

Sexual Harassment at Workplaces in Sivakasi

K. Subramanian*

Abstract

Globalization has thrown open huge employment opportunities for women in almost all sectors. Though their status has improved to a greater extent, they have to face many issues and challenges in their work life. Sexual harassment is one among the issues they face in their day-to-day life. Women have become victims of sexual harassment as they are considered the weaker sex. It is a peril experienced at the workplace, which could lessen the excellence of work among the employees, threaten the self-esteem of the victims, question the gender parity and stimulate various other related problems of sexual harassment in the organization. Proper knowledge and training must be given to the employees against sexual harassment.

Keywords: violence against women, women workers, correlation, learning awareness.

I laugh, I love. I hope, I try, I hurt, I need, I fear, I cry and I know you do the same things too, so we're really not that different, me and you. –Anonymous

Introduction

Women are vulnerable to victimization like facing verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuses at work place. According to the Supreme Court definition, “sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexuality determined behaviour, such as Physical contact, a demand or request for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, any other physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature”.

Sexual harassment affects all women in some form or the other. Sexual harassment at work is an extension of violence in everyday life and is discriminatory, exploitative, thriving in atmosphere of threat, terror and reprisal. Respondents said that women do not complain fearing loss of reputation, loss of job, consequent hostile work environment and fear of retaliation in public places. The chairpersons said that “only 1 per cent of the cases are reported”. One respondent felt it was advisable for women to sort out problems on their own. This respondent commented, “If a woman faces a problem, she complains the whole issue becomes very serious. The harassment may not stop and she may find it difficult to continue working in a hostile work environment.” Most women themselves fail to recognize sexual harassment and treat it as trivial and routine. Such has been the internal coping mechanism. Ignoring offensive behaviour or denying its existence is the most common ways women deal with sexual harassment. Though it is mandatory to establish complaint cell or committee or grievance redressal mechanism in work place wherever women are employed as per the guidelines issued by the Apex Court of India in Visaka’s case in 1997, many organizations are yet to constitute such complaint mechanism. This condition also influences women’s reporting behaviour. Sexual harassment is used to remind women of their vulnerability and subjugated status. Sexual harassment is

* Assistant Professor, Economics, Saraswathi Narayanan College, Madurai

E-mail: supi1982@yahoo.co.in

all about expression of male power over women that sustain patriarchal relations. In a society where violence against women, both subtle and direct, is borne out of the patriarchal values operating in society, they force women's conformity to gendered roles. These patriarchal values and attitudes of both men and women pose the greatest challenge in resolution and prevention of sexual harassment.

Statement of the Problem

In our nation, the religious and social conditions and the structure of society are most disadvantages to women. Men dominate women from birth to death. Globally, most employed women come from poor families and generally from rural communities. Family poverty forces women into the workplace. A second factor contributing to the labour situation is family debt. Women's earnings have a positive correlation with children's health, nutrition levels and education. Increase in women's income translate more directly into better health and nutrition for children. The rise of female participation in unorganized sector is due to the compulsion for family background. So easy to assess the employer, women employees preferring low wages than men. Mostly women workers are appointed in printing industry, match factory and fireworks in Sivakasi. Working women have faced many problems and suffered a lot. Sexual harassment is serious hazardous faced by working women. No job security for women worker's is there in industries. Sexual attempt on the employees by the managers, supervisors, colleagues, out siders, labour officers etc., utilize their power in a wrong way. Working women at workplace faced so many problems like physical and mental exertion, tension and strain, lesser attention towards child care, and husband. Women workers health status is day-by-day dangerous position. On account of these factors, an attempt has been made by the researcher to study "Impact of sexual harassment on women at workplace in Sivakasi". It would during out their problems and solutions.

