

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF EMPLOYEE AWARENESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT OF THE POSH ACT ON WORKPLACE CLIMATE IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRY: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS APPROACH

Ahmed Hassan

Department of Computer Science, Cairo University Faculty of Engineering, Cairo, Egypt

Mariam Ali

Department of Information Systems, Alexandria Institute of Technology, Alexandria, Egypt

ABSTRACT

The Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act represents a critical legal and organizational framework aimed at ensuring safe, inclusive, and equitable workplace environments in India. Despite its statutory significance, the effectiveness of POSH implementation varies significantly across industries, particularly within the service sector, which is characterized by high interpersonal interaction, customer-facing roles, and diverse workforce structures. This study provides a comprehensive structural analysis of employee awareness and the organizational impact of the POSH Act on workplace climate in the service industry. Drawing upon secondary empirical studies and policy evaluations, the research synthesizes findings related to awareness levels, institutional compliance mechanisms, grievance redressal effectiveness, and behavioral outcomes within organizations.

The study identifies that while awareness of POSH has increased over the years, as noted in empirical findings (Karuna Jadhav, S. P. (2022)), substantial gaps persist in procedural understanding, reporting confidence, and committee effectiveness. Organizational impact is found to be closely linked with leadership commitment, training frequency, and cultural sensitivity. The analysis further reveals that POSH compliance often functions as a formal requirement rather than a deeply embedded organizational value system.

Using structural analysis, the study highlights systemic inconsistencies between policy design and workplace implementation. It concludes that while POSH has positively influenced workplace climate in principle, its practical effectiveness depends on organizational architecture, employee empowerment, and continuous awareness reinforcement.

KEYWORDS

POSH Act, workplace safety, employee awareness, service sector, organizational climate, sexual harassment prevention, structural analysis, grievance redressal, workplace policy, India.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Workplace safety and dignity have become central concerns in contemporary organizational governance, particularly in service-oriented industries where employee-client interaction is constant. The POSH Act (Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act) was enacted to address rising concerns regarding gender-based workplace harassment and to institutionalize preventive and corrective mechanisms. However, despite its legal robustness, implementation challenges remain widespread across organizational levels.

The service sector, encompassing hospitality, healthcare, retail, IT services, and customer support industries, presents unique challenges due to its dynamic work environments and heterogeneous workforce composition. Empirical evidence suggests that awareness levels among employees significantly influence the effectiveness of POSH implementation (Karuna Jadhav, S. P. (2022)).

Problem Statement

Although the POSH Act provides a structured legal framework, disparities exist between policy formulation and workplace execution. Many employees remain partially aware or misinformed about reporting mechanisms, leading to underreporting and ineffective grievance resolution systems. Furthermore, organizational commitment to POSH compliance often varies based on leadership priorities and institutional culture.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To evaluate employee awareness of the POSH Act in the service sector
- To analyze the organizational impact of POSH implementation on workplace climate
- To examine structural gaps in compliance and enforcement mechanisms
- To identify behavioral and institutional barriers affecting effectiveness

Scope and Significance

This study is significant for policymakers, HR professionals, and organizational leaders aiming to strengthen workplace governance systems. By analyzing structural dynamics, the research contributes to understanding how legal frameworks translate into organizational behavior and cultural transformation.

Literature Review

Existing literature presents a multidimensional understanding of the POSH Act, focusing on awareness, legal enforcement, organizational behavior, and institutional effectiveness.

Ahmad Bhat (2017) provides an analytical overview of sexual harassment in India, emphasizing structural vulnerabilities in workplaces and the necessity of legal protection mechanisms. The study highlights that despite regulatory frameworks, socio-cultural barriers often hinder effective implementation.

Chawla (2024) evaluates a decade of POSH implementation in India, revealing mixed outcomes in organizational compliance. The study suggests that while formal adoption of POSH policies has increased, substantive behavioral change remains limited in many corporate environments.

Gupta et al. (2021) critically examine whether the POSH Act provides genuine redressal or merely sustains procedural compliance. Their findings suggest that institutional mechanisms often prioritize documentation over justice delivery, thereby limiting effectiveness.

Karuna Jadhav, S. P. (2022) highlights awareness levels among women employees in industrial settings and identifies significant gaps in understanding reporting procedures and complaint mechanisms. This study is particularly relevant as it underscores the importance of awareness as a foundational determinant of POSH effectiveness.

Namrata Prakash and D. G. (2023) emphasize the role of POSH in improving workplace environments for women. Their empirical study suggests that structured implementation positively influences organizational inclusivity when supported by training and leadership commitment.

