

# LEARNING ON SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES TO PREVENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT (SH) ACROSS UNIVERSITIES

A **virtual learning workshop** was held with the objective of sharing successful strategies to prevent sexual harassment (SH) across university campuses on 13 December 2021. The workshop was jointly organized by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh and UN Women Bangladesh. UN Women has been working in partnership with UGC to support university authorities in fulfilling their accountability under the Bangladesh High Court Directive (2009) to prevent sexual harassment in tertiary level education institutions. With technical support from UN Women, UGC has developed a monitoring tool to collect periodic information from universities on their compliance with the High Court Directive. Additionally, the UGC has developed a Guidance Note for universities to adopt Whole of School (WoS) approach – an evidence based global prevention approach to prevent sexual harassment and other forms of violence against Women (VAW) in campuses.

Members of Sexual Harassment Prevention and Complaint Committees (SHPCs) from six universities joined the workshop.

## DISCUSSION

Dil Afroza Begum, Member, UGC and Convenor, Sexual Harassment Prevention and Complaint Committee drew attention to the need for universities to comply with the HCD to prevent sexual harassment and other forms of violence on campuses. Universities should have functional complaint committees to identify and address SH. This is necessary to create an environment for students, teachers and staff which is conducive to learning and teaching.

## The Workshop Highlighted

1. Findings from research on gender friendly educational institutions conducted in Comilla University (CU) and Patuakhali Science and Technology University (PSTU).
2. Tools to monitor implementation of High Court Directive (HCD) developed by the UGC with technical support from UN Women.
3. Orientation on the WoS approach to prevent SH across universities.

Shrabana Datta, Knowledge Management Analyst, UN Women Bangladesh shared findings from the research on gender friendly education institutions, conducted in Comilla University (CoU) and Patuakhali Science and Technology University (PSTU) in 2019 and 2020 within the framework of UN Women's Combatting Gender-based Violence (CGBV) project. According to the research findings for Comilla University (CoU), physical contact is experienced even by male students (64.81 %) whereas female students (57.14%) mentioned being "ragged" by senior students. Whereas, in Patuakhali Science and Technology University (PSTU) sexually coloured verbal representation was the most frequent form of sexual harassment (73.3 % females and 62.9 % males). For both universities, sensitization is required with regard to the HCD and SHPCs by disseminating relevant information and behavioural change materials. Recommendations included strengthening the functioning of SHPCs and establishing referral mechanisms.

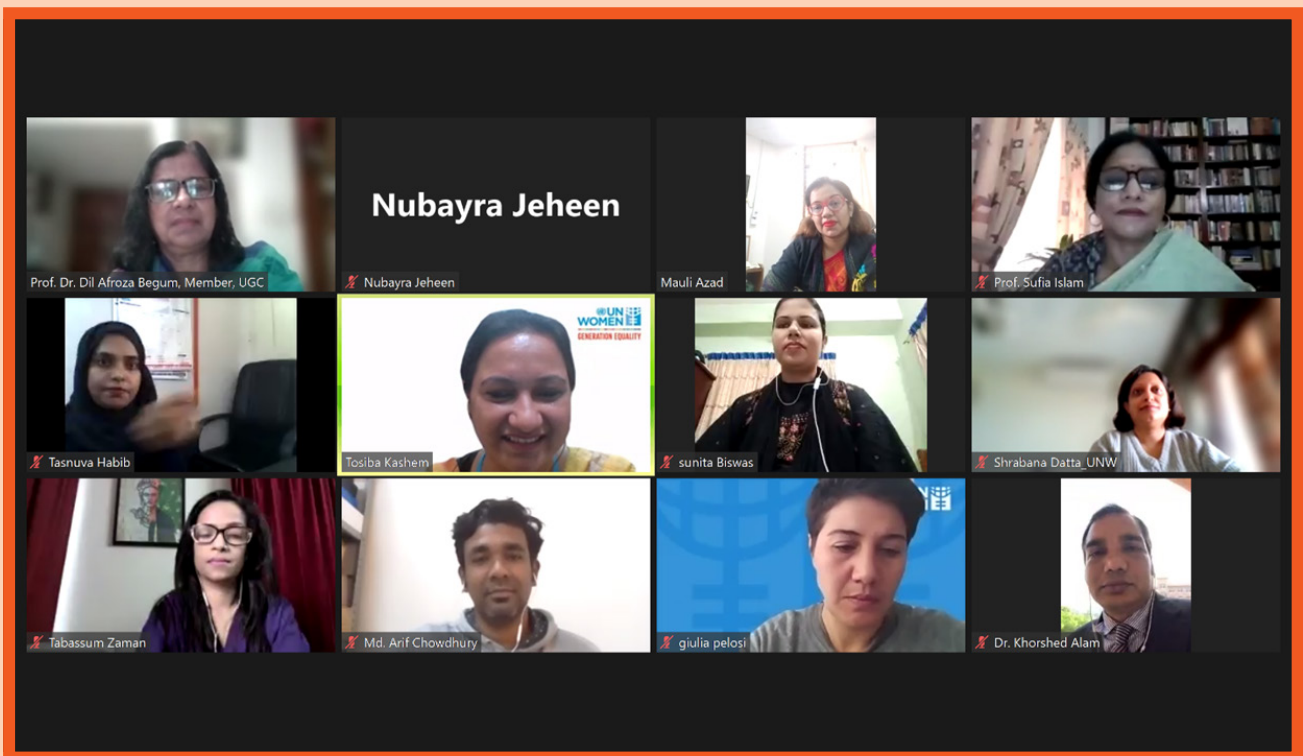
Mouli Azad, Deputy Director, University Grants Commission and member of Sexual Harassment Prevention and Complaint Committee reiterated the HCD requirement for educational institutions to have complaint committees. To obtain real time information on the performance of complaint committees, the UGC has developed a monitoring tool (form/reporting template) with UN Women's technical support. Universities provide half-yearly reports according to the reporting template. UN Women has been supporting the UGC in analysing data and information based on these reports. Ms. Azad went onto to explain the template and the manner of reporting with real time data and information. She also shared the key findings from the analysis of 2019 reports.

Giulia Pelosi, Program Specialist, UN Women Bangladesh shared that the broader purpose of working to prevent SH and gender-based violence is to bring institutional and behavioral change. The WoS approach identifies violence as a complex issue that needs a comprehensive and multi- sectoral response and tackled from the viewpoint of leadership, institutional ownership and behavioural change of university teachers, management and students, families and communities. Ms. Pelosi explained the seven components or strategies of the WoS approach and shared the progress made thus far by implementing the WoS approach at Comilla University in partnership with UN Women.

Dr. Shahidul Islam, convenor of Patuakhali Science and Technology University's Sexual Harassment Prevention and Complaint Committee reiterated the need to take forward the WoS approach. The committee supported by PSTU management, teachers and students would do their best in this regard.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- UGC will provide further clarification on the process and issues such as outside membership in complaint committees and how to manage anonymous cases and complaints against university teachers or staff by outsiders.
- UN Women will guide the private universities on research support, partnerships for implementing the WoS approach and knowledge products if requested.
- Formation of a resource pool by UGC and UN Women which can provide support in facilitating learning and sharing workshops or events on WoS.
- Further orientation and discussions on HCD guidelines and roles and functions of SHPC will be arranged for the Sexual Harassment Prevention and Complaint Committees.
- Strong coordination is required among proctorial, advisory and SH prevention and Complaint Committees to prevent SH as students prefer to lodge complaints with the university proctorial committee due to its authority to provide justice and punishment.



Attendees at the learning and sharing workshop. Photo credit: UN Women

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