

Policy for prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace

Introduction

Sarvodaya Ashram is unequivocally committed to providing a safe, respectful, and dignified work environment for all its members. This Policy for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (the "Policy") is a cornerstone of this commitment. It has been developed in strict compliance with the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013** (the "POSH Act"), and its corresponding rules. This Policy also aligns with all other relevant laws and regulations of the Government of India concerning labor and gender equality. The objective of this Policy is to not only prohibit sexual harassment but also to create a proactive framework for its prevention and a robust, confidential, and time-bound mechanism for its redressal.

Applicability

This Policy applies to all individuals associated with Sarvodaya Ashram, whether on a permanent, temporary, or contractual basis. This includes, but is not limited to:

- All employees, regardless of gender or designation.
- Contractors, consultants, and vendors.
- Interns and volunteers.
- Visitors or any other person entering the organization's premises.

The Policy's scope extends beyond the physical premises of Sarvodaya Ashram and covers all work-related activities, including off-site meetings, official travel, events, and communication through electronic media.

Zero-Tolerance and Prohibited Behaviors

Sarvodaya Ashram maintains a **zero-tolerance** stance against all forms of sexual harassment. Any behavior, whether explicit or implicit, that constitutes sexual harassment is strictly forbidden. The following are considered to be sexual harassment:

- **Physical:** Unwelcome physical contact and advances, such as touching, patting, or blocking someone's path.
- **Verbal:** Unwelcome verbal conduct, including making sexually suggestive or explicit comments, jokes, or remarks; spreading rumors of a sexual nature; or making demands or requests for sexual favors.
- **Non-Verbal:** Unwelcome non-verbal conduct, such as leering, winking, whistling, or displaying sexually suggestive pictures, objects, cartoons, or posters.

- **Other Forms:** Any other unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment.

A single instance of a serious act of sexual harassment is sufficient to constitute a violation of this Policy. The organization will take immediate and decisive action in all such cases.

Internal Committee (IC)

In accordance with the POSH Act, an Internal Committee (IC) has been constituted to receive and inquire into all complaints of sexual harassment. The IC's composition is designed to be fair, impartial, and sensitive to the nature of these complaints. The IC shall include:

- A **Presiding Officer**, who must be a woman at a senior level in the organization.
- At least **two members from among employees**, preferably committed to the cause of women or with legal knowledge or experience in social work.
- At least **one external member** from an NGO or an association committed to the cause of women or a person familiar with issues relating to sexual harassment.

Sarvodaya Ashram will ensure that at least **half of the IC members are women**. The organization also commits to including members from different communities to ensure a diverse perspective and fair representation. All IC members will be trained to handle complaints with discretion, sensitivity, and impartiality.

Complaint and Redressal Mechanism

A clear, accessible, and time-bound complaint mechanism is fundamental to this Policy.

1. **Complaint Filing:** Any individual who believes they have been subjected to sexual harassment (the **Complainant**) can file a written complaint with any member of the IC within **three months** of the date of the incident. In exceptional circumstances, the IC may extend this period if it is satisfied that the Complainant was prevented from filing the complaint within the time frame.
2. **Inquiry Process:** Upon receipt of a complaint, the IC will initiate a confidential inquiry. The IC will provide a copy of the complaint to the person against whom the complaint has been made (the **Respondent**), who will be given an opportunity to present their side. The IC will hear both parties and all relevant witnesses. The inquiry must be completed within **90 days** from the date of the complaint.
3. **Confidentiality:** The identity of the Complainant, the Respondent, and all witnesses will be kept strictly confidential to protect the privacy of all involved

parties and to prevent any form of retaliation. Any breach of confidentiality will be considered a serious violation of this Policy.

4. **Actionable Recommendations:** Based on the inquiry findings, the IC will submit a detailed report with recommendations to the management within **10 days** of the completion of the inquiry. The recommendations may include disciplinary action against the Respondent, a formal apology, or other appropriate measures.

Disciplinary Actions and Legal Consequences

Sarvodaya Ashram will take strict disciplinary action against any employee found guilty of sexual harassment. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Formal written apology.
- Warning or reprimand.
- Transfer to another department or position.
- Withholding of promotions or increments.
- Suspension.
- **Termination of employment.**

In cases where the complainant wishes to pursue legal action, the organization will cooperate fully with the authorities and will not interfere with the process. The organization is also committed to ensuring that evidence and facts are preserved to support any legal proceedings.

Prevention and Awareness

To create a harassment-free environment, Sarvodaya Ashram is committed to proactive prevention strategies:

- **Awareness Programs:** Regular workshops, training sessions, and seminars will be conducted to educate all stakeholders on the provisions of the POSH Act, the definition of sexual harassment, and the available complaint mechanisms.
 - **Communication:** Informative posters, pamphlets, and materials will be displayed in prominent locations within the workplace. The Policy will also be made available on the organization's internal portals.
 - **Open-Door Policy:** The management encourages an open-door policy for communication and will ensure that any early signs of harassment are addressed before they escalate.
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False Complaints

While Sarvodaya Ashram is committed to protecting complainants, it also recognizes the seriousness of malicious and false complaints. Any individual found to have filed a complaint with a malicious intent will be subject to disciplinary action, as this undermines the very spirit of the Policy.

Conclusion

This Policy is a living document that will be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with any legislative changes. Sarvodaya Ashram is fully committed to maintaining a workplace that is free from sexual harassment and is dedicated to fostering a culture of mutual respect, dignity, and equality. All stakeholders are expected to adhere to this Policy and contribute to a safe and respectful work environment for all.

