

46 Nifty companies report 415 sexual harassment cases

By [Kiran Kabta Somvanshi](#), ET Bureau | 23 Sep, 2015, 11.56AM IST

MUMBAI: Two-thirds of companies on the Nifty, a 50-stock benchmark index of the NSE, reported cases of sexual harassment in the previous financial year, according to a study by the ET Intelligence Group. An examination of the annual reports of 46 Nifty companies showed a total of 415 cases, with 80% of these in information technology (IT) and banking firms.

Wipro heads the list with 100 cases, followed by ICICI Bank with 94. In the manufacturing sector, where women are less well represented, Tata Steel leads with 24 cases, followed by Cipla with 17. Among state-run companies, State Bank of India leads with 14 cases.

The disclosure is in compliance with the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, which superseded the Vishakha guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997. The financial year ended March 2015 was the first full year of reporting after the Act came into force, so a comparison with previous data isn't possible.

"With a legal remedy being provided for women, there is bound to be spike in the number of complaints initially," said Vishal Kedia, founder of Complykaro Services, a boutique advisory firm.

Both IT and banking have a higher proportion of women in the workforce than other sectors. A greater number of cases doesn't mean that the workplace in such companies is less safe — it also reflects an enabling culture that emboldens women to complain against harassment rather than stay silent and suffer because of lack of support.

"We want employees to be aware, alert and sensitive and come forward to report," said Priti Kataria, vice-president and global human resources head, GIS, Wipro. "An increasing trend of complaints shows the increasing awareness and the conviction in the organisation's process to be able to address the concerns. We have seen around 100 cases last year and this, on a base of 152,000-plus employees, is a small percentage, but each case has its own context."

Wipro staff are encouraged to enroll in the company's online training module on prevention of sexual harassment, Kataria said, adding managers are sensitised to be watchful of such behaviour and to lead by example.

"Organisations with a high number of cases probably have supportive and progressive grievance redressal forums and enhanced enforcement mechanisms, which encourage their employees to report instances of sexual harassment without fear of victimisation," said Veena Gopalakrishnan, senior member, human resources law practice, Nishith Desai Associates. ICICI Bank also follows a policy of zealous reporting on such issues.

"The sexual harassment law formalised what we have been doing at ICICI Bank since more than a decade," said TK Srirang, head of human resources at ICICI Bank. "We have chosen to report all the cases of harassment perceived by our women employees. Organisations are a reflection of the societies in which they operate. If ICICI Bank has instances of harassment reported by its employees, so would be the case with most other organisations. The number of cases is a function of what and how one reports."

NO HARASSMENT

Those Nifty companies that have reported receiving no harassment cases include Reliance Industries, [HDFC](#), Larsen & Toubro, [Lupin](#), [Bajaj Auto](#), [ACC](#), [ONGC](#) and Coal India. The data aren't available for four companies — two haven't touched on the matter and two haven't published annual reports.



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Companies need to actively encourage employees to report harassment, a workplace issue that's under-reported due to a variety of reasons, Gopalakrishnan said. "In the Indian context, there is still a lot of stigma and practical societal implications associated with being a victim of sexual harassment and this prevents women employees from approaching the internal complaints committee," she said. "In addition to victimshaming, aggrieved individuals fear being retaliated against or isolated in the organisation."

The law requires that organisations have to set up internal complaints committees to examine accusations of sexual harassment.

"There is a fear among companies that the law can be misused by women," said Kedia. But there are provisions to tackle false complaints, he said. Another expert pointed out that gender sensitivity is only paid lip service at most companies, with few of them seeking to address the issue of harassment.

"The tragedy is that unlike global companies, sexual harassment is not a board agenda in India," said Poonam Barua, founder of Forum for Women in Leadership. "There is hardly any time that Indian CEOs spend on gender issues." More needs to be done to tackle with the issue and punish wrongdoing, said human rights lawyer Vrinda Grover.

While it is encouraging that the companies are reporting the cases of sexual harassment, it is more of paper compliance unless it is also revealed what action was taken to resolve these cases and whether any workshops were held on gender equality, she said.