

Beyond Silence: Preventing Workplace Harassment and Building Safer Campuses

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Abstract

Harassment at the workplace is a major issue for universities, which affects students, teachers, and employees. It can be categorized as sexual harassment, bullying, discrimination, and misuse of authority. The effects of harassment are long-lasting for both the victim and the academic institution. The victim suffers from mental trauma, loss of confidence, and an impact on their academic or professional growth. Similarly, academic institutions also suffer due to loss of trust, productivity, and their reputation. The paper aims to discuss the measures that can be taken by universities to prevent harassment at their institutions. The paper also aims to discuss the role of power relations and social hierarchies in the context of harassment. By taking appropriate measures to prevent harassment, academic institutions can not only protect their students or employees but also strengthen their academic community as a whole. The academic community can be made better by addressing the issue of harassment openly and taking appropriate measures to prevent it.

Keywords: workplace harassment, safe campuses, higher education policy, institutional accountability, gender equality, counselling support, university culture, discrimination prevention, reporting mechanisms, academic environment

Introduction

Universities are supposed to be learning, research, and growth institutions where people of diverse social, cultural, and academic backgrounds come together. Ideally, universities are supposed to be environments that promote learning, intellectual growth, creativity, and critical thinking. Despite all the positive ideals surrounding universities, the issue of harassment remains a serious concern in the context of higher learning institutions. Not only does harassment compromise the security of the student body, the teaching staff, and the non-academic staff, but it also impacts the quality of their performance.

What is Workplace Harassment?

Generally, workplace harassment refers to unwelcome behaviours in the workplace that cause a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment. Workplace harassment may include sexual harassment, bullying, discrimination based on social identity factors, and abuse of hierarchical power. Harassment victims may suffer from increased levels of stress, anxiety, decreased productivity, and in severe cases, complete withdrawal from academic or professional life.

The international debate on gender equality, the growing international movement against sexual harassment, and international law have all pointed to the need for higher education institutions to address the problem of harassment in universities in a more effective manner. It is not enough to have policies in place; rather, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This paper seeks to discuss institutional policies and strategies in the context of preventing workplace harassment in universities.

Literature Review

Research carried out on workplace harassment has shown that mobbing and bullying are common issues in many organizations that can lead to a hostile environment. Such practices in organizations can be a result of power imbalances in the institution. The practices can include repeated intimidation and abuse. Such practices have negative effects on individuals and the organization. Hence, the importance of effective preventive measures in organizations (Branch et al., 2007). Sexual harassment in academic environments is a common phenomenon in academic environments. Sexual harassment in academic environments mainly takes place in environments where there is a hierarchical relationship between individuals. Research carried out by Clancy and colleagues revealed that many students and junior researchers were subjected to harassment and assault during academic fieldwork. The perpetrators were mainly individuals in authority. The perpetrators dissuaded the victims from reporting the abuse (Clancy et al., 2014).

The policies in institutions also play a crucial part in the prevention of harassment. In the context of India's higher learning institutions, policies against sexual harassment in the form of internal complaints committees have been put in place to address such issues and raise awareness. The implementation of these policies remains a challenge in many institutions that lack enforcement and awareness among their staff and students (Biswal, 2016).

Overall, the literature indicates that for successful prevention of workplace harassment, a number of factors are involved, including cultural change, policies, and awareness, among others. In addition, universities must go beyond symbolic commitments and ensure that they have effective mechanisms in place for the protection of their entire academic community.

Understanding Workplace Harassment in Academia

Workplace harassment in academia is a complex phenomenon with social, cultural, and hierarchical determinants. Workplace harassment in academia can take many forms, such as verbal abuse, intimidation, discrimination, and microaggressions, among others. Understanding different types of harassment, such as gender-based, racial, and identity-based harassment, among others, is a fundamental concept in developing effective prevention strategies for workplace harassment in academia. Understanding power relationships in a university setting is a fundamental concept in developing effective prevention strategies for workplace harassment in academia.

Sexual Harassment

One of the most prevalent cases of misconduct in the university setting is sexual harassment. This is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, comments, coercion, or the abuse of power or authority. The power relationship that exists in the academic setting, such as the relationship between a professor and a student or a senior and a junior, may make the victim more vulnerable to sexual harassment. This is the situation that makes it difficult for the victim to report the case of sexual harassment that he or she is subjected to.

The effect of sexual harassment on the victim is a multifaceted one. The victim may experience emotional distress that may result in a loss of self-confidence. This may affect the academic performance of the victim.

