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Article

Role of gender sensitisation training in combating gender-based bullying, inequality, and violence

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MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Role of gender sensitisation training in combating gender-based bullying, inequality, and violence

Ashwani Kumar Upadhyay^{1*}, Komal Khandelwal², Jayanthi Iyengar¹ and Geetanjali Panda¹

Abstract: This study investigates the vital role of gender sensitisation training in resolving gender-based bullying, inequality, and violence in Indian organisations. The research examines the multifaceted forms of gender-related issues using the theoretical frameworks of the Social Dominance Theory, Gender Role Socialisation Theory, and Social Identity Theory. The qualitative study uses an exploratory approach to examine gender-based bullying, inequality, and violence in Indian academic and professional settings. Furthermore, the research examines whether gender sensitisation training is only a compliance measure or an effective strategy for promoting gender equality. According to preliminary studies, while gender sensitisation training implementation in India has been delayed, its primary focus has been statutory responsibilities. Despite global and local attempts to achieve gender equality, significant efforts are still required to improve the efficacy of gender sensitisation training measures. Although some organisations have used technology for training online, considerable improvements are needed. Finally, this study emphasises the importance of gender sensitisation training as a transforming



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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper explores the vital subject of gender-based harassment, discrimination, and violence in Indian workplaces. This paper highlights the role of gender sensitisation training in tackling these complex issues, providing promise for a more welcoming and equal workplace in developing countries. Gender sensitisation training trains participants to recognise and challenge unfavourable presumptions and biases to build a work climate that values diversity and respects all genders. By utilising well-established concepts and theories, this study illuminates the subtleties that underlie gender-based challenges in business and other professional settings. It aids our understanding of how early sensitivity exposure may considerably assist in eradicating these issues. Thanks to our inquiries in this study, diversity and inclusion practitioners are one step closer to developing gender-neutral workplaces where everyone may prosper and provide their best work with respect and dignity.

instrument rather than a symbolic gesture, emphasising the need for comprehensive and long-term methods to achieve gender equality in Indian organisations.

Summary:

The authors of this study represent a diverse group of academics and researchers. The interaction of technology, people, and strategy inspires the group. Dr Jayanthi's research focuses on gender violence in the publicly accessible digital sphere. The entire research group is interested in learning about the role of gender sensitisation training in addressing violence, inequality, and bullying motivated by gender. Ms Geetanjali is eager to learn and comment on the subtleties of gender-based bullying. The team is trained in using various tools and strategies to do qualitative and quantitative research.

Subjects: Gender Studies; Gender & Development; Business, Management and Accounting; Gender Studies - Soc Sci;

Keywords: gender-based bullying; gender inequality; gender sensitisation; gender-based violence; training

1. Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental human right to which every human is entitled. However, according to the United Nations gender equity index, it will take over 267 years to achieve economic equality between genders and the subsequent empowerment of the compromised one (United Nations, 2019). The United Nations 2030 agenda for sustainable development (Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) includes a separate sustainable development goal (SDG 5) on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (United Nations, 2015). While planning for SDG 5 of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, policymakers ought to think about strategies to combat gender-based bullying, gender inequality, and gender-based violence, which are not new occurrences.

The focus and big push for reducing gender-based bullying, gender-based violence, and gender inequality come from several factors, such as the alarming statistics of violence against women and the high reputational risk organisations face because of sexual misconduct allegations following the #metoo movement. As this paper focuses on gender-based bullying, discrimination, and violence in the workplace, it is critical to first define and describe the key terminology.

Gender-based bullying, according to UNESCWA (n.d.), is a “complex form of violence that targets a person's sex or sexuality, representing a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated event.”

Gender-based violence is defined by the European Commission (n.d.) as “violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately.”

According to WorkSafe Victoria (n.d.), “Work-related gendered violence is any behaviour, directed at any person, or that affects a person, because of their sex, gender or sexual orientation, or because they do not adhere to socially prescribed gender roles, that creates a risk to health and safety.”

Work-related gendered violence is directed explicitly towards someone because they are a woman, identified as LGBTQIA+, or do not conform to socially prescribed gender roles and stereotypes. Gendered violence at work might also be experienced indirectly. A person may

encounter gendered violence that is not expressly intended at them (for example, overhearing a conversation that impacts them) or directed at someone else (WorkSafe Victoria, [n.d.](#)).

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality ([n.d.-a](#)), “gender inequality is a legal, social and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles.”

Gender equity is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations “as a situation in which there is no discrimination based on gender” (United Nations, [2018](#); World Health Organisation, [2002](#)).

There is growing pressure from the United Nations (UN) and other multilateral agencies on member nations to promote gender equality (United Nations, [2019](#)). Organisations must manage gender inequality as it strongly impacts their ability to compete (Rajesh et al., [2019](#)). Gender mainstreaming has been widely accepted globally as a critical technique for achieving gender equality. Its goal is to eliminate gender disparities in policies, services, and government initiatives (European Institute for Gender Equality, [n.d.-b](#)).

There is additional pressure from the government and judiciary on organisations to take steps to ensure gender equality by implementing measures such as gender sensitisation training.

As defined by UN Women ([2014](#)), gender sensitisation training is a “tool, strategy, and means to effect individual and collective transformation towards gender equality through consciousness-raising, empowering learning, knowledge building, and skill development.”

