation's policy and follow it. The best programmes go beyond ticking compliance boxes; they reinforce professionalism and mutual respect as everyday values.

3 Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is both a strategy and a process for organisationGender mainstreaming is a strategy and process for changing organizations. It includes the experiences, knowledge, and interests of both women and men in how a workplace operates. It is not just about hiring more women, but about creating broader social integration and unity.s, attending to the needs of home as well as work, widening opportunities for fair distribution of work, and promoting equality, freedom and empowerment. In practice, it can take the form of gender policies, equal opportunity policies, gender-responsive budgeting, and structured training and career counselling.

4 Building Workplace Equality

An inclusive workplace does not happen by accident. It has An inclusive workplace needs to be built on purpose. This means creating the right environment and helping staff become more aware of gender issues. Programs work best when there is trust and respect, not fear. Every complaint should be addressed, no matter who is involved, and women should know that speaking up will not be used against them.s Colleagues should feel comfortable with each other. Awareness of gender inequality can be raised through in-person education and social campaigns. There should be zero tolerance for disrespectful or harassing behaviour. Organizations should also have a clear anti-harassment policy, set up the ICC, make it easy to file complaints, hold regular workshops, and encourage both employees and trade unions to get involved.work is not simply a private grievance between two people. It is a systemic expression of gender inequality, and it damages the dignity, safety and productivity of working women. Over the past three decades, India's legal and institutional response, from the Vishaka guidelines of 1997 to the comprehensive framework of the 2013 Act, has greatly strengthened the protection available to women.

However, under-reporting is still common, complainants still face a heavy burden of proof, and cultural attitudes that excuse harassment remain. Legal changes alone are not enough. Real prevention needs ongoing commitment from employers, government, trade unions, and employees, along with regular training, easy and confidential complaint systems, and a broader shift toward gender sensitivity.

This review offers several recommendations. Organizations should do more than just meet the basic ICC requirement—they should make sure their committees are truly independent, well-trained, and approachable. Awareness programs should happen regularly, not just at induction. Data on complaints and outcomes should be tracked and

reviewed to spot patterns. Men should be included as active allies in prevention, not just seen as possible offenders. More research on how common harassment is, why it goes unreported, and its effects on organizations is needed to improve these systems and make workplaces truly safe and fair.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sexual harassment at work is not simply a private grievance between two people. It is a systemic expression of gender inequality, and it damages the dignity, safety and productivity of working women. Over the past three decades, India's legal and institutional response, from the Vishaka guidelines of 1997 to the comprehensive framework of the 2013 Act, has greatly strengthened the protection available to women.

Yet under-reporting remains widespread, the burden of proof still weighs heavily on complainants, and cultural attitudes that trivialise or excuse harassment have not disappeared. Legal reform, on its own, is not enough. Real prevention depends on the sustained commitment of employers, government bodies, trade unions and employees, backed by regular training, accessible and confidential complaint mechanisms, and a wider cultural shift towards gender sensitivity.

This review points to several recommendations. Organisations should go beyond token compliance with the ICC requirement and make sure their committees are genuinely independent, properly trained and easy to approach. Awareness programmes should be held regularly, not just once at induction. Data on complaints and their outcomes should be kept and reviewed so that systemic patterns can be identified. And men should be drawn in as active allies in prevention, rather than viewed only as potential respondents. Further research on prevalence, under-reporting and the organisational consequences of workplace sexual harassment is essential if these mechanisms are to be refined and workplaces made genuinely safe and equitable.

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