



Not Without Her Consent

(The editorial is based on the article *"Not without her consent"* which appeared in The Hindu on 12th October 2018. It provides an explanation for the #MeToo moment)

Women around the world have started speaking up on social media - picking up on harassment stories, making public suppressed memories, breaking free from the helplessness or a false sense of humiliation

that had kept them quiet for so long. //

- Allegations have ranged from violent rape to sleazy texting.
- The testimonies so far have mostly concerned the film world and the mainstream media, and cover both the workplace and private spaces. They range from stories of assault to propositioning, suggestiveness to stalking.

#MeToo

- This is a movement that deals specifically with sexual violence. And it is a framework for how to end sexual violence.
- #MeToo was started by an activist Tarana Burke after she had a conversation with a 13-year-old girl who opened up to her about the sexual abuse she was experiencing.
- Although the #MeToo movement had already been around for years, it finally gained international attention after allegations of sexual assault and harassment by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein started a crusade within the industry to speak out.

#TimesUp

- Time's Up shares a similar vision for women's empowerment with #MeToo, but it has some different, specific goals.
- Time's Up can be thought of as a solution-based, action-oriented next step in the #MeToo movement.
- The organization's aim is to create concrete change, leading to safety and equity in the workplace.
- It was started by a group of over 300 women in Hollywood, with high-profile leaders including Reese Witherspoon, Natalie Portman and Shonda Rhimes.
- To fund this goal, they created the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund, which is a source of legal and financial support for women and men who want to fight sexual misconduct through the justice system.

#UsToo

- It is India's version of #MeToo. Where women started sharing stories of harassment on social media platforms.
- In the quick aftermath of actor Tanushree Dutta's allegations, women have been speaking of their experiences and the trauma, mostly on Twitter and Facebook.

Concerns

- Patriarchal norms that made it easy to victimise women thrived because of permissiveness, silence of the society.
- Being subjected to unwelcome and inappropriate behavior at work, while trying to carry on and perform well under the usual stresses of a job, can have damaging and long-lasting effects on an individual.
- A workplace environment that fails to properly address the issue of sexual harassment will be at risk of developing signs of a negative work culture - low morale, discontented employees and high levels of absenteeism will soon be reflected in lower productivity and profits.
- Victims of sexual harassment can suffer significant psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, headaches, sleep disorders, weight loss or gain, nausea, lowered self-esteem.
- Physical health and emotional health are closely linked. When victims of sexual harassment experience mental and emotional problems, it often leads to physical health issues, such as loss of appetite, headaches, weight fluctuations, and sleep disturbances.
- Sexual harassment can risk a victim's emotional and mental health. It can lead to the loss of self-esteem and it may even compromise personal relationships.
- Moreover, each year, millions are lost due to absenteeism, low productivity, employee turnover, low morale, and legal costs stemming from sexual harassment. The economy also suffers due to premature retirement and higher insurance costs.

Way Forward

- There is a symptom of a larger, systemic inequality and a systemic pattern of exclusion for women. First, this inequality should be solved because power imbalances are at the root of harassing behaviour.
- There must be focus on getting passing legislations and changing policies. Passage of laws for gender parity issues such as equal pay and equal work environments - as well as increased opportunities, particularly for women in low-wage industries.
- Clear line should be drawn between sexual harassment and bad social conduct, as there is too much subjectivity in this entire proposition.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, built on the Vishaka Guidelines issued by the Supreme Court in 1997, makes it mandatory for organisations to have an internal complaints committee to report and probe such cases. The law has Vishaka guidelines that define sexual harassment and how companies must address them. This should be properly implemented.
- No one should be deemed guilty only because he had been named and any punishment must be proportionate to the misdemeanour.
- Women thought that their words and feelings would be dismissed, their careers would suffer, or their families would pull them back into the safety of home. This fear of making a complaint needs

to be overcome in all workspaces, not only the media and the film industry.

- All of society needs to internalise a new normal that protects a woman's autonomy and her freedom from discrimination in the society.
- A fair system that delivers brisk justice should come into place before victims of sexual crimes entirely lose faith in the justice system.

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