

Laws and Procedures: Sexual Harassment in the Workplace
Vishaka Guidelines against Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Guidelines and norms laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in
Vishaka and Others Vs. State of Rajasthan and Others (JT 1997 (7) SC 384)

HAVING REGARD to the definition of 'human rights' in Section 2 (d) of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993,

TAKING NOTE of the fact that the present civil and penal laws in India do not adequately provide for specific protection of women from sexual harassment in work places and that enactment of such legislation will take considerable time,

It is necessary and expedient for employers in work places as well as other responsible persons or institutions to observe certain guidelines to ensure the prevention of sexual harassment of women.

1. Duty of the Employer or other responsible persons in work places and other institutions

It shall be the duty of the employer or other responsible persons in work places or other institutions to prevent or deter the commission of acts of sexual harassment and to provide the procedures for the resolution, settlement or prosecution of acts, of sexual harassment by taking all steps required.

2. Definition

For this purpose, sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour (whether directly or by implication) as:

- a) Physical contact and advances;
- b) A demand or request for sexual favours;
- c) Sexually coloured remarks;
- d) Showing pornography;
- e) Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature

Where any of these acts is committed in circumstances where-under the victim of such conduct has a reasonable apprehension that in relation to the victim's employment or work whether she is drawing salary, or honorarium or voluntary, whether in government, public or private enterprise such conduct can be humiliating and may constitute a health and safety problem. It is discriminatory for instance when the woman has reasonable grounds to believe that her objection would disadvantage her in connection with her employment or work including recruiting or promotion or when it creates a hostile work environment. Adverse consequences might be visited if the victim does not consent to the conduct in question or raises any objection thereto.

3. Preventive Steps

All employers or persons in charge of work place whether in public or private sector should take appropriate steps to prevent sexual harassment. Without prejudice to the generality of this obligation they should take the following steps:

- (a) Express prohibition of sexual harassment as defined above at the work place should be notified, published and circulated in appropriate ways.
- (b) The Rules/Regulations of Government and Public Sector bodies relating to conduct and discipline should include rules/regulations prohibiting sexual harassment and provide for appropriate penalties in such rules against the offender.
- (c) As regards private employers, steps should be taken to include the aforesaid prohibitions in the standing orders under the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946.
- (d) Appropriate work conditions should be provided in respect of work, leisure, health and hygiene to further ensure that there is no hostile environment towards women at work places and no employee woman should have reasonable grounds to believe that she is disadvantaged in connection with her employment.

4. Criminal Proceedings

Where such conduct amounts to a specific offence under the Indian Penal Code or under any other law, the employer shall initiate appropriate action in accordance with law by making a complaint with the appropriate authority.

In particular, it should ensure that victims, or witnesses are not victimized or discriminated against while dealing with complaints of sexual harassment. The victims of sexual harassment should have the option to seek transfer of the perpetrator or their own transfer.

5. Disciplinary Action

Where such conduct amounts to misconduct in employment as defined by the relevant service rules, appropriate disciplinary action should be initiated by the employer in accordance with those rules.

6. Complaint Mechanism

Whether or not such conduct constitutes an offence under law or a breach of the service rules, an appropriate complaint mechanism should be created in the employer's organisation for redress of the complaint made by the victim. Such complaint mechanism should ensure time bound treatment of complaints.

7. Complaints Committee

The complaint mechanism, referred to in (6) above, should be adequate to provide, where necessary, a Complaints Committee, a special counsellor or other support service, including the maintenance of confidentiality.

The Complaints Committee should be headed by a woman and not less than half of its member should be women. Further, to prevent the possibility of any undue pressure or influence from senior levels, such Complaints Committee should involve a third party, either NGO or other body who is familiar with the issue of sexual harassment.

The Complaints Committee must make an annual report to the Government department concerned of the complaints and action taken by them.

The employers and person in charge will also report on the compliance with the aforesaid guidelines including on the reports of the Complaints Committee to the Government department.

8. Worker's Initiative

Employees should be allowed to raise issues of sexual harassment at a workers' meeting and in other appropriate forum and it should be affirmatively discussed in Employer-Employee Meetings.

9. Awareness

Awareness of the rights of female employees in this regard should be created in particular by prominently notifying the guidelines (and appropriate legislation when enacted on the subject) in a suitable manner.

