

Experts laud HUL's policy to help staff facing abuse

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NEW DELHI

Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) has rolled out a policy to help employees cope with domestic abuse, underscoring how India Inc. is expanding the scope of its human resource policies to make them worker-friendly.

Employees who are subject to, or are survivors of, acts of physical or emotional abuse outside the workplace can access urgent medical care and psychological counselling for themselves and their families, besides paid leave of up to 10 days, India's largest consumer goods maker said.

"This policy seeks to protect and grant relief to employees who are survivors of abuse, or acts of physical or emotional



The policy will cover more than 20,000 employees at HUL. MINT

abuse beyond the workplace, such as in their personal (home) or other public spaces, including online," HUL said.

The policy will cover more than 20,000 employees of HUL, including white-collar and blue-collar workers. Globally, Unilever launched the

framework in October across all the markets it operates in.

The move follows reports of rising instances of domestic violence, as employees started working from home since the worldwide lockdowns imposed to combat covid-19. One in three women and one in seven men encounter abuse at some point in their lifetime, according to HUL.

"First and foremost, the workplace is evolving. Thus far, we have seen in our practice that organizations have been reluctant to address the domestic abuse issue among employees. But covid-19 and the lockdown has added a new dimension to this with people working from home. So, post-covid, we have encouraged them to re-examine their HR

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Experts endorse HUL's new HR policy

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policies to address various facets of the 'new normal'. If HUL has looked at this, it is a step in the right direction as it will certainly impact productivity in a positive manner and contribute to the welfare of all employees," said Shivakami Ravichandran, practice head, (Chennai) at Cohere Consultants, a boutique practice covering legal, compliance and gender-related aspects of workplace sexual harassment.

According to Nand Kishore, a partner at law firm DSK Legal, "From Indian companies' perspective, I have not seen this kind of a policy for domestic violence. Basically, the harassment policies that are in place, the POSH Act, are restricted to workplace harassment. Now, with the home being an extended workplace, perhaps it is a good idea to actually cover even those form of harassment."

HUL's initiative may set a precedent for India Inc. that



HUL's initiative may set a precedent for companies that have been looking to make workplaces equitable and inclusive. REUTERS

has been embracing HR policies with an aim to make workplaces equitable and inclusive.

Last year, Tata Steel introduced a policy covering partners of employees who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community to avail HR benefits permissible under the law.

Lalit Suri Hospitality group too proudly identifies as an LGBTQ-friendly workplace. The idea is to provide more

suitable opportunities to people of the community and end any form of stigma attached to them that might hinder them from getting employment.

More recently, cricketer Virat Kohli's decision to leave the ongoing India-Australia tour as his wife Anushka Sharma is expecting their first child has also highlighted more men seeking paternity leaves and stepping up partici-

pation in chores at home.

In a new policy announced in August, food ordering platform Zomato allowed all women (including transgender people) to avail up to 10 days of period leaves in a year.

"Zomato understands that men and women are born with different biological realities. It is our job to make sure that we make room for our biological needs, while not lowering the bar for the quality of our work and the impact that we create," the company said in a blog post in August. 35% of Zomato's employees are female.

Pop culture, too, has played a role in strengthening the conversation around domestic abuse. Indian films may have long portrayed the woman as the silent sufferer, but recent releases such as Taapsee Pannu's *Thappad* and Netflix original *Bulbbul* are more in sync with the evolution of the female lead as someone who can stand up for herself.

Lata Jha contributed to this story.