Rationale of Study

Sivakasi is one of the industrially developed areas in Virudhunagar District. Sivakasi is popularly known as Mini-Japan, possesses multifarious industries like Fireworks, Match Factories, Offset Presses which provide employment opportunities to a large mass of people. More than 75,000 workers are engaged in matches, fireworks, printing and allied industries in Sivakasi. These industries not only employ men workers but also it employs a vast amount of women workers. Being the women workers are cheaper and more responsible, the employers employ more of women workers than male workers. Since both of them are working in same places for a longer period, there is chances for sexual harassment. In developed countries, the women are having awareness and they come forward to make complaints about work place sexual harassment. But in developing countries like India, we should take some measures to create awareness regarding this serious problem. Sexual harassment of women workers will lead to the decrease in work participation of women. Due to this, the national income and economic growth rate will fall down. Hence, the sexual harassment of women worker based study is very important in the modern world. So, the present study analyses the nature of sexual harassment, the factors influencing sexual harassment and the measures to prevent sexual harassment in the work place in general and in the study area in particular.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

- To examine the type and level of sexual harassment against women workers in the study area.
- To find out the factors influencing sexual harassment against women workers in work place.
- To suggest measures to control sexual harassment against women workers.

Hypothesis

On the basis of the above objectives of the study, the following hypothesis has been framed.

- There is a significant positive association between the age of victims and age of harasser.

Period of Study

The present study covers a period of one year i.e., from August 2014 to July 2015.

Source of Data

The present study is based on primary data as well as secondary data.

Primary Data

To reduce the non — sampling errors, utmost care has been in the present study. In the present study, the researcher has paid much attention to reduce the response error. The purpose and need for the study are explained to the respondents to gain the confidence and to make them furnish the required information. Personal interviews and unbiased observations are the most suitable methods to establish a good rapport with the respondents to collect necessary data. For this, pre-tested interview schedule has been used. Information collected through the direct field enquires from the respondents forms the database for the study.

Secondary Data

The secondary data relevant to the present study have been collected from Government Records, Records of Taluk and District Offices, Research Articles, Reports, Magazines, Journals and Websites.

Sampling Design

Sivakasi Block consists of 54 villages. Out of this, five villages have been selected by applying Systematic Sampling Technique. Sixty respondents are selected from each village. Thus a total of 300 respondents are interviewed.

Tools of Analysis

For the analysis of data and testing the hypothesis, the following statistical tools are applied.

Correlation Coefficient

To determine the degree of relationship between two or more variables, the correlation analysis is used. The framework of analysis is as follows:

$$r = \frac{\sum XY}{N\sigma_X \sigma_Y}$$

where,

$x = (X - \bar{X})$

$y = (Y - \bar{Y})$

σ_X = Standard Deviation of Series X

σ_Y = Standard Deviation of Series Y

N = Number of pairs of observation

r = Correlation Co-efficient

Averages and Percentages

To analyze the socio-economic conditions of women workers, the problems of sexual harassment of women workers in the workplace, averages and percentages are used and the results are represented with tables and diagrams also.

Physical Harassment

Sexual harassment against women in work places is classified into physical harassment, psychological harassment, verbal and non-verbal and others. Physical harassment consists of touching, brushing the women's body, giving kisses or trying to give kiss, sexually assaulted, raped, bad looking, giving sexual signals etc. The researcher has identified and classified the different forms of physical harassment among the sample respondents and the same is depicted in Table 1. It is apparent from Table 1 that bad look, sexual suggestive signals are very common in work place. Because, out of 300 respondents studied, 296 respondents reported that there is bad looking and sexual signals are made by the male workers in the work place. One hundred twenty one respondents are of the opinion that, there is prevalence of pinching and touching against the body of the women worker. Brushing against the body (especially chest and back portion of women) is witnessed among 95 respondents. Attempted for kissing and sexually assaulted, raped and unwanted intercourse is reported by 50 and 30 sample

respondents respectively. It is evident from this table that, the women workers in the study area are physically harassed at work place.

Table 1: Physical Harassment against Sample Respondents

Sl. No.	Physical Harassment	No. of Respondents
1	Pinching and Touching	121
2	Brushing against the Women's Body	95
3	Attempted for Kissing	50
4	Harassed, Raped, Sexually Assaulted or Unwanted Intercourse	30
5	Bad look, Sexual Suggestive Signals	296

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

Psychological Harassment

Psychological harassment is one of the types of sexual harassment. If any type of activity which disturbs the psychological feelings of the person also treated as harassment. Table 2 clearly explains the different types of psychological harassment against women at work place in the study area.