Raj (2023) focuses on POSH committees and their operational role in addressing workplace harassment. The study highlights inconsistencies in committee functionality across organizations.

Rachan Sareen and Dhingra (2024) provide a critical assessment of POSH implementation in India, identifying progress alongside persistent shortcomings such as lack of awareness, weak enforcement, and procedural delays.

Sarma (2021) explores legal protections under workplace harassment laws, emphasizing the importance of institutional accountability.

Merkin and Shah (2014) provide comparative insights into the impact of sexual harassment on job satisfaction and turnover intentions, reinforcing the organizational cost of ineffective harassment management systems.

Across these studies, a key research gap emerges: limited structural analysis of how awareness translates into organizational climate transformation, particularly in the service sector. This study addresses this gap by

integrating awareness, compliance, and workplace climate into a unified analytical framework.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative secondary research design with structural analysis as the primary interpretive approach. The methodology focuses on synthesizing existing empirical findings to understand systemic relationships between awareness, policy implementation, and workplace outcomes.

Data Sources

The research is based exclusively on peer-reviewed journals, policy analyses, and empirical studies provided in the reference list. No external datasets are introduced.

Analytical Framework

A structural analysis framework is used to examine:

- Input variables: employee awareness, training, organizational policies
- Process variables: reporting mechanisms, committee effectiveness
- Output variables: workplace climate, employee satisfaction, behavioral compliance

This framework allows identification of systemic gaps between policy intent and operational outcomes.

Analytical Procedure

The study involves thematic synthesis of literature, comparative evaluation of findings, and identification of recurring structural patterns. Special emphasis is placed on awareness-impact relationships, as supported by Karuna Jadhav, S. P. (2022), which repeatedly demonstrates that awareness is a critical determinant of POSH effectiveness.

Limitations of Methodology

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and absence of primary field validation. Additionally, variability in industry-specific implementation is not empirically tested but inferred from literature synthesis.

Results / Findings

The structural analysis of employee awareness and organizational impact of the POSH Act in the service sector reveals a complex interplay of institutional design, behavioral responsiveness, and cultural interpretation of workplace safety norms. The findings indicate that POSH implementation is not uniformly effective across organizational layers, and its outcomes are significantly mediated by awareness intensity,

managerial commitment, and the maturity of internal complaint mechanisms.

A primary finding is that employee awareness remains fragmented and unevenly distributed across service organizations. While most medium and large organizations have formally institutionalized POSH training programs, the depth of understanding among employees is often limited to procedural familiarity rather than conceptual clarity. Employees may recognize the existence of POSH policies but lack clarity regarding reporting hierarchies, confidentiality protections, and evidentiary processes. This gap leads to passive compliance rather than active utilization of grievance mechanisms. The observation strongly aligns with Karuna Jadhav, S. P. (2022), who found that awareness among women employees in industrial and service settings is often incomplete, particularly in relation to formal complaint filing systems and committee functions.

Another significant finding is the structural inconsistency in POSH committee effectiveness. Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs), which are central to the enforcement mechanism of the Act, exhibit considerable variability in their functionality. In well-established service organizations, ICCs are more proactive, conducting periodic awareness drives and maintaining procedural transparency. However, in smaller or resource-constrained service firms, ICCs often exist as nominal compliance structures with limited operational engagement. This leads to delayed grievance resolution, reduced employee trust, and underreporting of incidents. Raj (2023) supports this observation by emphasizing that the effectiveness of POSH committees is highly dependent on organizational commitment and procedural autonomy.

A third key result highlights the direct relationship between awareness levels and workplace climate quality. Organizations with structured training programs and continuous sensitization workshops report significantly improved workplace environments characterized by psychological safety, higher employee confidence, and reduced fear of retaliation. Conversely, organizations that limit POSH engagement to onboarding sessions or annual compliance training show weaker workplace climate indicators. This reinforces the argument that awareness is not a one-time intervention but a continuous organizational process. Karuna Jadhav, S. P. (2022) again reinforces this finding by demonstrating that sustained awareness initiatives significantly improve employee readiness to report misconduct.

The analysis also identifies a persistent underreporting phenomenon, which emerges as a critical structural weakness in POSH implementation. Despite legal protections, employees often hesitate to report harassment incidents due to fear of professional retaliation, reputational damage, or lack of confidence in institutional fairness. This underreporting is particularly pronounced in the service sector, where hierarchical dependency and customer-facing job insecurity are high. The study by Gupta et al. (2021) supports this

finding, noting that procedural availability does not necessarily translate into effective grievance utilization, as institutional trust remains a major barrier.

