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SEXUAL HARASSMENT AWARENESS AMONG INFORMAL SECTOR WOMEN WORKERS

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment at workplace is one of the important issues affecting women workers in India. It violates the dignity, safety, equality, and freedom of women. The problem is not limited to offices, companies, or formal institutions. It is also present in informal and unorganized workspaces where women work as domestic workers, construction laborers, street vendors, and agricultural workers.

Women in the informal sector usually work without written contracts, job security, fixed wages, or formal grievance mechanisms. Many of them belong to economically weaker sections and depend on daily income for family survival. Because of this dependency, they may avoid complaining even after facing harassment.

The informal sector is also difficult to regulate because workplaces are scattered and often invisible. For example, domestic workers work inside private homes, agricultural workers work in fields, street vendors work in public spaces, and construction workers work under contractors. These settings create different kinds of vulnerability.

In India, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 gives legal protection to women. The law applies to both organized and unorganized sectors. However, the real challenge is implementation. Many women workers are not aware of their legal rights and many do not know about Local Committees formed at district level.

This research paper studies awareness regarding sexual harassment among informal sector women workers in Rewa District, Madhya Pradesh. The study uses primary data from 60 respondents and presents the findings through tables and diagrams.

KEYWORDS: Sexual harassment, Women, informal sector

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is important because informal sector women workers are often ignored in discussions on workplace safety. Most

policies and awareness programmes are more visible in the formal sector, while women in informal occupations continue to face risk and insecurity.

Rewa District has a large number of women working in informal occupations. These women contribute to household income and

local economy, but their working conditions are often unsafe. Understanding their awareness level is necessary for improving legal outreach and workplace protection.

The study also highlights the gap between law and practice. The POSH Act, 2013 provides legal protection, but if women do not know about the law or complaint mechanism, the law remains less effective. Therefore, this study is relevant from both social and legal perspectives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are: 1. To study awareness regarding sexual harassment among informal sector women workers. 2. To examine awareness regarding legal rights and complaint mechanisms. 3. To analyze the experience of workplace harassment among women workers. 4. To identify major reasons for non-reporting. 5. To compare awareness levels among domestic workers, construction workers, agricultural workers, and street vendors. 6. To study the relevance of the POSH Act, 2013 for informal sector women workers. 7. To suggest measures for improving awareness and safety.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: Women workers in the informal sector have low awareness regarding sexual harassment laws and legal remedies.

H2: Fear, shame, and lack of knowledge about complaint mechanisms are major reasons for underreporting of sexual harassment.

H3: Women working in domestic and agricultural sectors are more vulnerable because of isolated workplaces, low

awareness, and economic dependency.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is limited to Rewa District of Madhya Pradesh. The research focuses only on four informal sectors: domestic workers, construction workers, agricultural workers, and street vendors. The sample size is 60 respondents, with 15 respondents from each sector.

The study covers awareness of sexual harassment, awareness of legal rights, experience of harassment, reporting behavior, and reasons for non-reporting. The study is not intended to represent the whole country, but it provides a local understanding of the issue in Rewa District.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on informal sector workers show that women in unorganized employment face multiple vulnerabilities such as low wages, absence of social security, unsafe workplaces, and weak bargaining power. Sexual harassment becomes more difficult to report when employment is informal and dependent on contractors, employers, or customers.

Reports of the International Labor Organization highlight that informal workers across the world often lack access to workplace protection and complaint systems. Women workers are more vulnerable because of gender inequality, economic dependency, and social stigma.

UN Women has repeatedly highlighted that violence and harassment against women are connected with gender inequality and lack of institutional support. In informal work, women may not have human resource

departments, internal complaint committees, or written employment records.

Academic literature on the POSH Act, 2013 shows that while the Act is strong in principle, its implementation in the informal sector remains weak. Local Committees are expected to support women in the unorganized sector, but awareness about these committees is very low.

The literature supports the need for field-based studies that examine the actual awareness level among women workers. The present study contributes by providing primary data from Rewa District.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is descriptive because it explains the present level of awareness among women workers. It is analytical because it interprets the data through percentages, tables, and diagrams.

Primary data was collected from 60 respondents through a simple questionnaire. Fifteen respondents were selected from each sector: construction workers, domestic workers, agricultural workers, and street vendors. The questionnaire included questions on awareness, legal rights, harassment experience, reporting behavior, and reasons for non-reporting.

