

# Resources and guidance for individuals

This document is primarily meant for people who work in an organisational structure. While the POSH Act refers only to women as the targets of sexual harassment, in this document we recognize that other genders can also be in this situation and that many institutions have gender-neutral POSH policies. Therefore, the general guidance given here is meant to be helpful for any victim of harassment.

## Know your rights

There are several laws that set out women's rights at the workplace. In the context of sexual harassment or abuse, the most relevant law is the *The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013*, commonly referred to as the POSH Act. The POSH Act built upon earlier guidelines and rules ([Vishaka](#), [Saksham](#) report) as well as intersecting laws (see National Commission for [Women](#)).

Under the POSH Act, sexual harassment is considered a violation of a woman's fundamental and constitutional right to equality as well as her right to life and to live with dignity. Sexual harassment is defined as *any unwelcome* sexually related behaviour, whether in person, or via messaging, digital platforms etc. Examples include "unwelcome physical contact and advances, demand or request for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, or any other unwelcome physical verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature". It also includes quid pro quo-style demands for sexual favours in return for preferential treatment, or under threat of discriminatory treatment in the workplace.

A key aspect of the definition is that harassment is *not* defined by the intention of the accused, but rather by *how it is perceived by the aggrieved person*. For example, if Person A makes a comment about Person B's body or appearance ("I was only joking/I wanted to compliment her/I was just expressing my feelings"), it counts as harassment if Person B finds it offensive. Consider another situation: if Person A tells Person B about sexually explicit content (like pornography) or shares images or screenshots, it counts as harassment if Person B finds it offensive.

The POSH Act stipulates that women have the right to safe working spaces and that employers have a dual responsibility: to *prevent* sexual harassment as well as take *remedial* measures if any instances are brought to their notice.

The Act uses an *extensive* definition of "workplace" - it is not just your ordinary location of work (e.g: your office) but includes *all* the places you visit as part of your work, including transport to and from these places. This means that the Act covers meeting places in another institution, workshops and conference venues, field stations and field sites, as well as transport to such locations that is arranged by or paid for by your employer.

**Box: What are your employer's obligations?**

Quoting from the POSH Act, your organisation is obligated to:

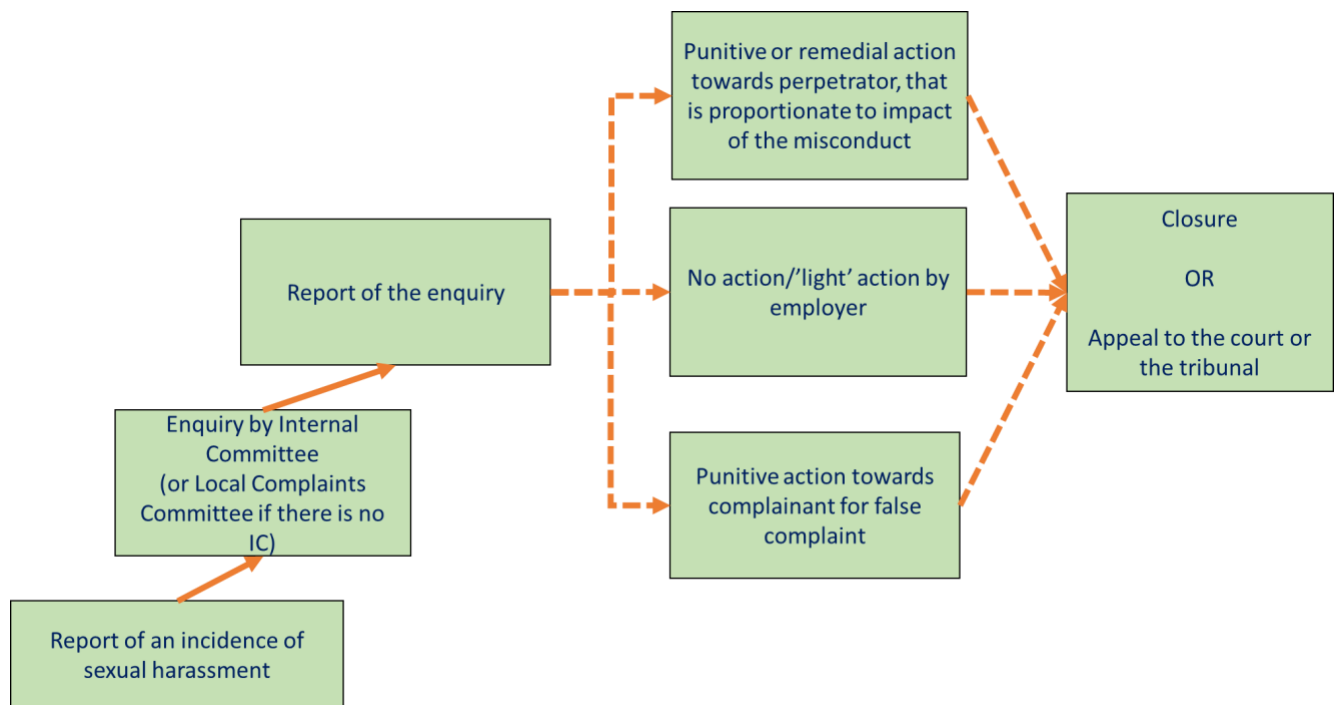
- i. Provide a safe working environment
- ii. Have a POSH policy and constitute an Internal Committee that can address complaints or incidents of sexual harassment at the workplace.
- iii. Display conspicuously at the workplace, the penal consequences of indulging in acts that may constitute sexual harassment and the composition of the Internal Committee (also called the Internal Complaints Committee)
- iv. Organise workshops and awareness programmes at regular intervals for sensitizing employees on the issues and implications of workplace sexual harassment and organizing orientation programmes for members of the Internal Complaints Committee
- v. Treat sexual harassment as a misconduct under the service rules and initiate action for misconduct.
- vi. The employer is also required to monitor the timely submission of reports by the ICC.