Table 2: Psychological Harassment

Sl. No.	Psychological Harassment	No. of Respondents
1	Stress, Guilt, Anger & fear	282
2	Shame / Humiliations & powerless	170
3	Depression / Anxiety	177
4	Confusion	241
5	Low Self-image	219
6	Learned Helplessness	255

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

From Table 2, it is visible that 282 respondents are of the opinion that due to inhuman activities leads to stress, guilt, anger and fear. Further 170, 177, 241, 219, 255 respondents are informed that psychological harassment is in the nature of shame or humiliations and powerless, depression/ anxiety, confusion (they are not in a position to take correct decisions), low self-image and learned helplessness respectively. In general women are psychologically inferior when compared to men and this type of harassment leads to wrong decisions and their life is questionable.

Verbal Harassment

Verbal teasing is very common in the work place according to the opinions of the sample respondents in the study area. Verbal teasing / verbal harassment includes sexual remarks about the body structure and clothing, insulting sound, humour jokes, stories about sex in general, comment about their personal life and phone calls or sending messages. The researcher presented the different types of verbal harassment taken at work place in the study area in Table 3.

Table 3: Verbal Harassment

Sl. No.	Verbal Harassment	No. of Respondents
1	Addressing a Professional in a Belittling/ Demeaning	255
2	Sexual Remarks about Clothing / Body Structure	295
3	Insulting Sound	285
4	Humour, Jokes, Stories about sex in General	300
5	Comment about their Personal Life	274
6	Phone Calls or Sending Message	154

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

It is noticeable from Table 3 that humour jokes, stories about sex, sexual remarks about clothing and body structure and insulting sounds are common and frequently happened in the work place. About 300, 295 and 285 sample respondents informed that humour jokes and stories related to sex, sexual remarks about clothing / body structure, insulting sound respectively are quite common at the work place. Two hundred and seventy four respondents pointed out that the personal life of the worker or worker's family members will be commented. One hundred and fifty four respondents are of the opinion that unwanted phone calls and messages are sent by the male workers to the women workers.

Non -Verbal Harassment

Table 4 clearly point out the non-verbal harassment against women workers at work place in the study area. Non-verbal sexual harassment includes giving sexual letters / love letters, leering, making obscene gestures, display of sexual photographs / cartoons and unnecessary works of pictures at bathrooms and toilets. It is obvious from Table 4 that 264 respondents are of the opinion that displaying sexual photos or cartoons or sometimes the picture showing sexual organs of male or female are displayed in front of the female workers in the work place. Unnecessary words written on the walls or doors of both rooms and toilets and also pictures explaining sexual intercourse are drawn in the both rooms and toilets used by women workers are also witnessed from the opinion of 260 respondents. Two hundred and twenty two respondents' perception is towards giving love letters or letters consisting of sexual words. Leering and making obscene gestures are witnessed by 158 and 130 respondents respectively.

Table 4: Non - Verbal Harassment

Sl. No.	Non-Verbal Harassment	No. of Respondents
1	Sexual letter	222
2	Leering (e.g. staring at specific part of the body)	158
3	Making obscene gestures	130
4	Display photographs / cartoons	264
5	Unnecessary words at bathroom and toilet	260

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

Other Type of Harassment

Apart from physical, psychological, verbal and non-verbal harassments some other type of harassments are also happening at work place in the study area and the same is clearly pointed out in Table 5.

Table 5: Other Type of Harassment

Sl. No.	Other Harassment	No. of Respondents
1	Forcing Women to Work an Unsociable Hours	222
2	Loss of Reputation	192
3	Increase Vulnerability of Further Exploitation / Abuse	246
4	Sent them Inappropriate Gifts	206
5	Revenge	144

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

From Table 5, it is apparent that, regarding other types of harassment at work place according to the sample respondents' perception are, forcing women workers to do work an unsociable hours, loss of reputation, increase vulnerability of further exploitation or abuse, sent them inappropriate gifts and revenge are 222, 192, 246, 206 and 144 respondents respectively.