In the last decade, gender sensitisation training as a tool for ensuring gender equality (Eade, [2017](#)) had been a focal point of discussion among social scientists, activists, regulatory bodies, the judiciary (Minamino, [2014](#)), and the academic fraternity (Siddiqi & Shafiq, [2017](#)). Despite poor results, nearly all Fortune 500 companies engaged in diversity training programmes (Dobbin & Kalev, [2016](#)). Diversity management had favourably impacted organisational performance (Khunkaew et al., [2023](#); Omotayo et al., [2020](#)). The percentage of female directors, average age, and intermediate education level significantly affected their financial and corporate social responsibility (CSR) achievements (Amadi et al., [2023](#)). Diversity and inclusion practices too had significantly impacted innovative culture in the workplace (Chaudhry et al., [2021](#)).

For anything to have the capability to empower its surroundings, it needs to be effective enough to break through rigid norms (UN Women, [2014](#)). Even after striving so hard for gender equality through several global and national programmes, including gender sensitisation training, much still needs to be done.

During the literature review, the authors could not locate any studies that employed the Social Dominance Theory, Gender Role Socialisation Theory, and Social Identity Theory to explain gender-based bullying, violence, and inequality. In addition, inadequate literature clarifies whether and how gender sensitisation training can be utilised to address gender-based bullying violence and attain gender equality.

Using the theoretical lenses of the Social Dominance Theory, Gender Role Socialisation Theory, and Social Identity Theory, this exploratory study aims to document on-the-ground perspectives of gender-based bullying, gender inequity, and gender-based violence at academic and professional organisations in India. Furthermore, the study intends to evaluate the usefulness of gender sensitisation training programmes for dealing with gender-based bullying and violence and achieving gender equality.

2. Review of literature

The following section presents findings based on a review of definitions, theories, and the existing state of research in the area. Existing research shows that gender-based bullying, gender-based violence, and gender discrimination exist in workplaces and are aided by gender stereotyping and organisational factors (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). Gender-based bullying and violence at work could result from little actions, such as commenting on a woman's dress, to blatant acts, such as demanding outright sexual favours (Adikaram, 2017).

Employees in firms struggle to defend themselves against long-term gender-based bullying and gender-based violence (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007) as gender-based bullies engage in violent or nonviolent activities such as abuse and social rejection. Gender discrimination and violence are linked because they are human rights violations that include harmful acts directed at a person because of their gender; these are rooted in inequality, power abuse, and harmful norms. In many parts of the world, gender-based violence is a disputed and culturally sensitive reality (Dwivedi & Sachdeva, 2019).

Gender-based bullying, gender inequality, and gender-based violence often result from the interplay of multiple factors at the individual, organisational and societal levels. One such factor that leads to gender-based bullying or violence is a disparity in power systems and dynamics, resulting in gender inequalities (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). Gender-based bullying is rarely an isolated incident and is frequently unjustified. Power discrepancies make it more difficult for victims to defend themselves against gender-based bullying or violence (Woodrow & Guest, 2013), resulting in extreme effects such as stress disorders, or, in severe cases, even suicide (Routley & Ozanne-Smith, 2012).

Gender discrimination can manifest itself in various ways, from subtle mistreatment to unwanted sexual attention and reciprocal actions. Recently, new kinds of non-sexual gender-based harassment have evolved (Berdahl, 2007; Leskinen et al., 2011). Previous research has found that women are more likely than men to identify unfavourable events as bullying (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2004). At times, gender-based bullying, as well as violence, is not reported as women's hatred towards other women is positively related to acceptance of interpersonal violence and serves as a barrier to their collective advancement (Cowan et al., 1998). For difficulties such as abuse of emotions, social exclusion, and professional discrediting, women frequently regard hostile acts to be more severe than in the case of males. Experts believe that gender training partially solves gender inequality and violence (Porter & Smyth, 1998; Wotschack, 2018).

Intersectionality of gender with other variables, such as race, caste, religion, economic status, or class leads to a hierarchy between people in power and their subordinates (Sweetman & Rowlands, 2016). Intersectionality, as investigated by Viswambaran and Diwakar (2020), emphasises the interrelated impact of numerous social identities (e.g., race, gender, and class) on an individual's experiences, emphasising that discrimination cannot be understood in isolation. Barodia (2015), on the other hand, takes a relational approach to workplace discrimination, emphasising the dynamic relationships between individuals, organisational structures, and cultural norms. This point of view highlights how discriminatory practices originate from complex interactions, arguing for a comprehensive approach to addressing biases and promoting inclusive workplaces that recognise the complicated web of ties that shape employees' experiences.

Gender mainstreaming is a proactive strategy advocated by the European Commission and the European Institute for Gender Equality to avoid gender-based violence and improve gender equality (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.-b).

The Council of Europe (n.d.) defined gender mainstreaming in 1998 as "the (re) organisation, improvement, development, and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality

perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making.”

Adopting a gender equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, plans, and projects is gender mainstreaming. By including a gender perspective in all policies, potential risks and inequities are identified and addressed early. Gender mainstreaming seeks to account for these discrepancies when developing, implementing, and evaluating policies, programmes, and projects so that they benefit both men and women and do not promote inequality but rather advance gender equality (Council of Europe, [n.d.](#)).

2.1. Relevant theories

Several theoretical frameworks or perspectives may be utilised to examine the complexities of gender-based bullying, gender inequality, and gender-based violence. Gender power dynamics are derived from the Social Dominance Theory, Gender Role Socialisation Theory, and Social Identity Theory and may be utilised to comprehend gender differences and gender-based bullying conduct. The list of theoretical frameworks or relevant approaches is exhaustive. We have focused on the significant ideas that explain the reasons for gender-based bullying, gender inequality, and gender-based violence.

