

Awareness Level on Sexual Harassment Among Students in Higher Educational Institutions

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is the problem associated with health and has severe implications on the dignity and respect of the students, their physical as well as psychological state. Persons with good level of awareness on sexual harassment are ready to cope with the situations of sexual harassment effectively and courageously. The purpose of this research was to assess the awareness level of sexual harassment among University students.

The present study used descriptive research design to assess the study objective. Self-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Convenience sampling was used in the present study to select the participants. A total sample of 400 (300 female and 100 male) respondents were selected for sampling from higher educational institutions of Sagar and Jabalpur city of Madhya Pradesh respectively. The results of the current study show that the majority of the students were aware regarding sexual harassment.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Awareness Level, Students, Higher Educational Institutions.

Introduction

Sexual harassment is considered as an indication of those relationships among humans that are not healthy. It is considered as the violation of rights especially a threat related to right to life and peaceful existence of an individual guaranteed by the land of law. It is also the violation of human dignity and honor, social security and right to equality as guaranteed by the constitution of India. Sexual harassment in employment sector has received a greater attention by society. On the other hand, sexual harassment in different educational institutions in country has not gained much attention. Sexual harassment includes an unwelcome and sexually exploitive conduct that can take various forms such as physical contact, demand or undue request for sexual favors, casting

of sexually colored remarks towards a prospective victim for harassment. It can take more aggressive forms such as showcasing of pornography against the will of a person. It also includes acts such as verbal or non-verbal misbehavior of sexual nature such as staring, telling of dirty jokes, making sexual comments about a person's dress, body, and appearance etc.

Around the globe, Sexual harassment has been recognized as one of the severe forms of violence against women. The pioneering case of "Vishaka vs State of Rajasthan" (1997) in India in which the apex court recognized sexual harassment at the workplace as a human right violation. The judgement of this case became the base for the guidelines for the law related to sexual harassment. With the landmark judgement of Vishaka vs state of Rajasthan, there were no laws and legislations that would address the problem of sexual harassment. It took a very long time of sixteen years for the legislation of India to enact the bill on sexual harassment that gave detailed procedure for grievance related to sexual harassment.

"The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 defines sexual harassment as any one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behavior (whether directly or by implication) namely:

- (i) Making Physical contact and advances
- (ii) Demand or request for sexual favour
- (iii) Making sexually coloured remarks
- (iv) Showing pornography
- (v) Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature"

In recent times, the issue of gender equality and violence against women has been a prime focus of attention and concern in India. Sexual harassment generally takes place when there is inequality of powers among persons. The persons involved may be students vs teachers, employee vs organizational head, research supervisor vs research student etc. sexual harassment involves gender inequality in work related activities, educational duties and activities. In higher educational institutes, both the offender and offender chairpersons, head of the institutions can be held responsible of sexual harassment.

Higher educational institutions are the pioneer institutes of higher learning that are expected to provide safe environmental conditions for students, teachers and administrative staff to achieve their educational goal. Despite providing favorable and friendly environment for teaching learning process, sexual harassment is considered as one of the important issues in educational institutes. There are number of studies conducted on

sexual harassment of girl students in educational institutions. Bizu *et.al*, (2009), Hill and Silva (2005) argued that the problem of sexual harassment is universal especially in all levels of education institutions. Bizu, *et.al*. (2009) revealed that 86% of the female students were the victims of sexual harassment in United States of America. In one more study by Hill and Silva (2005), 62% of the college students were victims of different forms of sexual harassment in different colleges of America.

In modern era of technology, people believe in equality. Constitution of India guarantees the rights of women which are clearly explained in article 14, 19 and article 21. These three rights are considered as golden triangle of the constitution which has been clearly defined by the apex court under article 32. Sexual harassment has been defined in the Indian Penal Code under section 354 (A).

Review of literature:

Alizah Ali (2017) studied about the level of awareness on sexual harassment in workplace. It studied the aspects that contribute to the awareness level such as lack of knowledge about the issue, shame and fear etc. The study recommended that it is the responsibility of government to organize campaigns to prevent persons from sexual harassment. It also argues that the authorities of institutions need to perform their responsibilities well in ensuring that employees working are provided safe environment in workplace.

Keerthi (2017) studied the level of awareness and strategies for avoidance of sexual harassment. The study revealed that most of the respondents have less awareness related to the strategies used for avoidance of sexual harassment. A very less number of respondents showed satisfactory level of knowledge of strategies they use during the occurrences of sexual harassment. The study reveals that due to lack of strategies to avoid the occurrences of sexual harassment, most of the respondents will not identify the threats of sexual harassment. Thus, the victims will not be in a position to use strategies to avoid harassment that is perpetrated on them.

Leonard et al., (1989) in a study conducted on sexual harassment identified five types of sexual harassment behavior in campus. The study reported that sexual perpetrators are using “unwanted sexist comments, unwanted sexual statements, unwanted personal attention, unwanted sexual propositions, and unwanted physical or sexual advances.”

Objective of the present study:

- To study level of awareness regarding Sexual Harassment in higher educational institutions of Sagar and Jabalpur city.

Methodology:**Research design:**

The present study used descriptive research design to assess the study objective. A survey design was used to support the research objective. Self-structured questionnaire was used for data collection.

Sampling and Sample size:

Convenience sampling was used in the present study to select the participants. A total sample of 400 (300 female and 100 male) respondents were selected for sampling from higher educational institutions of Sagar and Jabalpur city of Madhya Pradesh respectively.

