

A brief report

Pakistan: Women health workers protest against sexual harassment

Tuesday 19 May 2009, by [KHALIQ Bushra](#) (Date first published: 19 May 2009).

Sexual harassment at work place is a most common crime committed against women in Pakistan. Social norms and patriarchic environment encourages men to commit such crimes and compels women victims to be silent and helplessly face their perpetrators. But not all women face this social oppression silently. Some decide to break the silence and bring their case to the public.

Nabeela, a woman health worker in Toba Tek Singh is one of those, who preferred to go to public breaking the widely accepted phenomenon of silence. She was sexually assaulted by her boss on 19 April 09. She resisted, talked to her colleagues and decided to protest against the criminal act of the boss.

Police though registered the case but did not arrest the culprit, which triggered women health workers protest. They have blamed that police deliberately avoiding arrest the culprit. Gradually a number of her colleagues, unions, progressive groups and women organizations and other household women are out to support her bold stance. They are demonstrating in front of health department and local press club and taking out rallies on alternative days.

Now the protest has entered into third week. More and more women health workers of whole district are joining. They are demanding immediate arrest of the culprit and vow to continue protest till the arrest of the culprit.

On Monday representatives of the Women Workers Help Line also joined the protest. Me and Azra Shad reached Toba Tek Singh to show solidarity with protesting women. A grand rally was taken out under the scorching heat. About 5000 women health workers participated. They were highly motivated and raising slogans against their bosses.

The rally marched on the main city roads. Participants were demanding physical security at work place and due punishment to the perpetrators, Women were sloganeering: stop sexual harassment", raise our salaries; the local media duly covered the protest demonstration. The rally terminated at a central point of city where rally leadership delivered speeches. In my speech I assured the protesting women that Women Workers Help Line (WWHL) would extend sort of moral and technical support to get justice.

These women workers are employed by the government at very low wages (Rs. 3000 to Rs 3800) under Extended Program of Immunization (EPI). They were also demanding immediate release of salaries. Many of them told that bosses stop their salaries and use tactics to pressurize them. These women health workers normally called as Lady Health Workers (LHWs) and Lady Health Visitors (LHVs) are not considered as permanent workers despite the fact they are working for the last 5 to 8 years.

The minimum wage in Pakistan is Rs. 6000 but these workers are getting half of this amount, which

is clear violation of labour rights. (ENDS)

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