

Women journalists discriminated against at workplace: survey

By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, JUNE 19. Though women have made inroads into journalism, a report released jointly by the National Commission for Women and the Press Institute of India here today says that a majority of women experience gender discrimination at their workplace.

Emphasising the importance of putting structures in place to ensure that working conditions for women journalists are improved, the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women, Poonima Advani, shared the details of the report "Status of Women Journalists in Print Media in India" at a press meet today.

"This is a first of its kind of survey in the country. It has opened avenues for a larger public debate on the subject that has not been adequately covered by the media," she said. Calling the report an "eye-opener," Ms. Advani raised the issue of discrimination against women journalists in the regional and national press and also touched on the issue of subjects delegated to them. "Why are women always associated with 'soft' jobs and not 'hard' jobs," she asked.

According to the report, while at one level there has been an increase in the presence of women in journalism, the resistance to their recruitment

still persists. Also, while there is an impression that women have access to higher posts, a majority of women journalists have a slow and limited progress, if not total stagnation in their career. Though spectacular success stories are also mentioned, the report says there is a tendency to relegate women to particular functions and beats.

As for gender discrimination, up to 80 per cent of all respondents said that they had faced such situations whether in terms of work allocation, promotions, facilities and even in employment. The report also speaks about maternity benefits adding that 30 per cent of the respondents felt that being a mother was a disqualification for promotions.

The report touches upon the situation in the regional language press that is "ridden with gender-based problems." About 23 per cent of the respondents experienced sexual harassment while another 5 per cent were not sure about what constituted "sexual harassment."

Taking the report as a basis to explore the issues of discrimination and harassment across the country, she said the NCW would shortly be holding a national consultation with the Censor Board of Film Certification and various Councils on July 14 to discuss the portrayal of women in the media.

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Women face abuse in media: study

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, JUNE 19

Sexual harassment is part of work culture in media organisations in India, according to a report released by the Information and Broadcasting Secretary, Mr Navin Chawla, here on Saturday.

The 130-page report is based on a study commissioned by the National Commission for Women.

The NCW chairperson, Dr Poornima Advani, said the study by the Press Institute of India (PII) had been an eye-opener about the status of women in the print media. In August, the NCW plans to hold a national consultation

with 200 journalists across the country on the subject. On the PII's suggestion for setting up a cell, Dr Advani said journalists should not hesitate in approaching the NCW and the state women commissions to take up cases of harassment. She urged women journalists to break their silence and speak up. Dr Advani also called upon journalists in other media organisations to use their pen to write about the problems faced by their sisters in other media organisations. "Women journalists are vocal and articulate but when it comes to discrimination at the workplace, they are silent. Why?" she asked.

"The fact that women jour-

nalists did not want to respond for fear of job security and the rampant discrimination which goes unreported, shows the dismal state of affairs in media establishment. We must create a pressure lobby to help women journalists fight the unjust system," the NCW chairperson said.

The PII team has inferred that either women do not know how to do anything about sexual harassment, or for a wide variety of reasons, choose not to do anything about it. Only 15.2 per cent of women who experienced sexual harassment had made a formal complaint. According to the report, journalists working for English and vernacul-

lar newspapers suffer discrimination, sexual harassment, disparities in pay and denial of promotions. Contrary to popular public perception, the condition of these activists in print is far from rosy.

While reporting her findings about the status of women in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, Sushmita Malviya, a member of the research team says the concept of women journalists in MP and Chhattisgarh does not exist.

Another researcher, Surekha Sule from Mumbai, has reported that some women journalists have been promoted only once or twice during a service of over 20 years.

AGE

'Women ^{Asian Age} journalists face bias'

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 19: There may have been a drastic increase in the number of women journalists in the country, but a majority of them are "denied" access in certain areas of work and to management positions on account of their gender, according to a survey carried out by the National Commission for Women.

The study, carried out by NCW in conjunction with the Press Institute of India, whose results were released here on Sat-

urday, found that a whopping 80 per cent of the respondents had experienced some form of gender discrimination in work allocation, promotions, facilities and even employment.

And pointing at prejudices and the proverbial glass ceiling, 60 per cent of the women journalists said in the survey on status of women journalists in India that they were not given certain beats and were denied access to management positions. Job segregation was an issue of importance for many of the respondents,

with the general feeling that women were thought to be better off at covering lifestyle, arts, gender, fashion and education. Releasing the study report, NCW chairperson Poornima Advani said the first of its kind survey in the country had opened the floor for a larger public debate on the subject that has not been adequately covered by the media. "Prior to this survey, there was little documentation of the harassment that women journalists go through on account of their gender," Ms Advani said.

'Women journalists still play second fiddle'

Inequalities in wages and working conditions, sexual harassment at the work place and absence of basic privileges still hold back women from flourishing.