Bullying and Psychological Harassment

Bullying is a series of actions or behaviour that is intended to intimidate, belittle, or humiliate another individual. In a university setting, bullying may manifest itself in a number of different ways. Unlike other forms of misconduct that can easily be identified and reported, such as sexual harassment, bullying can sometimes pass unnoticed since it can happen in daily interactions and practices. Bullying can affect a person's confidence and academic performance. Over time, it can lead to a hostile environment that can affect one's participation and development in a professional setting. Therefore, in this regard, the need to address the issue of bullying in a university setting cannot be overstated

Discrimination and Identity-Based Harassment

There are many issues, for instance, gender discrimination, caste, race, ethnicity, religion, or disabilities, which still exist. Faculty, students, or staff from a minority group can face microaggressions, discriminatory assessment, or lack of opportunities. The theory of intersectionality refers to the effect of harassment due to aspects of social identity, which are unique for every marginalized social group. This is a negative influence on the individuals' sense of belonging, psychological well-being, and growth as a person. This can hinder the growth of the individuals' professional lives, thereby promoting inequalities within the system.

Consequences of Harassment

There are major consequences of harassment, both for the individual and the academic institution. The individual may suffer from a high level of stress, anxiety, as well as decreased productivity in academic or professional work. Harassment can lead to a negative reputation for the academic institution, legal action, as well as the erosion of trust within the academic community. It can also lead to a hostile academic environment, which can undermine academic excellence, talent, as well as innovation. Thus, the issue of harassment is not only a moral imperative, but it is also essential for the creation of a positive academic culture.

Importance of Institutional Policy Frameworks

Institutional policies are a major contributing factor to the prevention of incidents of harassment, as they create a framework that guides the behaviour of all members of the university community. The policies also outline the procedures to be followed when a case of harassment is reported, which ensures that the case is handled fairly, transparently, and expeditiously. This contributes to the creation of a safe working environment for all, as individuals can concentrate on their growth without the fear of being harassed. Institutional policy frameworks are essential, as they demonstrate the commitment of the university to the protection of women, as well as vulnerable members of the community, from the vice of harassment. The policies are a foundation for the creation of awareness, which is essential for the prevention of the vice, as opposed to a reactive approach. The culture of respect, equality, and inclusivity is essential for the achievement of excellence within the higher learning institutions.

Clarity and Scope

Policies that are clear in their writing include clear explanations and examples of harassment. It is essential that policies include all individuals in the institution, from faculty to staff and students. There is a need for policies that address all issues, both direct and indirect harassment, including any power imbalances that may exist in the institution. A clear policy helps individuals understand their rights and the institution's responsibilities in dealing with harassment. In addition, clear policies help create a framework for accountability, fair investigation procedures, and trust among individuals that the institution is working towards a safe and respectful academic environment.

Accessibility and Awareness

The policies must be accessible and effectively communicated to the entire academic community. This can be done by incorporating these awareness initiatives into orientation programs, workshops, university websites, and ongoing training activities. This is a critical component since it ensures that all individuals in the academic community are able to clearly understand their rights and responsibilities. Moreover, periodic awareness campaigns, seminars, and educational activities may be used to normalize these policies among the individuals in the academic community without any stigma attached to them. This will help individuals feel free to report any cases without any fear of retaliation or victimization. This promotes a culture of transparency and understanding among individuals in the academic community, where everyone feels empowered to contribute to a safe and supportive academic environment. This will be reinforced by periodic reviews and updates on the information pertaining to the policies.

Reporting Mechanisms and Confidentiality

Confidentiality is another crucial issue that motivates victims of bullying to report bullying without any fear of reprisal or embarrassment. This is because when individuals are aware that their information will be kept confidential, they will be encouraged to report bullying and seek assistance accordingly.

Additionally, it is also important that the policy outlines clear reporting procedures that are easy for individuals to follow when filing a complaint. This is crucial in helping victims of bullying understand where they can report bullying, thus creating a safer environment within the university.

Alignment with Legal Standards

The policies of institutions need to be aligned with national labour laws, anti-harassment acts, and human rights legislation. Such an alignment is important to ensure the accountability of institutions while also providing an additional layer of protection to the victims of harassment. Moreover, such an alignment would enable institutions to adopt standardized legal procedures while dealing with complaints of harassment. Additionally, adherence to legal standards would also enhance the credibility of the policies adopted by institutions while also ensuring that victims have access to legal remedies

Institutional Mechanisms for Prevention and Response

In addition to these policies that a university has in place for dealing with harassment cases, it is also important that the university ensures that it has in place mechanisms that are effective for the implementation of these policies. This may include the creation of offices or cells for dealing with harassment cases or the creation of posts for officers that deal with these issues. It is also important that the university organizes regular training sessions for creating awareness among students, faculty, and staff about their rights and responsibilities in dealing with these issues. Such mechanisms not only help in the implementation of these policies effectively, but they also help in creating a culture of accountability and transparency. By creating mechanisms that provide avenues for reporting harassment cases, investigation mechanisms, and support for victims of harassment, universities can help create a culture where individuals feel safe, heard, and respected.

Grievance and Complaints Committees

Grievance committees are the main bodies charged with handling cases of grievances within the university. These are usually made up of different members who are trained in a way that they can resolve cases of grievances in a sensitive manner. This shows that the university is committed to ensuring that its members are accountable for their actions, and for the victims, they have a platform where they can report their cases without fear of reprisal. In addition, grievance committees are important in ensuring that they recommend measures that will ensure a culture of trust within the academic community, thus showing their dedication to a respectful environment within the university.

