

HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SOCIETY: ARE WOMEN SAFE AFTER HARASSMENT BILL AROUND DISTRICT BAHAWALNAGAR?

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Abstract

This paper aims to bring forth the harassment and gender discrimination being faced by women of different segments of society. How have they been victimized? and their awareness and response regarding discrimination. Qualitative approach has been applied for study and interviews of groups of females of different professions, students, lawyers, working-class women and house- wives are the source to analyze the facts. Total numbers of 25 females have been interviewed for this study. In addition, analysis shows the level of understanding about their rights and sensitivity regarding harassment and discrimination. The results are evident of unawareness, gender biased norms of society and ignorance about the rights and types of harassments. Mainly the victims are ignorant and if aware, society and cultural norms do not allow them standing against discrimination. However, the act for protection against women harassment has been initiated since 2010 yet there is long way to achieve its benefits for securing females. Secondly, it addresses the deficiency in the act for those women staying at home and facing harassment by different male relatives and they share no place in it. The Act no doubt is a milestone to address the serious issue of security of females but it will take time for females to feel secure in the wake of its true implementation. The need lies in evaluating the true circumstances, societal norms and hurdles to resolve the problem because main issues are usually ignored.

Keyword: Harassment, Women, Act 2010, Awareness, Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Harassment is a kind of discrimination which affects both the genders - males and females. But females especially become victim of it at most of the stages of their lives whether they are students or belong to working class or sometimes at their own places staying at their homes even. It can be verbal, non-verbal and behavioral as well which includes unwanted attention or favors and sometimes ill treatment. Basically, it has been considered normal in male dominating society for so long and no one raised voice against it. Harassment or discrimination caused trouble for females as students and working women more than those women staying at homes because they face more male dominating environments than the females who stay out of home for work. This hostile environment not only damages their self-esteem but their level of motivation to exceed in their fields as well.

Gender harassment is the most common term of sexual harassment and is defined as "A broad range of verbal and non-verbal behaviors not aimed at sexual cooperation but that conveys insulting, hostile or degrading attitude about women" (Fitzgerald, et al.,1995). In contrast, sexual discrimination pertains to cases concerning women losing jobs because of rejection of their employers' demands for sexual relations (Franke,1997).

The aim of the harassment act 2010 is to provide safe atmosphere for females, especially the working class who are most vulnerable as they are not at homes. It also aims to give them safe environment at work to enhance their productivity and reduce hurdles to advancement. It is constructed on the principles of equality for both men and women to be able to work for their living without any obstacle or fear, and represents the government's obligation to improve the standards for labor and women's empowerment according to international standards. It requires all government and private institutes to follow the international code of conduct and a mechanism to make sure women work at safe atmosphere. Law

enforcement is always important to enforcing a safe environment especially for females, including educated, uneducated, and working-class women and even the rights of women of non-working classes.

Need of hour is to identify whether the awareness of harassment at all levels of society is present or not because majority is unaware of the facts that the way they are being treated is not right and falls under the title of harassment. There are numerous ways of discrimination, which are not seriously noticed and it would rightly be said that to enforce the law to prevent harassment, the victims must be aware of their rights, and identify the behaviors they face as discrimination.

In this perspective, the purpose of this study is to evaluate thoroughly the reasons behind unawareness of females and why women are not safe and it is still a most common offence against them even after the government has taken initiative in this step of harassment bill 2010 to make sure that law protects the women.

Females are integral part of society. They are working at high positions and at lower positions even working in fields and bricks factory. They are to do jobs for their families, kids and sometimes for their passion. Whereas women at home are responsible to fulfill the needs of their families and take care of their kids. The important aspect is that they are needed in society. However, they face abusive behaviors of others, sometimes even from their own relatives. Although, the government initiated a bill to protect all females in 2010 called Act 2010, the question arises: Is it sufficient to protect all females in society? This study addresses this gap by examining three areas: (1) If the act protects the non-working females or low positioned females in society; (2) Whether the females have awareness and courage to reap the benefits of the 2010 harassment act...and (3) do the actual facts and figures help to take necessary steps?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Harassing environment is created by the rude or unethical remarks, discussing dirty or anti-female jokes in their presence, making unethical statements, and demanding sexual favors or sexual relation (Jackson, 1981; Meritor Savings Bank V. Vinson, 1986). In such an environment where sexual harassment is tolerated and ignored, females are harassed more directly (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Williams et al., 1999). Glomb et al. (1997) have shown the kind of environments which do not allow or support harassment or that has transparent and strong rules and regulation to curb this kind of behavior, definitely reduces the incidents of sexual harassment or discrimination in spite of the behavior of some men having strong tendencies to be involved in these kinds of activities. Further, Lim & Cortina (2005) reveal that if the organization overlooks the harassment issues and behavior, and the management does not pay attention on these unethical acts, it would prove a red flag for the management or organization of education or work because harassment is always high at such places where uncivil or unethical activities are overlooked. Moreover, Farley (1978) reveals that the harassment incidents occur for women belonging to all socioeconomic classes, all races, and occupations.

