



**International Journal of Multidisciplinary  
and Scientific Emerging Research (IJMSERH)**

**Volume 14, Issue 2, April-June 2026**

**Impact Factor: 9.274**



# Role of HR in Implementing the Posh Act: Challenges and Best Practices

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the role of Human Resource (HR) departments in implementing the POSH Act, 2013 in organizations in Vadodara. The study is based on primary data collected from 30 respondents using a structured questionnaire.

The findings show that most employees are aware of POSH policies and training programs. Around 76–80% respondents agreed that training programs, HR fairness, and implementation practices are effective. However, employees still hesitate to report complaints due to fear of career impact and lack of trust in the system.

The study also reveals that HR faces challenges such as pressure in sensitive cases, difficulty in maintaining neutrality, and emotional stress. The research suggests improving transparency, training, and reporting systems to strengthen implementation.

**KEYWORDS:** POSH Act, HR Role, Workplace Safety, Employee Trust, Organizational Culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, commonly known as the POSH Act, was introduced to ensure a safe, secure, and respectful working environment for employees. The Act makes it mandatory for organizations to establish proper systems such as Internal Committees (IC), awareness programs, and complaint mechanisms to prevent and address workplace harassment.

In today's professional environment, maintaining workplace dignity and equality is very important. Organizations are not only expected to follow legal requirements but also to create a culture where employees feel safe, respected, and confident. In this context, Human Resource (HR) departments play a very important role. They are responsible for organizing training sessions, handling complaints, ensuring confidentiality, and conducting fair investigations.

However, in many organizations, the implementation of the POSH Act is not fully effective in practice. While policies and procedures exist on paper, employees often hesitate to report cases of harassment. This hesitation is mainly due to fear of career impact, lack of trust in the system, and concerns about confidentiality. In some cases, employees prefer to handle issues informally rather than using official complaint mechanisms.

This situation creates a gap between **policy and actual practice**. Even though organizations follow legal requirements, the real effectiveness of POSH depends on how comfortable employees feel in using the system.

Therefore, this study focuses on understanding the actual situation within organizations. It aims to analyze the role of HR in implementing POSH policies, identify the challenges faced during implementation, and examine employee perceptions regarding reporting and workplace safety. The study also tries to highlight the gap between what is required by law and what happens in reality.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies on workplace harassment and the implementation of the POSH Act highlight several important aspects related to awareness, reporting behavior, organizational culture, and the role of HR.

Firstly, research shows that **awareness of POSH policies has increased** in recent years. Many organizations conduct training sessions, workshops, and awareness programs to educate employees about workplace harassment and their

rights. Employees are generally aware of what constitutes inappropriate behavior and the existence of complaint mechanisms. However, this awareness is often limited to basic knowledge and does not always translate into practical action.

Secondly, studies consistently indicate that **reporting of harassment cases remains low** despite increased awareness. Employees often hesitate to file formal complaints due to fear of negative consequences such as damage to their career, reputation, or workplace relationships. This shows that awareness alone is not sufficient; employees must also feel safe and supported while reporting issues.

Another important factor identified in the literature is the **role of organizational culture**. A positive and supportive workplace culture encourages employees to speak up and report misconduct. On the other hand, a rigid or hierarchical culture discourages reporting, especially when the accused person holds a higher position. Therefore, culture plays a more significant role than written policies in influencing employee behavior.

Studies also highlight that **HR professionals face multiple challenges** while implementing POSH policies. HR is expected to ensure fairness, confidentiality, and proper investigation. However, they often face pressure in sensitive cases, especially when senior employees are involved. This creates a situation of role conflict, where HR has to balance between organizational interests and ethical responsibilities.

In addition, the literature points out that **lack of trust in the system reduces the effectiveness of POSH policies**. Employees may believe that complaints will not be handled fairly or confidentially. This lack of confidence leads to underreporting and weak implementation of the law.

Overall, previous research suggests that effective implementation of the POSH Act depends not only on legal compliance but also on factors such as employee trust, organizational culture, and the capability of HR departments. Simply having policies in place is not enough; organizations must create an environment where employees feel safe, supported, and confident to use the system.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study is conducted with the purpose of understanding the practical implementation of the POSH Act within organizations and the role played by HR departments. The specific objectives of the study are explained below:

#### 1. To understand the role of HR in implementing the POSH Act

This objective focuses on analyzing the responsibilities and involvement of HR in ensuring proper implementation of POSH policies. It includes understanding how HR conducts training programs, handles complaints, ensures confidentiality, and manages investigation processes. The study also examines whether HR functions independently or faces limitations while performing these roles.

#### 2. To identify challenges faced by HR professionals

The study aims to identify the key difficulties experienced by HR while handling POSH-related matters. These challenges may include pressure from management, maintaining neutrality, handling sensitive cases, emotional stress, and dealing with complex situations involving senior employees. Understanding these challenges helps in evaluating the practical difficulties in implementation.

#### 3. To analyze employee perception and reporting behavior

This objective focuses on understanding how employees view the POSH system in their organization. It examines whether employees feel safe and confident to report harassment cases or whether they hesitate due to fear, lack of trust, or organizational factors. It also studies whether employees prefer formal reporting systems or informal solutions.

