

# **Awareness and Sensitization Program on Identifying and Preventing Harassment in the Workplace**

*2nd February 2023*



**Organised by  
Internal Complaints Committee  
Netaji Subhas Open University**

## **Report**

Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), Netaji Subhas Open University organized an Awareness and Sensitization Program entitled “Identifying and Preventing Sexual Harassment” in the Workplace on 2nd of February, 2023. This program was planned to sensitize members of the staff, learners and research scholars on Identifying and preventing harassment in their work spheres. Some of the esteemed personalities illuminated the seminar with their presence. The Hon’ble Vice chancellor, Netaji Subhas Open University, Prof Ranjan Chakrabarti, Prof. (Dr.) Kaushiki Dasgupta, Vice Chairman, West Bengal State Council of Higher Education, Dr. Sharbani Goswami, School of Women Studies, Jadavpur University, and Adv. Susanta Kumar Gangopadhyay, Advocate, Calcutta High Court, Visiting Professor, IISWBM, Kolkata were present and shared their views and experiences.

The program started with a brief welcome note by the Smt. Ananya Mitra, Joint Registrar (Administration), NSOU. In her welcome address, she spoke about gender sensitization which leads to making both women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral part of all policies and programs in an organization so that all can benefit equally. She reminded that sensitization is by far the most effective and non-confrontationist approach to reforming society. We may say that through these processes we can help both men and women change their perspective of each other and help each other to come out of the stereotypical image they have about one another.

Harassment in the workplace is a reality and the subsequent enactment of sexual harassment of women in the workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 has helped in countering such inappropriate and unwarranted behaviour and created greater awareness among workers on the issue. Still further awareness needs to be created on this and thus by sensitizing

society we can create this greater awareness. Finally, proactive, aware and empowered organisations along with their employees can become agents of change and create an appropriate workplace where all can work , co-exist with dignity, sense of personal security , equality and respect.

Professor Ranjan Chakrabarti, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Netaji Subhas Open University inaugurated this sensitization program. He talked about the primary form of social organization where all must share an empathetic relationship. Each individual in society needs to play a unique role in their respective endeavour, it may be at home or in the workplace, or in society to ensure gender equity. We should not be gender biased. He also pointed out the importance of gender studies and gave the instance of renowned universities having women studies departments and gender cells. He addressed gender discrimination as a social disease. He also referred to various sections of the IPC relating to gender behavior and attitude, especially in Articles 14, 15, 19 (1G), 21, 42, and 51 A.

Dr. Barnana GuhaThakurata, Associate Professor, Political Science, & Member, Internal complaints committee (ICC) NSOU briefed about the ICC activities of NSOU. Dr, Guha Thakurta said that the committee was formed in 2016. The main objective of this committee as elsewhere, is the prevention of any kind of sexual harassment within the organization. She also spoke about the different awareness programmes and Seminars that have been organised by the ICC from time to time. She also said as a member of ICC it is our responsibility to ensure gender equality within the organization and to maintain the principle of sustainability so that everyone feels comfortable.

Prof. (Dr.) Kaushiki Dasgupta, Vice Chairman of the West Bengal State Council of Higher Education delivered the keynote. She said ICC is a policy-making body too in many respects. In the beginning, she raised a very appropriate question as to why we need to hold awareness programs to prevent sexual harassment standing in the 21st century.? It is shameful for us. She pointed out various types of sexual harassment, sometimes we are so accustomed to different abuses that we forget to identify them as sexual harassment. Not only women are sexually harassed but at the same time, men are also bullied by their co-workers. From a newborn baby to an old woman, or a nun everyone is a victim of sexual harassment. She said we don't consider marital rape as sexual harassment. She said body shaming is also a kind of sexual harassment. She shared her own experience where she needed to leave her job just because she is a woman and she used to receive many letters where she was threatened to be killed or acid attacked. She also shared the role of ICC and how this committee can work. Most

employees don't launch any complaints to ICC however that doesn't ensure that there are no such issues in the workplace. We must address them and take proper steps to prevent such unwarranted behaviour. As responsible citizens, we must spread awareness among others, especially in rural areas, and also among kids, and teenagers about different types of sexual harassment and how to do confront such acts fearlessly.

The next speaker of the seminar was Dr Sarbani Goswami, who has been working for a long time on women's empowerment. She pointed out some rampant cases of sexual discrimination from society, mentioned the Nirbhaya case (Delhi gang rape Case, 16th December 2012) & many more, and shares some glimpses of her journey as an activist for women's empowerment and as a guide in women's studies. In her lecture, she quoted many eminent scholars and activists of Human rights. She specifically mentioned the thoughts of Gloria Steinem, Charlotte Bunch, Haspels, Kasim Thomas, Mackann, Catherine Mackinnon, A. Agarwal, and Stanko.

The United Nation's declaration in 1993 on the elimination of violence against women (CEDAW) -articles 1 and 2 defined violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women it could be threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state.

It can be concluded that whenever women are sexually harassed or abused at workplaces it involves sexual coercion, intimidation, deprivation of their right to work in a violence-free atmosphere, and a hostile work environment that affects their safety, well-being, and health. She pointed out that development is not an economic issue alone but rather an issue of empowerment and human growth.

She shared her suggestions -The information needs to be communicated through Posters, stickers, circulars, newsletters, in-house journals, announcements to the staff, etc. She also talked about some policy-making and roles on responsibilities of the management and complaints committee. She suggested that an appropriate complaint mechanism should be created in the employer's organization for redress of complaints made by the victim as stated by the supreme court guidelines and the rules and the responsibilities of the committee are to prevent sexual harassment and to provide redress if a complaint is lodged.

The last speaker of the seminar was Advocate Susanta Kumar Gangopadhyay. Though there was a shortage of time, his lecture was short and crisp. He shared some rules and regulations for preventing of sexual harassment. He pointed out the importance of a women's harassment prevention cell, and how to launch complaints to that cell. He shared few of his cases, on how to address an employee in the workplace.

There was a Q&A session. Four questions were taken from the audience.

Q.1. If a female boss insults a male employee, is it not harassment?

Ans. Both should be equally treated.

Q.2. How to collect data for research purposes from any red-light area?

Ans. Need to work with NGOs working in the respective areas.

Q.3. How to educate students belonging to the rural village about sexual harassment?

Ans. School teachers and local health workers can play effective roles. The government needs to take more initiative.

Q.4. How to prevent/stop sexual harassment?

Ans. No committee, no organization, or no government can change until each person changes their mindset and educates themselves to become a better human being.

The session was followed by a brief demonstration of the ICC section from the NSOU Homepage by Dr Barnali Roy Choudhury, Assistant Professor, Library and Information Science Department & Member, ICC, NSOU. So that any user can have relevant information on the ICC activities and its function, place a complaint or their views by using that page link.

This One day National Awareness program ended with a vote of thanks by Dr Manoj Kumar Halder, Assistant Professor, Political Science, NSOU.

Women specifically become important when it comes to the topic of sexual harassment. However, it should always be kept in mind that gender is beyond binary now. So, we must have equal concern and treat every individual with utmost dignity irrespective of gender, caste, creed, or religion.

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