

Sexual Harassment Prevalent in the Hotel Industry in Chennai

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Abstract: *The women status in India has been subjected to many great changes over the past millennia. They constitute an integral part of total workforce. In 1981, work participation rate was only 19.67 %, 1991 it was 22.73% and 26.68 per cent in 2001. One of the major limitations for Women at workplace is sexual violation. It is a commonly understood that sexual harassment was in the eye of the beholder. Only blatant and aggressive actions or comments like a direct threat to dismiss someone if she or he refused a sexual request were acknowledged by all as sexual harassment. This paper focuses on analysing the general awareness (sources and forms) among women workforce regarding this consequential area and also its prevalence in a well established 4 star hotel industry in Chennai on sexual harassment and the prevailing status in the organization. Since this issue is sensitive purposive and snowball sampling is adopted. The respondents include only women employees who were willing to share their experiences. From the below research it is understood that all the 60 women respondents has underwent at least one form of Sexual Harassment. The study revealed that all the respondents accepted that the sexual harassment is vivid in their organization and the major source of sexual violation is the managers. The major limitation in conducting the this original research work is getting a formal authorization from the concerned hotel revealing that this workplace issue is still considered to be trivial and a part of women employed in the hotel industry leading to high attrition in this industry.*

Keywords: Hotel industry, Sexual harassment, women workforce, Gender bias

Introduction

In earlier days, women had quiet and passive attitude at their workplace since very few women stepped out for jobs. But now the Indian economy heads towards a double-digit growth where women have surpassed men in the area of employment with a 3.35 % increase in employment between 1998 and 2004, *Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM)* - Women Employment Growth Rate and Gender. But with all the factual growth of women, the workplace bias and discrimination still cripple them from reaching the standards they deserve. Workplace discrimination happens when an employee suffers an unfair or unfavorable treatment on the basis of race, gender, religion, caste, nationality and so on. It is evident that most of the problems of working women are rooted in the social perspective of the women position. Traditionally men are seen as the bread winner and women as the house-keepers, child bearers. This typecast role model continues to pull down women from reaching heights. So at the basic level a change is required in the attitudes of the employers, policy makers, family members and the public at large because many of the biggest workplace challenges faced by today's super women still revolve around gender.

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So what is Sexual Harassment? UNWELCOME is the key in defining it. It is termed as “Eve-teasing” in India and is described as ‘unwelcome sexual gesture or behaviour whether directly or indirectly as sexually coloured remarks; physical contact and advances; showing pornography; a demand or request for sexual favours; any other unwelcome physical, verbal/non-verbal conduct being sexual in nature’. Sexual Harassment at work is an extension of violence against women in everyday life and is discriminatory, exploitative, thriving in atmosphere of threat, terror and reprisal. The issue is of concern for both women and the employers as studies show that sexual harassment touches lives of nearly 40-60% of working women.

The Supreme Court definition, sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexually determined behaviour, like

- Physical contact
- A demand or request for sexual favours
- Sexually coloured remarks
- Showing pornography
- Any other physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature.

Several studies have already indicated sexual harassment as a factor in professional and personal decline employees in the any industry particularly in media and hotel industry.

Sexual Harassment and Hotel Industry

The Hospitality industries require close association with clients, which leaves both the party vulnerable to sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a critical issue in any industry. However, it is very vulnerable particularly in hospitality industry because of the nature of the service it provides which requires close interaction with clients.

Woods and Kavanaugh (1994) found that more than 80 % of men and women perceive gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace as an ongoing problem. Through their 49 - question survey to 1,550 hospitality managers, all of whom had earned a bachelor or master’s degree from hospitality management programs within the proceeding seven years where 58% of the respondents were women, they found that in many cases the reasons why most women graduates left the hospitality industry was due to gender discrimination or sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is the creation of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. Repeatedly staring provocatively and colour jokes or remarks are also considered as sexual harassment.

Woods (1992), a study on the frequency of sexual harassment occurred in the hospitality industry. “Nearly one - fourth of both female and male respondents agreed with the statement: ‘Most women in my field have been subjected to sexual harassment at work’. Many recent researches on gender issues in employment in the hospitality industry reveal that “there is rapid rise of sexual violation in the hospitality field”.

The Human Rights Commission in New Zealand’s first study of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry conducted by Neil Lunt and Carl Davidson of No Doubt Research for the HRC."One of the consequences of considering harassment a part of working in hospitality is that some staff normalise harassment behaviour and dealing with it becomes their responsibility," Mr Lunt says. Almost all the Hotel staff taking part in the survey reported dealing with various forms of harassment from colleagues and customers in informal ways ranging from laughing it

Sexual Harassment Prevalent in the Hotel Industry in Chennai

off to leaving their jobs. Others who experienced harassment had reported it to the employer and the harasser was subsequently relieved from duty though it is not an option when the harasser is the boss.

Relevance of the Study

The biggest assets of any company are its employees. The workforce and management, or basically the employees, of any company are essentially the ones running it. Good and healthy practice for their employees is always a big concern for any companies. A workplace should be a safe giving importance to health does not just gain healthier employees but actually gain more.

In the past few months, New Delhi India has been dubbed the "rape capital" of South Asia. Violence against women is the fastest-growing crime in India, a recent study concluded. Every 26 minutes a woman is molested, every 34 minutes a rape takes place, and every 43 minutes a woman is kidnapped, according to the *Home Ministry's National Crime Records Bureau*. And sexual harassment in the workplaces is a well-known issue that thousands of women and men encounter on a daily basis.

Research Methodology

Objectives

- To understand the women employees awareness on sexual harassment.
- To confirm with the extent of sexual harassment prevailing in the hotel sector.