2.1.1. The social dominance theory

The Social Dominance Theory is an essential theory that analyses power and gender; according to this theory, society comprises a hierarchy of power (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). One social group typically dominates the other; different social groupings have varied societal expectations and standards due to differences in power. Access to resources and social positioning differs according to social and economic status. Previous studies have found a strong link between gender and social power (Carli, 1999; Scott, 1986) since gender leads to group membership, resulting in power inequalities and societal influence. To demonstrate their superiority, strong groups may use oppression against weaker groups.

Previous studies suggest that males perceive women’s shift from oppressed to dominant groups as a danger, resulting in the victimisation of women for social control (Cortina et al., 2002). Using the lens of the Social Dominance Theory, one may investigate the causes of gender-based bullying and harassment in male-dominated organisations.

2.1.2. Gender role socialisation and differentiated socialisation

Recent research shows a significant connection between interactions and the gendered character of power systems in organisations. It has also been claimed that because of gender role socialisation, women report higher levels of gender-based bullying, resulting in men and women conforming to differing norms of behaviour based on their gender group (Eagly, 2008). Men tend to be more aggressive and assertive (Salin et al., 2013), whereas women are more communal (Heilman & Caleo, 2018), showing warmth and compassion to others. Female targets are more likely to report gender-based bullying behaviours when they encounter senior women who are aggressive and demanding.

“Differentiated socialisation” refers to the process of shaping and teaching individuals societal standards, attitudes, and behaviours corresponding to specific roles or identities (Block, 1983). Gender roles are essential in socialisation because they often perpetuate assumptions and expectations about how people of different genders should behave and interact at work (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Differentiated socialisation can result in unequal opportunities and treatment, impacting career choices, promotion, and work-life balance. Gender-related socialisation must be addressed to promote workplace equality and eliminate gender prejudices. According to Solbes-Canales et al. (2020), participants had internalised traditional gender norms from an early age, especially when asked to assign male qualities. Furthermore, group disparities were discovered, with boys appearing to be more aware of masculine norms and girls attributing feminine qualities

to women more frequently than boys. Gender differences due to differentiated socialisation can result in differences in perceptions of leadership behaviour(s) and workplace effectiveness (Stelter, 2002).

2.1.3. *Social identity theory*

The Social Identity Theory is valuable for understanding the foundations of prejudice between groups. According to this thought, individuals form groups and categorise members as belonging to in-groups or out-groups. Depending on whether one is in or out of a group, one's behaviour is favourable or unfavourable (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Gender plays a prominent role in workgroups, and gender likely influences how we label ourselves and others and with whom we identify.

The perspective of the Social Identity Theory helps us understand why male spectators are unable to notice and define harassment. Males prefer to make favourable evaluations because they identify with males as their in-group (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005). Social identity associations can influence views of the gravity of gender-based bullying and harassment allegations, failing to protect the victim or punish the abuser.

3. Methodology

3.1. *Research questions*

This exploratory study's primary goal is to answer critical research questions about gender-based bullying, discrimination, and violence experienced by women in India. The first research question (RQ1) examines the many aspects of gender-based violence and bullying women in India endure. The RQ1 seeks to identify the various forms and expressions of such behaviour contributing to their vulnerability and how the Social Dominance Theory, Gender Role Socialisation Theory, and Social Identity Theory explain gender-based bullying, violence, and inequality. The second research question (RQ2) examines the on-the-ground realities of gender sensitisation training in reducing gender-based bullying, inequality, and violence. Furthermore, the third research question (RQ3) seeks to identify the barriers to gender sensitisation training implementation in Indian academic and industrial organisations. Finally, the fourth research question (RQ4) critiques the methods and content for increasing the effectiveness of gender sensitisation training programmes.

3.2. *Research methods*

Social constructionism, which has academic roots in the work of Berger and Luckmann (1967), has been used as a paradigm in this study to make sense of reality. According to the social construction of reality, the origin of knowledge is social (Allen, 2018). Based on the social constructionism paradigm, this study employs a qualitative research technique that includes data collection through in-depth interviews. According to research, the construction of ideas and the emergence of themes in research should be based on the study participants' thoughts, replies, and practices rather than the researcher's predefined concepts (Burnard et al., 2008).

The exploratory study includes qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews with 25 individuals from academia and industry, including six experts and 19 trainees. Using a discussion guide, the researchers have administered open-ended questions through interviews conducted on Zoom, Google Meet, and telephonic conversations, lasting between 15 minutes and one hour. An Associate Professor with 15 years of research experience and a PhD scholar with three years of research experience have decoded the machine-transcribed interviews for further analysis.

3.3. *Sampling design and participants*

Purposive and snowball sampling approaches have been used in this study. The researchers have kept the number of interviewees to 25 since comments became repetitive due to circularity, indicating data saturation. Six of the 25 respondents were gender experts and trainers for gender sensitisation training courses, while the remaining 19 had received gender sensitisation training. Four participants were from the industry, while the remaining 21 were from academics. The 25

participants included seven males and 18 women. All participants had attended university, with 12 earning PhDs and 13 earning master's degrees. The 25 participants were divided into three age groups based on their ages, with four under the age of 30, eight between the ages of 30 and 40, and 13 above 40. No incentive was offered for participation.

4. Results

4.1. Types of gender-based bullying, gender discrimination, and gender-based violence

According to the Social Dominance Theory, society comprises a power hierarchy in which powerful groups can rule over weaker ones due to power imbalances. Because of differences in power dynamics and positions in poor and emerging societies, women and other personnel in more vulnerable groups face oppression at the hands of those in control.

