

General Studies-2; Topic– mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of the vulnerable sections.

#MeToo Movement in India

1) Introduction

- The #MeToo movement, which began as a hashtag on Twitter in 2017 has now become a global phenomenon.
- India is experiencing its second wave of the #MeToo movement, in which women—some of them public figures—have levelled sexual harassment charges against certain men, many of whom occupy powerful positions.
- Over the past few weeks, women in the entertainment industry and in journalism have used social media to name their alleged harassers.

2) Significance of the Movement

- Many personal stories of anger and guilt, buried under years of silence, emerged out to public media because of this recent campaign.
- It is creating awareness about sexual violence and sexual assault.
- It reveals one thing - the legal and systemic provisions to deal with sexual harassment have failed.
- Women who suffered silently for years are now angry enough to put their faith in a “name and shame” mechanism.
- The campaign allows victims to find courage to name the accused through a collective.
- This forces administrators or the people in charge to take the problem seriously and begin a process of redress.
- It also aims to change the power dynamics between males and females by exposing the abuse of power and position by influential men for sexually harassing the women around them.
- The #MeToo movement resonated at the opening plenary session of the fifth Global Symposium on Health Systems Research.
- SDG 5 is about gender equality and calling out sexist behaviour which is at the heart of the #MeToo movement.

3) Women from Unorganised Sector

- Social media has highlighted sexual harassment in offices, but there’s little recourse for those who work in homes.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 provides for local complaints committees at the district level for workers from the unorganised sector.
- Domestic workers neither know of this provision nor how to reach authorities.
- Their biggest fear is counter allegations of theft which results in loss of livelihood.
- Enforcing the law for the unorganised sector has been dismal.
- There is a need to create deterrence at the community level.
- Residents’ welfare associations can start by creating committees for domestic workers to report cases.
- These can be linked to district authorities where the local complaints committees must be set up.
- Regulating placement agencies is critical to defining the employer-employee relationship.

4) Importance

- Tackling workplace sexual harassment is an ethical imperative and an economic imperative.
- Such harassment infringes on an individual's right to freedom of profession and occupation and undercuts the ideals of a modern democracy.
- Getting and retaining more women in the workforce has the potential to be a major growth driver.

5) Issues in implementation Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act

- 70% of the women do not report sexual harassment by superiors due to the fear of repercussions.
- According to a 2015 research study, 36% of Indian companies and 25% of multinational companies had not yet constituted their Internal Complaints Committee (ICCs) which is mandatory under the Act.
- Cases remain pending in court for long time enhancing the agony of victims.
- The Act does not fix accountability as to who is in charge of ensuring that workplaces comply with the Act.
- The Act does not contain provisions to address anonymous complaints
- In India wherever the accused has been influential they have got a free hand. It creates a sense of alienation, disbelief about the law.

6) Concerns / Challenges

- It has shown us that even the most privileged among women have not been spared from cultures of sexual harassment and exploitation.
- If it has taken this long for women to come out in journalism/cinema, it will be difficult for women to speak up in the corporate world or other areas that are a lot more hierarchical.
- There can be collateral damage with people getting wrongly accused.
- Women can experience health problems after workplace sexual harassment even by words also, a new study finds.
- These health problems can include high blood pressure, poor-quality sleep, anxiety and symptoms of depression.
- Greater gender diversity at the workplace—an area where India lags.

7) Way Forward

- It is for policymakers and civil society to now closely examine how the system is failing women against powerful male colleagues.
- There has to be a sense of fear in the mind of the offenders which has to be ensured.
- The attitudinal change, socialisation process and education must go towards making man more sensitive while dealing with women.
- Workplace audits should be as big a priority as auditing the finances of the company.
- The law that mandate that the investigation should be completed within 90 days should be strictly adhered to.
- Adequate workshops and awareness programme against sexual harassment must be conducted.
- There must also be equal punishment to women who make false charges.