#### 4. To evaluate the effectiveness of POSH practices

The study aims to assess how effective current POSH practices are in organizations. This includes evaluating training programs, awareness levels, fairness of investigation processes, and overall implementation of policies. The objective is to understand whether these practices are creating real impact or are limited to formal compliance.

#### 5. To suggest improvements for better implementation

Based on the findings of the study, this objective focuses on providing practical suggestions to improve the effectiveness of POSH implementation. It includes recommendations related to training, reporting systems, HR support, leadership involvement, and organizational culture. These suggestions aim to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

### IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study are based on the responses collected from 30 participants across different organizations. The analysis highlights important aspects related to training, HR role, implementation effectiveness, and employee behavior.

#### 4.1 POSH Training and Awareness

The study indicates that a majority of respondents, approximately **76.7%**, agree that POSH training programs are useful and that awareness initiatives are conducted regularly within their organizations. These training sessions help employees understand workplace behavior, rights, and reporting procedures.

In addition, around **80% of respondents believe that training programs contribute to behavioral change**, rather than just increasing awareness. This suggests that organizations are making efforts to ensure that training has a practical impact.

However, despite these positive responses, there is still a need for improvement. Some employees feel that training programs should be more interactive, continuous, and practical in nature to create deeper understanding and long-term impact.

#### 4.2 HR Role and Fairness

The findings show that nearly **80% of respondents agree that HR ensures fair and unbiased inquiry processes** in POSH-related cases. This reflects a generally positive perception of HR's role in handling complaints and maintaining procedural fairness.

Most respondents also express confidence in HR's ability to manage sensitive cases effectively. However, around **20% of respondents remain neutral**, which indicates that trust in HR is not completely strong across all employees.

This suggests that while HR is performing its role effectively in many cases, there is still scope to strengthen transparency and build greater employee confidence.

#### 4.3 Effectiveness of POSH Implementation

The data reveals that approximately **76.7% of respondents believe that POSH policies are effectively implemented** in their organizations. Only a very small percentage, around **3.3%**, disagree with this statement.

This indicates that most organizations have established systems such as Internal Committees, training programs, and complaint mechanisms. However, the presence of neutral and slightly negative responses suggests that implementation is not completely consistent or fully trusted by all employees.

Therefore, while the structure of implementation exists, its effectiveness can still be improved.

#### 4.4 Learning from Past Cases

The study shows that about **76.7% of respondents agree that organizations learn from past complaints and use those experiences to prevent future issues**. This reflects a positive trend towards adopting a preventive approach rather than only reacting to complaints.

This finding indicates that organizations are trying to improve their systems over time. However, further efforts are required to ensure that such learning is applied consistently across all levels.

#### 4.5 Employee Participation in Training

The results indicate that approximately **83.3% of respondents believe that employees attend POSH training sessions seriously rather than treating them as a formality**.

This shows a high level of engagement and interest among employees in understanding workplace policies. It also suggests that organizations are able to create awareness and participation through their training initiatives.

However, participation alone does not guarantee reporting behavior, which highlights the need for further improvements in trust and confidence.

#### 4.6 Neutrality Challenges

One of the important findings of the study is that around **73.4% of respondents believe that HR faces difficulty in maintaining neutrality when both parties involved belong to the same department.**

This indicates a significant challenge in practical implementation. Maintaining objectivity becomes difficult in such situations due to internal relationships, hierarchy, and workplace dynamics.

This issue can directly affect employee trust in the system and may discourage individuals from reporting cases.

#### 4.7 Overall Observation

The overall analysis of the data suggests that organizations are making considerable efforts in implementing POSH policies. Awareness levels are high, training programs are effective, and HR departments are actively involved in the process.

However, despite these positive aspects, certain challenges still exist. Employees continue to hesitate in reporting harassment cases, mainly due to fear, lack of trust, and concerns about fairness and confidentiality.

This indicates that while formal systems are in place, the emotional and psychological confidence required to use these systems is not fully developed. Therefore, organizations need to focus not only on policy implementation but also on building trust and a supportive work environment.

### V. CHALLENGES IN POSH IMPLEMENTATION

The findings of the study highlight several important challenges that affect the effective implementation of the POSH Act in organizations. These challenges are not only related to systems and processes but also involve behavioral, cultural, and organizational factors.

#### 5.1 Fear of Reporting and Career Impact

One of the most significant challenges identified in the study is the hesitation among employees to report harassment cases. Many respondents believe that reporting such issues may negatively impact their career growth, job security, or professional relationships.

Employees often fear:

- Being judged or labeled
- Losing future opportunities
- Facing indirect retaliation

This fear creates a barrier between the availability of reporting systems and their actual use. Even when formal mechanisms exist, employees may avoid using them due to these concerns.

#### 5.2 Lack of Trust in the System

Another major challenge is the lack of complete trust in the complaint handling system. Some employees are unsure whether their complaints will be handled fairly and confidentially.

This lack of trust may arise due to:

- Past experiences
- Perception of bias
- Lack of transparency in outcomes

As a result, employees may prefer informal discussions or remain silent instead of using formal procedures.