Gender discrimination or harassment includes remarks, insults, sexual remarks or attempts and often is driven not by desire of sex but sexual hostility (Fiske & Glick, 1995; Franke, 1997; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000; Schultz, 1998; Maass et al., 2003; Stockdale et al., 1999). According to Berdahl (in press), the harasser approaches the target upon identification of the sex of the target and especially at females. Gender harassment can create a hostile environment (Fitzgerald et al., 1988).

According to Fitzgerald et al. (1988), sexual harassment is a very common form of gender harassment. Harassment or sexual discrimination is called a behavior which is termed as "socio-sexual" and it is followed by men who act like sex agents, where women are

objects or targets (Gutek, 1985; Gutek, Cohen & Konrad, 1990; Gutek & Morasch, 1982). This is also called gender harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1988).

Data and Methodology

Qualitative Research methodology has been applied for the study, which included interviews and personal observation. For this purpose, population has been taken in a group of females from different segments of society of public and private institutions, students, females belong to working class, fields and brick factories (Bhatta) and non-working class were interviewed in district Bahawalnagar and its tehsils: Minchinabaad, Haroonabad, Chishtian and Fortabbas. McNamara (1999) defines that interviews are useful for getting participants' personal experiences and in-depth information about the topic.

A total of 25 women were interviewed. The interviews were unstructured and participants have been assured that their names and identities will not be mentioned anywhere in publication. Basically, they were asked fundamental questions about their backgrounds and personal experiences of harassment at any stage of their lives. A total number of 25 females interviewed belonging to different parts of society.

ANALYSIS

Harassment is an immoral act that not only spoils the spirit of females to exceed or excel in their fields but also damages their mental health at the same time. It is a stigma and most of the women have gone through it at any stage of their lives. The educated and liberal women somehow can cope with circumstances but women who are poor, uneducated and belong to the low part of society are not even aware of their rights and hide their sufferings. This attitude encourages the culprits to continue their bad deeds. The most disturbing factor in this regard is the response of society towards

this criminal activity where it is considered that the females are guilty somehow of it rather than supporting them. The analysis of different females has been presented according to their segmentation.

To describe serious issues of society, thematic analysis is a useful approach within qualitative analysis to evaluate political, social or cultural problems that are serious in nature. In interviews, participants reveal these issues and their backgrounds, which can lead to diagnosis and resolve the issues. Interviews can be of both natures; structured and unstructured hence, I have chosen unstructured according to my research topic. It suits my study design given the guidelines described by Braun & Clark (2006) who has suggested that first, the researcher gets acquainted with the collected data and next, identifies the main points to develop as codes of description. A total of twenty-five women have been interviewed, belonging to four groups of society.

First group was from labour class, seven in number out of which three were working at homes, two in fields and two were working at brick factories etc. They were not familiar with their rights and found it a routine matter to experience staring, sexual advancements and sometimes abuse from men, but none of them felt it a matter to be reported. Adult females, the teenage girls and even of age 8 –10 years, were harassed routinely by men touching and abusing them both verbally and physically, but they kept silent and ignored it, because they just needed to earn a living. If they report it, they will lose their job and be defamed in their job market; nobody will hire these women. One of them said, “Men are men and they do it by nature otherwise how can they prove themselves”.