Results:**Demographic characteristics:**

Socio demographic information of the study participants. From the table it was observed that most of the participants were females 300 (75%) while as 100 (25%) were males. Regarding age of the participants, most of the participants belong to the age group of 18-21 n=144 (36%), participants belong to age group from 22-25 were 31.5% (n= 126), participants belong to age group from 26-29 were 14% (n= 56), participants belonging to age group from 30-34 were 18.5% (n=74). educational qualification of the participants was (47.8%) n= 191 were UG students, 26.8% (n=107) were P.G. students, 25.5% (n=102) were Doctoral students. 48.8% (n=195) respondent's do not have any income, 21% (n=84) participants income is below one lakh rupees, 13.5% (n=54) participants income is between one lakh to three lakh rupees, 14.5% (n=58) participants income is between three lakh to five lakh rupees, 2.3% (n=9) participants income is between five lakh to seven lakh rupees. 64.5% (n=258) participants belong to general category. 28.5% (n=114) participants belong to O.B.C., 4.5% (n=18) participants belong to Scheduled tribes, 2.5% (n=10) participants belong to scheduled castes.

Awareness on sexual harassment

In the present study, data were analyzed by descriptive statistics and represented as in percentage. The results of the present study show that most of the students were aware about sexual harassment. Participants were asked whether "Making seductive remarks about a person's appearance is a sexual harassment" n=370 (92.5%) reported as "Yes" and n=30 (7.5%) reported "No". Participants were asked whether "Making sexually offensive gestures towards someone is a sexual harassment" n= 371 (92.8%) reported "Yes" and n=29 (7.3%) reported "No". similarly, participants were asked whether "Sexiest comments such as jokes or remarks that are stereotypical or derogatory to member of one sex is sexual harassment" n=352 (88%) reported as "Yes" and n=48 (12%) reported "No". Participants were asked whether "Unwanted sexually suggestive looks that makes a person uncomfortable is sexual harassment" n=362 (90.8%) reported "Yes" and n=37 (9.3%) reported "No".

participants were asked whether “the promise of making the team for engaging in sexual behavior is sexual harassment” n=370 (92.5%) reported “Yes” and n=30 (7.5%) reported “No”. participants were asked whether “Unwanted attempt to kiss, hug touch, or fondle someone is sexual harassment” n=388 (97%) reported “Yes” and n=12 (3%) reported “No”. participants were also asked whether “Forceful attempts of sexual touching or sexual intercourse is sexual harassment” n=394 (98.5%) reported “Yes” and n=6 (1.5%) reported “No”. participants were asked whether “Sexist remark about gender roles is sexual harassment” n=359 (89.8%) reported “Yes” and n=41 (10.3%) reported “No”

Table 1: Shows participants Awareness on sexual harassment

S.No.	Statements	Response	
		Yes	No
1	“Making seductive remarks about a person’s appearance is a sexual harassment”	370 (92.5)	30 (7.5)
2	“Making sexually offensive gestures towards someone is a sexual harassment”	371 (92.8)	29 (7.3)
3	“Sexiest comments such as jokes or remarks that are stereotypical or derogatory to member of one sex and sexual harassment”	352 (88)	48 (12)
4	“Unwanted sexually suggestive looks that makes a person uncomfortable is sexual harassment”	362 (90.8)	37 (9.3)
5	“The promise of making the team for engaging in sexual behavior is sexual harassment”	370 (92.5)	30 (7.5)
6	“Unwanted attempt to kiss, hug touch, or fondle someone is sexual harassment”	388 (97)	12 (3)

7	“Forceful attempts of sexual touching or sexual intercourse is sexual harassment”	394 (98.5)	6 (1.5)
8	“Sexist remark about gender roles (e.g. engineering is for man and nursing is for women)”	359 (89.8)	41 (10.3)

Discussion:

The results show that participants are much aware about sexual harassment. The results were supported by Menon A et.al., where they conducted a cross sectional study in Zambia among 855 university students in which 401 belong to male students and 422 belong to female students. The purpose of the study was to determine the awareness of students on sexual harassment. in the present study, Systematic sampling was followed and self-structured questionnaire was used for collection of data. The study reported that majority of the participants (71.5%) were aware about sexual harassment whereas 5.8% of the respondents were not aware about sexual harassment.

Abeywardene A et.al. conducted a cross sectional study among 242 school boys aged 14-19 years. The study aimed to assess the awareness on sexual harassment and sexual abuse. The study reported that there is high incidence of sexual harassment among boys. The study also reported that there is low level of knowledge regarding sexual harassment among the participants and only 3.7% of the had adequate knowledge regarding sexual harassment.

A study by Johannes A had been conducted among 890 undergraduate and post graduate students and 66 teachers in Mumbai. The objective of the study was to assess the level of awareness & perception about sexual harassment. The study reported that majority of the students are not aware about the definitions of sexual harassment. 39% of the participants are not aware of the women development cell situated in the university.

Conclusion:

The present study was able to assess the level of awareness among undergraduate, post graduate and Ph.D. students. The study reported that students are very much aware of the sexual harassment. The study was restricted to assessment of level of awareness on sexual harassment in higher educational institutions. There are very few studies conducted in this area, thus a lot of studies need to be conducted particularly at high school and higher secondary levels. It will help to implement proper and effective interventions for the students who are the victims of sexual harassment.

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