Abstract

Sexual harassment at workplace is a manifestation of deep rooted patriarchy prevailing in the larger society encouraging power based discriminatory practices and in turn creating hostile work environments where women workers are vulnerable to experience harassment and abuse. In Karnataka, majority of the garment factories are located in Bangalore and they employ around five lakh women. Economic dependence on the job for their livelihood, social perception of obeying the superiors, job insecurity and spilt over patriarchal biases into the work environment make the women garment workers more vulnerable to become victims of sexual harassment. There is a lack of empirical studies which measures the working conditions and how it is related to the concept of sexual harassment and coping behaviours of the victims in the garment factories in India. The aim of the current research study is to analyze the nature and frequency of sexual harassment experienced by the victim, organizational mechanisms to deal with sexual harassment, and consequences of sexual harassment on the victim-vocational, psychological, interpersonal and physical strain, the strategies (whether external or internal coping strategies) used by the victim to cope with sexual harassment and develop a training manual based on the findings of the study to help victims effectively deal with sexual harassment at workplace. The research study has adopted a descriptive and quantitative research design. Data has been collected from a sample of 312 victims of sexual harassment (women garment workers) who have approached two unions for support through structured interview method using structured, close ended, standardized interview schedules.

Findings reveal that majority of the victims in the study experience high frequency sexual harassment (75.3%) which has a negative impact on their physical, mental health and their relationships at work as well as relationship with their families and majority of the victims
have employed negative coping strategies such as endurance (95%), avoidance (75.6%), or seeking social support (75%) to cope with sexual harassment instead of confronting the harasser (only 5% of the victims have been assertive or confronted the harasser) or filing formal complaint (only 2% of the victims have sought organizational relief from their factories). This extends the study into developing the training manual to empower women to be assertive when faced with harassment, demand for a safe workplace through pursuing their factories to establish workplace policies with regard to sexual harassment and establish internal complaints committees where sexual harassment can be reported and the victims are empowered to approach the internal complaints committee and seek redressal.

Key words: Sexual harassment at workplace, women garment workers, coping with sexual harassment