

✓ Sexual Harassment in the Work Place

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Nursing is the one profession which is dominated by females. Nurses have to work during odd hours. They are exposed to lots of occupational hazards. Some problems they are exposed are overt and lots of awareness is created among nurses for their prevention.

Tricky issues like sexual harassment by the male counterparts like doctors, ward boys, male attendants, male patients and so on are quite common. Nurses often do not reveal the truth for fear of damaging their career prospects. It is very important that the nurses become aware of these hazards at the very beginning of their profession and learn how to deal with them. It is the responsibility of the teaching institutions to create an awareness among the young nursing students. This area is often neglected as we are more concerned about the coverage of syllabus and pay little attention to this field.

Definition

Sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour, whether directly or by implication as: -

- ♦ physical contact and ad-

vances.

- ♦ demand or request for sexual favours.
- ♦ sexually coloured remarks.
- ♦ showing obscene photographs.
- ♦ any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Sexual Harassment and the Law in India

There are several provisions in the Indian Penal Code that refer to women's chastity and modesty. These provisions include Section 509 (words, gestures or acts intended to insult the modesty of a woman) section 209 deals with obscene acts and song. In 1997 the Supreme Court had issued certain guidelines about proper workplace behaviour.

Institutional Responsibility

- ♦ **Policy**- Every institution should introduce policy on sexual harassment. The managerial staff should be clear about the policy and procedures. They should be given proper training and should be responsible for its implementation, monitoring and continuous improvement in the workplace.
- ♦ **Awareness** - The policy should be made aware to all female employees through circulars or

inservice education.

- ♦ **Complaint Mechanism** - Irrespective of whether the conduct constitutes an offence under law or a breach of the service rules, an appropriate complaint should be lodged. The complaint should have time bound treatment for resolving the case.

- ♦ **Complaint Committee**- The complaint Committee should be headed by a women (like Nursing Superintendent /Senior lady doctor etc). Half of the committee members should be women. The committee should involve third party for fair judgment like NGO who is familiar with the issues of sexual harassment. The committee must submit an annual report on the complaints lodged and action taken by the committee. Only in those organizations where the top management is gender sensitive the committee functions well otherwise there is only eyewash. According to the Supreme court's status of the committee is not specified hence the committee gives recommendations which may be conveniently ignored or another committee may be set up thus leading to further trauma, delay and denial of justice.

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- ♦ **Initiative** – Nurses should be allowed to raise issues of sexual harassment at their meetings and these issues should be further discussed at length at higher forums.

Preventive action

- ♦ All employers should prohibit sexual harassment and give appropriate punishment to the offender.
- ♦ Employers should ensure that the victims or witnesses are not victimized or discriminated against while dealing with complaints of sexual harassment.
- ♦ The victim of sexual harassment should have option to seek a transfer.
- ♦ Appropriate work environment should be provided in respect of work, leisure, health and hygiene to fur-

ther ensure that no woman employee should have reasonable grounds to believe that she has disadvantage in connection with her employment.

What one should do ?

- ♦ If someone uses vulgar words, puts his hands on your shoulders, pinches any part of your body, makes vulgar body language signs, insists you to indulge in smoking or drinking or you feel uneasy in the person's presence, do not fear to stand up for your dignity.
- ♦ Avoid walking alone in the corridors, secluded areas, unlit or unknown places, especially at odd times.
- ♦ Do not wear provocative dresses, jewellery, perfume on duty.
- ♦ Ensure adequate privacy while engaged in

personal calls and ensure the doors are bolted properly.

- ♦ Be vigilant if someone is keeping track of your duty shifts, off duty etc.
- ♦ Be very careful of your body language while working especially in male ward and night shifts.

Bibliography

- ♦ Bajpai Asha, Sexual Harassment at workplace- An organizational challenge, Indian Management Vol. 39 No. 1 January 2000 pp 32-35
- ♦ Madangarli Supriya, Sex and the Workplace, Hindustan Times Bhopal 22 November 2005
- ♦ Supreme Court Judgment in the case of Vishaka vs. State of Rajasthan regarding sexual harassment of working women. ■

Maternal and Child Health Centre at Indore

A Health Care Centre at Govind Nagar Colony, Indore has been opened under the aegis of Society of Midwives and supported by Choithram College of Nursing, Indore.

Special guests on the occasion were : Dr. Savita Inamdar, ex-President, State Women's Commission, who formally inaugurated the Centre; Mrs. Rose Thomas, Vice President, TNAI, and Mrs. Archana Jaiswal, Vice President, Women's Empowerment Cell, Indore.

The Community Centre has facilities for regular antenatal checkup, early detection



of high risk pregnancy, immunization of mother and child, dais and voluntary health workers' training, nursing interventions, health awareness programmes, school

health programmes and arrangement of special clinics with the help of specialists for the endemic diseases and common health problems. ■