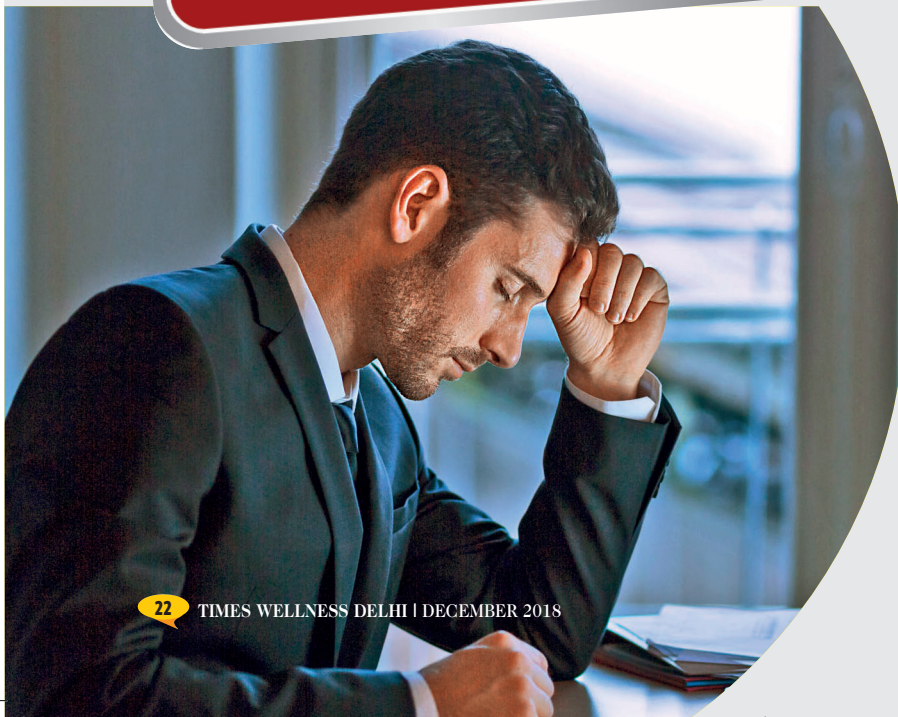


IN FOCUS

IN THE WAKE OF THE MOVEMENT SWEEPING ACROSS THE COUNTRY, THERE IS HEIGHTENED CONCERN OVER THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE HARASSMENT ON THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF VICTIMS

HEALTH in the time of

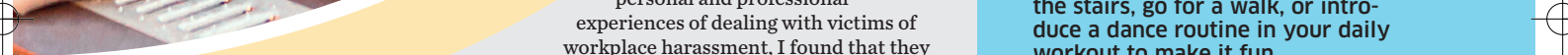
#MeToo



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Workplace harassment and predatory behaviour is a reality that seriously compromises the health and quality of life of the people who suffer as a result of it. High levels of anxiety and stress are found in women as well as men who suffer from the discriminatory work situations they are exposed to.

Survivors of workplace harassment often report psychosocial distress, sick days, and worsening health. There are symptoms of poor sleep, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other psychological problems experienced by victims who have been at the receiving end of workplace bullying and sexual harassment. And, for those who cannot



She further adds: "In my personal and professional experiences of dealing with victims of harassment, I found that they

tim strain on their relationships, especially when they're not ready to share their problem with them. Also, victims may become unmotivated or

Says bullying expert and author Dr Mildred Peyton, Washington D.C. Metro Area, "Workplace harassment is a common phrase used to define when a man or woman is being mistreated, harassed, or bullied by another employee in the workplace. But far too many times, we hear and see women, in particular, bear the brunt of this misconduct. And sadly, the #MeToo movement has shed greater light on how widespread this phenomenon is, and

#MeToo, bearing the weight

How to take care of your health if you've been a victim of workplace harassment

Switch off your phone and laptop to allow your mind to clear out the clutter without any distractions.

Focus on a strategy deal with your stress factors. Start by introspecting on the factors that make you anxious and tackle each of them separately.

Confide in a friend, member of the family, or colleague about your self-care strategy. It provides you a support group to draw on when things look difficult on the work front.

