

Sexual Harassment in Educational Institutions in Delhi' NCR (India): Level of Awareness, Perception and Experience

Adetutu Deborah Aina¹  · Pradeep Kulshrestha¹

Published online: 27 July 2017
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Abstract This study examined the level of awareness of sexual harassment in educational institutions in Delhi NCR (India). This paper grouped the results of all respondents into two categories, i.e. Private and State institutions, wherein a total number of 430 respondents were selected from ten private and state universities by simple random sampling from their respective law faculties. The statistical tools used in analyzing the data collected were frequency and chi square which revealed that the level of awareness of private or individually owned institutions is relatively high but lacks clarity, and boils down to a lower level of awareness as compared with state or government owned institutions. The findings also revealed that private universities experience sexual harassment just like state universities. Based on these results, the author recommends the augmentation of awareness programs in all universities, especially private ones. Compulsory sexual education courses for new intakes could be arranged, and final year students could also be re-oriented before they graduate.

Keywords Awareness · Higher Educational Institutions · Internal Complaint Committee · Private and State universities · Sexual harassment

Introduction

Over time, the right to education has become a fundamental right across the globe. It demands non-discrimination, sensitivity and decorum in a conducive environment, for students to assimilate whatever they are being taught. However, sexual harassment is a major constraint, which has, undoubtedly, hindered the realization

✉ Adetutu Deborah Aina
ainaadetud@gmail.com

¹ Department of Law, Sharda University, Greater-Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

of this right. Moylan and Wood (2016) documented that social work students are experiencing sexual harassment in their field of education and these experiences are causing low to moderate levels of distress and interference with learning. Over 55% of their study sample had experienced at least one incident of sexual harassment and 63% of that group had experienced more than one form of harassment. Similarly, Imonikhe et al. (2012) and Omonijo et al. (2013) discovered, in their survey, that a majority of their respondents agreed that sexual harassment is prevalent in schools and that it impacts the academic performance of victims negatively. According to Ministry of Human Resources Development (2016), by virtue of section 2(k) (i) and (ii), the University Grants Commission of India defines sexual harassment as:

(i) An unwanted conduct with sexual undertones if it occurs or which is persistent and which demeans, humiliates or creates a hostile and intimidating environment or is calculated to induce submission by actual or threatened adverse consequences and includes any one or more or all of the following unwelcome acts or behaviour (whether directly or by implication), namely; -

(a) Any unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature; (b) demand or request for sexual favors; (c) making sexually colored remarks (d) physical contact and advances; or (e) showing pornography”

(ii) Any one (or more than one or all) of the following circumstances, if it occurs or is present in relation or connected with any behaviour that has explicit or implicit sexual undertones- (a) implied or explicit promise of preferential treatment as quid pro quo for sexual favors; (b) implied or explicit threat of detrimental treatment in the conduct of work; (c) implied or explicit threat about the present or future status of the person concerned; (d) creating an intimidating offensive or hostile learning environment; (e) humiliating treatment likely to affect the health, safety dignity or physical integrity of the person concerned;”

Explanatorily, the first two provisions of the above definition deal with unequal power relations between the employer/supervisor and employee/subordinate (Smit and Du Plessis 2011). An employer, a supervisor or faculty demands sexual gratification from the employee, subordinate or student, in return for job benefits or favourable grades respectively. The third provision refers to the existence of a hostile work environment where the victim's life could become a living nightmare (Okoroafor et al. 2014), in which case the offending behaviour interferes with the satisfactory work performance of the victim (Ladebo 2003).

Sexual harassment is dignitary harms on an individual's standing (Anderson 2006). The consequences of sexual harassment are categorized into job-related (attitude towards work), psychological (stress related symptoms), and physical outcomes (increased depression) (Richman et al. 1999; Chan et al. 2008). Remarkably, Barak (2005) said that sexual harassment exists on the Internet (without physical contact) just as much as it exists off the Internet. However, the sexual harassment in the cyberspace is the commonest. This indicates that students can harass or be harassed via the Internet, especially in our recent age of technology advancement.

It is apposite to note that harassment can be of any kind and may occur in many places; in the workplace, schools, or other public places (Fitzgerald et al. 1988; Mohammed et al. 2014). Extreme harassment can include homicide and physical assault, but the more common ones are minor such as obscene gestures, dirty looks, threats, yelling, whistling, giving the silent treatment, belittling, etc. (Bowling and Beehr 2006). Sexual harassment is a problem that is universally faced by workers (Mohd et al. 2007), in educational institutions and offices all over the world, but women are more bothered than men (Haas and Hoing 2009; Pilgram and Keyton 2009; Abe 2012) and women's attitude is more of endurance than resistance, for the fear of double victimization (Akhtar 2013), thus providing opportunities for repeated harassing behavior (Page and Pina 2015). In another research conducted by Gila et al. (2003), it was revealed that 91% of nursing students/nurses reported having experienced at least one type of sexual harassment and 30% reported having experienced more than three out of the seven types listed.

