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Men seek help. Is women's panel listening?

Aditya Ghosh

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MUMBAI: Counsellors at the Maharashtra Commission for Women, setup to help women harassed by men, are having a tough time these days. Besides women, they have men queuing up with complaints against their partners, wives, girlfriends and even mothers-in-law. And of the complaints filed by women, many are turning out to be false.

"In quite a few cases, women are filing complaints which are not only motivated but quite misleading — just to harass men deliberately," said the MCW Member Secretary Sudha Bhave.

Counsellors are investigating the matter before making a judgment. "In one case, a woman complained against her husband saying that he was not keen to live with her. "After investigation we realised that the husband was unnecessarily being made a villain," a counsellor said.

In another case, a woman complained against her brother for harassment in a property dispute. "We found that the woman had never discussed the matter with her brother and did not even turn up for hearing. On the contrary the brother came on the scheduled date and we found it was a falsified complaint," said Bhave.

But what is really intriguing is the rapidly increasing male turnout. The number of cases filed by men has gone up and now comprises 5 per cent of the total complaints with the commission. "Quite a few men are coming to us seeking to redress various kinds of agonies they are facing from women, be it their wives, mothers-in-law or even bosses," said counsellor Vaishali Thakur.

In a recent case, she claimed, a lady boss harassed a man so much that he sought help from the commission which counselled both parties to sort out the crisis.

But is there a technical problem in helping the men in distress? Though set up with the aim of helping women, the commission believes it can help men as well.

"We have decided that the commission will deal with any dispute which 'involves' a woman," Bhave claimed. She added, "Our main job is to counsel both parties so that the dispute is resolved. As we were counselling men all this while, we will counsel women as well now. We call both the parties and try to understand who is troubling whom."

The cause for the shifts, of men filing complaints and women misusing the law, probably has to do with the fact that the "law favours women heavily".

"A strong law is required in most cases, but sometimes at the commission, we have seen how a woman has harassed the man by exploiting the law and issuing false statements to the police," said a counsellor.

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