



AIU MFF Safe Campus Program

Learning how participatory assessments and orientations can contribute towards creating gender just and safe campuses

Rationale

Workplaces including academic institutions are, to a large extent, a reflection of the realities prevailing in society. As microcosms of society, it often mirrors its social fabric and with it, its gendered thinking, often creating structures which are discriminatory for both men and women working in these organisations. Sexual harassment of women at the workplace is considered to be one of the most pervasive ways of subjugation, intimidation and discrimination of women in the workplace. It is also one of the most under reported forms of violence against women. A survey by the Indian National Bar Association conducted in March 2015 showed that nearly 70% of women in India do not report sexual harassment at the workplace.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can play a significant role in ensuring the safety of the students by putting in place fool proof mechanisms and impregnable standards of safety. The key lies in institutionalising the best practices and standard operating procedures that can substantively protect students from any threats and assaults, physical, social or psychological.

The University Grant's (UGC's) commitment to create safe and gender just spaces for faculty and students in all HEIs was reiterated in a Notification issued by UGC on 17th December 2015 with a broad mandate of laying down an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to understand the social and cultural constructions of gender. These guidelines envisaged the engagement of Gender Champions in all educational institutions across the country in order to increase the outreach for creating an environment that fostered gender equal workplaces.

The need for creating an environment that fosters gender just and safe spaces within HEIs was further articulated by UGC through the enactment of the UGC Regulations for the Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of women employees and students in HEIs of India, 2015 through a Notification issued by the Ministry of Human Resources on 2nd May 2016.

These Guidelines laid down the responsibilities of all HEIs to combat sexual harassment and commit itself to a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment. While Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 makes it mandatory for employers in both formal and informal sectors to have policies in place to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace, women seldom take recourse to them



for the fear of losing their jobs including the stigma such a move could entail. Often, employees are unaware about their rights or anti-sexual harassment policies aren't in place.

Context

A national level consultation on “Safe Campus: Implementation of UGC guidelines/regulation on Gender Champions and POSH” was organized by Pt. Ravi Shankar Shukla University (PRSU) and Martha Farrell Foundation in association with Association of Indian Universities on 22nd -23rd Jan 2020 in PRSU, Raipur. Faculties and students of different universities from all over India (Kashmir, Kanyakumari, Bihar, Assam etc. participated in the event.

Objectives

The objective of the consultation was to develop understanding of implementation of various elements of UGC's policies on Gender Champion and POSH:

- To equip and empower Gender Champions and Nodal Teachers to achieve their roles and responsibilities
- To enhance capacities of internal committee to fulfil their role in the prevention, prohibition and redressal of sexual harassment of women employees and students within HEIs
- To develop an operational plan for implementation of the policies in a time bound manner
- To share examples of good practices in India and internationally
- To evolve a shared learning platform for ongoing mutual support and learning on this theme

Workshop Proceedings

The sessions were activity based, where participants from different backgrounds and experiences were able to interact with and learn from each other. It helped them in locating the relevance of this issue within their own contexts, including their work as practitioners and academicians.

Ms Nandita Pradhan Bhatt, Director of Martha Farrell Foundation initiated the discussion on the issue of Safe campus and the UGC regulation on Gender Champions. Through different participatory activities they deconstructed concepts and personal understanding of gender - how identities are formed and challenges in expressions and attributions. It was seen as an important exercise for faculty members who have the responsibility to treat each student equally with respect irrespective of their gender or sexual identity. Very often it is these very deeply ingrained narrow understanding of Gender that also attributes in creating unsafe spaces for students.



The UGC Guidelines which laid down the responsibilities of all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to combat sexual harassment and commit itself to a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment were examined during the consultative workshop.

Some steps that can be taken towards addressing these challenges were discussed collectively:

- By introducing Gender studies module in their course curriculum
- By taking out time during lectures to discuss the issue of gender and safety with students
- By appointing 2 to 3 Gender Champions from each section to take forward the agenda as mandated by the Guidelines
- By organizing exposure visits of gender champions to different organisations working on the issue of Gender
- By organising lectures on women's empowerment
- By facilitating discussions around appropriate/inappropriate behaviour
- By ensuring that that speakers invited to speak should represent the diversity of gender identities

On the second day of the consultation, participants discussed the role of higher education institutions in ensuring the safety of the students by putting in place accessible mechanisms and impregnable standards of safety. Sexual harassment is an unwelcome sexual behaviour which are explicit and implicit in nature. It is the gender challenge of the workplace. The discussion on the UGC regulations for the Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual harassment of women employees and students in HEIs of India, 2015 began with building understanding on the issue of sexual harassment in workplace. Through small group discussion participants understood behaviours that might be perceived as being unwelcome in nature for the recipient, who could be fellow faculty members, students or non-teaching staff in universities. They learnt to demystify these behaviours and develop a clear understanding that sexual harassment at workplace is intent vs impact. The participants discussed the UGC's POSH guidelines and the responsibilities of the Higher Education Institution (HEIs), complaint procedures, supportive measure, punishments, composition of the Internal committee which also includes students, penalty for non-compliance with the law. These guidelines further articulate the need for creating an environment that fosters gender just and safe spaces within HEIs.

- At the end of the discussion, participants in a group activity discussed: Recommendations/steps that needs to be taken by the universities for safe campus
- Challenges that can be faced by university communities - faculty, students, non-teaching staff, visitors
- Remedies for the same



The discussion concluded that the key lies in institutionalizing the best practices and standard operating procedures that can substantively protect students from any threats and assaults, physical, social or psychological. This was an attempt to create a common understanding on the safe and gender just HEIs campus.

The program facilitated learning how participatory assessments and orientations can contribute towards creating gender just and safe campuses. Each University was able to produce a detailed plan of action which was submitted to their own Universities as well as to the AIU for further deliberations and action.

About the Organisers

Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) has been set up in the memory of feminist civil society leader Martha Farrell, who was killed in a terrorist attack in Kabul in 2015. Under the ambit of PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia), which was founded in 1982 by Dr. Rajesh Tandon, MFF is a social enterprise committed to securing a gender just society by supporting practical interventions which challenge gender discrimination and promote gender mainstreaming within organisations and wider society.

Association of Indian Universities is a Delhi-based organisation founded in 1925. It is responsible for academic equivalence to the qualifications awarded by the accredited/approved/recognized foreign Boards and Universities, for the purpose of higher studies and employment. In doing so, it facilitates students by issuing equivalence certificates to them.

About the Facilitator

Nandita Pradhan Bhatt is the Director of the Martha Farrell Foundation. For the last 25 years, she has been promoting the inclusion of gender in organisations, governance and development programmes. Ms. Bhatt specialises in gender mainstreaming, gender sensitisation and prevention of sexual harassment of women in the organised and unorganised sector in India.