Age-Wise Classification of Victims

The researcher analysed which age group of the women workers are the victims of sexual harassment at work place in the study area and the same is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Classification of Victims on the Basis of Age

Sl. No.	Age Group of Victims	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Below 20 years	146	48.67
2	20 — 30 years	104	34.67
3	30 — 40 years	36	12.00
4	Above 40 years	14	4.67
	Total	300	100.00

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

From Table 6 it is transferring that out of 300 respondents studied, 146 respondents (48.67 per cent) are in the age group of below 20 years. One hundred and four respondents (34.67 per cent) are between the age group of 20 and 30 years. Thirty Six and Fourteen respondents (12 per cent and 4.67 per cent) are between 30 and 40 years and above 40 years respectively. It is evident from the, table that about 50 per cent of the victims are below 20 years of age and most of them are unmarried girls. If these group of women are affected more by sexual harassment means, it will affect their marriage life and the society will not give any respect to the victims and their family. Further, this will lead to make suicide either the victim alone or the entire family. This should be controlled and removed by efficient steps by both the owners of the firm and the government.

Correlation Analysis

H₀: There is a significant positive association between the age of victims and the age of harasser.

The result of the correlation between the age of the victims and the age of harasser is 0.89 at one per cent level of significance. Thus, it means that there is a significant positive association between the age of the victims and the harasser. Hence, one can accept the null hypothesis (H₀).

Persons Involved in Sexual Harassment

Table 7 clearly picturised the persons who are involved in work place sexual harassment against women. From the top level workers to the low level workers are involved in this type of inhuman practices at work place.

Table 7: Persons Involved in Sexual Harassment

Sl. No.	Persons Involved in Sexual Harassment	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Co-workers	146	48.67
2	Supervisors	68	22.67
3	Managers	48	16.00
4	Owners	38	12.67
	Total	300	100.00

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

The persons who involved sexual harassment in work place are classified by the researcher into co-workers, supervisors, managers and owners. It is understood from Table 7 that out of 300 sample respondents interviewed, 146 (48.67 per cent) informed that the co-workers are mostly involved in this type of harassment. The reason behind this is both the workers are working together more number of hours and most of them are from the same village or nearby villages. Sixty Eight (22.67 per cent) respondents reported that the supervisors involved into this type of inhuman practices. Forty Eight respondents (16per cent) are of the opinion that the managers involved in sexual harassment. Further, it is very pity that owners of the firms themselves involved in work place harassment. This was informed by 38 respondents (12.67 per cent). The supervisors, managers and owners are the higher level authorities who provide protection to the workers working under them. If they themselves involved in these practices means it is not a healthy condition to the economy. It should be controlled. In overall, the co-workers mostly involved in workplace sexual harassment against women in the study area.

Marital Status of the Harasser

The researcher examined the opinion about the marital status of the harasser from the sample respondents in the study area and is presented in Table 8

Table 8: Martial Status of the Harasser

Sl. No.	Marital Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Married	140	46.67
2	Unmarried	160	53.33
	Total	300	100.00

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

From Table 8 it is evident that out of 300 respondents 160 respondents (53.33 per cent) of the opinion that most of them are unmarried persons and they either don't know about the future impact or they are imprudent about the problem or action taken against them. One hundred and forty (46.67 per cent) respondents remarked that the married people even the age old people also involved in such type of activities in the work place. It is concluded from this table that, mostly unmarried workers are involved in workplace sexual harassment in the study area.

