

## Policies to Prevent Workplace Harassment and Ensure Safe Campuses

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### Abstract

Harassment is a form of discrimination. It refers to behavior that hurts, insults, or makes a person or group uncomfortable because of who they are. This may be based on factors such as race, culture, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other personal characteristics. Harassment is a serious issue that affects employees' well-being and productivity across the world. Workplace harassment remains a major challenge in educational institutions and workplaces globally. Universities and colleges are expected to provide safe and inclusive environments where students and staff can study and work without experiencing discrimination or harassment. However, despite these expectations, incidents of harassment—especially sexual harassment and gender-based violence—continue to occur on many campuses. Governments and educational institutions have taken steps to address this issue by introducing laws, policies, and institutional mechanisms that aim to prevent harassment and protect victims. In India, one of the most important legal frameworks is the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, commonly known as the POSH Act. The Act defines sexual harassment as any unwelcome sexual behavior that creates a frightening, hostile, or uncomfortable work environment. It also sets rules for preventing harassment and handling complaints. Universities are required to conduct awareness programmes, provide gender-sensitisation training, and create transparent reporting systems. These measures help promote dignity, equality, and safety on campuses. This research paper examines policies designed to prevent workplace harassment in academic institutions and suggests ways to improve their effectiveness. The importance of institutional responsibility and collective efforts in creating safe workplaces is also highlighted. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for stronger implementation of policies and greater awareness among individuals. By addressing these issues, institutions can contribute to building respectful and harassment-free environments.

## Introduction

Workplace harassment is a serious issue that affects individuals across different sectors, including educational institutions. Harassment may be verbal, non-verbal, or physical. In academic environments, harassment not only affects employees but also students who depend on institutions for education and personal development. Universities and colleges serve as spaces for intellectual growth, research, and collaboration. Therefore, maintaining a safe and respectful environment is essential for academic success. When harassment occurs, it can negatively impact mental health, productivity, and academic performance. Victims may experience stress, anxiety, and loss of confidence, which can affect their career prospects and educational outcomes. Recognizing the seriousness of workplace harassment, governments and institutions around the world have introduced various laws and policies to address the problem. In India, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013—commonly known as the POSH Act—provides a comprehensive legal framework for preventing and addressing sexual harassment in workplaces, including educational institutions. Higher education institutions also follow rules given by the University Grants Commission (UGC). These rules require universities and colleges to implement preventive steps such as forming an Anti-Ragging Committee and Squad, an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), and a Grievance Redressal Cell. They must also conduct awareness programmes and provide safe infrastructure on campus. This paper explores the policies designed to prevent workplace harassment and ensure safe campuses. It also examines the challenges in implementing these policies and suggests strategies for strengthening campus safety. The need for effective implementation of policies within institutions is also given greater attention. Institutions must encourage a culture of respect and responsibility among students and staff. Awareness of rights and reporting mechanisms should be promoted to prevent incidents of harassment.

## Understanding Workplace Harassment

Workplace harassment covers a broad spectrum of unwanted behavior at work that makes a person feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or disrespected. It may include physical, verbal, or psychological actions that harm an individual's dignity and well-being. Workplace harassment can occur in various forms and negatively affect employees' dignity, safety, and well-being. Verbal harassment involves the use of offensive, insulting, or threatening language in spoken or written communication. Physical harassment refers to unwanted physical contact or behavior that makes an individual feel insecure or threatened. Psychological harassment includes actions that harm a person's mental or emotional health,

such as frightening, isolation, or constant criticism. Cyberbullying occurs through digital communication channels like emails, messages, or social media. Additionally, discrimination takes place when employees are treated unfairly based on characteristics such as gender, race, religion, or other personal attributes. Such behavior can create a hostile and uncomfortable work environment for individuals and reduces employees' confidence, motivation, and efficiency at work.

## Legal Framework for Preventing Workplace Harassment

In India, several legal measures have been introduced to prevent workplace harassment and ensure a safe environment for employees and students. One of the most important laws is the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, commonly known as the POSH Act. The Act to provide protection against sexual harassment of women at workplace and for the prevention and Redressal of complaints of sexual harassment and for matters connected therewith. According to the Act, every organization and institution must establish an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) to receive and address complaints related to sexual harassment. It requires organizations that have more than ten employees to set up an Internal Committee (IC)The committee is responsible for investigating cases and recommending appropriate action against the offender. This Act also highlights preventive measures such as conducting awareness programmes, training sessions, and sharing information about employees' and students' rights. In addition, government agencies and commissions have launched various safety and awareness initiatives to strengthen the implementation of anti-harassment policies.

Key digital platforms like the SHe-Boxportal allow for online complaint registration. The MoWCD launched the Sexual Harassment electronic Box (SHe-Box) on 29th August 2024. Sexual Harassment electronic Box (She-Box) is an effort of Government of India to provide single window access to every woman, irrespective of her work status, whether working in organized or unorganized, private or public sector, to facilitate to registration of complaint related to sexual harassment. Any woman facing sexual harassment at workplace can register their complaint through this portal. Once a complaint is submitted to the "She-Box", it will be directly sent to the concerned authority having jurisdiction to take action into the matter.

