Review Article

Unravelling workplace harassment: Impact on professional journey of Indian women

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Abstract

Modernization has increased the number of women working in both the organized and unorganized sectors, and we can witness a culture clash in many cases when a woman is the family's breadwinner. As women fight to pursue their career goals, they often face significant challenges, especially in patriarchal societies like India. A number of obstacles are presented in shape of discrimination and stigma based on gender, which hampers women's advancement and undermine their professional goals. Though progress has been made in the direction of gender equality, deeply rooted cultural prejudices and conventions still exist, which makes it difficult for women to succeed in the workplace. Workplace harassment is one of the widespread phenomena which cannot be overlooked when it comes to professional growth of women. Despite the existing laws like POSH Act protecting individuals from it, the issue continues to loom in the air. The purpose of this secondary research is to better understand the source of workplace harassment that Indian women experience and how it affects their careers and general well-being. To draw the conclusion, a pool of 70 research papers was reviewed from various databases, out of which 15 types of research were cited according to relevance. The current research looks at the psychological toll that harassment has on victims, such as tension, anxiety, and diminished productivity. The research spots power disparities, gender inequality, and societal norms as the main contributors. The results suggest achievable strategies like quick reporting systems, victim support, bystander education, and creating a polite work environment in order to manage the workplace harassment against women.

Introduction

Half of India's population is female, therefore empowering and developing them is essential to strengthening the country's economy. We need to bring women into the spotlight and provide them

the human rights they deserve.[1] Indian working women have had a difficult time making a name for themselves in the workforce. In the past, social reformers were crucial to the advancement of women's suffrage and education. To improve their circumstances, the Indian government has created a number of legislation and initiatives. However, discrimination against Indian women persists, both overt and covert. Bhattacharyya pointed out sexual harassment as one of the challenges that Indian women still deal with.[2]

Harassment can be understood as any inappropriate or unpleasant behaviour that could offend or humiliate another person. Using gestures, words, or any other action intended to irritate, criticize, abuse, intimidate, humiliate, or disgrace the other individual creates an intimidating and offensive work environment. Women experience discrimination from an early age, particularly in societies where male children are favoured. The prevalence of workplace harassment is rising across all economic sectors, mostly as a result of more and more detrimental effects. Several non-profit organizations have developed anti-harassment rules as a result of this.

According to the Ministry of Labour, Sexual harassment has been reported as one of several crimes against women in the Indian media. Women's employment involvement has increased over the 1990s, rising from a modest 19.67% in 1981 to 25.51% in 2011.[3] Unfortunately, the way society views women hasn't changed, which is awful for their safety and well-being. Television, the media, and liberalization have an impact on social ideals, but traditional patriarchal values are still prevalent, demonstrating that social change is still not complete. In recent years, crimes against women have progressively climbed. Some prevalent examples include eve-teasing, molestation, stalking, rape, acid attacks, assaults on honor, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and other offenses that are gender-based. The discussion of Indian femininity reflects society's conflicted views on women. Power dynamics that hold the woman captive and hold her responsible for upholding the honour and respect of the family at any cost, including her life, have an impact on gender relations. The issue is made worse by the fact that many people, especially the perpetrators, doubt the gravity of sexual harassment.[4]

A secure workplace is a legal entitlement for women. The Constitution of India's preamble emphasizes ensuring "equality of status and opportunity" for all citizens. Articles 14, 15, and 21 guarantee the equality and personal liberty of every person under the law. Sexual harassment at work violates a woman's fundamental rights. It contradicts the essence of Article 19(1)(g), which grants every Indian citizen the right "to practice any profession or to carry out any occupation, trade, or business". In many instances, workplace harassment hinders women from employment. Consequently, a robust law was needed to mandate all Indian workplaces to ensure a safe and harassment-free environment for women.

The POSH Act is crafted based on the legally enforceable directives established by the Supreme Court in the landmark case "Vishaka vs. State of Rajasthan (1997)," widely recognized as the Vishaka Guidelines.

The Act provides a broad concept of sexual harassment, encompassing unwanted acts such as physical contact, favours based on sexuality, making sexual comments, or any other un welcomed physical, verbal, or non-verbal behaviour sexual in nature. Remarkably, the POSH Act is country specific to India, and legal frameworks in other countries may differ. Organizations in India and individuals must be aware of and abide by the POSH Act's requirements to ensure a respectful workplace for all employees.

The Act requires companies to protect employees from sexual harassment in order to establish a safe working environment. It is mandatory for employers to form internal committees to manage and resolve allegations of sexual harassment.

Establishing an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) at every office or branch is necessary for employers with over ten employees. The ICC is accountable for receiving and handling complaints addressing sexual harassment.

