



A Study On Sexual Harassment Among Women Workers At Work Place In Velore City

KEYWORDS

Sexual Harassment., Organizational Context, Women's Rights

Dr. Edison Nesa Doss

M.A (S.W.), P.h.d., PGDGC , HOD, Department of Social work, Voorhees College, 1/A, Officers Line Vellore-1 (Tamilnadu)

Mr. Pavan K Mukherjee

M.S.W., Asst. Professor, Department of Social work, Voorhees College, 1/A, Officers Line, Vellore-1 (Tamilnadu)

Mr. M Arvin Kumar

M.S.W., Social Worker, Vellore (Tamilnadu)

ABSTRACT

Men and women were created in the same image to enjoy equal participation in all the opportunities of creation but it could not be carried on as women slowly became a commodity only. Sexual harassment is one of the major social problems of all establishments in recent years. Sexual harassment is present in various forms such as physical, verbal, non verbal and visual sexual harassment. In a study conducted in Vellore 100 women workers of different retail sectors were studied in order to bring out the hidden difficulties in being a working woman especially that of sexual harassment. The research study has clearly revealed that sexual harassment has been and is still a work place problem in retails in Vellore city. The failure of recognizing the sexual harassment is a human rights issue that must be addressed. By addressing such issues within the organization would create equality and the workers may enjoy job satisfaction.

Introduction

Sexual harassment is one of the major social problems in our society. This consequently causes problems such as loss of job, dignity, social status and sometimes loss of life. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. Sexual harassment is defined as an unwelcome sexual advance or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, abusive or offensive working environment' (International labour organization 2005).

A recent survey has revealed that almost 17 percent of women workers in India face sexual harassment at their work place, with incidence rates being high in both organized and unorganized sectors (Agrawal, 2012). Further, it says that 26% of women, belonging to the unorganized sector, are the sole bread winners of their families and therefore economic vulnerability leads to 'fear of losing the job'. Other factors are 'absence of any compliant mechanism at the workplace', 'fear of getting stigmatized', and 'unawareness of existing redress mechanisms'.

Fresh graduates from universities are the most vulnerable targets at the workplace. 'Fresh women graduates join different private sector companies as trainees. These women become the easy targets of their immediate superiors who promise a salary hike or a permanent job' (The times of India, Dec30.2012, Patna). 'Workplace bullying' has grown substantially since the term was introduced and defined as a workplace problem in Britain in the early 1990s (Adams, 1992).

Despite this growing knowledge and the fact that cases and reports of sexual harassment are on the increase in India, no action has been known to have been taken against its perpetrators. Sexual Harassment at the workplace is a serious problem that must be addressed by the government in order to ensure a safe working environment for women. Recent information from Delhi shows that 78% of Delhi women were sexually harassed in 2012 (Patnaik, 2013). Our research study

will underline the presence of this problem among a specific group of retail shop women workers which can be translated to the other workers as well, as it is an important social problem. This study therefore sought to reveal the prevalence of sexual harassment in the retails market in Vellore district and to lay out strategies of dealing with the problem.

Forms of sexual harassment

It is generally accepted that sexual harassment includes two types of behaviour. The first is usually defined as "quid pro quo" and relates to where an individual, often in a position of power, will explicitly or implicitly make sexual requests and/or advances. In exchange they may offer some desired compensation, for example a promotion. The second is sexual harassment which can be defined as "hostile environment", which refers to sex-related behaviours which make the person being harassed feel uncomfortable, thereby creating an intimidating working environment (Smolensky and Kleiner, 2003: 60).

Rutter (1996) listed the seven most frequent forms of harassment. In order of frequency they were: Sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or questions; pressure for dates; letters, telephone calls, or materials of a sexual nature, Internet etc.; Sexual looks or gestures; deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering or pinching; pressure for sexual favours and actual or attempted rape or sexual assault.

Though the study has been conducted with the working women of retail sector and the results may just be the tip of the ice berg it would give us an insight into embarrassments and difficulties that a working woman faces in her daily day to day work life. The study would certainly lay down the foundation towards confidence building; improve work culture and self-dignity and self-worth.

Objectives

In the light of this literature, the study was focused to find out prevalence of sexual harassment and its impact among working women. Five specific areas were highlighted in this

study namely prevalence and types, sources (from whom), work environment, the levels of job satisfaction and awareness levels of Sexual Harassment.