Reasons behind Sexual Harassment

The researcher identified and analysed the reasons behind the work place sexual harassment in the study area and the same is given Table 9. The researchers identified the reasons behind the sexual harassment in the work place. The reasons are body structure of the women worker, dressing sense; admit the comment at the first instance, no moral support and financial help. From Table 9 it is evident that body structure and dressing sense are the most influencing factor of sexual harassment at workplace. Out of 200 respondents interviewed, 101 (33.67 per cent) and 95 (31.67 per cent) of informed that the physical structure of the women and the way in which they are dressing respectively place major reasons for sexual harassment. In general these two factors naturally tempt the male gender to do something against female gender. Hence, it is in the hands of the women only to protect themselves against the work place harassments. They should change themselves according to the nature and conditions of the work place. Further, 47 respondents (15.67 per cent) are of the opinion that the women who admit the sexual comments at the first instance are affected by sexual harassments. Another 22 (7.33 per cent) and 35 (11.67 per cent) respondent's view point is that, no moral support and doing some financial help to the women workers are also the reasons behind the work place sexual harassment.

Table 9: Reasons behind Sexual Harassment

SI. No.	Reason for Sexual Harassment	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Body structure	101	33.67
2	Dressing sense	95	31.67
3	Admit the comment at the first instance	47	15.67
4	No moral support	22	7.33
5	Financial help	35	11.67
	Total	300	100.00

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

The researchers identified the reasons behind the sexual harassment in the work place. The reasons are body structure of the women worker, dressing sense; admit the comment at the first instance, no moral support and financial help. From Table 9 it is evident that body structure and dressing sense are the most influencing factor of sexual harassment at workplace. Out of 200 respondents interviewed, 101 (33.67 per cent) and 95 (31.67 per cent) of informed that the physical structure of the women and the way in which they are dressing respectively place major reasons for sexual harassment. In general these two factors naturally tempt the male gender to do something against female gender. Hence, it is in the hands of the women only to protect themselves against the work place harassments. They should change themselves according to the nature and conditions of the work place. Further, 47 respondents (15.67 per cent) are of the opinion that the women who admit the sexual comments at the first instance are affected by sexual harassments. Another 22 (7.33 per cent) and 35 (11.67 per cent) respondent's view point is that, no moral support and doing some financial help to the women workers are also the reasons behind the work place sexual harassment.

Time of Harassment

The researcher analyzed the time at which the chance for different types of sexual harassments involved at work place in the study area and the same is depicted in Table 10.

Table 10: Time of Harassment

Sl. No.	Time of Harassment	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Working Time	164	54.67
2	Rest Time	46	15.33
3	Travelling Time	56	18.67
4	After Working Time	34	11.33
	Total	300	100.00

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

From Table 10 it inferred that out of 300 respondents enquired, 164 respondents (54.67 per cent) are of the opinion that the sexual chatting started even at the working time itself. The sexual chatting leads to sexual harassment. Forty six respondents (15.33 per cent) are in favour of rest time. During rest hours i.e., lunch hour, the workers are scattered and the male workers utilized this time for involving sexual harassment. Another 56 respondents (18.67 per cent) pointed out that travelling time (i.e., both the gender are travelled in the same bus) make way for this type of harassment. The remaining 34 respondents' (11.33 per cent) perception is that after working hours and before leaving to home from the work place there is a chance for involving sexual harassment activities in the study area.

Pattern of Complaints against Sexual Harassment

Table 11 depicts to whom the sexually harassed women make complaint first in the study area.

TABLE 11: Pattern of Complaints against Sexual Harassment

Sl. No.	Women Workers to Whom Inform First about Sexual Harassment	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Friends & Relatives	66	22.00
2	Co-workers	160	53.33
3	Supervisors / Managers	44	14.67
4	Owners	30	10.00
	Total	300	100.00

Source: Calculated on the basis of Survey data

From Table 11, it is clear that the sexually harassed persons make complaint first to the co-worker who is working with them and who are very close by relatives or by friendship. Out of 200 respondents, 160 respondents (53.33 per cent) informed that they make complaint first to the co-workers. Sixty six respondents (22 per cent) revealed their opinion that they make complaint to their friends and relatives who are not working with them. They are all in the villages. Forty four (14.67 per cent) and 30 respondents (10 per cent) pointed out that, they made a complaint against sexual harassment at work place with the supervisors or managers and owners respectively.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are provided and recommended to eradicate sexual harassment of women workers at the work place.