Another important finding relates to the role of organizational leadership in shaping POSH effectiveness. Leadership engagement is found to be a decisive factor influencing both awareness dissemination and policy enforcement. Organizations where senior management actively communicates zero-tolerance policies and participates in sensitization programs demonstrate stronger compliance behavior among employees. In contrast, organizations where POSH is delegated solely to HR departments show weaker cultural integration of the policy. This suggests that POSH effectiveness is not merely a legal obligation but a leadership-driven cultural transformation process.

The study further reveals that workplace culture significantly mediates the impact of POSH implementation. In organizations with inclusive and gender-sensitive cultures, POSH mechanisms function more effectively, as employees perceive reporting systems as safe and credible. However, in hierarchical and rigid organizational cultures, POSH policies tend to remain procedural formalities with limited behavioral impact. This cultural dimension explains why identical legal frameworks produce varying outcomes across organizations within the same sector.

Additionally, the findings indicate that training quality and frequency are more important than mere policy existence. One-time awareness sessions are insufficient to build long-term behavioral change. Organizations that integrate POSH training into continuous professional development frameworks demonstrate better outcomes in terms of employee confidence, awareness retention, and reporting willingness. This finding aligns with Namrata Prakash and D. G. (2023), who emphasize that structured and recurring awareness initiatives significantly enhance workplace inclusivity.

The analysis also highlights a disconnect between policy compliance and experiential safety perception. Even in organizations that formally comply with POSH requirements, employees may still perceive the workplace as unsafe due to informal workplace behaviors, subtle harassment, or lack of visible enforcement actions. This indicates that compliance does not automatically translate into perceived safety, underscoring the gap between structural compliance and lived experience.

Finally, the findings suggest that the service sector exhibits unique vulnerabilities due to its operational nature. High employee turnover, customer interaction pressures, and informal work environments contribute to increased exposure to harassment risks and reduced reporting stability. These sector-specific dynamics make POSH implementation more challenging compared to manufacturing or structured administrative environments.

Summary of Key Results

Overall, the results demonstrate that:

- Awareness is foundational but unevenly distributed
- ICC effectiveness varies widely across organizations
- Leadership commitment significantly enhances POSH outcomes
- Underreporting remains a persistent structural challenge
- Workplace culture strongly influences policy effectiveness
- Continuous training is essential for behavioral change
- Compliance does not always reflect perceived safety
- Service sector dynamics intensify implementation challenges

These findings collectively confirm that POSH effectiveness is not determined by legal existence alone but by the structural, cultural, and behavioral integration of the framework within organizational systems.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight a fundamental reality: the POSH Act, while structurally robust as a legal instrument, operates within a highly complex organizational ecosystem where awareness, culture, and power relations determine its real-world effectiveness. The service sector, characterized by high employee interaction, customer dependency, and fluid workforce structures, presents unique challenges that significantly influence how POSH mechanisms are interpreted and operationalized.

A key theoretical implication emerging from the results is that legal compliance alone is insufficient to ensure behavioral transformation. Although most organizations formally implement POSH policies, the gap between procedural compliance and experiential safety remains substantial. This aligns with the critical perspective offered by Gupta et al. (2021), who argue that many workplace harassment frameworks function more as administrative systems of documentation rather than instruments of substantive justice. In this context, POSH becomes a compliance-driven mechanism rather than a culture-shaping intervention.

The persistent gap between awareness and action indicates that employee awareness must be understood as a multidimensional construct, not merely informational exposure. Awareness includes procedural knowledge, psychological confidence, and perceived institutional trust. The findings demonstrate that even when employees are aware of POSH policies, they may still refrain from reporting due to fear of retaliation or skepticism regarding organizational neutrality. This reinforces the argument that awareness is structurally

embedded in workplace power dynamics rather than being an isolated cognitive factor.

Karuna Jadhav, S. P. (2022) plays a critical role in contextualizing this argument, as her findings consistently demonstrate that awareness levels among employees are uneven and often restricted to superficial understanding. This reinforces the idea that awareness programs in organizations frequently emphasize policy existence rather than behavioral empowerment. As a result, employees may know that POSH exists but not how effectively it protects them in practice.

Another important discussion point is the role of Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) as institutional mediators of justice. The study reveals that ICCs often function within constraints of organizational hierarchy and resource dependency. In many service organizations, ICC members are selected internally, which may inadvertently compromise perceived neutrality. This structural limitation reduces employee confidence in reporting systems, thereby contributing to underreporting. Raj (2023) similarly highlights that ICC effectiveness is heavily dependent on autonomy, training, and organizational support systems.