The Act explains the procedure for submitting and handling sexual harassment complaints. It spots the requirement for unbiased and private investigation of the concerns. It establishes fines and other consequences for not adhering accordingly. Employers may face legal negative outcomes if they do not comply the Act's requirements.

In the long-running struggle against the threat of sexual harassment of women in the workplace, the POSH Act's passage represents a significant turning point.

This research bears an important value in revealing the existing problem of harassment in the workplace among Indian women, providing light on its adverse influence on individual well-being, professional performance, and gender equality. The findings contribute to a large conversation about building inclusive and powerful work cultures. In addition to protecting people's physical and emotional health, addressing workplace harassment is essential for developing an inclusive and respectful work environment. In the end, current research highlight urgent need for institutions and decision-makers to implement practical solutions that not only lessen the immediate effects of harassment but also back the long-term cultural shifts that progress gender equality and employee wellbeing.

Rationale

Indian women continue to face widespread workplace harassment despite legal protections, which has a detrimental effect on their well-being and productivity.

Understanding the effects of workplace harassment on Indian women's job performance and determining the underlying causes of this misconduct are the driving forces behind this secondary study. Itreviews previous research to explore the psychological effects on victims, the social norms that adds on a layer to the problem, and the importance of legislative frameworks and cultural shifts in promoting a secure environment.

Objectives

- To understand the impact of harassment in on job performance.

- To understand the potential causes of the workplace harassment among Indian women;

- To recommend strategies to implant harassment free environment.

Review of literature

Workplace harassment, especially sexual harassment (SH), is a critical issue affecting women in India. Several studies reveal the adverse impacts of workplace harassment on victims. Research found that victims of SH experience significant adverse impacts on their employers, coworkers, and jobs.[5] They experience considerable distress as a result, as seen by the negative consequences on their bodily and mental health as well as their general level of happiness. Because of their harassment, some victims might even develop signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. Rathore and Mishra (2019) states that an unpleasant behaviour has a greater negative impact on physical and mental well-being in an organised society, and it also stops the other women from being independent.[6] Every woman has a fundamental right to gain public employment. When sexual harassment occurs, a fundamental right is violated and leads a woman to refrain from such an employment.

Ngwane (2018) investigated that harassment can impact the performance of the employee. About 60% of women employees reported insufficient opportunities for professional development. The study suggests a drop on productivity as a result.[7] As said by a study, psychological injury is characterized by harm to an individual's intellectual, mental, and rational self.[8] A person is unable to reach her full potential as a result of this injury due to an inadequate work environment. Researcher notes extensive psychological impacts like stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and reduced wellbeing.[9] Sexual harassment can also have a negative impact on career prospects and professional advancement, which can result in lower output, absenteeism, and even job loss.

Previous findings also suggest that sexual harassment could lead to loss of interest in the job, character defamation of the women, increased absenteeism to avoid harassment, loss of job, stress in maintaining relations with peer and social withdrawal.[10]

While impacts on victims are severe, organizations also face fallouts. Only 17 per cent of bullying cases were addressed internally. When an employee faces bullying at workplace, they may perceive violation of psychological contract resulting in decreased engagement levels.[11]Additionally, a study shows how a hostile work environment, which includes bullying and abuse, negatively affects early-career employees; as a result, they are less driven and satisfied to complete their banking duties.[12]

Several studies shed light on the potential causes of harassment against women. The causes are multifaceted and complex. A study has found that due to women's higher level of intolerance for injustice and lack of confidence to fight against the situation, women are more frequently the targets of sexual harassment in institutions, both directly and indirectly.[13] Women are prevented from filing complaints against the offenders in educational institution settings due to their fear of embarrassment and blame.

According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, largely a variety of factors directly and indirectly are targets of sexual harassment. This includes male dominance, low paying jobs, higher education, and fewer career opportunities, leading to violations of employees' fundamental workplace rights.[14]

Gupta(2023) suggests that the innate belief that males are superior to women is one of the key components of all such reasoning to sexual harassment.[15] The social conditioning of men in a patriarchal society perpetuates this mentality, which serves as the foundation for crimes like workplace sexual harassment. Along similar lines, Jha (2016) suggested that sexual harassment taking place at work is rooted in the patriarchy, and the harasser uses his organizational power and power to abuse the women, leading to sexual discrimination in the workplace.[16] Previous research analysed that in order to survive and resist against sexual harassment, female civil servants who are viewed as outsiders put on a 'masculine face'.[4] Some female government servants use "acting male" or refraining from "acting male" as a way of resisting, but when a female civil servant acts "feminine," even her female co-workers criticize her for having "loose character."