Correspondingly, Pralhadrao (2014) said that sexual harassment has been recognized globally as an intimidating and one of the most violating forms of violence. Since long, many countries, India being one of them, have not only taken note of how degrading the experiences are on students, but have adapted legislative measures to combat it. In fact, it is a barrier towards International Labor Organization's primary goal of promoting decent working conditions for all workers (McCann 2005).

Boateng et al. (2015) reported that the harasser could be a superior, colleague, subordinate, supplier, customer or any person engaged in any form of activity related to the organization. It might be a male or a female, and it is not necessary that it be one from the opposite sex (Hussin 2015). Howbeit, most findings justified that females are mostly harassed, due to their nature (Rahama and Jahan 2015). Also, according to Reena and Saheab (2014), this injurious act does not only occur among the student and teacher, employee and supervisor, junior teacher and senior teacher, research supervisee and supervisor, but also involves treating others unequally on the basis of gender in work-related or academic duties or programs and not providing female students with the same prospects as male students or vice versa. Fitzgerald and Ormerod (1991) found that there are five types of sexual harassment in a university setting: gender harassment (11.15%), seductive behavior (18.79%), sexual bribery (9.76%), sexual coercion (15.16%), and sexual imposition or assault (13.77%) out of (1168) sample size.

Interestingly, Aja-Okorie (2014) grouped sexual harassment in universities into three forms; sexual harassment of student by another student, sexual harassment of faculty/staff member by student, and sexual harassment of student by faculty/staff member, the lattermost is the most rampant form of harassment experienced in educational institutions. This was further corroborated by the research conducted by Taiwo et al. (2014) where 98.8% of the respondents, significantly revealed that the trend of sexual harassment occurrence is from male lecturer(s) to female student(s). Reena and Saheab (2014), in a study on sexual harassment of women in educational institution in India, established that the Central Government through its central minister 'Mr. Sashi Tarur' in his statement before the Council of States, agreed to the occurrences of sexual abuse of students in educational institutions in Kendra Vidyalaya, Navodaya Vidyalaya. Similarly, in a cross-sectional survey conducted

by Aditi et al. (2016a, b) among 408 undergraduate students of selected professional colleges of Udupi district, Karnataka, India, revealed that the perception of undergraduates about sexual harassment differs with the students' age, gender and course of the study. Their study does not address the possible variance of perception by type of institutions that this study seeks to address. A study conducted by Pavithra and Relton (2015) among adolescent schoolgirls in Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu, India revealed the prevalence of different forms of sexual abuse ranging from forceful exposure of genitalia to physical touch in public places.

Schmiede and Yousaf (2016) also established that women in universities experience harassment throughout the hierarchal level and concluded that harassment hinders women from climbing the hierarchical scale. Apaak and Sarpong (2015) revealed that majority of their study in Ghana had awareness of sexual harassment through mass media as opposed to institutions/parents. Most females, do not know what sexual harassment constitutes exactly, as they confused it with rape. Also, Boateng et al. (2015) revealed that sexual harassment is a major problem faced by the world, though the concept is not well understood at the international and national arena by the majority.

Various studies demonstrate how problematic it is to define the term sexual harassment because of the difficulty for institutions to draw the line between flirting, playful courtship and sexual harassment. In furtherance, it can be viewed through a variety of lenses; some see it as a tool of patriarchy, others view it as a harmless form of interaction (Browne 2006), while in India; discussions on sex is deemed as a taboo (Leach and Sitaram 2007). Majority of the students became aware of sexual harassment through either media or by reading books as opposed to the institution of knowledge and parents preferred by them. The common reason for this is that, sexual education remains a favorite of conservative religious and of political groups. It is deemed that such education promotes promiscuous behaviors and early sexual activity (Khubchandani et al. 2014). Yet, religious leaders have recently being reported among people who sexually harassed girls in Indian society (Neethu Raghukumar 2017). Culturally, women are viewed as the weaker gender that are worthy of a lower social status as compared to men due to numerous reasons, especially viewed as dowry burdens, which is further aggravated by the very poor Gender Inequality Index of the country (Pereira and Rodrigues 2014). These enhance crimes against women and shows the importance of evaluating knowledge of awareness, which this study seeks to achieve'. In addition, Indian society is in a stage of rapid social transition (Banerjee and Sharma 2011) hence, the need for early sensitization of higher educational students in order to prevent them from falling prey of sexual harassment.