What I have come across is, you know, a person in authority or an influential male trying to seek sexual favours from females in an inferior position. (Adjunct Professor, male, 30 years of experience, gender awareness, legal expert)

The aforementioned quote emphasises power abuse along with gender issues. It depicts situations in which powerful men use their power to compel sexual favours from submissive females. The participant, who is a trainer, emphasises the ubiquitous problem of sexual harassment and power imbalance in a variety of situations. Power dynamics between privileged and vulnerable groups must be considered while designing transformative gender and diversity training to promote equality (Ferguson, 2019; Plantenga, 2004). All 25 participants in the study mentioned that people in power engage in gender-based bullying and seek favours, including sexual favours, for promotion, relevant work opportunities, or favourable appraisals.

It's not just physical harassment if someone touches you; only then is it sexual harassment. No, it can be emotional harassment, evident in somebody's expression. (Female corporate professional, 11 years of work experience)

The aforementioned quote challenges limiting views of harassment. The expert emphasises that harassment goes beyond physical contact, including emotional suffering and non-verbal signs. This remark broadens our understanding of sexual harassment by recognising its multidimensional nature. The quote emphasises the significance of recognising subtler types of abuse and their influence on the well-being of victims.

Forwarding or discussing jokes and at times abusing in the presence of a woman is a kind of harassment that can make a woman uncomfortable, and people need to draw a red line that they should not cross. (Male Associate Professor, 30 years of experience, gender awareness, and legal expert)

The quote underlines that making offensive jokes or engaging in abusive conversations around women are forms of harassment that cause discomfort. The statement distinguishes acceptable and harassing behaviour to create a more respectful workplace. It highlights the importance of addressing such behaviours to build safer environments in the context of gender-based bullying. It raises an understanding of the nuanced ways in which harassment occurs. There are instances where sexually loaded jokes and messages are circulated and laughed at by individuals of a particular gender without realising that such behaviour can also amount to gender-based bullying, violence, and discrimination. There are instances where a space or casual touch violation is registered as gender-based violence. Still, emotional abuse or expressions are not seen as part of gender-based bullying.

There were certain biases and distinctions between groups, and members were not always comfortable sharing or discussing difficulties with members of other groups. The phenomenon of group formation based on gender, caste, religion, language, or location may be examined through the Social

Identity Theory (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Surprisingly, male witnesses to gender-based violence or bullying could often not recognise the activity as harassment or gender-based bullying because they regarded other men as in-group members. All the female respondents identified other females as victims. Still, they did not wish to be classified as victims owing to the social stigma associated with the victim label or the consequences of reporting gender-based bullying or violence.

4.2. Need for gender sensitisation training programmes

Human rights and women's rights activists have fought for equal rights for women in different spheres of life for over a century. Since gender-based violence resulting in gender inequity is preventable (World Health Organization, 2021), measures to curb gender-based violence through training and sensitisation programmes have been the focus of discussion amongst experts (Siddiqi & Shafiq, 2017). Gender-based bullying or gender-based violence in the workplace may sometimes be addressed by training bullies or perpetrators to develop interpersonal skills, especially leadership abilities, or by educating targets to remain calm by coping and being thoughtful (Gardner & Cooper-Thomas, 2018).

All 25 participants agreed to the need for gender sensitisation training programmes. Though previous experiences with gender-based bullying and gender-based violence sensitisation sessions had not been particularly beneficial owing to their failure to eliminate stereotypical thinking (Kohen, 2014), all respondents agreed that gender training through teachers and trainers in academia and companies would work, echoing findings from parent-teacher and relational theories. However, there was still considerable work to be done to enhance the manner and method of training.

As HR managers, we need to make sure that everyone is well aware of their rights, the legal actions they are entitled to, and the systems they have in place to protect their employees.
(HR Manager, male, 10 years of experience in a multinational corporation)

The human resource department must ensure employees understand their rights, legal options, and safeguards related to gender-based bullying, violence, and inequality. It is essential to educate people about entitlements and safety net programmes. Educating employees promotes a harmonious workplace and reaffirms a commitment to employee welfare, providing a fair and compliant environment.

Following Muduli et al. (2019), p. 20 respondents saw gender education and training as a means of unlearning and moderating gender stereotypes among students and employees. A recurring topic among respondents was that training initiatives needed to be successfully and appropriately executed despite legal and other provisions. When the workshops were held, they were held in a formal, official setting, which limited the amount of knowledge that could be imparted and adequately digested.

In reaction to the changing circumstances, several organisations in India conducted online gender training. Despite several attempts at consistency, respondents perceived that training was being provided to satisfy legal mandates and regulatory needs. As a result, legal duties were to be upheld, requiring employers to listen to their employees' voices even when communication was virtual. On several occasions, the six facilitators and 19 participants thought that the gender sensitisation training was just for regulatory compliance purposes, undermining the true goal of guaranteeing and promoting gender equality.

Though gender sensitisation programmes have been widely adopted by the industry (ANI, 2020; Asare, 2020; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016), academics are divided on the need for gender sensitivity training; whether such training works (Carson, 2016; Chalaby, 2018; Dwivedi & Sachdeva, 2019; Kohen, 2014; Vyas et al., 2019); and whether such training and organisational texts and discourses could be bias catalysts. The respondents echoed the earlier findings from existing studies.

All 25 respondents in the study supported the argument that gender discrimination must be eradicated because of its political and legal consequences at individual and organisational levels. At the personal level, outcomes included lower self-confidence, morale, motivation, and self-esteem (Adikaram, 2017), leading to poverty in the long term (Hoel et al., 2001). At the organisational level, consequences included a dip in productivity, a rise in conflict, a hostile work culture, and lawsuits (Hoel et al., 2001).

