



- UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

Case Study Report

on

Role of youth in Prevention of Sexual Harassment At Work Place

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1. Introduction

Intensive debate on gender issues and empowerment of women have been taking place since last four decades in every section of the society, but in present context it is found that the gender inequality is felt by many. It is also apparent in the form of discrimination, sexual harassment and violence against women. It was thought proper to discuss the issue with university youth as their role, in bridging the gender discrimination, is remarkable.

Gender inequality is a multifaceted issue that concerns men and women. It refers to inequality in health, education, economic and political between men and women. In India, discriminatory attitudes towards either sex have existed for generations and affect the lives of both sexes. Women empowerment movements have brought the issues of women in forefront of the society. The society intern took the responsibility and it has resulted in making of laws and provisions to protect and empower women.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Act 2013, (Sexual Harassment Act) came into existence after judgment on case Vishaka vs. State of Rajasthan in 1997. In its judgment the Supreme Court had for the first time, acknowledged sexual harassment of women as a human rights violation, and outlined guidelines (the guideline is known as the Vishaka guidelines). The Supreme Court made it mandatory for employers to provide for sympathetic and non-retributive mechanisms to enforce the right to gender equality for working women.¹

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Act 2013 provides a very wide definition of 'workplace'. The statute, *inter alia*, applies to government bodies, public and private sector organizations, NGOs, organizations carrying on commercial, vocational, educational entertainment, industrial and medical activities including Educational Institutions, Sports institutions and stadiums used for training individuals. Additionally as per the Act a workplace also covers within its scope places visited by employees during the course of employment or for reasons arising out of

¹Measure for Ensuring the safety of Women and programmes for gender sensitization on Campuses, 2013
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_Harassment_of_Women_at_Workplace_\(Prevention,_Prohibition_and_Redressal\)_Act,_2013](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_Harassment_of_Women_at_Workplace_(Prevention,_Prohibition_and_Redressal)_Act,_2013)

employment - including transportation provided by the employer for the purpose of commuting to and from the place of employment.²

Despite all these, gender disparities remains, women faces harassment ,sexually, physically and psychologically. Some where there is a need to make the youth to understand these issues as they are the frontiers of the upcoming society.

For this purpose researcher approached university students a proper rapport was established. Students were involved in discussion. 150 student of Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur Chhattisgarh who belonged to various departments represented the student community.

were approached by conducting gender sensitization programs. Rapport with the students was established and gradually they were involved in the discussion on the gender issues. From the interactions with students following research objectives emerged out

Research Objectives

- To assess the level of awareness on sexual harassment at workplace (what constitutes sexual harassment at work place etc.) among the students
- To find out how student community can contribute towards making the workplace (university) free of sexual harassment at work place.

2. Partner

In course of time a research team was formed which included **Gender champions** :*Gender Champions* are envisaged as responsible leaders who will facilitate an enabling environment within their college and academic institutions where girls are treated with dignity and respect gender equality and monitor progress towards gender justice. **Class leaders:** Student representative of classes of departments covering Law, Social Work, Sociology, Economics, Psychology, Anthropology, Physical Education, Linguistic, Pharmacy and Physics. **Oxfam India:** Oxfam India is a fully independent Indian organization (with

²<https://theconversation.com/india-has-a-sexual-assault-problem-that-only-women-can-fix-101366>
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Indian staff and an Indian Board) is a member of a global confederation of 21 Oxfams. The Oxfams are rights-based organizations that fight poverty and injustice by linking grassroots programming (through partner NGOs) to local, national and global advocacy and policy-making. Oxfam India's vision is to create a more equal, just, and sustainable world.

3. Method

In this study both qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied.

Qualitative – Focussed group Discussion (FDG), Honey Bee Method, Realization of Self power Film appreciation tool, Key informant interview. *These methods of research encourages community actors to be involved in solving their own problems and issues and therefore contributing to community development (Tandon 2012).*

- Quantitative - Survey

Focussed group discussion

A series of FDGs were held with the student community. These discussions began with broad perspectives of gender inequality where the participants pointed out the various forms of discriminations faced by women i.e. in the context of choosing her career, choosing her life partner, holding property, discrimination faced in playground, harassment of sexual nature faced at workplace.

During the initial phase of research, it was analysed that Gender discrimination is a broader context to be dealt with. By and large in students discussion sexual harassment felt by female students was focussed. So gender discrimination in the present study concentrated on above said specific issue.

FDG- 1 Discussion on various types of discrimination

In the beginning of the research students shared the experience of gender discrimination observed families, institutions and in public places . Following points were shared -

- Gender discrimination is being seen in dress, Job selection, household works etc. Girls are always supposed to wear long dresses, lighter work as they are considered delicate and can't be involved in heavy activities.
- Emphasis on Public place as it is one of the core places for sexual harassment.
- Problems faced in the journey of sports career.
- Sexual harassment at work place
- Limited knowledge on redressal mechanism
- Difference of opinion among male and female students on sexual harassment at work place.

