

Awareness regarding “sexual harassment of women at workplace act” among non-teaching female staff in a tertiary care hospital

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ABSTRACT

Background: A safe workplace is women’s legal right. Sexual harassment at the workplace is a violation of human rights. “Sexual harassment of women at workplace act” was passed in 2013. **Objectives:** The objective of the study was to assess awareness regarding “sexual harassment of women at workplace act” among non-teaching female staff in a tertiary care hospital. **Materials and Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in tertiary care hospital. A total of 60 non-teaching staff members were included in the study. Data were collected using pre-designed questionnaire. **Results:** About 87% of participants were aware of year of implementation of the act and occupations protected under the act. About 73% were aware regarding objectives of the act. Half of the participants were aware of the number of employees needed to form Internal Complaint Committee. Awareness was found to be poor regarding time limit to give a complaint and to conduct inquiry. All were aware regarding existence of sexual harassment committee in the institute. **Conclusion:** Educational sessions should be conducted to improve awareness regarding the act.


KEY WORDS: Sexual Harassment; Workplace; Awareness

INTRODUCTION

The sexual harassment of women at workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) act is implemented in India since 2013. As per the Ministry of Law and Justice of India, “sexual harassment includes any one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behavior, namely: (i) Physical contact and advances; or (ii) a demand or request for sexual favors; or (iii) making sexually colored remarks; or (iv) showing pornography; or (v) any other unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal conducts of sexual nature.”^[1] In simple words, sexual harassment means the sexual advances, requests for

sexual favors, and other verbal, non-verbal, or physical conducts of sexual in nature by the person of opposite sex or same sex, whether intentional or not, and which is regarded as undesired or forced.^[2] Sexual harassment is a form of abuse that affects one’s performance at work badly, due to another person’s inappropriate behavior. Sexual harassment at the workplace is a violation of human rights.^[3]

Sexual harassment is also a serious cause for concern in health-care institutions that train students, employ women in various capacities, and also cater to health needs of men and women. Sexual harassment is a serious problem for women workers. There is extensive anecdotal evidence indicating its pervasiveness, but it remains hidden by the veil of silence surrounding the issue.^[4] Due to the nature of work in the hospital, nursing and paramedical staffs are vulnerable for sexual harassment at workplace. Sexual harassment affects work performance of staff and may interfere with the care of patients. Staff should be made completely aware of legislations regarding “sexual harassment of women at workplace.”

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The legislation regarding “sexual harassment of women at workplace” was passed in 2013. Before the act was passed, the legal protection of working women in India was as per “Vishakha guidelines.” More than 5 years have passed after the implementation of sexual harassment of women at workplace act. Few studies have been conducted in India to find out the prevalence of sexual harassment in females.^[4,5] However, no study has been conducted to find out awareness regarding act. Hence, the present study was planned to find out awareness regarding act on sexual harassment at workplace among non-teaching female staff in a tertiary care hospital.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of this study were as follows:

1. To study the awareness regarding “sexual harassment of women at workplace act” among non-teaching female staff in a tertiary care hospital
2. To find out perceptions regarding reasons for sexual harassment among staff.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 60 non-teaching female staff members in a tertiary care hospital attached to a medical college. After taking permission from the Institutional Ethics Committee, the study was started. Nursing staff, clerical staff, and technicians were contacted personally. Sixty staff members who were willing to participate were included in the study by convenient sampling. After taking informed consent, the data were collected using pre-designed and pre-tested self-administered closed-ended questionnaire. Questionnaires were collected on the next day. Data were collected anonymously. Confidentiality of the data was maintained. Questionnaire included information regarding knowledge of sexual harassment at workplace act (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal), knowledge regarding committee and perceptions of staff about meaning, and reasons for sexual harassment. The data were entered into Excel sheet. Analysis was done using Epi Info™ statistical software in the form of proportions. Results of the study were informed to the head of the institute. A separate session was conducted by the members of the committee for participants and legal implementation of the act was explained in detail.

RESULTS

The age group range was from 28 to 58 years. Among 60 participants, 35 were nurses from the hospital and 15 were non-teaching staff members, i.e., clerical staff, technicians, etc.

About 87% of participants were aware of the year of implementation of the act and occupations protected under the act. About 73% were aware regarding objectives of the

act. Half of the participants were aware of the number of employees needed to form Internal Complaint Committee (ICC). Awareness was found to be poor regarding proportion of women members required in ICC, time limit to give a complaint to the committee, and time limit to conduct enquiry (17%, 3%, and 10%, respectively) [Table 1].

All the participants were aware regarding sexual harassment committee in the institute. More than 90% were aware of ICC. About 67% of participants were aware regarding inclusion of non-governmental organization expert member in the committee [Table 2]. Overall awareness was good. Sensitization sessions have been conducted by sexual harassment committee for the staff in the institute. This may be the reason for the present study findings.