Methodology

The research study was conducted in 'Vellore City'. Four zones in Vellore City i.e. Katpadi, Sathuvachari, Vellore Fort and Shenbakam were chosen. Each zone was divided into fifteen wards. The researcher selected women workers from various retail units in greater Vellore area. The researcher used a descriptive study design with sample consisting of one hundred women workers from various private retail shops in greater Vellore. The researcher had to restrict the study to private retail markets alone as obtaining consent to undertake the study was easier. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling. Keeping in mind the sensitivity of the topic as even the word sexual harassment is not freely used among the traditional women population, the confidentiality of respondents was considered paramount.

Data collection was done with the help of a questionnaire. A pre test was conducted before the actual data collection and the appropriate changes were made. Analysis was systematically done using the 'SPSS' package.

Findings

The findings of this study are that the majority (85%) of the women belonged to 18-28 years. Women with a graduate degree were 39%. Majority of the respondents (83%) have work experience below 5 Years. Around 50% were earning less than Rs.8000 per month. The study reveals that 20 to 30 % of the respondents have had to face vulgar words. 50 per cent of the respondents have faced the unwelcome word 'darling' in their work place.

Table -1
Respondents who faced unwelcome comments about their body parts

Unwelcome comments about body parts	Frequency	Percent
Never	62	62.0
Sometimes	33	33.0
Often	4	4.0
Always	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 1 expresses that 38% of the respondents have experienced personal comments about their body parts.

The study shows that 11 % of the respondents faced intrusive question about their personal sexual life. Around 29% of the respondents were made to repeatedly and intentionally listen to dirty and filthy jokes. The study also revealed that 29% respondents repeatedly received many sexual short messages and around 11% of the respondents repeatedly received sexual e-mails unwelcomingly. Further the study also shows that 12% of the respondents were exposed to see the private parts at work place. Around 15% of the respondents also reported that they were made to repeatedly look at sexually explicit image or pictures.

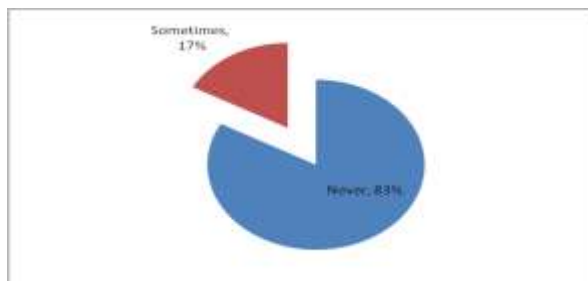


Figure 1 : Asking Question about menstruation

From Figure 1 it is again evidently clear that 17% of the respondents had to listen to disturbing questions about their menstruation.

In the study it was found that 26% of the respondents were shown obscene sexual gestures that were offensive and unwelcoming. Almost half of the respondents (47%) found people, standing very close to or cornered on their way. Shocking finding of the study was that 10% of the respondents reported to being forcibly kissed and around 17% of the respondents found that they were forcibly hugged both these situations were very disturbing and hurting for them.

Table-2

Marital status of the Respondents and Sexual harassment as a cross tabulation

Marital status of the Respondents	Affected by unwelcome Brushed of the Respondents				Total
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Married	32	6	0	0	38
Unmarried	35	18	4	3	60
Widow	1	0	0	1	2
Total	68	24	4	4	100

From table-2 it was revealed that the unmarried working women (25%) have been more affected by unwelcome physical contact. In terms of the reaction of the respondents against the sexual harassment it was found that the majority (52%) of the respondents did not react when sexually harassed but there are 2% of the respondents reacted strongly at the time of the harassment. It was also come out from the findings that about 21% of the respondents have had harassment experiences like black mailing.

The study also shows that around 40% of the respondents want to resign their job because of sexual harassment while 8% of the respondents have work overload because of sexual harassment.

A majority of respondents (77%) are not aware of the Sexual Harassment Act 2012. 83% of the respondents were aware that they can complain to the police in case of sexual harassment. A majority of respondents (88%) were not aware of IPC sections under the sexual harassment Act.

Discussion

Addressing employees or co-workers by their nick names may generate a synergy in the organization. But in common work situations when women staff (50% of respondents), are addressed using bad or unwelcome words such as "darling" at workplace in front of the co-workers and clients it is embarrassing. This is the major reason why people in India fear to send women to work. This study proves that this fear is not wrong because almost 40% of the respondents have experienced lewd comments with reference to their physique. For a safe working condition it is important to maintain the worth and dignity of the staff. If a woman staff is sexually insecure at workplace her dissatisfaction will certainly reflect on her quality of work.