Students group accepted that sexual harassment issue must be addressed in the society

FDG- 2

Students shared their dilemma in analysing the issues on sexual harassment. The male students shared that it is not necessary that boys are always at fault rather many a times girls take the advantage of being girls and misuse their gender in framing charges against boys.

Female students were also of opinion that the girls misuse their gender at workplace to **sick** benefit, Viz ; for promotion and personal advantages.

FGD – 3

After collating all the issues shared, student who are the bright future of our nation and who are going to drive future workforce of our country decided that sexual harassment domain should be studied so that we can understand the negative impact of harassment and also strengthen our role towards reducing sexual harassment. Students also stressed that issued should reach to wider communities, increase in awareness towards legal issues and various other aspects .

FGD – 4

After having a round of marathon discussions, a quantitative research was conducted to find out the knowledge and awareness level, types of sexual harassment at work place, redressal mechanism etc.



Fig 01 Focussed Group Discussions & Activities

Film Appreciation Tool

In film appreciation tool kit students were shown film clips related with sexual harassment and were asked their opinion on those scenes , the students were also asked what they would have done in that situation. Through the use of film cuts in Hindi, as well as through activities, and discussions, this toolkit has been used in generating a discussion on gender social norms and on sexual harassment in workplace.

Film Appreciation is a method which directly provides the responses of youth, on the subjects they are more inclined to words entertainment, especially movies. The tool helps in identifying the stereotypes existing in the opinion of youth related with the sexual harassment issues. thus this method helps in evaluating the impact of media in forming opinion on the above issue.



Fig 02 Film Appreciation Tool

4. Analysis

Survey

The issue of sexual harassment lead investigator to think about students awareness on the issue. For this purpose a close ended questionnaire was developed to assess awareness related to the information regarding Sexual harassment, experience, Internal Complaint Committee in college, helpline numbers, and steps to prevent sexual harassment by management etc. The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions covering all above components.

Analysis of the data obtained from survey revealed:

Survey reports reveals that 50% male respondents did not know about sexual harassment act. This result raises a point of concern for youth not knowing about the legal aspect of sexual harassment . The Post Graduation students who would be, in for the coming years, employed must be aware of the act.

More than 60% of male do not consider that college/ classroom/ library comes under work place whereas around 75% of females agree for the same.

Most of the students shared that neither they nor their friends suffered sexual harassment. But denying regarding the incidences of sexual harassment does not always mean that in real sexual harassment had not taken place. Factor of shy or fear of disclosing about the incidences may be one of the major reasons for not reporting.

The responses highlighted that half of the male respondents considered that physical abuse such as touching, beating, kissing etc. are only the component of sexual harassment, whereas most of the female responded that obscene behaviour, words and showing documents are included in the sexual harassment.

Around 68% of female respondents shared that they will remain silent and will not share about incident of sexual harassment if any, with family members or friends. Despite of knowing the fact that guilty lies on accused, girls deny to share the matter of sexual harassment.

More than 50% of male and female do not know what is Internal Complain Committee (ICC), The data directs towards the need to increased efforts from

the university & institution towards imparting knowledge. The result also highlighted that majority respondents were unaware of Internal Complaint committee which is compulsory to be formed at every work place. As the students were not aware of the ICC they were ignorant about, whether ICC is working as per guidelines of the act, and had no information regarding number of cases reported sexual harassment in their institution.

Most of the students responded that they never saw any advertisement, notice or any information material in the premises regarding prevention of sexual

Majority of the respondents had information regarding women helpline no. and 181 which is working 24*7 for women safety.

Apart from Qualitative and quantitative methods , students were asked to pen down their views and experiences on Gender equality and Sexual Harassment. Real experiences of sexually harassment shared by students

Case I

One girl shared that her experience, during a training programme she got hurt and her coach in the name of medication tried to touch her inappropriately. She did not like it at all and complaint to physical education teacher. She also shared that a girl can easily recognizes about the good and bad touch but in our society, she felt helpless and reasoned that in our society all the blame goes with girl and consequences become severe as member do not accept about the harassment.

Case II

Another female student shared that while in coaching course, her senior student took initiative to help junior girls in their studies .One of the boys asked the girls to spend some time in hotel and when girls denied they started troubling girls.

Case III

In a case where during a course senior boy was attracted toward a junior girl and proposed her and on denial started troubling her in many ways .The girl complained to parents regarding the problem. Parents wanted her to change the college. But she did not agree and requested for their support. After a lot of efforts and hardships parents agreed to continue her studies in the same college and also talked with the senior student to understand her feelings and her future aspirations. He was also asked to focus on his studies.

