
Exclusive: Nearly one third of G20 women harassed at work but few speak out - survey

13/10/2015



A survey by the Thomson Reuters Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation found women saw harassment as the third most challenging issue in the workplace after work-life balance and the gender pay gap.

The poll, conducted by Ipsos MORI, found 29 percent of women working in the Group of 20 leading economies have faced physical or online harassment at work - but of these 61 percent said they never or rarely reported harassment.

Turkey, Mexico and Argentina topped the list of G20 nations where women were most concerned about harassment in the workplace while women in South Korea, Russia, Germany and Britain were the least worried.

Women in India, however, were most likely to speak out, with 53 percent saying they always or most often reported harassment. India was followed by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

By contrast women in Russia, South Korea, Brazil, Japan and Indonesia were most likely to never or rarely report harassment. Ipsos MORI said the face-to-face element of polling in Indonesia and South Africa may have had some impact on the findings.

Indian lawyers attributed this to greater public awareness after voracious media coverage of gender crimes following the fatal gang rape of a student on a bus in Delhi in 2012 as well as a new law on sexual harassment in the workplace.

"There is a very high level of awareness among professional women in the formal sector because of the robust debate over violence against women we have had post-2012," said Supreme Court lawyer Vrinda Grover, who deals with many such cases.

"Women in India today are asserting that they will not remain silent on this issue. They are asserting that they will no longer carry the baggage of shame and stigma that victims were previously plagued with."

HARASSMENT IN ALL FORMS

According to the International Labour Organisation, harassment can be any conduct that is unreciprocated or unwanted and which affects the dignity of a person at work.

It can range from verbal abuse such as shouting and swearing to bullying, intimidation and physical assault, although experts say the most common harassment faced by women is sexual.

This includes teasing in a sexual way, showing pornographic images, unwelcome physical contact, and using sex in return for promotions or as a threat not to demote or fire a person.

The poll found Turkish women saw harassment as their major challenge at work, cited by nearly six in 10 women. Nearly half of women in Mexico and Argentina said it was their top worry.

Istanbul shop assistant Delek, who did not want to give her last name, said harassment of women at work in Turkey was commonplace and she had faced it firsthand at a job interview when she was younger.

"He said directly before the interview that I had to be with him before I could be hired," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"I felt so humiliated and I didn't know what to say. I left and I cried and I never reported it ... Women are not really able to talk about it because they get embarrassed."

INDIAN WOMEN BREAK SILENCE

Gender and legal experts said the survey illustrated the fact that harassment was "a part of culture" and that companies, governments and civil society groups need to change norms about acceptable behaviour.

"We haven't done a very good job in changing biases in the workplace ... corporations will have to play an increasingly more important role here," said Iris Bohnet, director of the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University.

But commentators said the survey's findings in India showed that attitudes could change.

India was thrown into the global spotlight over gender crimes after the fatal gang rape in Delhi sparked public protests and put the issue of gender rights into the mainstream.

Over the last three years, headlines in India have been filled with stories of rape and molestation, social media users fiercely debate gender discrimination, and even Bollywood stars are joining campaigns to promote women's safety and empowerment.

In addition, authorities have strengthened old and enacted new laws on gender crimes, including legislation on sexual harassment in the work place.

As a result, there has been a spate of cases involving high profile powerful men coming to light.

Top climate scientist Rajendra Pachauri, 75, stepped down as chair of a U.N. panel of climate scientists this year after a 23-year-old researcher at his Delhi-based think-tank accused him of sexual harassment. He has denied the allegations.

In 2013, Tarun Tejpal, editor-in-chief of one of India's leading investigative magazines, Tehelka, was arrested after a journalist accused him of sexual assault.

Two retired Supreme Court judges were accused by interns of inappropriate touching.

But while these cases highlight women willing to report such abuses, they also show their efforts have so far been in vain, say activists and lawyers, as few employers have grievance committees to handle such complaints.

"A larger number of women have found the courage to report sexual harassment, but not a single case that I know of has seen any form of justice being served," said Kavita Krishnan, secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association.

"Women may be coming forward, but who is listening?"

The survey of 9,501 women was carried out online by Ipsos Global Advisor from July 24–Aug 7 and face-to-face in South Africa and Indonesia from Aug 6-Aug 25.

The data on harassment excluded women who were not working in all countries. This included 42 percent of those questioned in Saudi Arabia, 41 percent in Indonesia, and 25 percent in South Africa. The sample involved just over 5,600 women.

Data are weighted to match the population profile of each country and the margin of error between two country sample sizes of 500 is about 6 percent at the 95 percent confidence interval.

TABLES:

We asked women in the G20:

- to rank harassment when listing the top two or three challenges at work
- if they had ever faced harassment in the workplace by co-workers (either in-person or online)
- if so, if they had reported it to the appropriate authorities

For the last two questions in all countries we excluded women who said they had never worked which, for example, was 42 percent of respondents in Saudi Arabia, 41 percent in Indonesia, 18 percent in Japan.

% who rate % harassed at % of those

harassment work who would

as one of always or
top 2/3 most of the
concerns at time report
work harassment

1. Turkey 56 35 21
2. Mexico 47 37 25
3. Argentina 44 31 14
4. Brazil 42 36 10
5. S.Arabia 40 31 15
6. India 35 27 53
7. France 33 22 16
8. Italy 26 16 13
9. Japan 25 24 8
9. Canada 25 34 26
11. U.S. 22 37 27
11. S.Africa 22 10 24
11. China 22 33 16
14. Australia 19 40 23
14. Indonesia 19 1 0
16. Britain 13 30 22
17. Germany 11 28 18
18. Russia 15 25 7
19. S.Korea 2 24 5

(Reporting by Belinda Goldsmith in London, Nita Bhalla in Delhi, and Dasha Afanasieva in Istanbul, Editing by Ellen Wulfhorst.; Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, corruption and climate change. Visit www.trust.org)