

Sexual Harassment at Workplace - #MeToo movement - II

Click [here](#) for Part I

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What is the issue?

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With the #Me Too movement in place, understanding the aspects associated with the movement and sexual harassment becomes essential.

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Nothing we do can make this world perfect. It can only make our situations better.

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Why is #Me Too a better tool?

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With opinions that the #Me Too movement is not the legal way of addressing the issue, here is why it nevertheless is a better tool.

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- Public backlash against instances of sexual harassment at workplaces is less to expect given the male-dominated nature.

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- Unlike this case, the new social media weapon under #Me Too offers access to anyone.

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- So the age-old workplace tactics of silencing the victims or other ways of intimidating will not work as easily as earlier.

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- Publicly calling out people who sexually harass, rules out the struggle to get the office officialdom to take note and act upon.

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- Naming and shaming can work better against even powerful men, whose

influential nature earlier silenced women from reporting.

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- It offers a better option to express than running around the police and courts with huge time and money costs.

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- Besides these, #MeToo has changed women's attitude in approaching sexual or any gender-based harassment henceforth.

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- It has created a widespread conversation about breaking silence, combating shame, shattering disbelief, and creating safe environments.

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- The shift is from “it’s my fault (that such a thing happened to me)” to “it’s my right (to not have such things happen to me)”.

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Why do women hesitate reporting?

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- **Society** - Many women do not believe that they have the right to not be treated in undignified way.

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- As, women are made to believe that they are infiltrators trying to force their way into the men’s world.

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- Girls, from the childhood, are conditioned with ideas such as

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i. take care of yourself

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ii. don’t put yourself in harm’s way

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iii. dress conservatively

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iv. change jobs or make career sacrifices to avoid people when you get signals that are uncomfortable

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v. don’t speak about harassments because everyone will say that it was probably your fault

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- So the mind set is that “bad things” are bound to happen to women who “break the rules” and “live dangerously”.

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- **Limitations** that restrict women from speaking up are:

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- i. the dominant status of men in workplaces, their power and privilege
- ii. the very lack of understanding on what constitutes sexual harassment
- iii. the social stigma associated with instances of sexual harassments and fear of re-victimisation
- iv. the mental trauma, a sense of fear, intimidation and powerlessness caused due to the incident
- v. the lack of trust on people to share this with
- vi. the lack of awareness on the legal recourses available - 20 or 30 years ago, a working woman had no redressal mechanism if harassed (Click [here](#) to know more on shortfalls in the present law)
- vii. fear over job and financial security, career progress, if reported

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- Given these, the scope and nature of the movement offers the awareness, courage and the needed support for aggrieved women.

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Is #Me Too movement inclusive in India?

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- ‘Me Too’ has its origins in Black feminism and the initiative of Tarana Burke, an African-American civil rights activist.
- As a hashtag, #MeToo became an online movement and engendered solidarity across race and class lines in America.

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- But sexual harassment is dictated not only by sex or gender, but by factors of race, caste, religion, colour, region, age, disability and sexuality too.
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- In India, sexual harassment issue has been defined by the struggles of Dalit-Bahujan and Adivasi sisters.
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- Race and caste divides had aggravated sexual harassment experiences.
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- In this backdrop, the movement is confined to upper-caste, middle-class, urban, non-disabled, cisgender women (same sex and gender identity as at birth).
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What is the way forward?

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- **Society** - Women should unapologetically assert the right to be treated as people with dignity and not as objects.
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- It is essential to break the notions that "boys will be boys" and "women have to pay the price for stepping out of their homes".
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- **Inclusiveness** - India has to find ways to relate the #Me Too movement to the subaltern communities.
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- Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, disabled, queer, poor and non-English speaking women should become part of #MeToo as it is #HerToo.
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- In all, the #Me Too movement has certainly laid a never-before foundation in terms of attitude and recourses.
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- Women and society should build on it and take it further to ensure freedom-filled and dignified places for women.
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Source: Indian Express, The Hindu, BusinessLine

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