Secondary data was collected from government reports, ILO reports, UN Women resources, academic journals, the POSH Act, 2013, and constitutional provisions. Convenient sampling was used because the respondents belonged to informal occupations and were not easy to identify through formal

records.

Percentage analysis was used for interpretation. The formula used was: $\text{Percentage} = (\text{Number of responses} / \text{Total respondents in sector}) \times 100$.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 is the main law dealing with workplace sexual harassment in India. It was enacted after the Vishaka guidelines and provides a legal mechanism for prevention, prohibition, and redressal of sexual harassment.

The Act defines sexual harassment to include unwelcome physical contact, demand or request for sexual favors, sexually colored remarks, showing pornography, and any other unwelcome verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of sexual nature.

The Act applies to both organized and unorganized sectors. For offices and organizations with ten or more employees, the law requires an Internal Committee. For workplaces with less than ten employees and for informal workers, the law provides for a Local Committee at district level.

The Local Committee is very important for informal sector women workers. Domestic workers, street vendors, agricultural workers, and construction workers may not have an employer with a formal office. Therefore, district level complaint mechanisms are necessary. However, awareness about Local Committees remains weak.

The law also requires awareness, assistance to victims, confidentiality, inquiry procedure,

and recommendations for action. In practice, informal sector women often do not use these protections because of fear, shame, illiteracy, and lack of guidance.

CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

Article 14 of the Constitution of India guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws. Sexual harassment violates equality because it creates unsafe and unequal working conditions for women.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex, religion, race, caste, or place of birth. Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based discrimination because women are targeted due to their gender.

Article 19(1)(g) gives every citizen the right to practice any profession or occupation. When women cannot work safely because of harassment, their freedom to work is affected.

Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. The Supreme Court has interpreted Article 21 to include dignity, privacy, and safe living conditions. Sexual harassment directly violates dignity and personal safety.

PROFILE OF STUDY AREA: REWA DISTRICT

Rewa District is located in the state of Madhya Pradesh. The district has both urban and rural areas. Many women are engaged in informal economic activities such as agriculture, domestic work, construction labour, vending, and other daily wage occupations.

The selected study area is suitable because informal work is common and women workers face social and economic challenges. In rural areas, women working in agriculture

may have limited access to legal information. In urban areas, domestic workers and street vendors often work without formal workplace protection.

The district-level focus is also relevant because the POSH Act provides for Local Committees at district level. Therefore, awareness of district complaint mechanisms is important for women in Rewa.

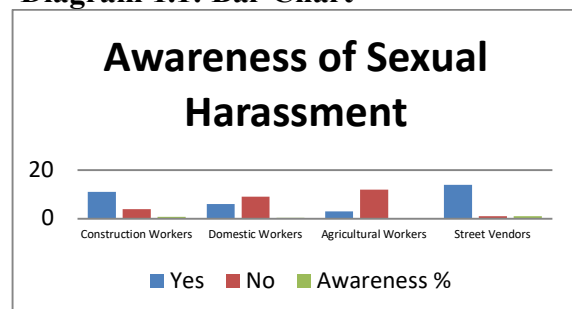
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data analysis is based on 60 respondents, with 15 respondents from each informal sector. The original primary data is kept unchanged. For each main table, three diagrams are added: a bar chart, a pie chart, and a Venn-style conceptual relationship diagram. These diagrams help to present the same data visually and improve comparative understanding.

Table 1: Awareness of Sexual Harassment

Sector	Yes	No	Awareness %
Construction Workers	11	4	73.3%
Domestic Workers	6	9	40.0%
Agricultural Workers	3	12	20.0%
Street Vendors	14	1	93.3%

Diagram 1.1: Bar Chart

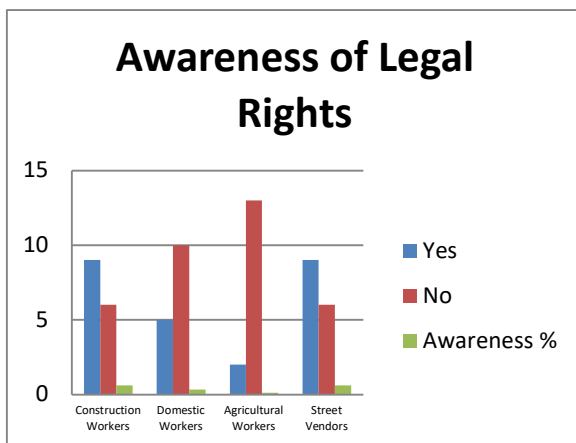


Interpretation: Street vendors showed the highest awareness regarding sexual harassment, while agricultural workers showed the lowest awareness. This indicates that women working in public spaces may have more exposure, while rural agricultural workers may have less access to awareness programmes.

