

Prevent, Prohibit & Redress: Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Work place sexual harassment is alarmingly common. Women cannot have their guard down anywhere, in public, at home or even at work. While most big companies have a sexual harassment committee that one can report to, a lot of institutions still haven't opened up to the idea. **Viji Hari**, the author of behind Closed Cubicles and CEO of Keep-Hill works in setting up governance models and prevention of sexual harassment in the corporate jungle.



A Nurse faces sexual advances from a doctor whom she works with. A woman gets a call from a stranger who threatens to leak her videos — if she does not comply with his demands. All these and so many more instances and true stories are part of the book, *Behind Closed Cubicles* by Viji Hari. The book shines light on work place sexual harassment cases with 18 fact based short stories.

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In a company, how does a sexual harassment committee function?

Each organisation that has more than 10 employees must have a sexual harassment committee that comprises of male and female members in addition to having a member from a third party organization. Sexual harassment is common in work place and now with awareness spread wisely, the number of men and women who come up and share their grievances has increased. The sexual harassment committee of an organization is not only committed to protecting its employees but the company's clients and non-staff members too. There is no necessity to go to the police. All that the victim has to do is send an email to the committee.

But does the complaint affect the victim?

We conducted a survey and came to the conclusion that about 22% were victims of sexual abuse. However, only 55% of the victims were ready to take action against it. This shows how forthcoming employees are when it comes to sharing their grievances. They think that they will lose their job or get their reputation spoilt. A sexual harassment committee swears to maintain secrecy. This secrecy will be sufficient to make sure that the victim's grievances do not leave the four walls of the committee. Victims often think that it might ruin their job. What they don't understand is that it could ruin their life in other ways.

Sexual harassment is a sensitive subject. How can a friendly work environment be established while handling sexual harassment?

There are subtle acts of sexual advancements like passing a dirty joke, sharing a co-worker's pictures or even a strange hand shake. They are both verbal and non-verbal. Towards the end of the day, it comes down to who's comfortable with what. There was a case where a woman from a remote village had taken a job in a corporate company in Bengaluru. She was not comfortable with what her co-workers did. Going out for friendly dates and casual bugs made her uncomfortable. This is where the organization has to step in to make sure that all employees are given a set of rules to follow so that nobody feels uncomfortable.

Most victims feel that a sexual harassment committee pays a defer to their complaint. Is that true?

When a complaint is lodged, the committee has to be neutral and hear both sides of the story. If they sympathize with one person then there is an assumption of unjust decisions being made. Committee members maintain a neutral game in order to avoid this. While sexual harassment cases are on a rise today, one needs to also understand that a scenario can only be changed if it is brought to notice. Filing a complaint, talking about it or reporting about a situation is the only way to bring the number of cases to zero.



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Book Review:

Behind Closed Cubicles

Awareness about Sexual Harassment is the need of the hour. When it comes to sexual harassment, there are various environments where it is witnessed. In *Behind Closed Cubicles* Viji Hari brings 18 different instances and weaves brilliant short stories about each of them.

The book is a short read and gives knowledge about the various scenarios where sexual harassment comes into play. Some of the stories are real life experiences that individuals have shared with the author. In each short story, there is no repetition of ideas and the only recurring factor is sexual harassment. Some of the stories have happy endings whereas in the rest, justice is given, no matter what. The book gives an idea about how sexual harassment can take place even if it is very subtle. *Behind Closed Cubicles* is not women centric when it comes to work place sexual harassment but rather gender neutral, giving a chance for the woes of men to be heard too.

The book rightly portrays workplace sexism and sexual harassment through its realistic stories. Before a chapter, a witty illustration is seen, portraying what the following short story is about. Similarly when a chapter ends, suggestion, remarks and facts about sexual harassment are highlighted. Even if an individual thinks that they are well equipped to handle sexual harassment, they should go through the facts that are highlighted towards the end of each chapter. Many points from the notes in each chapter can actually help someone dealing with sexual harassment. It is a must read for an employee as well as an employer in order to learn the nuances of sexual harassment.