The sexual harassment is not merely physical but psychological also which produces a lot of stress and frustration as a result women employees chose to quit from their job and sometimes end their life. This study shows that there are 17% of women respondents reported that they had been tortured mentally by questions regarding their menstruation. The study evidences that 8% of the respondents have work overload which may lead to an excuse for a sexual favour in the form of quid pro quo if not then sexual harassment. About 30% women respondents received unwelcoming phone calls and messages due to which some change their phone numbers to get rid of this problem. Thus the after work hours of the women are also affected.

More than 50% of the respondents did not react when sexually harassed. This may be due to a sense of embarrassment, poor financial situations or a fear of social stigma. This study also shows that 40% of the respondents want to resign their job because of sexual harassment. Majority of the respondents (77%) are not aware of the Sexual Harassment Act 2012. Without the knowledge of the legal rights women are being exploited. For true women empowerment, it is necessary to make the women aware of their rights at workplace. Each employer should have protocols to ensure a safe work place for their women workers. An orientation at the time of joining will make the employees aware of these before the need arises.

Assertive women have fewer problems compared to the others and hence it is advised that the organizations should create an appropriate environment. Sexual harassment free environment is not just the responsibility of the organization or the victim only but it requires a support from all the employees whether women or men. On the other hand the women worker needs to be more vigilant and should take bold steps to report any unwelcome incidences immediately to the concerned authority. A similar study should be conducted in the entire state on a larger level to find out even more about the sexual harassment going on in workplaces which would enable policy makers lay proper guide lines to eradicate this social evil against women.

Conclusion

This research has clearly revealed that sexual harassment has been and still is a workplace problem in retails in Vellore City. The magnitude in each case may differ according to the nature of the organization but it cuts across all retail sectors like jewel shop, textiles, departmental stores and retails markets. Lack of awareness of the available legal procedures is common among the study group. The position of women in the society, male dominance and cultural beliefs regarding women's rights are some factors which govern this social issue.

Failure to recognize that sexual harassment is also a human rights issue and that it must be addressed to create an equal, quiet and impartial working condition for women. Women also have every right to work in a friendly and congenial environment and when we achieve this we have indeed empowered our women.

REFERENCE

1. Adams, A. (1992) *Bullying at work. How to confront and overcome it.* Virago Press: London. | 2. Clair, R. P. (1993) 'the bureaucratization, commodification, and privatization of sexual harassment through institutional discourse: a study of the big ten universities'. *Management Communication Quarterly*. | 3. Dan, P., Pines, D. A. and Riggs, L. L. (1995) 'Sexual harassment as an occupational hazard in nursing'. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*. | 4. Dekker, I. and Barling, J. (1998) 'Personal and organisational predictors of workplace sexual harassment of women by men'. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*. | 5. Dougherty, D. S. and Smythe, M. J. (2004) 'Sensemaking, organizational culture, and sexual harassment'. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. | 6. Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Zapf, D. and Cooper, C. L. (eds.) (2003). *Bullying and emotional abuse in the workplace. International perspectives in research and practice.* Taylor and Francis: London/New York. | 7. Gilbert, D., Guerrier, Y. and Guy, J. (1998) 'Sexual harassment issues in the hospitality industry'. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*. | 8. Kohlman, M. H. (2004) 'Person or position? The demographics of sexual harassment in the workplace'. *Equal Opportunities International*. | 9. Pryor, J. B., LaVite, C. and Stoller, L. (1993) 'A social psychological analysis of sexual harassment: the person/situation interaction'. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour (Special Issue)*. | 10. Rutter, P. (1996) *Sex, power and boundaries.* Bantam: New York. | 11. Sczesny, S. (1997) 'Sexuelle Belaestigung am Telefon'. *Eine sozialpsychologie*. | 12. Sczesny, S. and Stahlberg, D. (2000) 'Sexual harassment over the telephone: occupational risk at call centres'. *Work and Stress*. | 13. Smolensky, E., and Kleiner, B. H. (2003) 'How to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace'. *Equal Opportunities International*. | 14. Tyler, T. R. (2002) 'Is the Internet changing social life? It seems the more things change, the more they stay the same'. *Journal of Social Issues* | Dailies | 1. The Times of India, Dec30,2012, Patna | 2. Hindustan Times, January 02, 2013, New Delhi | 3. The Hindu (10.03.2010), 'Rajya Sabha passes Women's Reservation Bill'