NEW DELHI, DHNS: They are supposed to report on the predicaments of society at large, but when it comes to their issues, they are seldom heard. Perhaps this sums up the plight of women journalists who have dared to storm the so-called male bastion, according to a report released here on Saturday.

While reflecting on the positive trend of phenomenal increase in the number of women journalists, particularly in the English newspapers in big metros, "Status of women journalists in India," prepared by the National Commission for

Women and Press Institute of India, also revealed that women were still playing second fiddle to their male colleagues.

Not only lack of proper opportunities for growth as majority of the women scribes were restricted to flower and fashion shows rather than politics, Finance or Defence, but inequalities in wages and working conditions, sexual harassment at work place and absence of basic privileges like maternity leave still hold back women from flourishing, if not surviving, in the world of news.

Discriminations against women journalists were more apparent in vernacular press than in the English media. Women are often paid less than men, have no job security, are restricted to desk jobs, have no job mobility and face more sex-

ual harassment than their colleagues in the English language media. In the report, based on random sampling, 20.5 per cent of the respondents said women were discriminated against when it comes to promotions. While 45.5 per cent felt it was because of their sex, a whopping 21.2 per cent refused to comment. But 8.4 per cent were forced to leave a media organisation due to promotion discrimination.

Though most of the respondents had not deferred marriage or pregnancy due to job insecurity, only 56.7 per cent of those with children had availed of maternity leave and a further 10.6 per cent had availed of unpaid or part maternity leave. Interestingly, 17.5 per cent were not aware of any such facility in their organisation. In Madhya

Pradesh and Chattisgarh the concept of women journalists with permanent jobs still do not exist.

"While the lucky ones are those on contracts with a measure of job security for two or three years, most women work without appointment letters or designations and are hired and fired on the whims of the management," the report said.

Only 35 per cent of the women journalists in the north-eastern states worked as permanent full time employees. About 72 per cent of them got salaries ranging between Rs 1,500 to Rs 5,000. The report also pointed out that even though sexual harassment was a major concern for the women journalists, only 15.2 per cent of the women, who experienced sexual harassment had made a formal complaint.

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Pro
01/7/04

Women do some soul-searching

Grave injustices persist against women journalists and their merit is frequently overlooked, says Anuradha Dutt

A report titled 'Status of Women Journalists in India', sponsored by the National Commission for Women and prepared by the Press Institute of India, was released last week. It was a long overdue study, assessing the position of women in the print media. While the sample number of 410 respondents from the English and regional press may be too meagre to be representative of women working in print journalism in the country, their triumphs and failures may speak of the commonality of experience.

The most important fact that emerges is the great disparity in the working conditions between the English language press corps and its regional counterparts in the towns and interiors. While the latter, especially in the big publications, earn decent wages and have some chance of upward mobility, the latter wage a continual battle against deprivation and gender bias.

It is the "India versus Bharat" syndrome manifesting, with the former being vastly privileged compared to the latter. Journalists in language press and stringers in places considered punishment postings for mainstream journalists, recount

stories of a precarious existence, with the sword of Damocles constantly hanging over their heads. Their service can be terminated on a whim. The lack of job security was acutely in evidence when a Shillong-based journalist, who surveyed the North-East for the report, had her contract with a premier English daily terminated shortly after her scathing observations on the paper's policies at the release function. It was a grim vindication of her point. The same media group was singled out for hounding out two others for opposing unfair treatment.

Sexual harassment at the work place seems pronounced in the language press, possibly because of feudal attitudes, that assign women's position to the home. It is a hard struggle for those resilient enough to brave such prejudice to retain both their dignity and their jobs. Discrimination on account of pregnancy, when maternity leave is denied or the fact of motherhood is turned against a journalist, is often cited. In contrast, women in the English press appear to have had far happier encounters with male colleagues, even if the top editorial posts go to them. A westernised education has some notable virtues.



At least, they do not have to face the extreme narrow-mindedness that afflicts much of the vernacular press corps, though they might have to tackle sexism.

This extended debate raises some other points, relevant to the contemporary work ethos. The first is whether it is fair to differentiate women into a separate category, when men equally face harassment by partisan bosses. It is a hard grind for both as competition gets tougher. In fact, aggrieved males can turn

around and charge women with using their gender to their own advantage. The truth is that unfair labour codes affect both adversely. Contractual employment, singled out for criticism in the study, is becoming the norm in other professions as well, as proprietors try to reduce liabilities. This can fuel a lengthy discussion on unjust labour laws and the absence of a security net for all employees, who do not enjoy a special relationship with the owners.