If an employer fails to constitute an Internal Complaints Committee or does not comply with any provisions contained therein, the Sexual Harassment Act prescribes a monetary penalty of up to INR 50,000. A repetition of the same offence could result in the punishment being doubled and / or de-recognition.”

If you have been the subject of sexual harassment at the workplace, you can complain to your organisation's Internal Committee. According to the POSH Act, all organisations with at least 10 employees *must* constitute such a committee (even if all 10 employees are male). The membership and contact details of the Internal Committee *must* be displayed prominently around the workplace.

If your organisation does not have an Internal Committee, you can complain to the District Officer, Women and Child Development/District Magistrate/District Collector. They can either demand a formal written explanation from the organisation/conduct a surprise inspection visit or summon relevant records. You can also complain to the police.

If, during the course of your work, you have been sexually harassed by an employee of another organisation, you can complain to that organisation's Internal Committee, or seek the help of your organisation's Internal Committee in filing a complaint, or complain to the police. If you make a complaint to the accused's organisation, their IC is *obliged by law* to take up your complaint.



*Flowchart: A broad outline of the procedure following a report of sexual harassment, as specified in the POSH Act*

**Box: If you are under 18 years of age**

If you are under 18 years of age, you are considered a minor by law. As a minor you may be part of an institution as a student, or as a volunteer or intern. Even if you are not part of such an organisation, you might interact with staff of an institution in the course of their education and outreach activities. If, being a minor, you are sexually harassed, this is an offence under the *Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act* ([link to Act](#)). Offences under the POCSO Act are taken very seriously; you should speak with a trusted adult who can help further.

## Other relevant laws

The Internal/Local Committee may also draw on other related laws when examining a complaint and listing the actions to be taken. For example, The Mental Healthcare Act 2017; working conditions as laid out by the relevant labour acts; The Equal Remuneration Act 1976; Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, Information Technology Act 2000 etc and relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (such as Sec 354, 354 A-D which deal with voyeurism, stalking, showing pornography etc; Sec 375, 376 A-D which deal with rape).

Section 46(4) of the Code Of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2005 - No woman can be arrested or summoned to a police station after sunset and before sunrise (i.e. 6 pm and 6 am). If at all necessary (due to exceptional circumstances), it has to be carried out by a

woman police officer after acquiring the prior permission of a first-class Judicial Magistrate within whose local jurisdiction the offence was committed or the arrest is to be made.

Section 53(2) – Whenever a woman has to be medically examined, the examination shall be made only by, or under the supervision of, a female registered medical practitioner.

## Warning signs at the workplace

### I. Interpersonal relations

Sexual harassment is often enabled by toxic workplace culture that ignores or even promotes unwelcome behaviour or gender discrimination. Below, we have taken a broad view of warning signs you can look out for. Some of these signs may directly relate to sexual harassment and some may indicate an atmosphere that enables harassment:

All organisations have hierarchies, with different individuals having differing levels of responsibilities, authority and power. However, extreme power imbalance can be a major contributor to a toxic workplace environment because it can enable an atmosphere where sexual harassment occurs, or goes unprimanded.

If a coworker puts another person, particularly a team- or institution-leader on a pedestal and admires them unconditionally, it can set up conditions that enable and perpetuate abuse. As a result of such idolizing, recipients of abuse may end up making excuses for inappropriate behaviour from such people or not have the courage to raise their voice due to the fear of repercussions. You may also observe instances where unfair treatment, offensive behaviour or sexually coloured remarks or jokes continue uncorrected.