Nauman and Abbasi (2014) and Rajoura et al. (2012) further disclosed that India has a strong history of women fighting against sexual harassment at workplace in plethora of cases cumulatively in (Vishaka and Ors vs State of Rajasthan and Ors, 1997)¹ where the Supreme Court acknowledged the lack of specific laws addressing sexual harassment at workplace in the Indian legislation. The court further provided Vishakha Guidelines to serve as legal framework for resolution, settlement or prosecution of sexual harassment cases pending the time that the Parliament would

¹ No. 384/1992 (SC, August 13th, 1997).

enact a suitable law to fill the lacuna (Parikh and Sinha 1999). Based on the said Vishakha guidelines, the Government of India formulated a circular for central government employees on 13th February 1998 (Singh 2013). Subsequently, on 3rd September 2012 sexual harassment of Women at workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill (2012) was passed into law by the Lower House of the Parliament, further confirmed by the Upper House of the Parliament on 26th February 2013 and received the President's assent on 22nd April 2013. It however became effective since 9th December 2013 (Veena et al. 2013). Sometimes May, 2016 the University Grant Commission realised the 'Act' only protects working women, so the Commission also amended its Rules and regulations to be gender neutral for the protection of educational institutions at large. At this juncture, it is right to agree with (Pina and Gannon 2010) who said that the mere presence of a sexual harassment policy is not enough to safeguard or to prevent sexual harassment from occurring. Hence, if continuous trainings and awareness is not sustained, then the remarkable effort of the laws will be nugatory (York et al. 1997).

It is apposite to note that the researchers chose the comparative sample of private and State educational institution because of the significance characteristics of their students based on their awareness and attitudes toward the subject matter. First, private educational institutions means those schools owned or solely financed by individual(s) or group of people under trust while, State educational institutions are owned, run and financed by government and partly by individuals that established the schools. Secondly, India news has it that students from private owned institutions are likely to commit suicide at slightest disorder they experience and they hardly have the capability to bear pressure due to their privileged upbringing (Sehran 2017) same with victims of sexual harassment who stand risks of suicidal thoughts, ideation and paranoia at school (Lijster et al. 2016). While the attitude of students from State owned institutions is more of withdrawal from schools or loss of interest in study. Albeit, several researches have been done on sexual harassment in educational institutions, using private and state educational institutions respectively as their samples, but none to our knowledge bring both types of institutions as sample of comparison on sexual harassment issue. This study seeks to place both institutions on the same parameters in order to assess their distinctive level of awareness, perceptions and experience of the subject matter. However, the level of awareness is still relatively impugned as some do not know how to redress their grievance when found in such situations, some are unaware of it as a criminal offence which is punishable by law, and some believe that it is a part of life or an inevitable experience based on the information obtained from the respondents via the questionnaire distributed to them.

It is also noted that a plethora of sexual harassment cases filed before the courts are majorly from State owned university, for example—(T. R. Sahrawat vs Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan 2014),² (S. Raju Aiyer vs Jawaharlal Nehru University and... 2013),³ (Dr. B. N. Ray v. Ramjas College and Others 2012),⁴

² OA No.4341/2012 (Central Administrative Tribunal, March 6th, 2014).

³ LPA 330/2013 (HC of Delhi, August 23rd, 2013).

⁴ W.P. (C) 4427/2008 (HC, Delhi, May 21st, 2012).

(Meenaski v. Delhi University 2011),⁵ (Dr. Punita K. Sodhi v. Union of India 2010),⁶ (Prof. Bidyug Chakraborty vs Delhi University and Ors. 2009),⁷ etc. Is it that there are no sexual harassment cases in private owned institutions or lack of clear understanding of what the 'act' is all about?

Flowing from all these occurrences is the reason for emphasis on "awareness." Nevertheless, law students or faculties have been selected for this research study because it is presumed that they have a reasonable level of knowledge of the laws and policies dealing with sexual harassment in their respective institutions. This reason has prompted the researchers to shed more light on sexual harassment in educational institutions by comparing Private Institutions and State Institutions. This paper will discover the effectiveness of the Internal Complaint Committee without a periodic check by a Central committee, the awareness of students about sexual harassment, etc.

Research Questions

- What is the knowledge and perception of students of selected universities in Delhi' NCR (India), about sexual harassment, the Internal Complaint Committee and the Sexual Harassment Act, 2013?

Research Hypotheses

- a. Private universities are more aware of sexual harassment than state universities.
- b. The type of institution will determine the students' perception of sexual harassment.
- c. Private universities do not experience sexual harassment in their institutions whereas state universities do.
- d. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is rarely enforced by institutions.

Methodology

A descriptive research design of the survey type was used for the study. The population comprised of 430 respondents, both males and females, who participated by filling questionnaires distributed to them through simple random sampling. The collections of data were held at 10 different universities, involving 5 Private owned universities (215) respondents and 5 State owned universities (215) respondents, situated at New Delhi, NCR, (India). All participants for this research were purposively used for this study. In the questionnaire, which comprised of '20'

⁵ W.P. (C) 8208/2010 (HC, Delhi, July 5th, 2011).

⁶ W.P. (C) 367/2009 and CMs 828, 11426/2009 (HC, Delhi, September 9th, 2010).

