



WOMEN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK: A SINE QUA NON

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ABSTRACT

The present paper emphasizes on women's health and safety at workplace. It is an attempt to provide some guidelines for the organizations and the working women in order to prevent them from the various hazards that they would face at their workplace as well as to the employers to take care of the dignity of their female staff.

KEY WORDS: health hazards, safety, harassment, empowerment, behavioral norms

INTRODUCTION:

As the present paper deals with women's health and safety, the writer intends to initiate the article with a quotation which quotes as, "The history of all times and of today especially, teaches that women will be forgotten if they forget to think about themselves."

Today's woman is called as the super-woman. There is tremendous growth in women's empowerment with respect to her position in society, education, economic position, gender equality, and so on. There is an instant increase in women stepping into the various professional fields. On one hand women entering into the public domain is a mark of progress but on the other hand simultaneously her health is put up in danger.

WOMAN AS A MULTI-PERSONALITY

Even though she is allowed to work in public space, she has to manage her outside world i.e., at work as well as her domestic world i.e., at home. Managing both the worlds is quite stressful for a woman. Fulfilling the responsibilities of both the worlds makes her negligible towards her health. Her stepping out of her domestic domain has left them unsecured as a harsh, cruel world awaits her. Working in public domain or domestic domain, whether the work is paid or unpaid, work is work which defines their roles in the society.

The work definitely provides economic independence and personal satisfaction but along with it hazards and risks to health and safety also do occur. The health hazards of women are under estimated. Even while she is limited to work in the domestic domain, her health and safety hazards are not taken into account.

A glimpse of women's health hazards and safety risk at work

It is seen that vast majority of women are working in agricultural as well as service sectors such as Education, Technology, Medicine, and so on. Women's dual role as a paid worker in public sphere and unpaid worker at home makes her work longer than men. The health hazards that she faces at her public sphere varies. For example in Agriculture sector she comes in contact with number of agro-chemicals, pesticides which might prove harmful to her health. Women who put their efforts in agriculture sectors

should be tutored and trained about the agricultural products that they use. Mostly women working in this sector are uneducated. They are not aware about the proper handling of the chemicals that they use for the crops. Some of them are dangerous to their health. They are unable to read the instructions of using them. So in order to avoid such health hazards proper education and training should be given to them.

In comparison to males, professional women are exposed to psychological and physical hazards. They have to face gender discrimination and sexual harassment at their workplace. The situation becomes more critical when they are supposed to work under the men who are more dominating. Women are treated as an object of commodity. She is humiliated through eve-teasing as well as sexual harassment. Such things have to be put to an end as they affect a woman's physical and mental health.

Prerequisite for a transformation of the mindset of the people towards working women

The organizations have to play a significant role in order to provide healthy and safe working conditions for women. Health promotion policies for women should be taken into account. Scope for gender equality should be given. Women's decisions and participation in project handling should be respected. With respect to Indian history we know that woman was considered as subordinate to man as we live in the male dominated society. But in today's scenario we cannot follow this belief. The male workers working with their female counterparts should change their view and attitude towards their female co-workers. They should have respect for them. They should stop viewing their work as unskilled.

Measures to be implemented for women's safety at work

The employers have to create a positive atmosphere at their respective workplace where women will be encouraged to work and their dignity will be preserved and will be free from harassment. The code of conduct for employees of both genders should be established. Employees violating the organization's behavioral norms should be punished. Such actions have to be taken in order to avoid the recurrence of such violations. Framing of Sexual Harassment Committee should be undertaken which should be headed by a female. The complaint records of such lawbreakers should be kept confidential. But stern action should be taken against the offender.

Health promoting activities need to be organized in order to increase the well-being and stability of the women employees. A business driven approach to women's health at workplace will result in increase in productivity and profitability as well as reducing absenteeism and turnover of the organization. Health awareness operations with respect to yoga, hygiene, behavioral practices and peer education training by conducting workshops can be organized for women staff.

Besides, timely sessions should be organized by the organization on ethical values to the staff. Womenfolk should be educated and trained on their rights and the facilities provided to them. They should also be trained for self-defense. The organization should take the initiative to organize such sessions for the female employees. Monitoring the workplace activities with respect to gender sensitization should be frequently undertaken.

CONCLUSION

If such measures are adopted by the respective organizations then the new generation of empowered young women would feel safer at their workplaces. Career oriented females would definitely be encouraged to work devotedly and without any fear. Thus the women's health and security should be focused on with respect to physical, environmental, psychological, and organizational arenas.

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