



ILLUSTRATION: JOHANA KARMAKAR JUI

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Another respondent from a one of the top Bangla newspapers writes that although a colleague would always flirt with a female colleague in public, when she protested one day, the harasser had an outburst and said that if she didn't watch out, she (the victim) would lose her job. Their supervisor, though present, said nothing to the harasser, reports the respondent.

He would say 'I love you' and call me whenever he wanted, despite being married.

#### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE REPORTS SEXUAL HARASSMENT

According to our survey, 40 percent of the employees reported their harassment to their respective organisations but only in four percent of the cases, the harassers were sacked. In almost every other case, the situation didn't change, except in a few cases where the harassers were transferred to another section or branch of the company, were yelled at, warned, or investigated about their misconduct. As shown earlier, in some cases the victims were actually fired from the organisations, blamed for something or insulted

in front of everyone by implying that they were not performing well at their job.

In one part of the survey, respondents were asked to rate their committee's effectiveness in dealing with their complaints. Only seven percent of employees (four respondents) rated their committees as 'very satisfactory', while 43 percent rated as 'very dissatisfactory' and 15 percent rated as 'dissatisfactory'.

In fact, respondents also say that in some cases the authorities of their organisations fail to even identify what constitutes an incident of sexual harassment; in other cases, they simply suggest that the victims shrug it off and handle it by themselves. For example, in a government-owned public limited company, when a female employee reported her incident to the administration that the harasser would block her path while walking, ask personal questions and make inappropriate and suggestive comments regularly, the administrative body said that it was not harassment because 'the accused did not use any slang'.

*Star Weekend* contacted the organisation and talked to a number of high officials of the administration. They took nearly a week to find out whether they have a committee to address sexual harassment at their office. A member of the committee then informed us that it

The authorities asked me to be more patient, when I filed a complaint against the harasser.

I will face retaliation if I name my organisation because now his bosom friend is my boss.

organisation that works on policy research based in Dhaka reports that they were physically, verbally and mentally harassed by their boss. One of them writes that her boss used to touch girls inappropriately, make offensive comments about menstruation and was involved in general forms of harassment like emotional abuse and blackmailing or manipulating the employees. But they didn't file any complaint about it since they had no such committee. However, when contacted, the organisation states that they are a small organisation having only 15 employees. The organisation has a committee of three members, headed by a man (according to the HC guidelines, such committees must be headed by a female person, if available).

What is surprising is that even in an or

I was working late at night at the office when he showed up and tried to touch me.

was formed a year ago, with five in-house employees. She insisted that they encourage employees to make complains but they hadn't received a complaint from any employee. However, the fact that the administrative officials themselves didn't know about the existence of the committee raises serious questions about the committees' functionality.

According to advocate Towhida Khanoker, director at BNWLA, if anyone feels that the committees are not working properly, they can inform the petitioner, i.e. BNWLA. "We know that implementation [of the HC guidelines] is very weak in such cases."

A former and a current employee of an

organisation of only 15 members, employees are unaware of the existence of their sexual harassment complaint committee. The organisation, however, admits that they don't conduct any seminar or meeting to teach employees on how to report an incident of workplace sexual harassment, also mentioned in the HC guidelines. They provide printed copies of their code of conduct to new employees and it is renewed every year.

This is not only the case at this organisation—64 percent of our respondents said they never attended such awareness building programmes and 26 percent of them are unaware of such programmes.

Rokeya Rafique, the CEO of Karmojibi Nari, informs *Star Weekend* that they aren't certain of how many garments factories have implemented the HC order. "We recently conducted a (draft) survey on 3,117 female workers of 325 factories, where we found that only four percent have a committee to address sexual harassment and abuse," she says.

"The thing is when something comes as guidelines, people don't follow it properly. This is why we need proper laws. We have also submitted a draft law 'Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention Act, 2018' last year to the law ministry, but as of now, there is no update on it."

The authorities said it was not harassment as the accused person did not use any slang.

Don't want to risk getting my name out and not get hired in the future.