

Campuses need functional anti-harassment safeguards



THE committees instituted in schools, colleges and madrassahs to prevent sexual harassment are reported to have largely been non-functional because of the negligence of the authorities concerned, lack of coordination among agencies, under-reporting and social taboo. The High Court on May 14, 2009 directed [educational](#) institutions to institute the sexual violence prevention committees and the [education](#) ministry, accordingly, sent orders to the institutions. [Education](#) ministry officials say that about 80 per cent of the schools, colleges and madrassahs have such committees, but they fail to come up with any statistics on sexual harassment in the institutions. Yet, incidents of sexual harassment continue to be reported, with perpetrators in many cases not having been held to justice. A 2024 report of Aachol Foundation has said that 1.8 per cent of female students faced sexual harassment and 59.4 per cent of the students could not find any teacher to talk

about the problems. The Violence against Women Survey 2024, which the Bureau of Statistics published in 2025, says that 1.3 per cent of women aged above 15 years faced physical violence by male teachers and 0.8 per cent faced physical violence by female teachers.

Education

Researchers, activists and officials say that sexual harassment is mostly unreported or under-reported because of social taboo, blaming weak oversight, lack of coordination among the authorities and the absence of a law for the implementation of the High Court order as a major reason for the ineffectiveness of such committees. When the High Court first gave the order, the institutions did not implement it. The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education on December 8, 2022 sent letters to the institutions, with seven instructions, noting that about 80 per cent of the institutions since then have such committees. But the directorate is reported to be in the dark about how effective the committees have been. A set of guidelines, which the directorate has worked out, on protection from sexual harassment in all offices and government and non-government educational institutions is pending approval. Some say that the oversight should not be limited to only the education ministry; and other agencies such as the women and children affairs, the home affairs and the local government ministry should also be involved. The Wifaqul Madarasil Arabia Bangladesh, one of the six boards of qoumi madrassahs, meanwhile, says that the High Court directive is not applicable to qoumi institutions as they are not under the education ministry. Qoumi authorities

appear to be forgetting that a High Court directive applies to all educational institutions.

Educational Resources

The government should, therefore, step up efforts to make the committees functional and make the law, if required, to end sexual harassment in educational institutions. The government should also take steps to enforce the directive in qoumi institutions.