

## Harassment at Work Place

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Harassment means any unwelcome advance, request for any inappropriate favours or other verbal or written communication or objectionable conduct, inappropriate attitude, causing interference with work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment<sup>1</sup>. Harassment in any form attempts to punish the person for refusal to comply with such a request, or creates the environment in which it is not possible to continue his/her professional work, hence affecting the job proficiency<sup>1</sup>. Persecution is not limited to the work place but covers any interaction or situation that is linked to official work or official activity outside the office.

There are three significant manifestations of harassment in the environment. These include firstly an abuse of authority which is a demand by the person in authority for any inappropriate favour making it conditional with certain job benefits be it a wage increase, a promotion, training opportunity, a transfer or the job itself<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, creating a hostile environment; such as an inappropriate advance, request for favours or verbal or physical conduct of objectionable nature, which interferes with an individual's work performance and hence creates an intimidating environment, at the workplace<sup>2</sup>. Thirdly, refusal to grant any inappropriate favour can result in retaliation, which may include limiting the

employee's option for future promotions or training, distorting the evaluation reports, generating gossip against the employee or other ways of limiting access to his/her rights. Such behaviour is also part of harassment<sup>2</sup>.

Harassment in medical profession is not new. It was probably present in all eras of time. Whether increased or decreased in present time remains to be ascertained due to non-availability of comparative data. The contribution of women in workforce has increased; the social and economic development of women maybe halted by a few stakeholders who harass them at work<sup>3</sup>. There may be an abuse of authority, hostile environment, asking for inappropriate favours, which results in the individual leaving their job and seeking other options to support themselves elsewhere. Whether male or female, both can be subjected to this attitude, behavioural problem at the workplace, but more so females.

Sexual harassment, one of its subtypes is more common in situations where there is an unequal gender ratio and large power differentials<sup>4</sup>. Examiner bias is also one form of this attitude. It may be considered a social evil, but not a crime. In medical profession, possibility of harassment persisting cannot be excluded, even though majority of the teachers and students are now females.

All over the world, students are harassed; this can be due to gender, sexual orientation, disability or race<sup>5</sup>. During face-to-face examination it is natural for the student to feel some degree of anxiety or stress. However, in the presence of an intimidating examiner student can be agitated further, hence may not be able to answer the questions asked of

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him even if he knows the answers. This scenario can exist regardless of the gender of teacher and student<sup>6</sup>. Even in the United States, harassment is punishable by federal law and their civil rights act of 1964, protects students at public schools from discrimination<sup>7</sup>.

In Pakistan, it is expected that harassment is more in females at workplace. Hence, in early 2010, Government of Pakistan passed a law called "Protection against harassment of women at work place act 2010"<sup>2</sup>. The Code provides the guideline for behaviour for all employees, including management, and the owners of the organization; to ensure the work environment, free of work harassment and intimidation. It was reported by Harassment Watch Organisation that in Pakistan out of 1074 organisations in the database; only 362 have adopted this code of conduct<sup>8</sup>. It is high time that everybody should be aware of this law to prevent them self from being harassed.

This act is for all employees including both women and men, and puts the responsibility of cleaning the menace of harassment from the organizational environment on the shoulders of the management. Thus, the emphasis is on holding individuals accountable for their behaviour through professional mechanism. The code follows the theme and provision identified in the national policies for equality of citizens by the government. This is in cognizance of provision of constitution of Pakistan where non-discrimination on the basis of gender in public and work place is stated in article 25, 26 & 27<sup>9</sup>.

The compliance of the code involves following four measures. These include making the Code of Conduct a part of Human Resource policies, form a three-member enquiry committee to address any complaints of sexual harassment within employee (one of the members has to be a woman), display the Code in office so that the employees have access to the information, follow the Code in letter and spirit to make the office environment more dignified. However, recent study done locally in Abbottabad has shown that protection against ha-

arrassment of women at workplace Act 2010 was considered ineffective by the respondents who were concerned about the lack of social support system for the act. Hence, future policies need to be amended based on this concern voiced by women<sup>10</sup>.

It is hoped that with this awareness, students and teachers, and especially women in workplace will know their rights and duties. It will help them behave like responsible human beings and work in a congenial and professional manner. This, in the long run will not only be beneficial to them as professionals, teachers, and parents but also as worthy human beings. They will also serve as role models for those peers with whom they are working young or old and as a source of encouragement. Since the law of the country requires that we abide by this rule, therefore our attitude and behaviour and inner consciousness, must guide us at all times for the betterment of our institute, country and our people.

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