Table 2: Awareness of Legal Rights

Sector	Yes	No	Awareness %
Construction Workers	9	6	60.0%
Domestic Workers	5	10	33.3%
Agricultural Workers	2	13	13.3%
Street Vendors	9	6	60.0%

Bar Chart

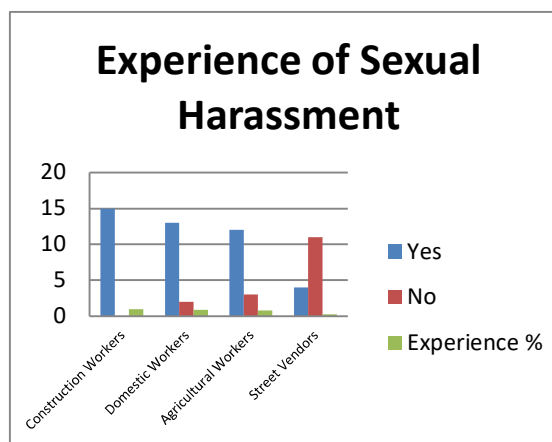


Interpretation: Legal awareness is lower than general awareness of harassment. Agricultural workers had very low awareness of legal rights, which shows a serious gap between the existence of law and knowledge at the ground level.

Table 3: Experience of Sexual Harassment

Sector	Yes	No	Experience %
Construction Workers	15	0	100.0%
Domestic Workers	13	2	86.7%
Agricultural Workers	12	3	80.0%
Street Vendors	4	11	26.7%

Bar Chart

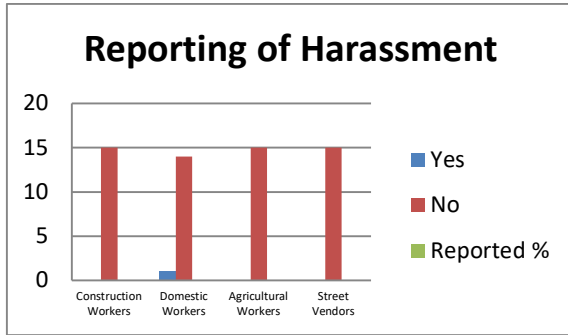


Interpretation: Construction workers reported the highest experience of harassment. Domestic and agricultural workers also showed high vulnerability. Street vendors reported lower experience in comparison, but they still face risks in public spaces.

Table 4: Reporting of Harassment

Sector	Yes	No	Reported %
Construction Workers	0	15	0.0%
Domestic Workers	1	14	6.7%
Agricultural Workers	0	15	0.0%
Street Vendors	0	15	0.0%

Bar Chart

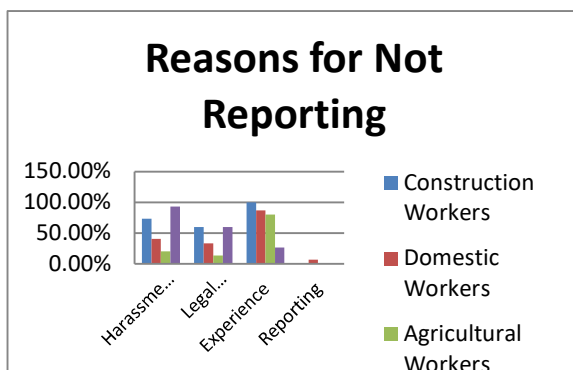


Interpretation: Reporting of harassment is extremely low. Only one respondent from domestic work reported harassment. This proves that underreporting is a major problem in the informal sector.

Table 5: Reasons for Not Reporting

Sector	Fear	Shame	Don't Know Where to Compl
Construction Workers	11	4	0
Domestic Workers	8	2	5
Agricultural Workers	2	4	9
Street Vendors	9	3	3

Bar Chart



Interpretation: Fear is the most common reason for non-reporting, followed by lack of knowledge about where to complain and shame. Agricultural workers mainly lacked knowledge about complaint mechanisms, while construction workers mainly reported fear.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis shows clear differences among the four informal sectors. Street vendors had higher awareness of sexual harassment, while agricultural workers had the lowest awareness. Construction workers had the highest experience of harassment, but none of them reported the incidents. Domestic workers showed high vulnerability and only one respondent reported harassment.