- To avoid sexual harassment at work place first of all we should provide education to both men and women in general and sexual education in particular.
- Awareness programmes in schools from the upper-primary levels and above should be organized so that female students gain confidence to report cases of sexual harassment. This issue should be dealt with sensitively in the school curriculum, so that female students and teachers gain confidence about reporting cases.
- The owners of the firm should take this problem in a serious manner and take efficient steps to avoid this problem. The owners of the firm should take decisions on an unbiased manner whoever may be involved in this type of activities and punish them severely by law.
- Dressing code should be introduced in each and every industrial unit and the dresses should be provided by the employer to the employees.
- The employer should appoint women supervisor in addition to the male supervisor where both men and women workers are working together.

- Training sessions at work places will help in providing information to employees not only to their legal obligations to deal with sexual harassment but also for complying with these obligations.
- Strict laws should be enacted by the Government against sexual harassment and should be implemented in full-fledged manner. The owners of firm those who are not taking care of this problem should be punished and the industrial license should be cancelled.
- The attitudes of male workers must be changed. The female workers are not office accessories. People need to see female workers not as women but as sisters, colleagues and workers.
- Code of conduct should be introduced for both men and women in factories and this should be followed very effectively.
- Developing awareness and support among female staff at different levels through information campaigns, meetings and discussions.
- Both trade unions and companies should do more to prevent harassment, by adopting internal procedures for reporting incidents.
- Like trade unions, a women's association should be started in each and every industrial unit to look after the inhuman practices of sexual harassment against women at work place.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment is faced by women as well as men in organizations. The offender need not necessarily be in a low cadre job but can also be holding a post at the higher level, sexual harassment takes place to those who are submissive in nature, because the harasser obviously knows that the victim won't voice out his/her dissent and the harasser can go on with his harassing ways. Though the deviant behaviour like sexual harassment takes place, many organizations want to look past it because they don't want the credibility of the organization to go down. By their silence, the organization encourages the harasser. The victim and the family are the main sufferers and so is the organization because the organization would lose a competent and loyal employee due its silence. Hitherto, it is the responsibility of the organization to preamble policies in the organization which would check sexual harassment and help the employees work in a productive and peaceful environment. Policies which are introduced must be checked often and the needed changes should be made and updated accordingly. This would help in the growth of the organization. Sexual harassment can be checked or stopped if measures against harassing behaviour is initiated and maintained in every organization and every employee of the organization is aware of the policies present against such behaviour.

References

- Anagha Sarpotdar, (2014), "Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace in India: Journey from a Workplace Problem to a Human Rights Issue", *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research*, Volume 3, No.7, pp- 18-27.
- Berdahl, J, (2007), "The Sexual Harassment of Uppity Women", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol.92, I(2), pp. 425-437.
- Fitzgerald, L.F., Gelfand, M.J., and Drasgow, F, (1995), "Measuring sexual harassment: Theoretical and psychometric advances", *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, Vol.17, pp- 425-445.
- Gary, L. W., and Shirley, H. T. (1998), "A theoretical integration of sexual harassment models", *Equal Opportunities International*, Vol. 24, pp. 21- 29.
- Gutek, B., and Morasch, B, (1982), "Sex Ratios, Sex-Role Spillover, and Sexual Harassment of Women at Work", *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol.38, No.4, pp. 55-74.
- Maypole, D.E. and Skaine, R, (1983), "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace", *Social Work*, Vol.28, pp-385-390.
- Piotrkowski, C, (1998), "Gender Harassment, Job Satisfaction, and Distress Among Employed White and Minority Women", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 3 (1), pp.33-43.
- Victoria A. Carter, (1992), "Working on Dignity: EC Initiatives on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace", *Northwestern Journal of International Law & Business*, Vol. 12, I-3, pp- 431-453
- Wilson, F., and Thompson, P, (2001), "Sexual Harassment as an Exercise of Power, Gender", *Work and Organization*, Vol 8, I.1, pp. 61-83.