Also included in the discussion dynamics were intersectionality (Viswambaran & Diwakar, 2020) and a relational perspective (Barodia, 2015) on workplace discrimination. In line with Wynn (2019), all six experts felt that gender sensitivity depended on the policymakers and top management's views of gender inequality. In India, additional causes included educational inequality, patriarchy, poverty, illiteracy, lack of awareness, customs, beliefs, and practices (Care India, 2022). All 25 participants in the study reiterated these factors and all six experts felt that one of the most legitimate and direct ways to address gender-based bullying, gender inequality, discrimination, and violence was gender sensitisation training.

4.3. Challenges faced during gender sensitisation training

Gender washing is one of the most significant hurdles to gender equality, in which an organisation purports to practise equality. Still, women and other marginalised persons see little or no growth (Fox-Kirk et al., 2020). The trainers in this study summarised that patriarchy, power dynamics, and socio-cultural aspects were behind work-gender-based bullying and gender-based violence, which perpetuated gender discrimination and hindered workplace training.

The biggest challenge is not about mindset; it is about learning. This is where most of the gender sensitisation training programmes fail. (Faculty, female, with 25 years of experience, and an expert in gender sensitisation)

The aforementioned quote moves the emphasis from altering mindsets to the necessity of knowledge acquisition. The expert suggests that many gender sensitisation programmes fall short of providing meaningful learning opportunities, indicating that the main barrier is imparting practical knowledge and skills rather than simply influencing attitudes, showing a potential gap in programme efficacy.

Despite the boldness and openness ushered in by the #MeToo movement (Naresh et al., 2021; Toor, 2019), age-old stigmas prevented victims from coming forward, making the training sessions one-sided, and widening the trainer-trainee gap. Abelson (2001) highlighted the rampancy of salary and promotion bias and the role these played in marginalising women within organisations. The trainees in this study pointed out that many trainers they had met could not understand the gravity of certain kinds of abuse, such as salary disparities, and how they affected the trainees. Further, virtual training distanced the trainer from the trainee. Twelve participants said that the trainer needed to understand that each individual was unique and necessitated personalised solutions to their issues and challenges.

The trainer should be able to provide solutions to the unique problems or issues of the victims. (Associate Professor, female, gender sensitisation trainer with 18 years of experience)

The trainer is responsible for customising solutions to the victims' problems or challenges. Individualised guidance is critical in assisting people to overcome their challenges. This personalised approach improves effectiveness while encouraging healing and growth by directly addressing the specific issues of each victim.

I was an external member of a sexual harassment cell in the Technopark. I have seen that it was just a namesake thing. (Faculty, female, with 25 years of experience, and an expert in gender sensitisation)

The aforementioned statement demonstrates a lack of effectiveness in the experts' sexual harassment cell. Despite being an outsider in a workplace (Technopark), the cell's operation seems superficial ("namesake"). Also, showing that the cell may not have adequately addressed sexual harassment issues raises questions about its effectiveness and purpose. The inadequacy and ineffectiveness of gender sensitisation training programmes have been highlighted by some researchers (Carson, 2016). All six experts in this study echoed earlier findings and pointed out that internal complaints committees and gender harassment cells often existed only on paper.

If trainees faced problems, so did the trainers. Prior research has focused on the psychological, unconscious, implicit, and deep-seated nature of gender bias at work in organisations (Bierema, 2020; Brownstein, 2019). Goel's research (Goel, 2017) found that short-term training needed to be improved to impact bias. Many trainers in this study endorsed the findings of earlier researchers. They found it difficult to make inroads into bias, which was unconscious, profoundly ingrained, and learnt during childhood at home and often from elders in patriarchal societies such as India.

In a recent article in the *Harvard Business Review*, researchers discussed why traditional approaches to unconscious bias had failed and what could improve effectiveness (Gino & Coffman, 2021). Traditionally, unconscious bias training presented trainees with theory, and the researchers argued that it was imperative to arm participants with tools to acknowledge, track, and reduce their unconscious bias. Nordvall and Wieslander (2019) argued that the discourse on gender equality is fragile and can sometimes have outcomes opposite to the intended ones.

The top management's intentions and actions will percolate to the lower levels. Workshops should be conducted, you know, so that actual people, the trainees, are made to do certain things. There should be posters for zero tolerance for sexual harassment. (Associate Professor, female, gender sensitisation trainer with 18 years of experience)

In line with the aforementioned quote, 12 trainees and four trainers said that organisations should involve the top management in building a culture of gender equality. Previous research studies, such as those by Wynn (2019), emphasised the importance of empathy, understanding, and the involvement of policymakers and senior management to effect change. In line with Chalaby (2018), respondents also said that despite spending large budgets on various activities, including programmes for women's leadership development and designing new unbiased assessment systems, the impact on the ground could have been more negligent.

One participant echoed this sentiment when she noted that gender sensitivity was lacking when organisations in India did not factor in the needs of LGBTQIA+ people and other minorities while building something as basic as washrooms, which catered only to men and women.

4.4. Measures to ensure the effectiveness of gender sensitivity training

Ten trainees and four trainers discussed building an inclusive organisation with an equitable culture. However, implementing diversity norms in a country such as India, divided by religion, caste, class, and creed, would not be without challenges. Interviewees felt that replicating a Western model or adopting a one-size-fits-all policy would not work for India.

Since children develop a patriarchal mindset when they are little, there is a need to catch them young. In line with Vyas et al. (2019) findings about the impact of gender sensitisation training programmes on adolescents, the interviewees recommended that such programmes be started at the school stage for maximum effectiveness.