⁷ W. P. (C) No. 8226/2007 (HC, Delhi, May 29th, 2009).

opened/closed-ended and multiple questions, the first ‘5’ questions were demographics, the second section was based on the knowledge/incidences of the participant on sexual harassment and the last section dealt with the compliance of their various institutions with the provided ‘SHWA’. The authors used this last section to determine the need for periodic check on educational institutions by Central Authorities. This method was adopted by (Arulogun et al. 2013; Lim and Cortina 2005; Norman, Aikins and Binka 2013; Schneider et al. 1997) in comparing two sample sizes of their distinct research works. The only research question generated, was answered using percentages, while the four research hypotheses formulated, were tested using inferential statistics of Chi square (χ^2) at a 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Results

The completed questionnaires were arranged, analyzed and interpreted with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 17). The data was generated by the use of descriptive statistics, and the data was characterized and assessed by the use of frequency and Chi square test coupled with cross-tabulations. The findings revealed the followings;

Based on the total number of 430 respondents used for this study, the results revealed that majority of the respondents were female students (54.7%) and undergraduates from both Private and State universities (58.6%), within the age range of 20–30 years (63%) (Table 1).

Research Question: What is the knowledge and perception of universities’ students in Delhi’ NCR (India) about sexual harassment, the ICC and the Act?

The analysis of the 20 questions contained in the questionnaire were divided into 4 tables and Chi squared into (variables) Private and State institutions. The first—deals with the awareness of sexual harassment, the second—with the perception of respondents of sexual harassment, the third—with the experience of respondents about sexual harassment; and the fourth with the effectiveness of the ICC without periodic check.

Hypothesis 1 Private universities are more aware of sexual harassment than State universities.

89.3 and 93.9% of the respondents from Private and State institutions respectively, are aware of the term sexual harassment, while 6.1 and 10.7% respectively, are unaware. This indicates that State institutions are more aware of sexual harassment than Private institutions. Also, 92.1% of the Private institutions respondents and 89.3% of State institutions respondents are aware that sexual harassment is a criminal offence in India while 7.9% respondents from the Private institutions and 10.7% from the State institutions are unaware of that fact. This

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in private and state higher educational institution

Items	Category	Institution		
		Private	State	Total
Gender	Male	108 (50.2%)	87 (40.5%)	195 (45.3%)
	Female	107 (49.8%)	128 (59.5%)	235 (54.7%)
Age	<20	72 (33.5%)	48 (22.3%)	120 (27.9%)
	20–30	132 (61.4%)	139 (64.7%)	271 (63.0%)
	31–40	9 (4.2%)	24 (11.2%)	33 (7.7%)
	41 and above	2 (0.9%)	4 (1.9%)	6 (1.4%)
Occupation	Student	186 (86.5%)	185 (86.0%)	371 (86.3%)
	Teacher	15 (7.0%)	26 (12.1%)	41 (9.5%)
	Administrative staff	13 (6.0%)	4 (1.9%)	17 (4.0%)
	Others	1 (0.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.2%)
Level of education	Undergraduate	155 (72.1%)	97 (45.1%)	252 (58.6%)
	Graduate	34 (15.8%)	48 (22.3%)	82 (19.1%)
	Post graduate	26 (12.1%)	70 (32.6%)	96 (22.3%)

indicates that Private institutions are more mindful of the fact that sexual harassment is a criminal offence and an act of discrimination in India. 21.2 and 27.4% of respondents from Private and State institutions respectively were given sexual harassment education when they resumed their institutions; while 72.6 and 78.8% from Private institutions and State institutions respectively, were not. This indicates that respondents from both Institutions were rarely given sexual harassment education when they resumed their Institutions, albeit the Private institutions were slightly more sexually educated than the State institutions. Notwithstanding the indications of rare sexual education, 46.5% of the Private institution respondents and 47% of the State institution respondents believed they are aware of the existence of “ICC” and its policies in their institutions while 53.3% of the Private and 53% of the State institution respondents were unaware. This indicates that few respondents from both Institutions know what “ICC” is all about. However; there is just a slight difference of 0.5% between both institutions, with the extra bulk tilting towards the State institutions (Table 2).

Respondents from Private institutions are very much aware of the consequences of sexual harassment, as compared to State institutions but almost half of them lack clarity on its consequences and only a few are completely unaware (see Fig. 1).

Hypothesis 2 The type of institutions will determine the students’ perception of sexual harassment.