From a structural theory perspective, the POSH framework can be understood as a multi-layered governance system, where effectiveness depends on alignment between legal structure, organizational implementation, and cultural acceptance. The findings suggest misalignment across these layers. While the legal structure is well-defined, organizational implementation is inconsistent, and cultural acceptance is often weak in hierarchical or performance-driven environments typical of the service sector.

A significant contradiction observed in the findings is the disparity between formal compliance and perceived safety. Organizations may score high on compliance audits, conduct mandatory training sessions, and establish ICCs, yet employees may still feel unsafe or reluctant to report incidents. This paradox indicates that compliance indicators alone are insufficient to measure POSH effectiveness. Instead, experiential metrics such as trust, psychological safety, and perceived fairness must be incorporated into evaluation frameworks.

The study also highlights the importance of leadership as a cultural amplifier. Leadership behavior significantly influences whether POSH policies are internalized or merely implemented. When leaders actively engage in awareness initiatives, communicate zero-tolerance policies, and support grievance mechanisms, employees are more likely to trust the system. Conversely, passive leadership results in symbolic compliance without behavioral reinforcement. This finding aligns with organizational behavior theories that emphasize leadership as a determinant of ethical climate formation.

Another critical dimension is the role of service sector dynamics in amplifying vulnerability. The service sector is inherently characterized by customer-facing roles, emotional labor, and performance pressure, which collectively increase exposure to potential harassment situations. Additionally, high workforce mobility

reduces the stability of awareness retention and institutional memory. These conditions create structural fragility in POSH implementation, making sustained awareness and enforcement more difficult.

The findings also raise important implications regarding training design and effectiveness. Traditional POSH training modules often rely on lecture-based or compliance-oriented approaches, which are insufficient for behavioral transformation. Instead, experiential learning models, scenario-based training, and continuous reinforcement mechanisms are more effective in building awareness retention and reporting confidence. The study suggests that organizations must move beyond checkbox training toward immersive awareness systems.

From a policy perspective, the research indicates that POSH implementation requires stronger integration between legal frameworks and organizational governance structures. The current system places significant responsibility on organizations without adequately standardizing enforcement quality. This leads to uneven implementation outcomes across sectors and organizational sizes. As highlighted by Chawla (2024), even after a decade of implementation, India Inc. continues to exhibit mixed results in translating POSH policy into consistent workplace practice.

The study also identifies a critical gap in measurement systems for workplace climate improvement. Existing evaluation frameworks focus primarily on compliance indicators rather than behavioral or psychological outcomes. There is a need for more comprehensive metrics that assess employee confidence, perceived safety, and willingness to report incidents. Without such metrics, organizations may overestimate the effectiveness of their POSH implementation.

Furthermore, the research suggests that cultural transformation is the most significant yet most challenging aspect of POSH implementation. Changing organizational culture requires long-term interventions that go beyond policy enforcement. It involves reshaping attitudes toward gender sensitivity, power dynamics, and workplace ethics. This transformation cannot be achieved through regulatory pressure alone but requires continuous engagement, leadership modeling, and institutional reinforcement.

Limitations of Interpretation

While the structural analysis provides deep insights, it is limited by reliance on secondary data sources. The absence of primary empirical validation restricts the ability to quantify relationships between awareness levels and behavioral outcomes. Additionally, variations across different service sub-sectors (IT, healthcare, retail, hospitality) are not separately analyzed, which may influence generalizability.

Overall Insight

In essence, the discussion reveals that the POSH Act functions as a necessary but insufficient mechanism for workplace safety. Its effectiveness is determined not by its legal strength alone but by the depth of organizational integration, cultural acceptance, and employee empowerment systems. Without addressing these structural dimensions, POSH risks remaining a procedural framework rather than a transformative workplace governance tool.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of the POSH Act in the service sector is strongly dependent on employee awareness, organizational commitment, and structural integrity of implementation mechanisms. While legal frameworks provide a necessary foundation, their success is contingent upon continuous training, leadership engagement, and cultural integration.

The research highlights that awareness is the most critical determinant of POSH effectiveness, as consistently supported by Karuna Jadhav, S. P. (2022). Without adequate awareness, reporting systems remain underutilized and workplace climate improvements remain limited.

Future research should focus on primary data collection and quantitative modeling of awareness-impact relationships. Organizations must prioritize behavioral training and institutional trust-building to ensure meaningful implementation of POSH principles.

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