These gender sensitisation training programmes should not be conducted just in offices but also in schools and suburban societies. (Associate Professor, female, with 10 years of experience)

The aforementioned quote emphasises the significance of broadening gender sensitisation beyond the workplace and into schools and suburban neighbourhoods. It lays stress on the fact that such training for cultivating knowledge and respect for all genders should not be limited to office surroundings, underlining the importance of a broader educational scope.

Further, interviewees suggested that the training should be interactive, aided by multimedia and other tools to make it enjoyable. The training frequency could vary, but adding assessment to the training module would help. Follow-ups could be need-based, customised, and one-on-one. Echoing Cranny-Francis and Gillard (2020), all 12 participants in the age bracket of less than 40 suggested harnessing innovative tools such as social media platforms to connect with the younger generation.

It is essential to understand that being aware of cross-cultural differences and understanding the space between two individuals needs to be communicated to the participants. First, one needs to know that we have a lot of cultural differences within our society, and therefore, what may work in Western culture may not work in the Middle East or even in India. Providing resources, training need analysis, the profile of participants, and understanding that a “one-size-fits-all” policy will not work are vital for a gender sensitisation training programme.

One of the experts talked about building an inclusive organisation with an equitable culture; having the right gender-friendly policies and infrastructure is essential. People tend to forget about LGBTQIA+ and other groups while designing restrooms and even communicating.

Is it necessary to reflect on policies to create an equitable culture within the organisation before engaging in gender training? (Professional communicator, veteran news journalist, female, with 18 years of experience)

The aforementioned quote emphasises the importance of integrating policy changes with cultural reform. It encourages contemplation on the synergy between policies and cultural change in creating an equal organisational environment through gender training efforts.

As a trainer, I believe that having conversations and sharing stories—good stories, bad stories, angry stories—allow people to share their discomfort and recognise that it is okay. (Associate Professor, female, with 10 years of experience)

The aforementioned quote emphasises the trainer’s viewpoint about the importance of open dialogues and story-sharing in dealing with discomfort. It highlights the use of various positive and negative stories as tools for recognising and normalising suffering. Individuals might face anxiety through discourse and narrative exchange, enabling acceptance and growth.

The need for gender sensitisation programmes and their influential role in forming and changing gender attitudes among adolescents have changed both long-term and short-term beliefs (Vyas et al., 2019). The six trainers in the study reiterated the same.

Gender sensitivity and issues of harassment stem from the environment a child was brought up in. A well-behaved child is unlikely to become a misbehaving adult. So these programmes should be done in office spaces, schools, and suburban societies. (Associate Professor, female, with 10 years of experience)

According to the aforementioned quote, upbringing determines gender sensitivity and offensive behaviour. It draws a connection between childhood and adult behaviour, calling for expanding

programmes beyond businesses to schools and suburbs. This technique establishes positive values in children at a young age, contributing to a more respectful society.

It is important to have gender sensitisation training programmes that are interactive and involve some kind of assessment, like online quizzes or polls.

So, you probably need some quizzes and videos in place, and, you know, have people talk about sharing their experience, which, again, depends on whether you have people who volunteer to do it. (Professor, psychologist, female, with 30 years of experience, and an expert in gender sensitisation)

The above quote reflects the importance of having gender sensitisation training programmes that are interactive and involve some kind of assessment, like online quizzes, cases, or polls.

Training frequency can vary depending on the situation. Initially, gender sensitisation training can be part of orientation. Later, gender sensitisation training should be need-based; whenever the manager feels the need after talking to the team, a gender sensitisation training programme can be organised or arranged with examples of what happened and how other people deal with gender-based violence or discrimination.

Though the training has been taking place in multiple organisations, and we, as a society, have come a long way from considering it taboo to slowly accepting and acknowledging the wrongs, the effectiveness of this training still needs to be improved. The trainers found numerous gaps in these sessions and many ideas about how they could be more effective. Some of the findings were making these sessions more personal instead of just based on presentations, bringing in doctors and specialists, making the talks more creative, encouraging reach-outs and one-on-one conversations, and making these sessions more frequent and meaningful.

So, we need to involve them; it should not be lecture-based. So, we present the case and then ask them to discuss and debate. In the case of a lecture, after 20 minutes, the participants stop listening. They get actively involved when there is a role play or a case. (Adjunct Professor, male, 30 years of experience, gender awareness, legal expert)

The aforementioned quote emphasises active participation over passive learning. It highlights the ineffectiveness of lecture-based methods and advocates for interactive techniques such as discussions and role plays. The expert emphasises the necessity of involving people to sustain attention, enabling more effective and interactive learning experiences by giving cases and attracting debates.

New platforms, like social media platforms and television, are used for gender training. The younger generation of girls resonates with the content as realistic, true to life, and down to earth (Cranny-Francis & Gillard, 2020).

4.5. Improving the methods and content of the gender sensitisation training programme

Experts considered the gains from the gender sensitisation training programmes to be self-perpetuating. Six trainees and three trainers suggested using interactive tools such as arts festivals, theatre festivals, and film festivals in a continuum to involve trainees and gain long-term benefits.

You can adopt many methods, such as an art festival, a theatre festival, or a film festival, that involve a lot of interaction and involvement. (Faculty, female, 25 years of experience, and an expert in gender sensitisation)

The expert recommends a variety of techniques for participation, such as art, theatre, and film festivals. She emphasises interactive and immersive experiences to engage the audience. The quote highlights the potential of creative platforms to encourage meaningful interactions and involvement by providing options other than traditional means.

An expert with experience in conducting gender sensitisation workshops observed that a simple approach, bereft of jargon, was necessary to get the message across. Echoing Ogilvie and McCormack (2020), some experts suggested adopting gender-collaborative training, which is used in sports. As part of the training, women had to be taught to set boundaries and stick to them, irrespective of the aggressor.