Table 3 depicts that 94.9 and 93% of the respondents in Private and State institutions respectively, agreed, while 5.1 and 15% respectively, disagreed, that lack of awareness is the root cause of sexual harassment in their institutions. This indicates that both institutions have a clear observation of the fact that lack of

Table 2 Awareness of sexual harassment among respondents in higher educational institution

S. no.	Items	Institution						χ^2
		Private			State			
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	
1.	Have you heard of sexual harassment in your institution?	192 (89.3%)	23 (10.7%)	215 (100%)	202 (93.9%)	13 (6.1%)	215 (100%)	0.084
2.	Do you know sexual harassment is a form of discrimination/criminal offence in India?	198 (92.1%)	17 (7.9%)	215 (100%)	183 (89.3%)	22 (10.7%)	215 (100%)	0.401
3.	Were you ever counsel or given sexual harassment education when you resumed your institution?	59 (27.4%)	156 (72.6%)	215 (100%)	45 (21.2%)	170 (78.8%)	215 (100%)	0.135
4.	Are you aware if there is an Internal Compliant Committee or any policy to that effect in your institution?	100 (46.5%)	115 (53.5%)	215 (100%)	101 (47.0%)	114 (53.0%)	215 (100%)	0.923

All items shown are significant at $p > 0.05$

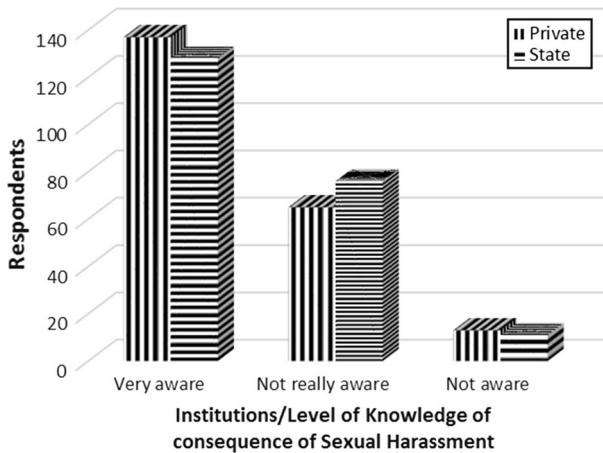


Fig. 1 The level of knowledge of the consequence of sexual harassment among respondents in institutions

awareness of sexual harassment makes students prone to sexual harassment. Also, 85.1 and 98.1% respondents of Private and State institutions respectively, agreed, while 14.9 and 1.9% respectively, disagreed, that sexual harassment affects our institutions. This indicates that both pools of respondents have a clear observation of the fact that sexual harassment affects our institutions; nevertheless, some respondents from Private Universities had a different view.

Similarly, with respect to the commonest form of sexual harassment in their institutions, the respondents chose 'verbal' harassment resoundingly, while sexual gesture was the least common form of harassment, out of the five options provided: 34 and 6.5% for Private institutions while 38.7 and 5.4% for State institutions respectively. In a like manner, on the commonest consequences of sexual harassment in their institutions, a majority from both institutions believed it to be 'Psychological and physical health challenge' while the minority believed it to be 'Low performance': 42.3 and 8.8% for Private institutions while in State institutions 36.2 and 11.9% respectively. On the respondents' suggestions to victims of sexual harassment, among the five options provided, the majority proposed that the victim should speak up (69.8% respondents in Private institution and 72.4% in State institutions) and the least popular option, according to them was 'suffer in silence': 3.7% while for the State institution is Quit education 1.9%.

Hypothesis 3 Private universities do not experience sexual harassment in their institutions but State universities do.

Among the respondents in Private universities 16.3% experienced sexual harassment in their institutions and 83.7% never experienced it while 18.6% of the State universities respondents experienced sexual harassment in their institutions and 81.4% never experienced it. This indicates that respondents in Private universities experience sexual harassment just as State universities though it is slightly higher in the latter. When the victims were asked whether they reported the

Table 3 Perceptions of respondents about sexual harassment

S. no.	Items	Institution						χ^2
		Private		State		Total	Total	
		Yes	No	Yes	No			
1.	Do you think lack of awareness of sexual harassment makes people fall victim?	204 (94.9%)	11 (5.1%)	200 (93.0%)	15 (7.0%)	215 (100%)	215 (100%)	0.418
2.	Does sexual harassment affect our educational institutions?	183 (85.1%)	32 (14.9%)	211 (98.1%)	04 (1.9%)	215 (100%)	215 (100%)	0.000

act to their universities authority, 24.7% of the Private universities respondents claimed that they did while 75.3% claimed that they did not, and among the respondents in State universities, 17.6% claimed that they did while 82.4% claimed they did not (Table 4).

In furtherance, the victims were asked the attitude of the institutions towards the complaint filed before their respective university authorities. From the five options provided, apart from the substantial (65.1%) who claimed not to have experienced sexual harassment, 11.6 and 18.2% of the respondents in Private and State universities respectively claimed their institutions' attitude were co-operative while 2.3% of Private and 1.7% of State university respondents believed that the attitude of their university authority was abusive.

The respondents who claimed to have experienced sexual harassment but did not file a complaint were further asked the reasons for not filing a complaint. From the five options provided, apart from the substantial number of respondents who claimed not to have experienced sexual harassment, 25.1 and 52.7% respondents in the Private and State universities respectively, claimed that 'they did not know how to go about it' and the least i.e. 3.7 and 4.3% of the respondents in Private and State universities said that 'they were not aware that the act was a punishable offence'. This further supports the findings that they lack clarity of what sexual harassment denotes (Table 5).

