

“Sexual Harassment- A Bane for Gender Blindness”

*O.S.S. Sarada Rasagnya¹
School of Law,
SASTRA Deemed to be University,
Thanjavur*

Abstract

Over the past year’s awareness on sexual mistreatment of women has stunned the world. women especially young are often made to feel sexual shame before they find a language that is capable of explaining what they think and feel about themselves and their bodies. Work is stressful for most of us and imagine carrying that extra added emotional weight of having to ‘deny’ and suppress the very fundamental aspect of who we are and our image in the society. And revealing your authentic self to those whom you work with and have to face them daily, we do this just to make them ignore or ostracize us as a result. The urge to satisfy or meet carnal desires has been increasing day by day and this led a great way to sexual abuse, assault and many other offences. Sexual harassment is now very often at work place, school, office, home, etc. These inappropriate behaviours often go unreported because women are scared of retaliation and they did not believe that there would be change. They think reporting against a man will not bring change but on the contrary women will be held accountable. Women think these harassments should be taken less personally just because there will be no accountability of the offender. The term sexual harassment is very wide and includes various unwelcomed sexual activities, it can be defined in many ways. The scope of the term sexual harassment is not confined but depends and expands according to the situation and conditions under which it occurs. It is often that women undergo sexual harassment but it is also that men too face it sometimes so whether both women and men should get equal opportunity in expressing their grievance as well. The purpose of this research is to make people aware of such inappropriate things happening around and the need to speak out for themselves or for others who are suffering. And to throw light on some stereotypes and which we think are part of life but in reality, they are not.

Keywords: crime, sexual harassment, law, implementation.

1.Introduction

Sexual harassment has existed since ages and the modern legal understanding was developed in 1970’s although similar incidents or practices have existed in other cultures. The first known usage of this term was in 1973 report of discrimination called “SATURN’S RINGS” by Mary Rowe. Massachusetts Institute of technology (MIT) was first large organisation in U.S to develop specific policies and the procedures that aimed at stopping sexual harassment. Legal activist Catherine Mackinnon is credited with creating laws surrounding sexual harassment with her book “Sexual harassment of working women”. Sexual harassment has first been codified in U.S law as a result of series of sexual harassment cases in 1970’s and 1980’s.

¹ III Year, B.B.A.LL.B.(HONS.), School of Law, SASTRA Deemed to be University, Thanjavur 613401,

A theory proposed by psychologists Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts in the mid 1990's says that when women are treated as objects, they eventually view their own bodies from the perspective of the person who is objectifying them. Momentarily they become preoccupied with their physical appearance and sexual value. Self-objection will lead women to experience unpleasant feelings such as anxiety and shame. It may eventually also lead to psychological harm. Sexual harassment has become very common and is being carried out as if it's a procedure. Sexual harassment is a conduct which has the intention of violating someone's dignity or degrading, humiliating or offending them on purpose. The intimidation of sexual harassment lies in making someone feel that their physical attributes are more important, which undermines any talents or insights or skills the person has got within. Sexual harassment is not only physical harassment but a psychological one too it makes the person shattered from inside and has many other unimaginable consequences. A U.S based research says that women undergo six types of gender related challenges which includes sexual harassment and inadequate organizational responses.

2. Sexual Harassment, Abuse and Assault

Sexual harassment is sexual activity that is offensive, humiliating and intimidating. The unwelcomed sexual activity can be in person or online, it can be written, verbal or physical. Men and women both can be the victims and when it happens in work, school or uni it may amount to sexual discrimination. There is always a dilemma whether sexual assault is sexual harassment or not? sexual assault is often physical invasion of body It can sometimes result in bodily harm or injury as well as psychological and emotional trauma. The definition of sexual assault includes rape as well as other acts that invade or hurt the body. It also includes inappropriate touching, attempted rape, groping, forcing to perform sexual act or penetrating any part of your body with a part of their body or with an object, whereas sexual harassment ranges from unwanted touching, gesturing, and inappropriate jokes requiring sexual favour in order to give you something you deserve say promotion, sexual harassment does not always have to be sexual it can also feel like teasing, intimidating, or offensive comments based on stereotypes or bullying someone based on their sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation there is no requirement that the sexually harassing person or persons derive any sexual pleasure from there acts or that they are sexually attracted to their victims .In short sexual harassment is harassment that is sexual, sex-based, or gender-based in the nature of harassment itself regardless of the orientation, gender-identity, sexual interest or pleasure of the harasser. So often times sexual harassment may lead to sexual assault but not necessarily always sexual harassment is sexual assault it can be identified based on the sexual activity that is performed by the offender.

There is also a dilemma whether sexual abuse and sexual harassment are the same? sexual abuse also referred to as molestation is abusive sexual behaviour by one person upon another it is often perpetrated by taking advantage of another. when force is immediate, or short duration, or infrequent it is called sexual assault also covers any behaviour by an adult or older adolescent towards a child how to stimulate sexually the use of a child or other individuals younger than age of consent the sexual stimulation is referred to as child sexual abuse are statutory rape so sexual abuse can lead to sexual assault but not necessarily sexual harassment.

3. LGBTQIA community and sexual harassment

The LGBTQIA will be most affected set of people due to sexual harassment, because they carry an additional weight of suppressing the very fundamental aspect of who they are, that is their gender identity just because it is not in conformity with the societal norms people have regarding gender expression. They can't either reveal themselves and experience stigma of discrimination, hostility and the pressure to manage their identities in all of the social settings. These experiences do set a host of psychological responses that will have devastating results for trans individuals, their emotional well-being, inclination to remain with the same employer and job satisfaction. Till date many organizations are ill-equipped to create policies and workplace cultures that will support trans individuals. Most of the people still think it as a disease that people are LGB and the TQ are still not considered normal humans. They are only judged and looked up on their gender but not based on their individuality. Even many companies do this and the trans employees still feel stigmatised to come to work every day. A normal human takes up challenges to reach heights in life whereas for the trans community people life itself is a challenge. It is very pathetic to imagine the discriminatory behaviour they go through.