#### 5.3 Pressure on HR in Sensitive Cases

HR professionals often face pressure while handling POSH cases, especially when the complaint involves senior employees or high-performing individuals.

This pressure may come from:

- Top management
- Organizational reputation concerns
- Internal relationships

Such situations can make it difficult for HR to act completely independently and may affect decision-making.

#### 5.4 Difficulty in Maintaining Neutrality

The study shows that maintaining neutrality is a challenge, particularly when both the complainant and the respondent belong to the same department or team.

In such cases:

- Personal relationships may influence perception

- Workplace hierarchy may create bias
- Internal conflicts may arise

This makes it difficult to ensure complete fairness and objectivity in the investigation process.

### 5.5 Emotional Stress on HR Professionals

Handling POSH cases involves dealing with sensitive and emotionally charged situations. HR professionals often experience stress due to:

- Nature of complaints
- Responsibility of fair decision-making
- Managing both parties involved

Continuous exposure to such situations can affect their mental well-being and performance.

### 5.6 Confidentiality Issues

Maintaining confidentiality is a critical requirement in POSH cases. However, the study indicates that it becomes difficult, especially when cases involve senior management or widely known individuals.

Challenges include:

- Informal discussions spreading information
- Difficulty in restricting access to case details
- Increased visibility of cases within the organization

This can reduce employee confidence in the system.

### 5.7 Resource Constraints in Smaller Organizations

In smaller organizations, proper implementation of POSH policies may be affected due to limited resources.

These limitations include:

- Lack of trained HR professionals
- Absence of structured systems
- Limited access to external experts

As a result, implementation may remain formal rather than effective.

### 5.8 Concerns Regarding Misuse of POSH Provisions

Some respondents also highlighted concerns regarding possible misuse or false complaints. While such cases may be limited, they can create hesitation in decision-making and affect the seriousness of implementation.

HR may become cautious in handling cases, which can delay processes and reduce effectiveness.

## VI. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and challenges identified in the study, several practical suggestions are proposed to improve the effectiveness of POSH implementation in organizations. These recommendations focus on strengthening systems, building employee trust, and supporting HR professionals.

### 6.1 Introduction of Anonymous Reporting Systems

Organizations should implement secure and anonymous reporting mechanisms such as digital complaint portals or helplines. These systems allow employees to report issues without revealing their identity at the initial stage.

This can:

- Reduce fear of retaliation
- Encourage more employees to come forward
- Improve early reporting of issues

Anonymous reporting can act as a first step in building trust in the system.

### 6.2 Strengthening HR Training and Skills

HR professionals should be provided with specialized training in handling POSH cases. This includes:

- Investigation techniques
- Communication and counseling skills
- Legal knowledge related to POSH
- Conflict resolution methods

Well-trained HR professionals can handle cases more effectively, maintain fairness, and build confidence among employees.

### 6.3 Increasing Leadership Involvement

Senior management and leadership should actively support POSH policies. Their behavior and attitude play a key role in shaping organizational culture.

Leadership can contribute by:

- Promoting a zero-tolerance policy
- Encouraging open communication
- Supporting fair investigations

When employees see strong support from leadership, their trust in the system increases.

### 6.4 Enhancing Transparency in Processes

Organizations should maintain transparency in handling POSH cases while ensuring confidentiality. This can be done by:

- Sharing general case outcomes (without revealing identities)
- Communicating the process clearly to employees
- Providing updates during investigations

Transparency helps in building trust and reduces doubts about fairness.

### 6.5 Conducting Regular and Practical Training Programs

Instead of one-time training sessions, organizations should conduct continuous and practical awareness programs.

These sessions should include:

- Real-life scenarios
- Case discussions
- Role plays and interactive activities

Regular training helps in reinforcing knowledge and improving behavioral understanding.

### 6.6 Strengthening the Internal Committee (IC)

The Internal Committee should be made more effective by:

- Including trained and independent members
- Ensuring gender diversity
- Providing regular training to IC members

A strong and unbiased IC improves the credibility of the system.

### 6.7 Promoting a Culture of Open Communication

Organizations should create an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their concerns. This can be achieved by:

- Encouraging feedback
- Providing safe communication channels
- Reducing hierarchy barriers

An open culture reduces fear and increases reporting behavior.

### 6.8 Conducting Regular Climate Surveys

Organizations should conduct regular employee surveys to understand:

- Employee perception
- Level of trust in the system
- Areas of improvement

These surveys help in identifying hidden issues and taking corrective actions.

### 6.9 Providing Emotional Support Systems

Since POSH cases involve sensitive issues, organizations should provide emotional support such as:

- Counseling services
- Employee assistance programs
- Support groups

This helps both employees and HR professionals in managing stress effectively.

#### 6.10 Ensuring Strict Implementation and Monitoring

Organizations should regularly review and monitor POSH policies to ensure proper implementation.

This includes:

- Periodic audits
- Performance evaluation of HR and IC
- Compliance checks

Continuous monitoring ensures that policies are not limited to documentation but are effectively practiced.

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**Impact Factor: 9.274**

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