Another warning sign is where the attitudes of some or most (or even one) colleagues are sexist and discriminatory. This may reveal itself in their behaviour and in their speech. Examples include expecting women staff to carry out tasks traditionally associated with their gender such as cooking (e.g., at field camps), cleaning, organising/anchoring social gatherings, accompanying guests out to shop, and so on. Sweeping comments about the competence and abilities of men versus women also signal problematic attitudes which could serve as breeding grounds for sexual harassment, e.g., stating that women are not equipped to carry out fieldwork.

In some institutions or teams, major decisions about work (or termination of employment) may be made in a non-transparent manner, without feedback or discussion to allow for course correction. Leaders may also display a marked unwillingness to answer questions. The roles and responsibilities of team members may be assigned without a consultation, or there may be a skew in the opportunities provided to each team member (e.g., [‘boys club’ mentality](#)). While it is true that not all decisions in an organisation are, or can be made, in consultation with all members, a systematic lack of transparency in how and why certain decisions are taken can lead to the abuse of power.

Excessive monitoring, humiliating and personal remarks instead of constructive feedback, or insensitive remarks made in the presence of other co-workers etc can also be signs of an unhealthy work environment. Criticism is part-and-parcel of mentoring but we want to emphasise that criticism needs to be given and received in a constructive manner. Further, it is not good practice for mentors or coworkers to get in touch outside of working hours (for work-related matters), or meet outside regular work-spaces (for work-related matters) without consent of all the people involved.

Manipulative or aggressive behaviours also indicate a toxic culture and may contribute to sexual harassment. Examples of these include invading someone's physical space (literally cornering them), touching them inappropriately, swearing at them, smearing the reputation of the person who reports an incident of harassment etc, threatening or asking an aggrieved person to not 'overreact' or blaming them etc.

As we can see from these examples above, we need to be attentive to how colleagues and supervisors interact because it can tell us whether that organization has a broadly healthy or unhealthy workplace culture.

## II. Institutional processes

In theory, institutional guidelines and processes should safeguard us against discrimination and harassment, but a lack of appropriate redressal mechanism for grievances may also facilitate abuse. Ideally, it should be clear how staff members can raise their concerns at various levels of escalation, from feedback to colleagues and supervisors, all the way up to making a formal complaint. The absence of such processes, that are widely known and understood by all, has the effect of disempowering individuals.

Sometimes the process may be clear on paper but may not be executed properly. For example, mutually acceptable solutions may be agreed upon but not implemented. Institutional resistance to feedback, passive-aggressive [styles of communication](#) in response to feedback, or the lack of follow-up despite stated commitment for change are also indicate the unwillingness of the organisation to work towards a safe and healthy work environment. Examples of this include if you are subject to silent treatment or a guilt trip upon providing negative feedback to a colleague or supervisor. Having guidelines, periodic discussions or training on how staff in leadership roles must receive and respond to negative feedback can go a long way in ensuring effective communication.

Ideally, institutions should ensure that their processes and culture strive to be rooted in empathy and compassion, and aspire to go beyond the letter of the relevant law or policy to address a conflict in the spirit in which they are intended. For example, your organisation's Internal Committee may not be able to take up a sexual harassment complaint about an incident older than 3 months, but it could still guide and help the complainant with other options, including making a complaint to the organisation's grievance committee or even the police. One should also be wary of instances where a number of coworkers are constantly low on morale or uninterested in completing the tasks assigned to them, or if there is a high staff turnover in an institution, or a lack of confidence in or respect for leadership and processes.

## At the workplace - what can you do?

There are two parts to this section: a) what can you do when faced with what you perceive as worrying signs or a toxic work environment and b) what can you do to foster a nourishing and positive work environment?

### I. If you are concerned about your work environment:

- a. Familiarise yourself with the POSH policy of your organisation, and be informed of its IC membership. Familiarise yourself with other grievance redressal mechanisms in your institution.
- b. If you are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable in your workspace, in particular, in your field camp, talk to your colleagues, team leader, or a senior in your organisation.
- c. If you feel like your team leader or supervisor is being unnecessarily critical of your work, talk to them; this may clear up any misunderstanding or miscommunication, and provides an opportunity to make your views clear to your supervisor. .
- d. If you still are unable to tackle the issue, consider seeing the advice of a senior person in the organisation. If colleagues also face the same issue, you could even informally approach your supervisor together, and request them to facilitate an open discussion on healthy workplace boundaries.