This indicates that both institutions have a clear observation of the fact that, without the central committee running a periodic check on the educational institutions, the effectiveness of the Act cannot be fully achieved.

Discussions of Findings

On the first assumption of the study, out of the 4 questions raised, 3 were resolved in favor of Private universities. However, a majority of the respondents were not given sexual harassment education when they joined their institutions, a majority from both types of Institutions did not know what "ICC" was all about and over an average of the respondents from both types of institutions acknowledged that they did not understand the term 'sexual harassment' in clear terms. Therefore, the first hypotheses fail to reject. This finding is in congruence with that of Joubert et al. (2011), where they found that the implementation of a sexual harassment policy at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa was problematic since only a few of the respondents of their study had training or guidance on the policy and this contributed to the low levels of knowledge of the policy. The same was seen in Das and Rath (2015), where they discovered their participants did not know the various "Indian Acts" that safeguard them against sexual harassment in their college.

Grounded on the Chi square result, institutions have a major role to play when it comes to the level of awareness of sexual harassment among their students. This finding is in contrast to that of Apaak and Sarpong (2015), where his hypothesis on the level of knowledge of female university athletes in Ghana on sexual harassment proved to be significantly high. Since majority of the respondents from both types of institutions seem to be reasonably aware, one would expect the respondents to know

Table 4 Experience of respondents on sexual harassment

S. no.	Items	Institution						χ^2
		Private			State			
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	
1.	Have you experienced any form of sexual harassment in your institution?	35 (16.3%)	180 (83.7%)	215 (100%)	40 (18.6%)	175 (81.4%)	215 (100%)	0.525
2.	Did you report to your University Authority?	53 (24.7%)	162 (75.3%)	215 (100%)	35 (17.6%)	180 (82.4%)	215 (100%)	0.100

All items shown are significant at $p > 0.05$

Table 5 Responses of respondents on effectiveness of the 'Internal Complaint Committee' without periodic check

Item	Category	Lack of check on Sexual Harassment Workplace Act			χ^2
		Yes	No	Total	
Institution	Private	77 (35.8%)	138 (64.2%)	215 (100%)	0.122
	State	62 (28.8%)	153 (71.2%)	215 (100%)	
	Total	139 (32.3%)	291 (67.7%)	430 (100%)	

$p > 0.05$

what the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) is and what its policies are about. But contrary to expectations, a majority of them do not know about the body or the committee provided to address the issue of sexual harassment in their respective institutions. Implicitly, when they are victimized, they will not be able to speak-up or seek help from the right channel. This assertion is consistent with that of Aditi et al. (2016a, b), where they found that in spite of the good knowledge that a majority of their survey sample had about sexual harassment, 250 (61.3%) of them were not aware of the provision of grievances committee pertaining to sexual harassment in their colleges. Also, sexual harassment education is to be conducted when students are just resuming institutions, followed up with regular seminars, workshops, trainings etc. But all of this seems to be of no avail.

This finding is in disparity with that of Thomas (2015), where he revealed that above 80% of his research participants opined that the key reason for not reporting sexual harassment incidents at educational institutions was lack of courage, fear of disgrace and social isolation, which was experienced by the victimized person on filing a complaint against the abuser. This research significantly showed that, one of the main reasons for sexual harassment in educational institutions is lack of proper awareness, which significantly contributes to people engaging in such manners and aid failure to speak-up. This was also supported in the Norman et al. (2013) finding, where they found that the medical schools of Ghana appeared to have sexual harassment policies but they were not widely circulated and the students were not aware of the protections offered to them.

It was further corroborated by a majority of the respondents from both types of institutions of this study, as they agreed that lack of awareness was the root cause of sexual harassment in institutions. One of the respondents specifically accentuated that the way 'ragging' is being publicized in educational institutions; the same should be applicable to sexual harassment in institutions. According to Dr. A. S. Anand, (then CJI) with R. C. Lahoti and K. G. Balakrishnan, JJ of the Supreme court of India, ragging is an act or words, spoken or written, with the effect of maltreating junior students or freshers, or indulging in an indiscipline activities which causes or likely to cause hardship, annoyance, physiological harm and fear to junior students in educational institutions (Vishwa Jagriti Mission through President v. Central Government through Cabinet Secretary, 2001).⁸ This act of 'ragging' is

⁸ 2001 SOL Case No. 431 (SC).

intolerable in all educational institutions in India and you must mandatorily sign an anti-ragging form as soon as you are admitted into higher education.

On the second assumption of this study, majority of the respondents from both types of institutions agreed that sexual harassment affects our institutions but the number of respondents who disagreed in the Private institutions was more than that of the State institutions. This could possibly be due to a lack of clarity on their knowledge of sexual harassment. This correlates with the findings of Sipe et al. (2009) where their study showed that many college students fail to perceive, in a realistic way, that sexual harassment may affect their own careers or that of women in business. A substantive number of researchers acknowledged sexual harassment as an act, which affects our educational institutions, and workplaces (Mohd et al. 2007; Pralhadrao 2014), which also correlates with the findings of this study.

