

Rising Reports of Workplace Sexual Harassment in India Highlight Gaps in Compliance and Awareness

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Over the past decade, Indian companies have reported an increase in sexual harassment cases in their annual reports. However, the number of complaints resolved has not kept pace with the rising number of reported cases. A small fraction of companies report these cases, with many reporting zero incidents, often for several years. Nearly all reported cases come from larger companies, while medium and smaller companies report very few, if any, cases.

The POSH Act, passed in 2013, mandates companies to disclose data on sexual harassment complaints. This disclosure aims to improve accountability and track the implementation of the act. However, the data remains scattered across individual company reports, making it challenging to identify industry-wide trends.

Our analysis of 300 listed companies on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) over 11 years shows a steady increase in reported cases. In FY 2013-14, companies reported 161 cases, rising to 1,160 in FY 2022-23. Yet, many companies, including large ones, often report zero cases, indicating potential non-compliance or underreporting.

The higher number of cases reported by larger companies may reflect both a higher incidence of harassment and better awareness and reporting mechanisms. Smaller companies, with fewer resources, may struggle to implement the POSH Act effectively. Additionally, some smaller companies may not fall under the act's purview if they have fewer than ten employees.

Despite the mandatory disclosure requirement, many companies fail to report data consistently. Poor compliance with the POSH Act hinders the creation of safe workplaces for women, impacting their ability to work with dignity and participate equally in the workforce.

Effective implementation of the POSH Act is crucial for ensuring safe and healthy work environments. However, the lack of a centralized data repository complicates tracking progress and identifying gaps. A common, publicly available dataset could improve accountability and help address the challenges in enforcing the POSH Act across all companies.