Sector	Harassment Awareness	Legal Awareness	Experience	Reporting
Construction Workers	73.3%	60.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Domestic Workers	40.0%	33.3%	86.7%	6.7%
Agricultural Workers	20.0%	13.3%	80.0%	0.0%
Street Vendors	93.3%	60.0%	26.7%	0.0%

The table shows a strong gap between experience and reporting. Even where harassment experience is very high, reporting remains almost zero. This confirms that legal awareness and reporting support are weak in the informal sector.

HYPOTHESIS ANALYSIS

H1 is accepted because data shows low awareness regarding legal rights, especially among domestic and agricultural workers. Although some women know about sexual harassment generally, many do not know the legal remedies available under the POSH Act, 2013.

H2 is accepted because fear, shame, and lack of complaint knowledge were the main reasons for non-reporting. Out of the recorded reasons, fear was the highest response overall.

H3 is accepted because domestic and agricultural workers showed high vulnerability. Domestic workers work inside

private homes and agricultural workers work in rural fields with low awareness and weak support systems.

DISCUSSION

The study shows that the informal sector has a serious gap between law and practical access to justice. The POSH Act, 2013 legally covers informal sector women workers, but many respondents did not know where complaints can be made.

Fear of losing work is a strong reason for silence. Women workers depend on daily income and often cannot take the risk of complaining against employers, contractors, customers, or co-workers. Social stigma also creates pressure on women to remain silent.

The data also shows that awareness and reporting are not the same. Street vendors showed high awareness of harassment, but reporting was still zero. This means that awareness alone is not enough. Women also need trust in complaint mechanisms and support from institutions.

Local Committees at district level are important under the POSH Act, but their visibility among women workers is low. For the law to become effective, local authorities, NGOs, legal service institutions, and women groups must work together.

FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

1. Awareness regarding sexual harassment differs across sectors. 2. Street vendors showed the highest awareness of sexual harassment. 3. Agricultural workers showed the lowest legal awareness. 4. Construction workers reported the highest experience of harassment. 5. Reporting of harassment is extremely low in all sectors. 6. Fear is the

most common reason for non-reporting. 7. Domestic workers face risk because they work in private homes. 8. Agricultural workers lack knowledge about complaint mechanisms. 9. Women workers are not sufficiently aware of Local Committees. 10. Economic dependency and social stigma prevent women from seeking justice.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that sexual harassment awareness among informal sector women workers in Rewa District is uneven and incomplete. While some workers understand the meaning of harassment, many do not know their legal rights or complaint mechanisms.

The most serious concern is underreporting. Even where harassment experience is high, most respondents did not report it. Fear, shame, social stigma, and lack of knowledge are the main reasons. This shows that the existence of law alone is not enough. Women must be made aware of their rights and supported in using them.

The POSH Act, 2013 is an important law for protecting women workers, including those in the informal sector. However, its implementation must be strengthened at district level. Local Committees should be visible, accessible, and active.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Regular awareness programs should be organized in Rewa District for informal sector women workers. 2. Local Committees under the POSH Act should be properly publicized. 3. Women workers should be educated about Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(g), and 21 of the Constitution. 4. Legal literacy camps should be organized in villages, markets, construction sites, and residential areas. 5. NGOs and legal

service authorities should provide support to victims. 6. Complaint procedures should be simple and confidential. 7. Women helpline numbers should be displayed in public places. 8. Employers, contractors, and local authorities should be sensitized. 9. Counselling and psychological support should be provided. 10. Government should monitor implementation of the POSH Act in the informal sector.

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5. UN Women, reports and resources on gender-based violence and women workers.
6. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, materials on workplace sexual harassment.
7. Periodic Labor Force Survey and government labor reports.
8. Academic journal articles on sexual harassment of women in informal and unorganized sectors in India.
9. National Commission for Women reports and awareness materials.

2. QUESTIONNAIRE APPENDIX

1. Are you aware of sexual harassment at workplace? Yes / No
2. Are you aware of your legal rights? Yes / No
3. Have you ever experienced sexual harassment at workplace? Yes / No
4. Did you report the incident? Yes / No
5. If not reported, what was the reason? Fear / Shame / Do not know where to complain / Other
6. Do you know about the POSH Act, 2013? Yes / No
7. Do you think awareness programs are necessary? Yes / No

Final Observation

The study highlights that women working in informal sectors continue to face insecurity and discrimination at workplace. Strong legal implementation, awareness, and social support are necessary to ensure dignity and safety for women workers in Rewa District.