

‘Understanding the Incidences and Impacts of Sexual Harassment among the Nursing Staff at Hospital: A Study Conducted in Eight Private Hospitals of Guwahati, Assam’

Synopsis of the Report

**~ Research Conducted by Bristi Borgohain,
Martha Farrell - National Association of Professional Social
Workers in India (MFF-NAPSWI) Scholar 2016**



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MFF-NAPSWI scholar, Bristi Borgohain conducted her research on the workplace sexual harassment faced by nursing staff in private hospitals in Guwahati, Assam. Through her research she conducted an assessment on:

- a) **The knowledge of employer and nursing staff regarding the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**
- b) **Availability of proper and appropriate security norms for nursing staff in every hospital.**
- c) **Impacts of Sexual harassment among the nurses.**

She conducted an in depth study in eight hospitals with 80 nurses in Guwahati and found out that Nursing staff in hospitals are extremely vulnerable to incidences of sexual harassment. The research report gives a very comprehensive understanding of Vishaka guidelines. It also outlines the major points under Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and what the Internal Complaints Committee and the Local Complaints Committee should consist of.

Private workplaces, such as the hospitals where Bristi conducted her research tend to fulfill only the bare minimum legal requirements. They **overlook any meaningful compliance** and show a deep seated apathy toward the issue of sexual harassment. . The two major aims of this research was to see whether there is meaningful compliance and gauge the level of awareness amongst the nursing staff itself regarding the Act and ICC.

The research focuses on Private hospitals because private sector jobs depend solely on employer's discretion. A substantial proportion of nursing jobs at these hospitals is on a contractual basis. The lack of job security and the continuation of contract at purely the employer's discretion make these hospitals an unsafe working space. It also creates an **unequal power equation that not only facilitates sexual harassment** but also ensures that out of fear of losing their jobs most nurses don't report incidences of sexual harassment.

She also discovered that there is a **serious lack of awareness** amongst the nursing staff regarding their legal rights and the function of Internal Complaints Committee (if any). Her study showed that only

28% of the respondents were aware of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 while **72% remained unaware**. Moreover since there is no orientation of the nurses regarding sexual harassment, most of them consider only physical harassment as instances of sexual harassment and not mental or implicit harassment.

Hospitals make for a very hostile environment for the nursing staff. They are **vulnerable to not only harassment from other staff members but also from the patients**. The long working hours, night shifts, pay gap and lack of job security add to the hostile environment. This study undertaken by the MFF-NAPSWI scholar underlines the importance of making hospitals a safe workplace. Nurses and other health care providers attend to people's needs in their most vulnerable periods; hospitals need to ensure that they are provided with a safe and enabling environment to work in. **Hospitals need to rise above the bare minimum legal compliance and take proactive steps towards #MakingWorkplacesSafe by meaningful compliance.**

(Synopsis of the report has been compiled by Drishti Chhibber.)