Daily workout increases the production of stress-relieving hormonal agents like serotonin. Take the stairs, go for a walk, or introduce a dance routine in your daily workout to make it fun.

Indulgent pleasurable pastimes
Set up a time to meet pals, complete your reading goals, or cook yourself a well-balanced meal.

The importance of 'mindfulness' can never be over-emphasised. Practising breathing exercises and meditating can go a long way in calming the mind.

Write a journal, blog or poetry to purge your mind of nagging thoughts. Writing down your innermost thoughts and feelings can be cathartic.

Sleeping can seem like the most challenging part of your day when you are stressed out or anxious. However, 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep is a must to keep you in optimum health.

Seek professional help
If you're feeling distressed or depressed, it might be a good idea to seek therapy for the emotional turmoil.

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IN FOCUS

EFFECTS ON WORKPLACE
HARASSMENT ON VICTIMS

STRESS ANXIETY
PANIC ATTACKS
INSOMNIA
HIGHER BLOOD
PRESSURE
ULCERS

experience loss of self-confidence or develop low self-esteem. Trying to cope with the stress and pain of being harassed at work can be overwhelming and a distraction in their lives. Those, who have experienced these types of situations, have taken actions such as filing an official complaint and it takes resilience to do that. They are choosing to overcome their trauma and become survivors."

It is seen that it is common for victims to avoid or delay disclosing their trauma for fear of ridicule, of losing their job, of being branded a troublemaker or being black-balled in their industry, besides battling concerns about physical safety of their family and their own. They typically avoid the harasser, deny or downplay the gravity of the situation, or attempt to ignore, forget, or endure the toxic behaviour.

Explains Mala Bhandari, Gender Expert at NIOS and Commonwealth of Learning, Canada, "When workplace harassment occurs, a woman can neither speak nor silently bear it. Her mind is full of contradicting thoughts - whether to speak or to tolerate! More often than not, the latter defeats the former. In the process of reaching a decision, she is mentally and emotionally exhausted, not to mention the physical implications. It may take a victim several years to flush the trauma out of her system and get back to a normal life."

While everyone agrees that sexual harassment and assault are psychologically traumatising, a new study has linked these attacks with long-term physical health consequences as well. Says Renu Sharma, a health and wellness expert, "The trauma is as much physical as it is emotional. Where emotional trauma causes depression and suicidal thinking, it can also cause hormonal imbalances and mensuration cycle disturbances which further becomes a reason for other medical complications. Regaining their health is a long and continuous process and is not possible without the support of family, friends and society. Hence, the #MeToo effort of today will build a secure future environment for the young girls of tomorrow. I am proud of those men as well who are in support of this movement."

#METOO

The recovery pattern clearly depends on safety provided, non-judgmental support available and positive coping skills, further helped by socio-legal avenues made available for expression and an atmosphere of openness.

According to Dr. Nimesh G. Desi, Director, Institute of Human Behavior and Allied Sciences (IBHAS), one of the most detrimental phenomena, not only for larger social relevance, but also for the long-term impact on individual psyche is the "cover-up" that victims are forced to be a part of, ever so often. "The immediate impact of being sexually assaulted or harassed at workplace, or indeed any non-consensual intrusion, generally leaves the woman feeling extremely vulnerable and traumatised. Additionally so, because of the social construction of responsibility and misplaced manner in which direct or indirect attribution occurs," he says.

In addition, on many occasions, these symptoms can cause a loss of motivation to perform enjoyable or self-rewarding activities, thus reducing the time dedicated to leisure and social contact. Emotional well-being may be the most significant concern for employees, yet it largely absent or ignored in typical workplace safety programmes.

Says Advocate Poonam Gaur, who has been working with victims of sexual harassment, "The survivors of workplace harassment have to undergo immense physical and mental trauma.

Photos: Gettyimages



Their personal lives are also adversely impacted and their families also have to suffer. It is not just their job at stake, but also their reputation, too."

There's no gainsaying that a work environment that condones sexual harassment and predatory behaviour adversely affects the health of victims. In addition to the social change sparked by social movements such as #MeToo, it is about time health experts started to research the psychological impact of these experiences.