Awareness and Training Programs

It is imperative that workshops and seminars be held at regular intervals to spread awareness about issues like harassment and consent. This will help prevent the normalization

of any kind of inappropriate or harmful behaviour. It will also help in building a culture that is respectful and considerate. This will help in building a safe and enabling environment in the university, where individuals are aware of their rights and responsibilities. It will help in creating a community that is considerate and respectful. This will be achieved over a period of time by holding workshops and seminars on these issues. It will help in building a culture that is safe for all.

Counselling and Support Services

Emotional support is also very important for the victims of harassment. The institutions need to provide access to professional counsellors and legal advice in a very confidential manner. These services are very helpful for coping with the emotional consequences of harassment and helping the victims heal from these experiences. Besides that, universities also need to offer safe spaces, peer support groups, and access to external mental health practitioners if needed. The enhancement of these support services is also a demonstration of commitment to the dignity, empowerment, and well-being of individuals who are harassed.

Challenges in Implementing Policies

Despite the effectiveness of the policies, there are a number of challenges that have to be overcome for the policies to work:

- **Underreporting:** There is a fear of retaliation, social stigmatization, or hierarchical pressures that may cause victims not to report the harassment.
- **Cultural Norms:** There are certain behaviours that are normalized within the academic environment, which may not necessarily lend themselves to the effectiveness of the policies.
- **Institutional Bias:** The hierarchical structure of the academic environment, as well as relationships, may not always favour a fair hearing.
- **Resource Limitations:** There are resource limitations, as some institutions are too small to have the resources needed for the implementation of the policies.
- **Intersectional Vulnerabilities:** There are individuals who are more vulnerable due to their intersectional identities, which may cause them challenges when reporting the harassment.

- Lack of Awareness: There may not be full awareness of the policies, which may cause the policies to fail.
- Resistance to Change: There may be a lack of willingness to change, which may cause the policies to fail.
- Monitoring and Evaluation Gaps: There may not be a system for tracking the effectiveness of the policies, which may cause them to fail.

Best Practices and Global Perspective

Universities all over the world are implementing new and unique strategies to address and curb the menace of harassment and create a safer and more inclusive environment for all students and staff.

- Mandatory Training: Many universities make training a part of their policy and require all students and staff to undergo training in sexual harassment and gender issues. This ensures that everyone in the academic community is aware and sensitive to the issues and behaves in a manner that is conducive and respectful to all.
- Confidential Reporting Tools: Harassed students can use these tools to report the incident in a secure and anonymous manner. This ensures that the victims do not fear backlash and can report the incidents in a timely manner.
- Bystander Intervention Programs: Such programs empower students and staff to take an active part in curbing the menace instead of just being bystanders and witnesses. The students and staff can intervene in a safe and secure manner in cases of harassment that they witness.
- Intersectional Policies: The policies and regulations in some universities address issues such as gender, caste, disability, ethnicity, and other factors that affect individuals differently.

Strategies for Creating Safer Campuses

Ensuring a safe campus does not only mean the formulation of policies; it requires a continuous institutional commitment and active efforts:

- Policy Review: It is imperative that policies are reviewed from time to time based on the changing values of society, research outcomes, and legal requirements.

- Training and Awareness: It is important that awareness programs are integrated into staff and student orientation programs and staff development programs.
- Transparent Reporting: It is Imperative that reporting mechanisms are easily accessible, confidential, and free from retaliation.
- Support Services: Universities must provide support services for victims.
- Leadership Engagement: It is imperative that the leadership actively endorses anti-harassment programs.
- Cultural Change: It is imperative that a culture of respect, equality, and inclusiveness is promoted in academic and social activities.
- Use of Digital Reporting and Monitoring Systems: Many universities are now using online complaint systems for efficient reporting.
- Gender Sensitization and Bystander Programs: Many universities are now using gender sensitization programs that empower students and staff to identify harassment incidents and intervene safely.

The implementation of these strategies enhances the integrity of the institution and provides a safe environment for all members of the campus.

Conclusion

The impact of harassment in the workplace reduces the value and significance of human dignity, equity, and productivity in higher education institutions. While policies are relevant, these need to be supplemented by awareness programs, counselling services, and training programs. In addition, there needs to be a strong commitment from the leadership of higher education institutions. In order to “go beyond silence,” active listening and action are required in supporting victims of harassment. Various approaches need to be employed that not only protect individuals but also benefit the overall higher education institutions in terms of excellence. A safe environment is required for higher education institutions to foster creativity, innovation, and social justice. Moreover, monitoring, feedback, and research on various instances of harassment can also help higher education institutions strengthen their policies and adapt accordingly. This way, higher education institutions can ensure that all individuals, especially women and other marginalized groups, are provided with equitable, empowering, and supportive academic environments.

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