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Title of the Ph.D. : Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace: With Special Reference to Public and Private Hospitals in National Capital Territory of Delhi

ABSTRACT

As women begin to take up their new assigned role and responsibility of contributing economically to their families, they venture out of their homes to fill up some of the roles which were hitherto confined only to males. They go out and work in almost all professions. However, this also brings a new challenge in their lives as once they go out to work, they become vulnerable and prone to Sexual Harassment in their workplaces. Any sort of harassment, whether it is sexual or discriminatory, adversely affects the lives of women and leaves an indelible mark on their minds and overall health.

Medical profession is viewed as a noble one not only in India, but throughout the world and therefore carries a lot of respect in the eyes of the public. So, if Sexual Harassment against women takes place in hospitals where the wellbeing of an individual is the primary concern, it is an extremely serious issue which needs to be tackled. Unfortunately, not much research has been done in this area which prompted the researcher to do her research in this field.

A hospital is a heterogeneous working place. It comprises of doctors, nurses, attendants, interns and other staff. Women can be seen performing any of these roles and in all cases they need to interact with males. At times, female staff irrespective of their hierarchy, can be extremely vulnerable.

However, from a researcher's perspective all these are mere assertions. Are female doctors and non-medical staff really safe? We really do not know. It must be noted that any incident of Sexual Harassment at Hospitals can severely damage the sanctity and public image of the hospitals as well as cause a lot of problem to the general public.

Study of hospitals from this perspective has not received much attention in the literature available and at a time when we have the 2013 Act, it becomes critical to assess whether it is being properly implemented or not and whether it has achieved the objectives for which it was enacted. The question further arises, whether it is able to solve such problem in hospitals, like any other workplace?

The study concluded that there is a lack of awareness among the respondents with regard to the law on Sexual Harassment. They are not even aware as to the fundamental elements which constitute Sexual Harassment. Whenever incidents of Sexual Harassment occur in the hospitals, victims do not even report them as they are not aware who should be approached in this regard. Even when reported, the response of the ICC was found to be unsatisfactory.

The Heads of the hospitals claimed that they organised awareness programmes in their workplaces. However, this raises a question as to what kind of awareness programmes were conducted when majority of the respondents were not aware even of the definition of Sexual Harassment, the provisions of the legislation (the 2013 Act) and the existence of ICC in their hospitals.

No hospital was found to be completely organised and up-to-date with regard to the conduct of awareness programmes on Sexual Harassment, as mandated by law.

When RTIs were filed with the concerned Government authorities to seek data for Private hospitals required in connection with the research, the researcher was intimated that no records were available with them. It shows that the provisions of the 2013 Act as they relate to Sexual Harassment, are not being seriously complied with.

In the light of the above findings, it can be concluded that there is lack of awareness among the respondents in hospitals regarding the provisions of the 2013 Act. The Employers have failed to take appropriate measures in making their employees aware about the Sexual Harassment law and its consequences for those people who indulge in such acts. It is but natural that when awareness of any law and its consequences is missing, its implementation will hardly have any effect.