For training to be meaningful, all the interviewees felt organisations needed to convey that the training sessions represented safety and a safe harbour for participants. Getting them to open up, pin accountability on the oppressor, and bond with the oppressed is essential.

Four trainers and fourteen trainees felt that gender training and policy had to translate into action. If complaints were filed, they had to be investigated and action taken. It would boost trust in HR and encourage discriminated employees to come forward.

Echoing Thompson (1995), some experts pointed out that there was reluctance amongst male and female students to participate in the discussion around gender. Others talked about the greater adoption of virtual tools such as social media platforms as superior delivery mechanisms. The 19 trainees and six trainers also discussed the benefits of accessing asynchronous online videos and presentations that the trainees could review and learn from at their convenience. In line with Viswambaran and Diwakar (2020), interviewees recommended including intersectionality training in the checklist of pedagogical improvements.

The methods used in these gender sensitisation training programmes are critical.

(Professor, psychologist, female, 30 years of experience, and an expert in gender sensitisation)

The aforementioned quote emphasises the importance of the approaches used in gender sensitisation training. It means that the strategies adopted significantly impact the programme's effectiveness. It highlights the need to carefully select methods that resonate with participants, generating deeper comprehension and encouraging positive change in attitudes and behaviours.

One participant suggested that even renaming the training as a workshop and calling the trainer a facilitator could make a massive difference. The trainees would view training as an activity-based exercise where they had agency.

The gender sensitisation training programme provided participants with relevant knowledge and skills to properly understand their role and importance and that of others in their familiar environment. It further helped them contribute to total efficiency in sensitising and uplifting.

An expert with experience in conducting gender sensitisation workshops observed:

I explain the provisions of the law in simple layman's terms because this is for the general public, not lawyers or law students. (Adjunct Professor, male, 30 years of experience, gender awareness, legal expert)

The aforementioned quote emphasises the importance of customising legal explanations to a broad audience. It recognises the importance of transparent communication by reducing complex legal jargon. It acknowledges that successfully communicating legal issues to the general

public entails avoiding jargon and utilising relatable terms for increased accessibility and comprehension.

Normally, a gender sensitisation programme consists of two components: gender sensitivity and direct sexual harassment. (Female corporate professional with 11 years of experience)

The above quote divides a gender sensitisation programme into two parts. It recognises gender sensitivity and tackling direct sexual harassment as critical components. This division suggests a dual focus: raising awareness and understanding of gender-related issues while also addressing individual cases of sexual harassment to provide a comprehensive educational approach.

All the 18 female participants discussed how a woman must be extremely clear about her boundaries and how no guy, no matter who he was, whether a boss, a professor, or someone in power, may cross them without her consent. All the 19 trainees mentioned how the courses they had attended or that their organisation had planned were mechanical, with only one speaker presenting and closing the session in an hour.

All 19 trainees suggested that there needed to be a drastic improvement in the planning and presentation of these training sessions so that there was a safe and healthy environment for attendees to share and acknowledge their experiences without fear and prejudice.

For gender sensitivity training to succeed, the management must communicate that it is a safe workplace. For gender sensitisation, the talk should translate into action; implementation is crucial. The administration should continue beyond training. At the end of the day, if there is a complaint of gender-based violence, has the institute or organisation acted on it? Has it been fair? Has it taken appropriate action and penalised the person concerned? If there is credible action, employees or stakeholders would consider the organisation a safe workplace. Companies can do training for legal requirements to maintain a record, but at the end of the day, it is essential that action against the accused after a fair trial is taken.

Despite being placed in equal positions and given equal opportunities, female employees are paid less than their male counterparts. Another point during the interviews was that even though women were mainly at the receiving end of this parity, some men and non-binary individuals also fell victim to the perpetrators. Therefore, gender sensitivity training and sessions in every workplace are essential to help victims and encourage them to stand up against this form of violence.

The exploratory research reports that although this training has been made mandatory in many firms, its effectiveness still needs to be questioned. In its reachability, employees feel this training is more mechanical, which completely nullifies the goal of gender sensitivity to increase empathy towards this subject matter. The frequency of these sessions is also significantly lower, which makes it challenging to create an impact on the predators. It was also suggested that the training be done to tick things off the checklist because the top-level management lacks empathy. The training pedagogy must consider intersectionality to help participants understand the nitty-gritty, characteristics, and manifestations of gender inequality (Viswambaran & Diwakar, 2020).

Further, the findings of this study suggest that it is crucial to figure out the parts that these gender sensitisation training programmes cannot deliver efficiently. Even though these gender sensitisation training programmes are at least 2 hours long, some trainers cannot penetrate the taboo and stigma attached to gender equality and sensitisation. According to research, a short period of gender sensitisation training is ineffective because gender bias and problems are deeply embedded in the personality and often require time to change (Goel, 2017).

When asked how this problem could be dealt with, trainees suggested that the trainers needed to be less instructive and more interactive. Interactions with doctors and specialists, creating

a safe environment for employees to address their experiences without any repercussions from the organisation, and the firm itself standing against discriminatory behaviour would help decrease the gender gap.

Based on the responses, it is fair to say that gender sensitivity training is just the beginning. However, stricter norms and actions against such practices are required, and this training must be more empathetic and comfortable to achieve its intended goal. Even renaming the training as a workshop and calling the trainer a facilitator can make a massive difference as the participants start seeing it as an activity-based exercise where they have agency. Several delicate nuances need to be taken care of in the right way.