In furtherance, the perception of respondents of sexual harassment in their institutions varies from institution to institution. As predicted, there is strong association between perception of respondents and their institutions viz-a-viz sexual harassment. Therefore, hypotheses 2 also fail to reject. Willness et al. (2007) affirms this in their study on sexual harassment, where they found that organizational context and the job gender of the organization plays an important role in facilitating the occurrence of sexual harassment. Pina and Gannon (2010) also confirmed that the perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment have a bi-directional relationship with the pasts and that respondents are aware by the consequences of the sexual harassment experience, which will definitely differ from institution to institution. In fact, majority of the students, 371 (90.9%) of Aditi et al. (2016a, b)'s study agreed that establishing sexual harassment awareness programs can be helpful in preventing sexual harassment in colleges. Consequently, institutions are the determining factor in the perceptions of their students about sexual harassment. Specifically, some Private institution respondents opined that the major consequences of sexual harassment are; mental trauma, withdrawal from social interaction, alienation from society, mental illness, committing suicide and misapprehension of people while one of the State institutions respondent said; "I thought it is normal so I cannot see it as any defect."

With respect to the third assumption of this study, it is observed that Private universities experience sexual harassment just as State universities, though on a slightly less level so institutions has nothing to do with where one will or will not be harassed (Srivastava 2010) so far the act is impugned and unwelcome or unsolicited. Significantly, the number of respondents who claimed to have reported experiencing sexual harassment in this study are much more than those who said they have experienced sexual harassment. Maybe they never experienced sexual harassment or they chose to answer the question dishonestly. Meanwhile, Das and Rath (2015) revealed that only 6% of their sample size agreed to having faced any form of sexual harassment in life, while 38% disagreed and the remaining 56% students remained silent by not answering the question, but they concluded that lack of knowledge and awareness was the reason for their silence. Imperatively, this is one of the limitations of this research work and is also inconsistent with Boateng et al. (2015) where they found that many people do not report sexual harassment cases.

In fact, this is a good area for further study; whether the university students experience sexual harassment and the institutions' level of compliance with the relevant Acts. Also, a majority of the respondents from both types of institutions "do not know how to go about it" as they did not have a clear understanding of how to go about sexual harassment complaint, when being harassed. Possibly, that is the reason for misconception in their responses. However, there is strong evidence against this null hypothesis so the hypothesis is hereby rejected i.e. experiencing sexual harassment is not stationed in Institutions, one can experience it anywhere so far there is power differences between the genders, transgender or same sex, wherein one is subordinate to the other. Ordinarily, and according to Smit and Du Plessis (2011), sexual harassment should not be cited with schools but this potential abuse of power, links sexual harassment in education to the workplace. Nauman and Abbasi (2014) also said that as long as men and women inhabit the same workplaces, they will interact as human beings and Browne (2006) further reported that part of the way human beings interact is sexually and romantically. Hence, the association is between power and sex and not institutions.

The fourth assumption of this study revealed that both institutions have a clear observation of the fact that without running a periodic check on their respective Institutions by a central committee, the effectiveness of the 'Act' cannot be fully realized. Therefore, the hypotheses fail to reject. Meanwhile, according to *section 21*⁹—states that; "the ICC shall in each calendar year prepare an Annual Report and submit same to the employer and the district officer". This act of the Appropriate Government is applauded, but needs to be supported with steady and impromptu check up on the institutions in order to assess the institutions' level of compliance with the said 'Act' or policies. Nonetheless, in a study conducted by Thomas (2015) on sexual harassment in Indian Educational Institutions, it was showed that 85% of the educational institutions did not have a policy framed to deal with sexual harassment complaints despite a legal mandate for having the same. All this will be prevented if a periodic check is run on the institutions, by way of interrogating the students, teachers and administrative staff, skillfully, on how well they are informed about the term 'sexual harassment'.

Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that sexual harassment occurs in both private and state educational institutions, and that the mode of handling such occurrences can be based on their level of awareness and knowledge of the subject matter. This variance could be attributed to the organizational structure of the institutions, personal exposure of the students, absence of firm knowledge of the 'term' and the nature of dispute redressal mechanism provided. However, sexual harassment is a phenomenon to be treated with more seriousness in educational institutions because the today students are the future of the country. Private educational institutions will be assumed to have clearer knowledge of sexual harassment because of several

⁹ *Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.*

factors, such as—the risk factor of reputation and image involved, the fear of losing admissions and the huge money being invested by the school and students in education. Unfortunately, this research reveals that the level of awareness of ‘sexual harassment’ by respondents from private institutions lacks clarity as compared with that of the State institutions.