A researcher proposes that the core causes of sexual harassment include gender inequality and power disparities. It frequently reflects the views, prejudices, and conventions of society. Gender stereotypes, the objectification of women, ignorance, ineffectual policies, and a deficiency in the enforcement of current laws are all contributing factors. Sexual harassment can also be sustained by organizational issues such a noxious work culture, hierarchical systems, and a lack of accountability.[9]

Method

Screening: A total of 50 research papers on the particular topic were reviewed. Out of those 15 papers were selected and included in the research paper based on their relevance.

Data bases: Secondary data was used to gather insights. Key databases such as PubMed, Frontiers, Research Gate, Springer, Consensus and Google Scholar were chosen.

Key words: Workplace harassment, Sexual harassment, Indian women, POSH.

Inclusion criteria: Recent studies from 2017-2023 were included. Studies that were conducted in India and included working Indian women as sample were included.

Ethical consideration: The article was reviewed by the ethical board and was accepted without any discrepancies.

Results

Table : Findings of the literature

Title of Paper	Author	Year	Findings
Impact of workplace bullying on work engagement among early career employees.	Javed et al.	2023	Early-career employees are less motivated and satisfied to do their banking responsibilities due to bullying and hostile work environment.
A comprehensive study on sexual harassment in India and its impact on women well-being and social dynamics.	Tripathi	2022	Findings indicate profound psychological effects of sexual harassment, including stress, anxiety, low self esteem, and diminished wellbeing.
			The negative repercussions extend to career prospects, professional advancement, resulting in lower output, increased absenteeism, and potential job loss. Proposed causes of sexual harassment include gender inequality and power disparities.

Study on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace in India.	Rathore and Mishra	2019	In an orderly society, inappropriate behaviour has greater negative impact on physical as well as mental health, deteriorating women from being independent.
Workplace harassment and its impact on staff performance: a case study of a south African higher education institution.	Ngwane	2018	Harassment impacts employee performance, with 60% of women reporting limited opportunities for career growth and professional development, leading to a decline in productivity.
Linking workplace bullying and work engagement: The Mediating role of psychological contract Violation.	Rai & Agarwal	2017	When an employee experience bullying at work, they may begin to perceive violations of their psychological contract, which will lower their level of engagement.
An Overview of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace in India: An Analytical Study.	Bhat & Deshpande	2017	Women become the targets of sexual harassment due to factors like male dominance, low paying jobs, higher education, and less job opportunities.
Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place in India: Emerging Perspective and Issues.	Yatindra Jha	2016	Sexual harassment could lead to loss of interest in the job, character defamation of the women, increased absenteeism to avoid harassment, loss of job, stress in maintaining relations with peer and social withdrawal.
A meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of workplace sexual harassment.	Willness, et al.	2007	Victims of SH experience significant adverse impacts on their employers, co-workers, and jobs.

The above findings commonly suggest that sexual harassment towards women at workplace leads to decreased motivation levels, productivity, increased stress and anxiety and even job loss. These behaviours not only hamper mental and physical health but also stagnates the career and growth of female employees also leading to absenteeism.

Discussion

Through this research, the complicated network of potential causes and the impact of harassment on job performance are tried to be understood, along with the complex dynamics of the workplace for Indian women. In India, workplace harassment is still a highly prevalent problem that primarily affects women and has a lasting negative influence on their careers and general well-being. Women make up half of the population, so empowering them is not only morally required, but also strategically important for the nation's economic growth.[1] However, despite social reforms and legal interventions, discrimination against women at workplace in India has continued, making their journey challenging.

The researchers' wakeful reality about the problem of sexual harassment has made it possible to understand the significant effects that these instances have on women's wellness and productivity at work. The results favour the researcher's finding that harassment has long lasting effects on personal as well as professional domains by declining productivity and opportunities for advancement.[7] When the variables that contributed to workplace harassment are reviewed, it reveals a tough scenario showing many threads tangled to create this kind of misconduct. Research highlighted the deeply embedded social norms and patriarchal values that serve as the basis for workplace harassment.[10,15]

Such persistent nature can be attributed in large part to the deeply rooted belief in male superiority and the abuse of organizational power. The power dynamics in this situation takes yet another level of complexity. The research's observation of conventional power dynamics highlights how harassment becomes a tool for enforcing social norms in addition to illuminating its prevalence.