Some have suggested making training compulsory, as would be the case with India as it promulgates gender equality. Many also see promise in combining big data analytics with gender sensitisation training programmes to improve reach and impact. Perhaps, therein lies the future of practical gender sensitisation training programmes.

For workable training solutions for gender sensitisation, it is essential to offer and develop customised gender sensitisation training programmes as gender roles and sensitivity vary between companies. Organisations should ensure that their gender sensitisation training programmes address specific problems or areas, and such training programmes can target specific behaviours, interactions, or attrition issues. Hiring external, neutral, and experienced trainers specialising in gender-related cases is always advisable. Before setting training goals, these trainers should understand the workplace's training needs and cultural dynamics. The gender sensitisation training programme should address biases and prejudices at both conscious and subconscious levels. Overall, the gender sensitisation training programme should be complete from all perspectives.

The gender sensitisation training programme can be evaluated using a variety of metrics ranging from recruitment, promotion, pay gap, retention, lawsuits, leadership, culture, growth, and overall workplace perception scores.

In sum, the findings endorsed that despite heightened awareness following #MeToo and India's elaborate legal framework to protect women at work, organisations could not create sufficient confidence in female employees for them to report abuse. Hence, under-reporting was still rampant. The interviewees supported the premise that teachers and trainers in India could be the vehicles for changing the mindset, but training had to be prolonged, sustained, and started early. Also, organisations had to be enthused to participate sincerely in gender sensitisation training programmes to provide improved content, presentation, and delivery.

5. Discussion

This study highlights the multiple issues women in India confront regarding workplace bullying, gender inequity, and gender violence. According to the study's findings, women face a variety of forms of bullying, including verbal abuse, exclusion, and intimidation. Unequal income, limited employment possibilities, and biases are all manifestations of gender inequality. Gender violence, which includes harassment and assault, contributes to how vulnerable they are. As noted by Hart (2019), the research reports that under-reporting of gender-based bullying, gender discrimination, and gender-based violence at work keeps stalling efforts towards gender equality, and acceptance of gender sensitisation training has been sluggish. Nevertheless, changing laws, social, and judicial activism, and the immense value created by the female workforce for some organisations were eroding prejudices.

The Social Dominance Theory, Gender Role Socialisation Theory, and Social Identity Theory are important theoretical frameworks that may investigate the intricacies of gender-based bullying, gender inequality, and gender-based violence, aiding in understanding gender disparities and related causes.

This study, which investigates the dynamics of gender sensitisation training efforts, reveals a gap between expectations and realities. While gender sensitisation programmes try to address workplace challenges, implementation flaws frequently limit their effectiveness. Challenges such as cultural resistance, a lack of understanding, and insufficient institutional support occur during training.

A holistic strategy is needed to ensure the success of gender sensitisation training. Comprehensive curriculum development suited to local conditions and the involvement of organisational leadership can result in significant change. Addressing cultural nuances and creating a safe space for open discourse will help break down the opposition. Collaboration among government, organisations, and civil society is critical in India for promoting gender parity, eliminating workplace bullying, and combating gender violence.

Further, experts in this study suggest modifications to training modalities. If the top management buys into promoting gender equality and curbing gender-based bullying or violence, the efficacy of existing gender sensitisation training programmes will improve tremendously. To multiply the gains from training, organisations should aim to have inclusivity in all forms and departments and adopt new methods for direct and indirect sensitisation of employees throughout the year instead of making it a statutory requirement.

A behavioural change requires extensive training, but some gender sensitisation training programmes were so short, simple, and quick that they met the primary goal of compliance rather than affecting a behavioural change. The Indian laws were elaborate, but their implementation was weak.

The content and delivery of existing gender sensitisation training programmes were unimaginative and dull. For mass impact, there was a need for innovative tools, including the use of social media, films, theatre, street plays, videos, workshops, quizzes, and games. For a long-term socio-cultural change, gender sensitisation training programmes are needed to address obvious instances of gender discrimination and harassment and subtle nuances of abuse.

According to the research findings, gender sensitisation training is occasionally viewed by both trainers and students as merely a statutory requirement. The participants in the online training programmes could be more engaged, but they only show up to sign their attendance. Organisations and regulators must take the necessary actions to ensure that gender sensitisation training is viewed as a tool for social change rather than just meeting regulatory requirements. Even though some organisations have used technology and virtual opportunities to support their gender sensitisation training by offering online resources, there is still much to be done to ensure gender equality because these programmes are seen more as compliance by both the organisers and the participants.

Gender mainstreaming encourages a societal transition by questioning old values and power structures that promote violence. It raises awareness, education, and resources while bringing stakeholders together to address gender-based violence. Furthermore, gender mainstreaming fosters an inclusive environment by allowing individuals to confront preconceptions and advocate for equality. Gender mainstreaming tries to address gender inequities, which are frequently concealed. As a result, it is a tool for achieving gender equality. This comprehensive approach lays the road for a more secure and equitable future for all.

5.1. Limitations and future scope

This study is exploratory, limited to India, and based on responses from 25 respondents. The location, sample size, and approach could only limit outcomes if tested on a multi-cultural, multi-local, and large sample.

Future studies should look into measures to improve the efficacy of gender sensitisation training. Research must discover strategies to promote stakeholder buy-in to ensure gender equality and

the eradication of gender-based bullying and gender-based violence in the workplace. The benefits of virtual gender sensitisation training for trainees and organisations have been discussed in this study. Future research could delve further into the implications of remote training for widespread adoption.

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Availability of data and materials

By submitting a proper request to the data owner, it is possible to get the supporting data for this study. Due to privacy limitations, the data is not accessible to the general public.

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