10. Third Party Harassment

Where sexual harassment occurs as a result of an act or omission by any third party or outsider, the employer and person in charge will take all steps necessary and reasonable to assist the affected person in terms of support and preventive action.

11. The Central/State Governments are requested to consider adopting suitable measures including legislation to ensure that the guidelines laid down by this order are also observed by the employers in Private Sector.

12. These guidelines will not prejudice any rights available under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.

Other legal provisions include filing a **criminal case** under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act and/or filing a civil suit.

The sections of the **Indian Penal Code** that can be applicable to sexual harassment (which makes it a criminal case):

1. Section 294

'Whoever, to the annoyance of others, (a) does any obscene act in any public place, or (b) sings, recites and utters any obscene songs, ballads or words, in or near any public space, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term that may extend to three months, or with fine, or with both.' This provision is included in Chapter XVI entitled 'Of Offences Affecting Public Health, Safety, Convenience and Morals' and is cognisable, bailable and triable by any magistrate.

2. Section 354

Whoever assaults or uses criminal force on any woman, intending to outrage her modesty or knowing it likely that he will thereby outrage her modesty, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

3. Section 509

(Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) This is included in Chapter 22 entitled 'Of Criminal Intimidation, Insult and Annoyance', and is cognisable, bailable and triable by any magistrate. It holds: 'Whoever, intending to insult the modesty of

a woman, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture is seen by such woman, or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.'

Under the **Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (1987)** if an individual harasses another with books, photographs, paintings, films, pamphlets, packages, etc. containing the "indecent representation of women", they are liable for a minimum sentence of 2 years. Section 7 (Offenses by Companies) further holds companies where there has been "indecent representation of women" (such as the display of pornography) on the premises, guilty of offenses under this act, with a minimum sentence of 2 years.

Civil case

A civil suit can be filed for damages under tort laws. That is, the basis for filing the case would be mental anguish, physical harassment, loss of income and employment caused by the sexual harassment.

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No. 11013/2/2014 Estt (A.III)
Government of India
Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions
(Department of Personnel and Training)

North Block, New Delhi,
Dated the 27th November 2014

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

Subject: Alignment of Service Rules with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013.

The undersigned is directed to say that the 'Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013' { SHWW (PPR) Act } has been promulgated on 22nd April 2013. Further to the Act, the 'Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Rules, 2013' were notified on 9.12.2013. The Act and the Rules framed thereunder provide a redressal mechanism for handling cases of sexual harassment at workplace. The Act and Rules are available at the website of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (wcd.nic.in) under Legislation/Acts.

2. The CCS (Conduct) Rules, 1964 and CCS (CCA) Rules, 1965 have been amended vide Notifications of even number published as G.S.R. 823(E) and G.S.R.822(E) in the Gazette of India – Extraordinary dated 19-11-2014. These are available on this Department's website www.persmin.gov.in

3. So far as Central Government employees are concerned, provisions already exist in the CCS (Conduct) Rules 1964 defining sexual harassment. Further, the proviso to Rule 14(2) of the CCS (CCA) Rules 1965 provides that the complaints committee established in each Ministry or Department or office enquiring into such complaints shall be deemed to be the inquiring authority appointed by the disciplinary authority and the committee shall hold the inquiry so far as practicable in accordance with the procedure laid down in those rules. Similar provisions exist in the relevant service rules of the Central Government servants not governed by CCS (Conduct) Rules / CCS (CCA) Rules.

4. Sexual harassment as defined rule 3-C of CCS (Conduct) Rules, 1964 in has been amended vide Notification of even number dated 19-11-2014 (copy enclosed). The amended rule is as follows:

"Rule 3C - Prohibition of sexual harassment of working women

(1) No Government servant shall indulge in any act of sexual harassment of any woman at any work place.

(2) Every Government servant who is incharge of a work place shall take appropriate steps to prevent sexual harassment to any woman at such work place.

Explanation- 1 For the purpose of this rule,

(a) "sexual harassment" includes any one or more of the following acts or behaviour, (whether directly or by implication), namely:--

- (i) physical contact and advances; or
- (ii) demand or request for sexual favours; or
- (iii) sexually coloured remarks; or
- (iv) showing any pornography; or
- (v) any other unwelcome physical, verbal, non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature.

