

SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF RMG WORKERS

NO PEACE ON OR OFF THE PRODUCTION FLOOR?

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Women's participation in the ready-made garments sector, and the importance of this sector to national exports and economic growth has contributed to changed perceptions of women's economic and public role and has provided women themselves with more options.

The increased participation of women in paid work both outside and inside the home has now brought to the fore issues of their safety and security in the workplace and on the commute to work. Violence and sexual harassment in the workplace are not new issues but are now recognised as critical enough that International Labour Organisation (ILO) is preparing an international convention against sexual harassment at the workplace.

Women's labour rights are protected by law. Through the revision of the Labour Act, 2006 in 2013 and formulation of Labour Rule in 2015 the rights of workers were addressed and initiatives taken to ensure a decent work environment. This included workers' right to trade unions, introduction of an insurance scheme, setting up of a central fund to improve the workers' living standards, and requiring 5 percent of annual profit to be deposited in employee welfare funds. The recent Labour Rules also have introduced detailed specifications for provisions such as child care and compensations. The National Industrial Health and Safety Council has drafted an Occupational Safety and Health Policy which remains at the final stages of approval. The implementation of this policy would benefit women more than men as they are more affected by its absence.

The Labour Code, 2006 and its revision in 2013 recognised the issue of sexual harassment in the work place. The High Court judgement on sexual harassment also provides guidelines to employers and educational institutions on how to address sexual harassment issues.

However there are still various barriers and constraints to women's participation in the labour force, especially in paid work outside the home. The kinds of work available for women do not meet their expectations and are sometimes demeaning and poorly paid; there are strong cultural and social constraints to outside paid work; and working conditions, safety and security in the workplace, housing and in public spaces on the way to and from work are often concerns for women entering the labour market and their families.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE RMG SECTOR

Infographic: Shaer Reaz | Source: Shojag Coalition
Illustration: Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo

The baseline sought to understand what measures women or men would or could take in the case of incidences of violence.