Statement of the problem

The study's focus is to confirm with the awareness and prevalence of sexual harassment in the hotel industry (Chennai) that affects the women employees working in this sector.

Pilot study

After the discussion with the industry experts a small scale preliminary study was undertaken to check the feasibility and to improve the design and nature of the research.

Universe and sample size

As regard to the actual size of the universe, due to the practical constrains sufficient and complete data on the women employees employed by them was not given. Instead they permitted to collect the data from 60 women employees whoever is available free and are willing to fill in the questionnaire. Thus adopting *purposive sampling and snowball* method the researcher collected the data from 60 respondents. The tool used for analysis is SPSS.

Tool used for data collection

The tool used for the data collection by the researcher is 'Questionnaire'. The method questionnaire was used because of the following two reasons:

1. All the respondents are well educated.
2. The topic is a sensitive one and only questionnaire will be an apt tool.

Research design

For the purpose of the present study the researcher has adopted Descriptive and Diagnostic design. The descriptive and diagnostic design is used in the cases of confirming with the prevalence of any issue in the given context and to identify the factors that influence the

occurrence of such an issue. In this present study since the researcher is interested in the issue of sexual harassment prevailing in the hotel industry, it is decided to adopt this particular design.

A. Analysis on General Awareness on Sexual Harassment

Since the study is about the sexual harassment of the women workers, the researcher first of all wanted to confirm with their general awareness on this issue. Therefore, a list of items responses on which will be reflecting the general awareness of the respondents with respect to what amounts to sexual harassment according to them. The data collected in this regard was tabulated as given below:

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by their opinion on what amounts to the sexual harassment in their workplace

Sl.NO	Issue amounting to sexual harassment in the work place	Frequency	Percent
1	sexual advantages	13	21.7
2	sexist remarks	8	13.3
3	inappropriate touching	12	20.0
4	SMS, videos	7	11.7
5	all the above	20	33.3
	Total	60	100.0

According to the above (Table 1):

- a sizable number of the respondents (21.7%) considers that sexual harassment amounts to only taking sexual advantages ,
- 33% of the women employees considers that sexual harassment includes all the above.
- 20% of the respondents feels that sexual harassment amounts to only inappropriate touching
- 13.3% of them considers that sexual harassment amounts to only sexist remarks
- 11.7% amounts to SMS, Videos.

Thus from the above, it can be inferred that the respondents understudy are to only some extent aware of what constitutes sexual harassment.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents based on the perception that SH is a blatant violation of the employee’s terms and conditions

Sl. No	SH a blatant violation of employment terms and conditions	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	60	100
2	No	00	0
	Total	60	100.0

Sexual Harassment Prevalent in the Hotel Industry in Chennai

The above (Table 2): clearly indicates the distribution of the respondents according to their perception that Sexual harassment is a blatant violation of the employment terms and conditions and all the respondents that is (100%) of the respondents responded affirmatively to the question.

B. Analysis on Prevailing Status in the Organisation

The simple frequency tables below represent the frequency and percentage measuring the *Sources and Forms* prevailing in the current organisation of the women respondents. The following tables clearly depict the frequency of the sexual harassment faced by the women respondents in their current organisation.

I. Sources

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents according to the responds of the internal source of Sexual harassment

SI. NO	Internal source of sexual harassment	Frequency	Percent
1	Supervisors	10	16.7
2	managers from other department	19	31.7
3	co-worker	31	51.7
	Total	60	100.0

As regard to the above mentioned (Table 3), 31 respondents out of 60 respondents responded that they have been sexually harassed by their own male co-worker more than their supervisors and managers from the other department.

Table 4: Distribution of the respondents according to the responds of the external source of Sexual harassment

SI.NO	External source of sexual harassment	Frequency	Percent
1	Vendors	12	20.0
2	Suppliers	15	25.0
3	Customers	33	55.0
	Total	60	100.0

According to the above (Table 4) 55% of the women employees felt that they have been sexually harassed by the hotel customers followed by the suppliers (25%) and Vendors (20%).

II.FORMS**Table 5: Distribution of the respondents according to the amount of the sexual harassment in the workplace**

SLNO	How are the respondents are currently facing SH in their work place	Frequency	Percent
1	Sexual advantages	9	15.0
2	Sexist remarks	24	40.0
3	Inappropriate touch	25	41.7
4	SMS, videos etc	16	26.7
5	All of the above	7	11.7
	Total	60	100.0

Regarding the above represented (Table 5) it is explicit that about 41.7% of the respondents have experienced sexual harassment in the form of inappropriate touch and closely followed by sexist remarks (40%) followed by SMS, Videos (26.7%), sexual advantages (15%) and nearly 11.7% have experienced the above mentioned manifestations of sexual harassment.

Table 6 Distribution of the respondents according to the visibility of sexual harassment in the workplace

SLNO	SH vividly visible in your workplace	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	60	100.0
	Total	60	100.0

The above frequency (Table 6) clearly indicates that all the 60 respondents responded that the Sexual harassment faced by the women employees is vividly visible in the organisation.

Conclusion

It is important for managers to realize the seriousness of a sexual harassment-free work environment and understand how employees feel about the issue. It is management's responsibility to observe, to listen, to reassure the employee, and to act. The traditional approach of training only managers is no longer sufficient. There is need for direct training of non-supervisory employees regarding sexual harassment. It is important to understand restaurant employees' perceptions of sexual harassment will help managers to prepare appropriate sexual harassment policies for and know the areas of difficulty.

Sexual Harassment Prevalent in the Hotel Industry in Chennai

Authors' Note

This manuscript is the authors' original work, has not been published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

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