The Vishaka Guidelines were a set of procedural guidelines for use in India in cases of sexual harassment. They were promulgated by the Indian Supreme Court in 1997 and were superseded in 2013 by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace

These programmes promote legal literacy, digital safety awareness, and leadership development among students, encouraging institutions to actively participate in awareness campaigns and training programmes to create safer campuses and workplaces. Students are also helped to understand their rights and responsibilities in maintaining a respectful environment. In addition, such initiatives encourage cooperation between students, faculty members, and institutional authorities to prevent harassment and promote safety.

## UGC Regulations and Institutional Policies for Safe Campuses

In India, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has initiated several regulations to ensure safety, dignity, and gender equality within higher education institutions and to address the problem of sexual harassment. A major step in this direction was the introduction of the University Grants Commission (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2015. These regulations were formulated under the University Grants Commission Act, 1956 and were officially notified by the Ministry of Human Resource Development on May 2, 2016. Over time, these policies have been strengthened to create safer, more inclusive learning and working environments in colleges and universities. Although the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 mainly focuses on protecting women from sexual harassment in workplaces, the UGC regulations borrow a broader and more gender-neutral approach so that complaints related to sexual harassment involving any gender can be addressed.

The 2015 regulations play an important role in promoting inclusiveness, equality, and safety within educational institutions. These guidelines were introduced to guarantee that institutions of higher education cultivate a space where students, faculty, and staff can engage in learning and work free from harassment or discrimination. By emphasizing fairness and equal treatment, the regulations seek to develop a campus culture grounded in dignity, respect, and mutual understanding. They offer a comprehensive framework applicable to all higher education institutions and assist them in formulating policies and practices that promote a secure and supportive campus environment.

According to these guidelines, institutions are required to establish Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) to address complaints related to harassment in a fair and transparent manner. These committees act as a formal mechanism through which victims can report their concerns and seek justice. The regulations also encourage institutions to conduct regular gender-sensitisation and awareness programmes so that students and staff understand issues

related to harassment, gender equality, and respectful behavior. Such programmes help create awareness and prevent inappropriate conduct by educating the campus community about rights, responsibilities, and acceptable behavior. Furthermore, the regulations require institutions to develop clear and effective systems for handling grievances. This includes establishing proper procedures for filing complaints, conducting inquiries, and ensuring that the investigation process is fair and unbiased. Maintaining confidentiality during investigations is another key requirement, as it helps protect the dignity and privacy of those involved in the complaint process. Institutions must also ensure that complaints are addressed and resolved within a reasonable period so that justice is not delayed.

In addition to these measures, educational institutions are expected to submit regular compliance reports explaining how these mechanisms are functioning. These reports provide information about the steps taken by institutions to implement the regulations, the number of complaints received, and the actions taken to resolve them. By doing so, the regulations promote accountability and transparency in the functioning of institutional mechanisms. Overall, the 2015 regulations play a significant role in strengthening institutional responsibility and ensuring that campuses remain safe, inclusive, and respectful spaces for everyone.

Educational institutions play an important role in implementing policies that promote safety, equality, and a respectful campus environment. One of the key measures is the establishment of Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs), as required by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and the University Grants Commission (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2015. These committees act as the primary mechanism for addressing harassment complaints within institutions. Their responsibilities include receiving complaints, conducting fair and impartial investigations, recommending disciplinary action when necessary, and maintaining confidentiality throughout the process. The presence of a well-functioning grievance redressal system encourages victims to report incidents without fear and ensures that complaints are handled in a systematic and sensitive manner.

### **Awareness and Sensitization Programmes**

In addition to complaint Redressal mechanisms, institutions must focus on prevention through awareness programmes, transparent reporting systems, and safe campus infrastructure. Universities and colleges regularly organize workshops, seminars, and

orientation sessions to educate students and staff about harassment laws, ethical behavior, and individual rights and responsibilities. Clear and accessible complaint mechanisms, including helpline numbers and reporting channels, help victims seek support without fear of retaliation. Furthermore, physical safety measures such as adequate lighting, security personnel, surveillance systems, and the display of emergency contact numbers contribute to a safer campus environment. The availability of women's support services and other assistance mechanisms further strengthens institutional efforts to prevent harassment and maintain a secure atmosphere for students and employees.

### **Challenges in Implementing Anti-Harassment Policies**

Despite the existence of strong policies, several challenges affect their effective implementation.

#### **a. Lack of Awareness**

One of the major challenges in implementing anti-harassment policies is the lack of awareness among students and employees. Rights and policies that protect individuals from harassment are not fully understood by many individuals. In addition, they may not know the proper procedures for reporting incidents or whom to approach for help. Due to this limited knowledge, victims are often discouraged from filing complaints. As a result, cases of harassment may go unreported and unresolved. To ensure that individuals understand their rights and feel confident in seeking support, awareness must be promoted through training and educational programmes.