A significant omission in the re-

port is the failure to give journalism its due. Above all other contemporary professions, it has provided women a dignified, high-profile forum to disseminate news and opinion, and to highlight iniquities, especially against their own sex. Never before have women writers and reporters, in such large numbers, been so widely read and even lauded. Women politicians, too, face hurdles, being hemmed in by venal political compulsions, unless they have an important lineage. And, showbiz achievers are bound primarily by youth, feminine wiles and physiognomy. Journalists have the additional advantage of having access to people and places, that provide an expansive view of the world.

No doubt, grave injustices persist, when merit is overlooked or sexual overtures are made. But, job options are usually available, this being a burgeoning field. Then, if cause for complaint remains, it is the editorial content of newspapers and magazines, that in the past decade, has been trivialised to a point where sex is constantly being sold in the guise of news and being foisted upon wary readers. That, however, is an issue worthy of a separate study.

Mixed Bag

Silence prevails

IT may come as a surprise but women journalists are a silent lot when it comes to speaking up about sexual harassment or gender discrimination at their workplace.

Now savour this: some 60 per cent of women journalists who participated in a survey conducted by Press Institute of India (PII) felt they were denied access to all areas of work and also to all levels of management positions.

Up to 80 per cent had experienced some form of gender discrimination – in work allocation, promotions, facilities, even employment. Yet only 15 per cent of the harassed women took courage to complain. Most did nothing about it, said Ms Usha Rai, a senior journalist now with the PII.

“Some 3,500 questionnaires were distributed to women journalists in three languages across the country. Just 410 were filled and returned despite a lot of phone calls and follow-ups,” she said releasing the report “Status of Women Journalists in India” that was commissioned by the National Commission for Women (NCW).

Speaking on the occasion, NCW chairperson Dr Poornima Advani said a Media Watch Group had been set up to enable the commission to take up specific cases with the government and the Press Council of India.

The positive side of the survey showed the number of women journalists on the rise, particularly in the English language newspapers in the big metros.

According to a survey conducted by NCW, women are still the silent sufferers of discrimination, Asha Ramachandran reports

Several have reached the top as well as newspaper owners in editorial positions.

On the flip side, the study revealed that women in the regional and vernacular press are lagging far behind their colleagues in the English language press.

They are often hired like contract labour on daily wages and if the establishment decides to size down its staff, the women are the first to be axed.

According to the survey, several newspapers are reluctant to employ women on the grounds they must be given maternity leave and need to be provided transport after night shifts.

Sexual harassment is a reality and despite the Supreme Court ruling that there should be a permanent committee in every organisation to look into such complaints, respondents said no such committee existed, Ms Usha Rai pointed out.

The Hindu
23/8/04

'People' a newsletter for breaking stories

IN AN attempt to raise public consciousness surrounding the changing paradigm of population which is no longer thought to be a game of numbers, the Press Institute of India (PII) has taken up a media advocacy project as part of which it is bringing out a newsletter titled "People" that focuses on the interconnected issues like population, development and gender.

"We want to focus attention on issues like the two-child norm, maternal mortality and female foeticide -- issues which are ignored by the mainstream media," says Usha Rai, Deputy Director, PII, adding: "Also, we have held several workshops in places like Bhopal, Bhubaneshwar, Jaipur and Udaipur to sensitise the media on these issues. Besides, we have organised an Editor's debate on population issues as well."

Unlike a conventional newsletter of government, non-government or other civil society organisations, "People" focuses on exclusive "stories" generated from the field through a network of sensitised reporters and therefore, raises issues that can actually be taken by the mainstream media. Some of the issues that have been focussed in the past are failure of the two-child norm, the "shishu rakshak" scheme to protect new-borns in Orissa, a unique rural insurance scheme for mothers in Karnataka, the "Janani Model" in Bihar and so on.

"The idea is to use the newsletter as a vehicle for exploring issues that look at the continuum between population, develop-

ment and gender. Population control is no longer about achieving targets in sterilisation, it is a much more intricate and complex issue and through stories that focus on maternal mortality, female foeticide and other such issues, we look at reasons why India's population has not stabilised as yet. Also, the attempt is to portray positive developments in the field," says Ms. Rai.

And while the workshops provide the base for generating such "field stories", the network of sensitised reporters serve as the information base.

"The PII along with the UNFPA also gives a small grant of Rs. 15,000 for any reporter wanting to do a story on this issue," says Ms. Rai, adding that the newsletter, therefore, serves as a vehicle for breaking stories.

"The media must tell the true story about the missing girls and why so many mothers are dying in the rural areas. When we did a story on the Janani Model in Bihar, more than 20,000 copies of "People" was distributed. Such is the power of a medium like this. I believe that health care must become a fundamental right and maternal mortality must be subject to investigation by the media."

The newsletter also comes out in Hindi and is called "Hum Log". Again, the stories in the English and Hindi newsletters are totally different and original -- an alternate media in the true sense of the term.

By K. Kannan