Furthermore, research has made it evident that psychological toll on victims has a broader impact on their mental health, leading to stress, anxiety, and decline well-being.[5,6,9] Another layer is added by Javed et al. (2023), explaining how early-career workers who are exposed to a hostile work

environment suffer from lower motivation and job satisfaction, further accelerating their capacity to carry out their professional obligations.[12]

The current body of research additionally recognizes organizational problems, power imbalances, and gender inequality as long-lasting causes of workplace harassment. It rightly brings to notice that these issues are not just the result of societal opinions; they are also encouraged by a toxic workplace culture and a decline of accountability in the company. It is undebatable that cultural needs a change, which calls for alterationof individual attitudes, organizational structures, and society perspectives.

Regarding constitutional frameworks, the POSH Act emerges as a hope for development, the foundations of which are laid in the Vishaka Guidelines, defining sexual harassment in detail and holding employers accountable for creating a safe work environment. The Act talks about the Indian Constitution's guarantees of equality and personal liberty, highlighting the importance of defending fundamental rights. However, it is the acknowledged in the discussion that legal frameworks are not enough on their own. In order to promote a safe and courteous workplace, the research highlights a call for cultural shift in which both individuals and organizations actively engage with and comply with the POSH Act.

These outcomes highlight the critical relationship that exists between harassment and performance of women employee, emphasising that an anti-harassment workplace is not only morally needed but also a useful move in creating a climate that supports professional development. The literature review pinpoints societal norms, power imbalances, and gender inequality as the main contributors to workplace harassment experienced by Indian women. An extensive strategy is needed to effectively deal with these issues.

Limitation

The study discovers connections between workplace harassment and the harm it does to Indian women. It might, for instance, show a link between harassment and sub par job performance or mental health issues. The current study, however, does not identify the managerial level at which harassment of women in the workplace occurs. What kind of harassment does a woman

experience at a higher level of an organization, if any? It is not possible to establish beyond a reasonable doubt-despite more research-that harassment is the main cause of these problems.

An important drawback of this secondary research is its incapability to demonstrate cause and effect. The possibility that workplace harassment may specifically target women who experience mental health problems and poor performance is one of the variables whose reverse causality has not yet been examined in this study.

Practical implications

The study's findings might have an impact on upcoming research projects and campaigns aimed at stopping workplace harassment of Indian women.

Law and policy

The research can provide important information to reinforce existing constitutional frameworks, like the POSH Act, by highlighting areas for improved enforcement or legislative amendments to better address the particular challenges faced by Indian women.

Culture of the organization

By establishing the link between harassment and lower amount of productivity, this research can encourage companies to prioritize creating a harassment-free environment. As a result, more receptive internal complaint system, training programs, and bystander intervention strategies may be developed. The research might spread awareness among leaders of how important it is to develop a culture.

Strengthening women and others

Implementing the research's recommendations for easily accessible reporting mechanisms and victim support can empower Indian women to report harassment and seek legal and professional assistance. Developing spectator training can create a more favouring work environment where employees feel liable for maintaining a respectful environment and are mindful of how to intervene effectively.

Recommendations

Prompt reporting mechanisms: Confidential

and quick accessible reporting mechanisms should be provided to enable employees to report incidents of harassment instantly. Protection to whistleblower should be ensured so that further steps be taken for reporting without fear of negative consequences.

Through investigations: Fair, and impartial investigation should be conducted without any biases regardless of authority status. Taking appropriate action indicates a clear message that harassment is not accepted whatever may be the status of the offender.

Training for bystanders: Organizations should train all employees on harassment since it affects not only the victim and the harasser but also spectators. This may foster a culture in which upholding an atmosphere free from harassment becomes everyone's duty.

Victim assistance: Emotional support, legal advice, and counselling must beprovided to victims of harassment, such as. By establishing a safe area of refuge, victims can receive the support they need to recover and minimize the long-term effects of the traumatic experience.

Encourage a respectful culture: The leadership of the organization has a great influence on its culture. Employers should encourage a culture that valuing respect, diversity and inclusivity. Promote open communication and ensure that no employee is resistant to report instances of harassment because of fear of repercussions.

Policy review and enforcement: When anti-harassment laws are actively obeyed, modified, and made to conform to modern social norms, they have an inhibiting impact.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the contributors of workplace harassment that Indian women experience and how it impacts their career advancement and general well-being. This research gathered secondary data through several data bases and reviewed the factors. The research clarified the complicated mechanisms surrounding the harassment at workplace that Indian women face. Research also points out the need for an entirely broad approach that takes organizational policies, legal frameworks, and social change into account. To set women free from the chained hands of

widespread discrimination and create work environments where women can thrive fearlessly, cooperation from employees at all levels is required. The study demonstrates how important it will be for organisations and policymakers to understand, address, and eradicate workplace harassment in order to set up a more inclusive and empowered future.

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