This is an alarming point because majority of women are from lower section of society and they have almost the same approach and opinion. Along with it they are bringing up another generation (off -spring) with the same views, which is actually dangerous. Sexual harassment is wrong but not considering it wrong is even more

damaging. Second group of six females were students of a college and a university. Here the findings are bitterer than those of other sections. Girls from distant remote areas join colleges and universities with limited resources and lack of awareness of their rights, face harassment at different levels by their teachers, clerical staff and sometimes by their male fellows, where social pressures keep them quiet and they are left with no other choice except being exploited by the teachers, administrators and their fellow classmates; even they use them as a worthless creature. The extent of exploitation is higher and the actual situation can never be analyzed because none of them is courageous enough or has support to bring forth this kind of cruel discrimination. They are even blackmailed, and the exploitation continues.

Lack of awareness, pressures of family and social threats destroy their lives. It is normally considered that female students secure high marks due to gender discrimination by male teachers, but this has no evidence. A very heart touching incident revealed by two students about how they had been exploited continuously for three years by senior management and teachers who deliberately failed them in their coursework, so that they could not get free or escape from their cage. This represents the worst type of discrimination and harassment which has been continued for years and this immoral act is prevailing without being noticed.

Third group of six females was homemakers. Working at home, they are considered safer and more secure as compared to the other groups. But the reality is opposite in many cases. They are supposed to do all house chores and bring up their kids. In this way, they put more labor than that of their males because they have very limited time to take rest. Along with it, they have to deal with different types of harassing behavior and discrimination by different relatives from their parent's or in law's sides. Social norms and pressures force them to be quiet even if they are aware of their rights. Family reputation, fear of being notorious and society's reaction are the

weapons being used against them. When any of them tried to report even in front of family, a very severe and humiliating reaction was the result. This thing disturbed them both mentally and physically. One female told how her father-in-law and brother-in-law dealt with her abusively in the absence of her husband and when she informed him about the situation, he also stood against her and divorced her. These outcomes and enmity against females do not give them courage to fight for themselves.

Fourth group of same number of six participants as in previous groups is most educated and aware of their rights but they face the same discrimination and harassment, despite being more confident and courageous. They are females, working as lecturer, doctor, banker, or holding a high designation in different institutes. They are well educated and have spirit to raise their voice, but they endure the worst behavior. As working women at high position, they are more vulnerable because they are not only the targets of their colleagues and higher ups, but also the preys of clients or customers simultaneously. They are to deal with all types of males categorized as subordinates, customers, colleagues and immediate bosses at the same time and most of the time they become victims within their circle. As the part of this circle, they are the easiest target for any of these people and are deliberately targeted by them. Sometimes, they are harassed verbally and fall prey to discrimination which leads them to bear obstacles in routine working and bear the mental agony, but the intense situation is faced when they are sexually harassed and they keep silent for the sake of their family name which makes the guilty stronger and creates smooth path for criminal activities in future. Even though these women are aware of their rights, society and their own families are not ready to help them morally.

Despite of their social status and independency, majority of them remain indifferent or silent due to family and society pressures. Only if a few steps are taken forward for their rights and face the

worst consequences because their family and friends do not support them at all. In recent years 'Me too' movement is an example of such kind of harassment which reveals a bitter truth; that not even the most successful women could escape from this torturous discrimination. A very high rank lady disclosed the truth as to how much difficult it was to escape from one of her directors at the middle of her career because he owned the business and she could not go against him at any platform or she would lose her job and also disgrace her family as well. This way they suffer from mental torture and agony and cannot focus on their career and work targets.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

By studying all the groups, the study reveals the sad reality of the miserable and insecure positions of women in society. It does not matter if they are educated or illiterate. Whether they belong to upper or lower class or if they are house wives or working women. Every one of them is vulnerable; the difference is only of the extent or extreme to the exposure of danger. Few women can avail themselves to use the 2010 Act for protection if family and society stand with them. There are only a few strong and determined females and their acceptance in Pakistan is rare. Even the strongest politicians and high-ranking females face gender discrimination. The Government needs serious actions to make security better and improve the education and health sectors.

Law can help only when the victims know what is wrong against them. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness first and this is necessary for women of all parts of society. To educate them about their safety is a must, because it is as much important as their basic needs of food, education and health. If they know their rights and learn to retaliate against this immoral behavior despite being embarrassed or try to hide it, only then they may take benefit of this act. On the part of implementation authority, approval of law is just

a step toward right direction. To ensure its implementation, it is most important to educate the overall society that it is not a positive and normal attitude rather it is immoral act which is not tolerable according to norms- religiously, socially, morally and it is indeed highly against the human rights. Moreover, it is very much important to raise voice against harassment so that the harassment act may bear the fruit adequately.

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