Creating Safe Workplace for Women

This editorial is based on [“Slow progress to creating a safe workplace for women”](#) **which was published in the Hindu Business Line on 21/02/2023. It discusses the issues women face at Workplace and steps need to be taken to address it.**

For Prelims: Creating Safe Workplace, Vishaka guidelines, Indian Penal Code in 2013, Supreme Court of India, Fundamental Rights, Gender Discrimination, Internal Complaint Committees, Periodic Labour Force Survey

For Mains: Issues Women Face at Work, Government Policies & Interventions, Human Resource

The recent **cases of** [alleged sexual harassment faced by female wrestlers](#) **in India have highlighted the lack of functioning internal complaints committees** and the need for adherence to the [Vishaka guidelines on reporting harassment.](#)

Although a **specific offence relating to sexual harassment was added to the** [Indian Penal Code in 2013,](#) the victim chose not to report the matter to the police, and there was no internal mechanism in place for redressal of complaints.

The Vishaka guidelines, framed by the [Supreme Court of India](#) **in 1997,** must be followed by both government and private institutions and **employers should not be allowed to violate the** [fundamental rights](#) of women at the workplace.

What are the Challenges with Women Workforce Participation?

- **Sexual Harassment:**
    - In recent years, **sexual harassment at workplace is becoming one of the most pressing issues** affecting women across the globe.
        - **Nearly 31,000 complaints of crimes committed against women were received** by the [National Commission for Women (NCW)](#) in 2022, the highest since 2014.
            - **About 54.5 % of the complaints were received from Uttar Pradesh.** Delhi recorded 3,004 complaints, followed by Maharashtra (1,381), Bihar (1,368) and Haryana (1,362).
- **Gender Discrimination:**
    - Women are **often discriminated against in the workplace,** whether in hiring, pay, promotions, or opportunities.
- **Lack of Diversity:**
    - Organizations with **limited diversity may lack understanding and empathy** for the experiences of women in the workplace.

- **Inadequate Support for Working Mothers:**
    - Women with children often face significant challenges in balancing their work and family responsibilities.
- **Occupational Segregation:**
    - Women are often concentrated in low-paying and traditionally female-dominated fields, while men are more likely to work in high-paying industries and professions.

What are the Major Legal Frameworks for Welfare of Women?

- **Constitutional Safeguards:**
    - Fundamental Rights:
        - It guarantees all Indians the right to equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State on the basis of gender (Article 15(1)) and special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women (Article 15(3)).
    - Fundamental Duties:
        - It ensures that practices derogatory to the dignity of women are prohibited under Article 51 (A).
- **Legislative Framework:**
    - Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
    - The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
    - The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013
    - The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO), 2012
- **Women Empowerment Schemes:**
    - Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme
    - One Stop Centre Scheme
    - **Ujjawala:** A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation
    - SWADHAR Greh
    - NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR
    - Mahila police Volunteers
    - Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)
    - NIRBHAYA Fund.

What should be the Way Forward?

- **Providing Women-Friendly Infrastructure:**
    - It's important to **create a physical space that is safe and welcoming for women.**
    - This can **include separate washrooms, breastfeeding rooms, and appropriate lighting and security measures.**
        - It's also important to ensure that the workplace is accessible for women with disabilities.
- **Constitution of Internal Complaint Committees:**
    - It is important to have a well-constituted Internal Complaint Committees (ICCs) that includes both men and women as members and is chaired by a senior female employee.
        - Internal Complaint Committees (ICCs) are **mandatory under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.**
        - An ICC is responsible for addressing complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace.
- **Spreading of Awareness:**
    - It's important for employees to be **aware of their rights and the procedures for filing a complaint of sexual harassment.**
    - Employers should **conduct regular training sessions and workshops to raise awareness** about the law and the redressal mechanisms available.

- This can help create a culture of zero tolerance towards sexual harassment and promote a safe and respectful workplace for all employees.
  - **Addressing the Deep-Rooted Structural and Cultural Violence:**
    - Addressing deep-rooted structural and cultural violence is essential for creating a safe and equitable society.
    - Here are some steps that can be taken to address this issue:
      - Education and Awareness, Empowering Marginalized Groups, Policy and Legal Reform, challenging harmful beliefs and attitudes etc.

Drishti Mains Question

What are the most effective strategies for creating a safe workplace for women, and how can organizations implement those measures to ensure a safe and inclusive work environment for all employees?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Mains

Q. We are witnessing increasing instances of sexual violence against women in the country. Despite existing legal provisions against it, the number of such incidences is on the rise. Suggest some innovative measures to tackle this menace. **(2014)**

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