(b) The following circumstances, among other circumstances, if it occurs or is present in relation to or connected with any act or behaviour of sexual harassment may amount to sexual harassment : -

- (i) implied or explicit promise of preferential treatment in employment; or
- (ii) implied or explicit threat of detrimental treatment in employment ; or
- (iii) implied or explicit threat about her present or future employment status; or
- (iv) interference with her work or creating an intimidating or offensive or hostile work environment for her; or
- (v) humiliating treatment likely to affect her health or safety.

(c) "workplace" includes, -

- (i) any department, organisation, undertaking, establishment, enterprise, institution, office, branch or unit which is established, owned, controlled or wholly or substantially financed by funds provided directly or indirectly by the Central Government;

- (ii) hospitals or nursing homes;
- (iii) any sports institute, stadium, sports complex or competition or games venue, whether residential or not used for training, sports or other activities relating thereto;
- (iv) any place visited by the employee arising out of or during the course of employment including transportation provided by the employer for undertaking such journey;
- (v) a dwelling place or a house."

5. All Ministries/Departments are advised that the following procedure may be adopted while dealing with complaints of sexual harassment:-

- (i) Sexual harassment will include any one or more of the Acts or behaviour defined in Rule 3-C of the CCS (Conduct) Rules 1964 read with Sec 3(2) of SHWW (PPR) Act.
- (ii) The Committee constituted in each Ministry/ Department/ office under the CCS (Conduct) Rules, 1964 shall inquire into complaints of sexual harassment in accordance with the provisions of Section 4 of the SHWW (PPR) Act.
- (iii) The Committee will as far as practicable follow the procedures prescribed in CCS (CCA) Rules 1965 for conduct of the inquiry.
- (iv) If any complaint is received directly by the committee, the same shall be referred to the appropriate disciplinary authority and the Committee shall inquire into the complaint on the complaint being referred to it by the disciplinary authority.

6. In addition, the Committee will have the powers to recommend to the employer:-

- a) to transfer the aggrieved woman or the charged officer to any other workplace; or
- b) to grant leave to the aggrieved woman up to a period of three months.
(The leave granted to the aggrieved woman under this section shall be in addition to the leave she would be otherwise entitled to.)
- c) to grant such other relief to the aggrieved woman as may be prescribed; or
- d) to deduct from the salary or wages of the charged officer such sum as it may consider appropriate to be paid to the aggrieved woman or to her legal heirs. Any amount outstanding at the time of cessation of the services of the charged officer due to retirement, death or otherwise may be recovered from

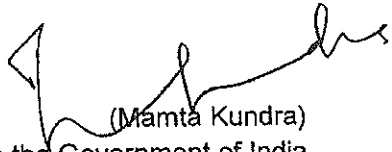
the terminal benefits payable to the officer or his heirs. Such compensation will not amount to penalty under Rule 11 of CCS (CCA) Rules in terms of the Explanation (ix) to Rule 11 inserted vide Notification of even Number dated 19-11-2014.

7. It may also be noted that the Committee may recommend action to be taken against the person who has made a complaint, if the Committee arrives at the conclusion that the allegation is malicious or the aggrieved woman or the person making the complaint has made the complaint knowing it to be false or has produced any forged or misleading document. The Committee may also recommend action against any witness if it comes to the conclusion that such witness has given false evidence or produced any forged or misleading document.

8. Attention is also invited to the following provisions of SHWW (PPR) Act:

- Sec 16 & 17 : Prohibition of publication or making known contents of complaint , inquiry proceedings and recommendations of the Committee.
- Sec 19 : Duties of employer. This may be read with provisions of Rule 3(C) (2) of CCS (Conduct) Rules.
- Sec 21, 22 of SHWW(PPR) Act and Rule 14 of the SHWW (PPR) Rules Annual Reports

9. All the Ministries/Departments are requested to bring the contents of this OM to the notice of all officers and staff working under them. The Ministries/ Departments are also requested to advise the PSEs /Autonomous Bodies under their administrative control to align their service rules with the SHWW (PPR) Act/ Rules.


(Mamta Kundra)
Joint Secretary to the Government of India
Tel: 23094276

To

All Ministries/Departments (as per standard list)