

## **Complaints and Inquiries during WFH – A Discussion**

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The New normal, Work From Home (WFH), has completely changed the working style of industries, globally.

There are as many fresh challenges faced by both employees as well as employers during this new normal, and few practices had obviously disappeared. But Sexual Harassment is the only one aspect, which has remained through, even during the WFH.

For all reasons, and also legally, the Home or the place from where the employee performs duty, is a workplace. This was well defined in many Judgments by the Hon'ble courts of India.

The Mentality of Diverse work-culture, which is predominant in a workplace, which has boundaries, has absolutely disappeared during WFH norm.

An employee, who works from home, with no restriction like working in an office, feels free by himself/herself – to take the work from anywhere, anytime, however he/she wants, with no fixed decorum of an office atmosphere. After all, there is nothing which binds the employee, except to connect (a) to meet or (b) perform his/her duties.

Women employees are at the receiving end while doing their regular core @ home and simultaneously performing their duties. They face lot of challenges, if their spouse is also working from home and kids are at home. Traditionally, it is burdensome for the Indian women who has to take care of domestic work also during the official timings, being at home. These challenges gets multiplied where the in-laws are also there in the house or in case the house does not have separate enclosures to perform duties from home. And the absence of servant maids (who cannot be allowed due to lockdown reasons) and more woes to the woman employee.

Notwithstanding, there are number of complaints being received by the IC / HR on the behaviours of the male managers or co-team members. The comments passed or remarks made, not conscious of that the woman is taking the call from her house, makes her uncomfortable to perform her duties.

Many women employees felt that their Managers do not have basic courtesy of “limiting review meetings / clients calls, before 8.00/9.00 pm”, while she is at home, apart from exceptional cases.

Many complaints were received stating that the Male Managers who commented that “if woman employees cannot perform such duties, as men @home, they can resign and restrict themselves to home/kitchen.

Further remarks passed on the woman employee includes,

- Costumes / clothing during meeting
  - Remarks about the surroundings (sofa / lighting – dark or bright/ beds, etc)
  - Comments about the siblings or other persons in the house
  - About timings – “what you will be doing @ this time if you were working at office and came back to home.....”
- △ Employer’s responsibility has increased sizeably, to address these challenges through continuous awareness sessions by the Stake-holding Managers.
- △ Senior Management people should involve themselves in some discussions to oversee (incognito) the conversations.
- △ Each discussion shall be recorded and perused by Senior Management

Similarly, upon receipt of complaints, the Internal Committee prefers to commence the Inquiry from office and not through conference meetings, for many practical reasons. It is suggested that this needs to be re-looked and Inquiry shall needs to commence without any delay, as the Provisions of the Act does not allow waiver of time limit (of 90 days) for such reasons.

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