#### **b. Social Stigma and Fear of Retaliation**

Social stigma and fear of retaliation are significant factors that discourage victims from filing complaints of harassment. Many individuals worry that they may be judged, blamed, or socially isolated if they speak about their experiences. In some cases, victims fear negative reactions from peers, colleagues, or society. There is also a concern that the Harasser may take revenge or create further problems after a complaint is filed. Because of these fears, many victims hesitate to report incidents of harassment and prefer to remain silent.

#### **c. Inefficient Implementation of Policies**

Ineffective implementation is another challenge in addressing harassment within institutions. In some cases, committees are formed only to meet formal requirements and exist merely on paper. These committees may not function properly or handle complaints

efficiently. Without proper monitoring, training, and institutional support, justice may not be ensured for victims through these mechanisms.

#### **d. Delays in Complaint Resolution**

Many institutions often experience delays in the resolution of complaints. Investigations are sometimes prolonged, and transparency is not always maintained during the process. These issues may discourage victims from pursuing their complaints. As a result, many cases may remain unresolved for a long time.

#### **Strategies for Strengthening Campus Safety**

Strengthening campus safety against workplace harassment requires a comprehensive approach that combines clear policies, proactive training, and a culture of accountability. To ensure the effectiveness of anti-harassment policies, institutions should adopt comprehensive strategies. Regular Observation and evaluation of these policies can help ensure that they are properly implemented.

#### **a. Enhancing Institutional Accountability**

Educational institutions need to regularly monitor the functioning of grievance committees so that they can perform their responsibilities effectively. Continuous Supervision helps ensure that complaints are handled in a fair and transparent manner. It is also important for institutions to follow all legal guidelines and institutional policies while dealing with such issues. By doing so, institutions can maintain accountability and build trust in the complaint resolution process.

#### **b. Regular Training and Workshops**

Training programmes and workshops should be organized regularly for faculty members, staff, and students. These initiatives play an important role in increasing awareness about harassment policies and the procedures for reporting complaints. They also help in encouraging respectful behaviour and responsible conduct among members of the campus community.

#### **c. Promoting Gender Equality and Inclusivity**

Universities should implement gender-sensitive policies to promote equality and mutual respect among all individuals. Building an inclusive environment can decrease incidents of

discrimination and harassment.. In addition, awareness programmes can encourage the development of positive attitudes toward diversity.

#### e. Use of Technology for Safety

Technology can play an important role in improving campus safety. Digital complaint platforms and online reporting systems are provided by many institutions so that complaints can be submitted through websites, mobile applications, or institutional portals. In several universities, official online portals have been created to allow students and staff to file complaints electronically. In addition, digital systems are used for reporting sexual harassment cases Government complaint portals such as SHe-Box (Sexual Harassment Electronic Box) have also been developed, through which workplace harassment complaints can be submitted online. Mobile safety applications like Himmat App and Raksha – Women Safety Alert are used to send emergency alerts and report safety concerns. In some institutions, university mobile applications are also developed so that incidents or safety issues can be reported quickly. Through these technological tools, quick assistance can be provided during emergencies and campus safety can be improved.

#### e. Encouraging Student Participation

Encouraging student participation is an important step in strengthening campus safety and promoting a respectful environment within educational institutions. Students should be actively involved in various initiatives that aim to create awareness about harassment prevention and campus safety. Their participation in awareness campaigns, workshops, and peer education programmes can play a significant role in spreading information about rights, responsibilities, and appropriate behaviour. Through these activities, students can help create a culture of respect, equality, and mutual support among the campus community. In addition, student leadership programmes and student-led organizations can contribute to promoting gender equality and inclusivity on campus. When students take part in discussions, awareness drives, and safety initiatives, they become more responsible and aware of the importance of maintaining a safe environment. Therefore, encouraging active student involvement can help educational institutions build a more supportive, inclusive, and secure campus atmosphere for everyone.

#### Conclusion

Workplace harassment continues to be a major challenge across different work environments, affecting employees as well as, in some cases, students or trainees. Ensuring

safety in workplaces and campuses requires a combination of strong legal frameworks, effective institutional policies, and appropriate preventive strategies. The implementation of laws such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act and the guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission has helped strengthen the mechanisms for addressing harassment in many institutions. Measures such as Internal Complaints Committees, awareness programmes, and transparent reporting systems play an important role in preventing and responding to harassment.

However, the effective implementation of these measures still faces several challenges, including lack of awareness, social stigma, and certain institutional barriers. To address these issues, organizations and educational institutions should adopt well-planned strategies that promote accountability, support gender equality, and create inclusive environments for everyone. By strengthening policies, increasing awareness, and encouraging shared responsibility, workplaces and campuses can develop into safe and supportive spaces where individuals feel respected and confident in pursuing their professional and academic goals.

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