

How to make workplaces safe for employees

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Violence and harassment are threatening and pervasive reality causing trouble to all, especially women. Although a safe working environment is a fundamental human right, it has long been treated as a privilege where women have been facing so many safety concerns for ages working in hostile workplaces.

According to a study conducted by Karmojibi Nari and CARE Bangladesh, a significant proportion of women employees (about 12.7%) face sexual harassment at workplace in Bangladesh whereas various surveys conducted globally show that over 70% women and 25% men (on average) have encountered some form of sexual misconduct in their respective workplaces while at work, work-related events or looking for work; such statistics are staggering.

Sexual harassment is a universal problem. However, only 54% of victims report experiencing unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion, sexually crude conduct, sexist treatments or comments in the workplace due to the fear of being subject to retaliation.

There are some ways, recommended by experts, employers can take to ensure safe workplaces for all irrespective of gender to support gender diversity and inclusion to accelerate productivity and success in the long term. If you hold the authoritative position, put the following into action to end gender-based violence:

Adopt a strict zero-tolerance policy for harassment at work

Organisational efforts enforcing a well-defined zero-tolerance policy can have a remarkable impact on tackling the scourge of sexual harassment as it can be prevented by implementing correct law infrastructure. Hence, you must review your organisation's "workplace safety policy" to promote a comfortable workplace culture. The policy should define all kinds of sexual harassments and outline the consequences as well. You need to make sure everyone has access to the company's rules and regulations. Put up the guidelines on the company's website and posters on the walls along with attaching emergency contact numbers or circulate them among all employees regularly. Everyone needs to know the repercussion of this to help make it feasible to call

out inappropriate, questionable and unwelcoming sexual-advances and acts so that no perpetrator can feel entitled to practice exertion of power and domination.

Set up a credible Internal Complaint Committee

Every company should have a reliable and sensitive ICC, assuring a well-enforcing approach against all sorts of abuses and indecencies. The committee should consist of both men and women because sexual harassment is not just a woman's issue; it is a violation of the law against humans where one goes to the extent of assaulting and oppressing another. The authoritative figures need to pass unbiased judgment analysing the timeline, inquire or investigate the allegation thoroughly, protect the appellant and take necessary disciplinary actions. Complaint and redressal



mechanisms must be established to ensure every complaint received is acknowledged preserving a safe space for the victim. Sexual harassment at work can happen in verbal, visual or physical ways. Upon the findings, the guilty predator or fake accuser alike can receive a range of punishment - from a warning to termination from the job.

Develop a better and viable security system

You need to take measures to counteract and eradicate this issue to foster a secure environment. The workplace's design needs to be considered for that. Glass walls can be used in the private and communal spaces striking a perfect balance where one is not too isolated, neither is left to feel trapped, which benefits everyone. You can ensure a well-lit workplace with suitable lighting

arrangements covering the entire workplace. Install CCTV cameras to monitor the whole area to enhance the surveillance system for up-to-the-mark security and make sure the system is operational round-the-clock without intruding on the privacy of anyone. It can help gather evidence in determining who was at fault if such an unfortunate incident occurs. You can provide other basic amenities according to employees' needs too. Collect valid identification documents from everyone working and maintain a record of the visitors. Also, hire well-trained security guards to improve the overall working condition.

Organise weekly/monthly seminars Workshops, innovative skits, interactive and open group discussions on the "intent vs impact debate" or speeches by professionals can help spread awareness among all. Conduct

educational sessions to teach workers right from wrong and the importance of being respectful towards others regardless of individual gender identity. Demonstration programs can help them understand what constitutes as harassment so that there will not be any ambiguity as to what appropriate workplace behavioural ethics is which can help reduce dreadful instances. Arrange mandatory conventional anti-sexual harassment training to help them learn about electronic safety options or basic self-defence techniques to make it easy to combat this menace. You can try to go the extra mile by conducting regular surveys asking for everyone's feedback and opinion on this matter and keep up, observe, and evaluate annual reports on the outcomes.

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