4. The bystander-effect

The main reasons why organizations don't put up sexual harassment issues out is the reputation of their organization and main reason why victims don't put out is their economic condition and their societal image. The largest issue that silences people is the potential for personal costs especially retaliation. Many of us may think of evidence. Someone would have seen it, or maybe a CCTV recording or something that will make the offender pay. Often in such cases there are witnesses but there is something called bystander intervention. Bystander effect is a tendency to freeze or look away when an unexpected or an inappropriate is happening in front of you. This phenomenon has been identified by psychological studies back in 1960's. There is still a fear in people that is stopping them from opening up. A Harvard research states that organizations should open up workshops to train people on bystander effect and make sure people intervene in issues of sexual harassment. They suggest the company should take a call in this than the bystander. The only reason why people shy away is they are afraid of retaliation. But retaliation should be illegal and, companies' policies should be in such a way that they oppose retaliation. It is human nature to worry about relations and due to this some people don't intervene in such issues just not to disturb their business relation but it is necessary to speak out such issues.

5. Backlash of legacy

The society is still at the close tipping point on trusting women and especially in believing accusers while pointing out at men. Women often end up risking their career, reputation and privacy. Women are already marked in our culture, behaviours and bodies garner more attention than their experiences and perspectives. Markedness is the reason why, what was she wearing? And has she been drinking? Are the questions probed in sexual harassment cases. The #MeToo Movement, has brought largest exposure of various sexual harassment issues at various fields of work. As per research sixty three percent of women have faced sexual harassment at workplace

and thirty three percent of them have faced it more than once. And only twenty percent of women have exhibited that they face sexual harassment and they say that the sexual harassment is also based on the job position they carry that is whether it is white collar job or a blue-collar job and also if they are married or not. The surprising result of the movements research was that seventy four percent women said that they would be willing to speak out against harassment than before and seventy seven percent of men have anticipated being more careful about inappropriate behaviour. And after this movement in the further the years the organizations are more reluctant in hiring women than before because of the fear of fall accusations and of more sexual harassment at the work place, now the question is whether the movement is a supporting platform for women or it is more in support of men. and Millions of women shared their stories and many men stepped down and lost their jobs too.

One of the best outcomes of this movement was that many states passed legislations to ensure more protection for workers including independent contractors and domestic workers. The concerns went so far along with the movement critics were worried about false accusations, punishments that exceed offences lack of due process, a delicate line between personal and professional conduct that will put their carrier at risk and the ever, expanding area of what is inappropriate behaviour.

6.Stereotype and social rewards.

From where does the thought of sexual harassment comes from? Are we taught how to do it? Or is it inherent? The roots of this stigma and discrimination comes from young age. Since the childhood boys are taught to choose blue and girls are told to choose pink, probably blue is more masculine and pink is feminine. The identification of an individual is more from their gendered behaviour and less from their actual gender. From young age everyone is “encouraged to display stereotypically gendered behaviours and discouraged from displaying non-normative ones”. Giving pink items to girls and blue items boys has become a tradition there are no biological roots for the preference of these colours. They are rewarded for choosing their gendered colours and often chastised for liking the other gendered colour. Children pick up on subtle signals from their parents. Children seek to fulfil the gender expectations only to secure parental acceptance and later on to gain peer acceptance. But as we grow up, we tend to find difficulty in distinguishing between expressions of gender and we in reality prefer and those for which we have been socially rewarded. Gender norms till today probably provide the basic organizing framework by which people define themselves and others as well. And it is a very challenging and difficult task to change it because they are deeply rooted, widely shared and the society all are socialised is especially like that.

6.1 Violence and Male self-perception

Ms. Susan Faludi, the author of Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women, says that male hostility toward women at workplace is connected to male attitudes regarding their role of a man in the society. The definition of masculinity is being a good provider for his family. Some men imagine that the feminist drive for economic equality is a great threat for their

traditional role. Sexual harassment is a way of violence professed as self-protection. The issue of sexual harassment is linked to the roles that are attributed to men and women in social and economic life, which is directly or indirectly, affecting women's position in social settings. If sex discrimination pushes women into low remuneration jobs, then sexual harassment keeps them there. This may not be necessarily the intention of the harasser, but it is often the effect. The stereotype that male is superior and female is the inferior paved a wide way to such instances.

7. Conclusion

People can achieve anything with their full potential and hard work only when they feel completely authentic and totally connected with the social settings or workplace. Everyone should speak out if they undergo or witness any inappropriate situations. Workplaces should adopt some basic policies which will make sure that there is no inappropriate behaviour and also form an inclusive environment for the trans employees. People must get to know that sexual harassment is not okay in any form and any where in the name of promotion or any other such things. The basic roots of eliminating sexual harassment should start with in people and organizations. Change should be brought in; it should not be awaited. Eliminating the stereotypes in the society should be taken as a responsibility by every individual. Belief and faith are the first step towards creating a meaningful change. We need to make changes in culture and get more people involved in solving problems. There is a need to design trainings and complaint systems that will give problem solving tools especially in workplaces and schools and colleges. There should be something called workplace culture that will eliminate the stereotypes and make people more comfortable and confident.

“Being the only woman in a room full of people of colour is much safe” than “being the only person of colour in a room full of women”- Ajuan Mance.