Gender discrimination (34%), male aggressiveness (42%), and lack of education (34%) were the reasons perceived by the participants for sexual harassment (multiple responses were allowed).

Table 1: Knowledge regarding legal act about sexual harassment of women at workplace among staff (*n*=60)

Questions Knowledge regarding	Knowledge	
	Present <i>n</i> (%)	Absent <i>n</i> (%)
Year of implementation of the act	52 (86.66)	8 (13.34)
Legal protection working women had in India before the act was passed	40 (66.66)	20 (33.34)
Objectives of the act	44 (73.33)	16 (26.67)
Occupations protected under the act	52 (86.66)	8 (13.34)
Number of women employees needed at workplace to form ICC	30 (50)	30 (50)
Proportion of women members required in the committee	10 (16.66)	50 (83.34)
Time limit to give a complaint to the cell	2 (3.33)	58 (96.67)
Time limit to conduct enquiry about complaint	6 (10)	54 (90)

ICC: Internal Complaint Committee

Table 2: Knowledge of sexual harassment committee among staff (*n*=60)

Question	Yes	No
Are you aware of sexual harassment committee in our institute?	60 (100)	0
Internal complaint committee is mandatory as per the act	56 (93.33)	4 (6.67)
Inclusion of NGO expert member is mandatory in the committee	40 (66.66)	20 (33.34)

NGO: Non-governmental organization

DISCUSSION

Of total 60 participants, 87% of participants were aware of the year of implementation of the act. About 73% were aware regarding objectives of the act. Half of the participants were aware of the number of employees needed to form ICC. Awareness was found to be poor regarding time limit to give a complaint and to conduct inquiry. All were aware regarding existence of sexual harassment committee in the institute.

A study^[2] was conducted among undergraduate students in South region to find out knowledge of sexual harassment, it was found that more than 80% had good knowledge. Although most of the students had good knowledge, still 3/5 students were not aware of sexual grievance committee in the institute. In the present study, all the participants were aware of sexual harassment committee of the institute. Drop boxes to drop the complaints and banners to increase awareness are placed at the major locations in the campus. This may be the reason for the present study findings.

Few authors^[6,7] conducted a study among undergraduate female students in women and coeducational college in Delhi and they studied about perceptions of students about various strategies to avoid sexual harassment. It was found that none of the subjects had good level of awareness, approximately 50% of the participants had moderate level of awareness of avoidance strategies and more than 30% of students had slight level of awareness. Very few (16%) students had just enough awareness of avoidance strategies for sexual harassment. About 50% of students in women's college had slight awareness and 10% of subjects had just enough awareness of avoidance strategies for sexual harassment. In the present study, though all (100%) were aware of sexual harassment committee in the institute, awareness was found to be poor regarding proportion of women members required in ICC and regarding time limit to give a complaint to the committee and the time limit to conduct enquiry. Khan *et al.*^[3] conducted a study in Peshawar, Pakistan, to assess sexual harassment among hospital staff and student nurses in tertiary care hospital and reported 66% of participants were experienced sexual harassment in hospital. Level of awareness regarding act was found to be poor. Less than 50% of nurses were aware of the policy/act of sexual harassment. This finding is contradictory to the present study finding. In the present study, awareness was found to be better. It may be due to efforts taken by committee to improve awareness. A study^[8] was conducted in an institution of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The objective of the study was to find out the knowledge and perceptions of sexual harassment. Half of the participants reported that they knew what sexual harassment was, one-fifth of participants were not knowing and one-third were not sure about it. Subedi *et al.*^[9] conducted a study in Nepal to find out proportion of sexual harassment among nurses. Two-fifth of total nurses

have faced some form of sexual harassment. However, most of them ignored it. They believed that a stronger security system and legal implementation of act would be helpful to prevent it. Banerjee and Sharma^[10] carried out a study in Pune among students from four professional colleges. It was found that there was a difference between males and females regarding awareness of sexual harassment. Awareness was found to be poor among men. A study was conducted to find out sexual harassment among female students of Menoufia University.^[11] The prevalence rate was 65.3%. It was found that verbal type of sexual harassment was more.

The present study is a totally new study and no such study had been conducted to find out awareness regarding “sexual harassment of women at workplace act” among non-teaching staff of hospital. It had helped in assessing awareness regarding the act. There were some limitations of the study. As the study was conducted in a single institute only, the results of the study would be limited to the present institute and cannot be generalized. Sample size was small. The study should be conducted in different institutes and on larger sample size.

CONCLUSION

Non-teaching staff members were aware of the provision of sexual harassment committee in the institute. However, awareness was found to be poor regarding the details of legal provisions under the act. Repeated educational sessions explaining details of the act should be conducted to make them aware of the act.

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