Although our respondents from both institutions agreed that sexual harassment affects our educational institutions and lack of proper awareness is one of the key issues for not reporting experience of sexual harassment in their institutions. Therefore, issue of such magnitude is in want of frequent and interactive education, with a clearer understanding by teachers, notwithstanding their type of institutions. One may initially think sexual harassment education should be provided to respondents by their parents, but in a cultural society where sexual issues are rarely discussed with the children, but rather proliferates; it is the educational institutions that serve as a major and last resort to impact this knowledge upon their students. Thus, if the Higher Educational Institutions fail in this obligation, the students are more likely to fall prey as victims of sexual harassment and the policies provided will be of no effect. It is concluded that, the type of educational institutions will determine the level of awareness and perception of students about sexual harassment.

Limitations of Study

Remarkably, the results of this study may be inconclusive by the sensitivity and personal nature of the information required of the respondents. Some of the respondents might also be reminded of horrible current or past scene of sexual harassment that they or people they are close to have experienced, and so this might have prevented them from giving out valuable information for the study. Also, the respondents were not directly asked the forms of sexual harassment they are privy of, but asked the form of sexual harassment that is rampant in their institutions. They were also not asked their attitude towards sexual harassment education, if their institutions ever enlightened them. Consequentially, this might vary the findings and indirectly prevented the respondents from sharing their personal experiences. The scope of the study is limited, as very few studies have attempted to determine the level of awareness of sexual harassment amidst educational institutions in India. Finally, most researches in India focus on only female participants, and these results might vary if the sample selected were only of female as well.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings, the following are my candid recommendations:

- Clearer expression and intensification of sexual harassment awareness knowledge in educational institutions through pro-active measures as opposed to the re-active measures provided by the Government of India;
- All institutions must strictly adhere to the provisions of section 3 of the UGC regulations for all Higher Educational Institutions¹⁰;
- The institutions should ensure its pupils or students are given practical sexual harassment education at different stages i.e. (fresh students) when joining their respective institutions (graduating students) on convocation day and (employees/administrative staff) during work induction program and staff meetings;
- More interactive seminars, workshops and trainings should be organized by institutions and possibly based on examination after such education;
- Regular sexual harassment education should be sustained in various campuses of the Higher Educational Institutions, just like it is done for “ragging”;
- Periodic check should be ensured by the “University Grant Commission” to Higher Educational Institutions, in order to assess their level of compliance with the guidelines provided on the subject matter;
- The Annual reports mandated by virtue of *section 21(1)*,¹¹ to be filed through the Local Complaints Committees or Internal Complaints Committees to the employer and District officer respectively, should be further subjected to practical verification by the Appropriate Authority.

¹⁰ “(a) publicly notify the provisions against sexual harassment and ensure their wide dissemination *with clear terms*; (b) organise training programs, workshops for the officers, functionaries, faculty and students, as indicated in the SAKSHAM Report of the Commission, to sensitize them and ensure knowledge and awareness of the rights, entitlements and responsibilities enshrined in the Act and under these regulations; (d) act decisively against all gender based violence perpetrated against employees and students of *all sexes* recognising primarily that women employees and students are vulnerable to many forms of sexual harassment, humiliation and exploitation; (e) publicly commit itself to a zero tolerance policy towards sexual harassment; (f) reinforce its commitment to creating its campus free from discrimination, harassment, retaliation or sexual assault at all *levels just like the effort placed to disabuse ragging on campuses*; (g) *create awareness about what constitutes sexual harassment including hostile environment harassment and quid pro quo harassment*; (h) *include in its prospectus and display prominently at conspicuous places or Notice Boards the penalty and consequences of sexual harassment and make all sections of the institutional community aware of the information on the mechanism put in place for redressal of complaints pertaining to sexual harassment, contact details of members of ICC, complaints procedure and so on...* employees and students should be inform of the recourse available to them if they are victims of sexual harassment; (j) organise regular orientation or training programs for the members of the ICC to deal with complaints, steer the process of settlement or conciliation, etc., with sensitivity; (k) proactively move to curb all forms of harassment of employees and students whether it is from those in a dominant power or hierarchical relationship within HEIs or owing to intimate partner violence or from peers or from elements outside of the geographical limits of the HEI; (l) be responsible to bring those guilty of sexual harassment against its employees and students to book and initiate all proceedings as required by law and also put in place mechanisms and redressal systems like the ICC to curb and prevent sexual harassment on its campus; (m) treat sexual harassment as a misconduct under service rules and initiate action for misconduct if the perpetrator is an employee; (n) treat sexual harassment as a violation of the disciplinary rules (leading up to rustication and expulsion) if the perpetrator is a student; (o) ensure compliance with the provisions of these regulations, including appointment of ICC, within a period of 60 days from the date of publication of these regulations;...”.

¹¹ Sexual Harassment Workplace (Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest Authors assert that there is no conflict of interest with this research.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee of Sharda University, (Research Training Development Center) and written informed consent was obtained from all Private and State participants of the study.

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