Like above experiences there are many other such incidences or experiences where female students are either molested or sexually harassed. In few cases students shared with their brother and other family members and they supported her in her tough time. While going through all case studies one important point is concluded that it is strange that though we all know the fact that girls are victim but still they are always asked to step down.

It is being analysed that registering a complaint also do not help them to We as a stakeholders and management are not able to provide a harassment free environment to our girls.

Inferences from FGDs

- Majority of the male members had a strong belief that decision making in the families is the exclusive responsibility of the male. Females have to follow the decisions and surprisingly majority of female agree to the same.
- Students (both male and female) shared that sexual harassment occurs during job selection, house hold work, public places such as stations, parks, buses etc.
- Majority of male shared that dressing of the females is one of the core reasons for the incidences of sexual harassment. They haven't developed the clarity that dressing is nothing to do rather there is an urgent need to develop understanding to accept respect females.

- Girls are more comfortable with the lady teachers as they find connectivity more in comparison to male teachers. They also perform freely and without any hesitation in the trainings or workout sessions.

The crux of the points shared are as follows –

- Girls are deprived from their rights starting from the beginning of their life and continue till the late years of her life.
- She never thinks as an individual rather always in perspective of daughter, wife, mother etc.
- She can never relate with the Gender Equality as she is never considered as she is always considered inferior to the males whether he is brother, husband, father or any other relation.
- She always battles for justice and receives humiliation.

In the beginning of the study it was decided that the discussion will cover all aspects of Gender inequality as the study proceeded various facets of gender inequality viz. discouragement of girls in taking up professional courses, restrictions in mobility of females, limited space for females to make choices (career & marriage), sexual harassment in public spaces etc. emerged. After two rounds of discussion with the students, it was decided that issues like mobility of females, issues concerning making choices etc. has to be seen in a much wider perspective of social norms. This meant that Gender equality is a multi-dimensional issue and it is complex to address every aspect. Hence delving in these issues demands longer and deeper engagement with the society at large. On the other hand the issue of sexual harassment of women in public spaces/ place of work was much more closer to the student community as about 60% of the community members mentioned that sexual harassment in some form or the other was faced by them or people whom they knew. So the student community decided they would like to know more about sexual harassment at work place and how they can play a role to make workspace for women more safe and healthy. Hence area selected for research was sexual harassment in educational institution role of youth .

Among a list of issues which manifests gender inequality, the student community choose to delve into the issue of sexual harassment of Women at workplace. Prevalent gender social norms pose challenge to women in making choices visa 'a vi education and career. Unsafe workspace adds to the problem. Therefore, the study aims at looking into level of awareness among students on legislation meant for safeguarding women from sexual harassment in workplace. And how student community can play a role in making their work place (educational institute) a space free of sexual harassment, for women.

Mobilization of Research findings and audience

- The result of the study was shared with the students in a meeting conducted with them .
- The result of the study was shared with Centre for Women's Studies for taking cognizance and organizing gender sensitization programs in the university.
- The result of the study was shared with ICC of the university so that proper publicity of ICC can be done.
- The result of the study will be shared with the University authorities and other stakeholders.

Lessons Learned

- ✓ Students opinion revealed that socialization play vital role in framing opinion on this sensitive issue.
- ✓ Intricacy/ Rigidity in the thought process of Male
It was really a challenging process to convey or make them understand regarding the gender equality. Changing the mindset prevailing is a long process and it will be requiring continuous engagement towards eradicating the issue. Patriarchal system or culture is completely absorbed and accepted in our families. It is not only the male who are following the pattern but females accepted it . They consider it as part of the system.

- ✓ Implementation of act should be focussed by the institutions

It has been concluded from the study that the act for prevention ,prohibition and redressal of sexual harassment should be enforced by the the institution.

Women help line no. etc. which shows that efforts had to be start from the grounds. Youth are the future of our nation so it is very important to build a relation with them and get regularly connected.

5. Way Forward

- This also stressed us to think that it is responsibility of university administrations to increase awareness regarding ICC among the students. Students should be imparted the basic information regarding ICC- structure, rules, guidelines etc.
- Highlighted that idea that the administration and management should focus on creating awareness with creative medium of advertising regarding the ICC and sexual harassment . Attractive and simple IEC materials should be posted in all the important areas in University premises such as Playground, canteens, library, staff room, notice board, reception etc.
- Proper trainings sessions should be organised separately for teachers, management and students to create awareness on Sexual Harassment.
- Legal awareness should be increased with contacting school of law ,legal cells/ Bar Association/lawyers in Raipur.
- As the study was conducted with the students of few departments, results and findings of the study will be shared with other departments so that a collaborative effort can be made towards the issue for the betterment of the institution.

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