

India Inc's efforts to counter workplace sexual harassment is poor

CHITRA SAWANT/Mumbai

However discrete it may be, but sexual harassment is a widespread phenomenon at workplace, and it has profound impact on women. The common fear is that the victim (female) will either jeopardise her own career if the charges against the man (accused) are not proved or may even earn a bad name for being the victim.

A recent survey conducted by Ernst & Young in a report titled 'Reining In Sexual Harassment At The Workplace' states that Corporate India's commitment to protect women employees against sexual harassment at the workplace is unsatisfactory. Another survey con-

ducted by city based firm Complykaro early this year showed that less than 3% of offices are aware of the law and most of even those do not have Internal Complaints Committees (ICC) at each location or have done training of employees and committee members.

This is despite the stringent Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013.

The findings of these surveys were validated when Minister for Women & Child Development, Maneka Gandhi admitted in Rajya Sabha that more than 90% of private organisations and government offices had not complied with the law.

"There is increase in number of

cases in the private and corporate sector. But unfortunately women don't come forward to register their complaints. The situation is worse for women who work in the unorganised sector where sexual harassment is common, but remains unarticulated due to fear of loss of employment", said Chitra Wagh, Member of Maharashtra State Commission for Women.

"There is fear of retaliation and backlash. Victims are concerned about retaliation from peers and the career or reputation impact that reporting sexual harassment might have, specially difficulty finding a new job if prospective employers find out about the claim", said Wagh.

Vasudevan Srinivasan, Director

Continuing Education and Training Center (CETC), "Women come forward to register complaints only in those places where they are assured by the organisation that they have zero tolerance towards sexual harassment and they have instituted a fair and impartial mechanism to deal with issues of sexual harassment without any fear of reprisals."

While speaking on the risk a victim may face Srinivasan said, "Organisations do take care that there is no reprisal against a complaining woman within the organisation. But reprisal can happen outside of the organisation. The other risk is complaining woman may be seen as a 'trouble maker' and may be branded so."