### II. Fostering a healthy work environment

A healthy work environment encompasses a broad range of aspects and this section outlines a few ideas for creating a supportive and safe workplace.

- a. Be cognisant of expectations with respect to your responsibilities, and make sure these are promptly fulfilled.
- b. Be aware of any code of conduct, or protocols that may exist in your workplace, or field camp and follow these.
- c. Be sensitive to your colleagues. This is particularly important when you are residing together in field camps.
- d. Take on or at least do your fair share of 'team responsibilities', e.g., keeping the office and workplace clean, ensuring equipment is in order, keeping field camps in order, cooking and cleaning in field camps etc.

## Being prepared

This section describes some ways in which you can keep yourself safe. We describe some advice for individual staff/researchers, as well as for team leaders. A separate section deals with how bystanders can help, and how to be an ally in case of an instance of witness sexual harassment.

## Individual researchers: what can you do?

### **BEFORE** (Tips to avoid a potentially sticky situation)

#### **Speak to your mentor/team leader**

What are the conditions for stay and work in the field? What is the cultural environment at the field site? Are there any risks to be aware of?

What is the reporting mechanism for inappropriate, negative or dangerous incidents?

(Ideally your team leader should organise such a session with the field team before a field trip/regularly)

**Let them know immediately** if you feel at risk, unsafe or uncomfortable, or if you are worried about your safety, in the field.

#### **Speak to fellow field team members**

Whom do team members speak to about a difficult situation? How can you support each other in the field? Are there ground rules or a code of conduct for everyone to follow?

(Here too, ideally your team leader should organise such a session with the field team before a field trip/regularly)

#### **Get the contact details of a mentor/internal committee member who can be contacted in an emergency.**

This is in addition to knowing about your organisation's formal POSH process.

#### **In the field, if required, try to work in pairs/groups.**

This helps to reduce the risk of harassment by people outside the team. Consider modifying field timings and locations if clear risks are indicated.

### **DURING** (What to do when you are **in** a sticky situation)

If you are comfortable with it and there are no huge safety risks, **call out** inappropriate behaviour ("please stop doing/saying that")

Try to **record** conversations/videos using your smartphone or preserve the messages/emails - it will serve as evidence for sexual harassment

If possible, try to **move out** of that location or **ask for help** from a fellow team member you are comfortable with (either to intervene or to help you move out)

### **AFTER** (What to do if you have experienced sexual harassment)

**Speak to a mentor** who can help with getting support, clarifying questions, guiding you on resources/redressal processes available

**Inform** a colleague whom you trust (helps if you need to file a formal complaint later)

**Note down** incidents in writing with as many details as you can remember including time and date of the incident, circumstances, conversation snippets etc. (helps tremendously in a formal complaints process)

Apart from the POSH Committee, can approach any of the following: Institutional supervisory committees; Disciplinary Committee; Institutional wellness centre; Campus counsellor; anyone who is formally your supervisor or employer.

If none of these are applicable, then the District Officer, Women and Child Development; District Magistrate; District Collector; police.

You can view online resources and helplines for sexual abuse victims [here](#) and [here](#).

Other resources:

<https://www.maggiegermano.com/blog/the-financial-impact-of-sexual-harassment-abuse/>

<https://www.collectiveactiondc.org/our-work/rethink-masculinity/>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-020-01328-5>

[https://www.ple.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/pitt\\_biological\\_sciences\\_field\\_safety\\_manual.pdf](https://www.ple.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/pitt_biological_sciences_field_safety_manual.pdf)

Team leaders: what can you do?

#### **BEFORE**

- Formulate a code of conduct for the field team and ensure that all are aware of this
- Make assessing risks at the field site a part of the preparation for field visits/fieldwork.
- Regularly conduct sessions with the field team in which the code of conduct, potential risks at the field site, support mechanisms among team members, and reporting mechanisms for negative incidents are discussed
- Communicate a zero-tolerance policy in a language that is understood by everyone i.e., in English and regional languages

#### **DURING**

If contacted by your field team member, first listen calmly

- Take any immediate action that you are able to, such as immediately advising the member on how to extricate themselves safely from the situation, talking to other team



members on site to provide assistance if required, helping with travel if the aggrieved wishes to leave immediately, removing the aggressor (if they belong to the team)

#### **AFTER**

If contacted by your field team member, first listen calmly

- Take any immediate action that you are able to, such as helping with travel if the aggrieved wishes to leave immediately, removing the aggressor (if they belong to the team)
- Help with accessing support/redressal

## Bystanders/allies

Sexual harassment does not only involve the **perpetrators and the victims**. Rather, all of us have a role and a responsibility to work towards removing, or at least reducing, such behaviour. In some cases, when we are present when an incident takes place, we can take direct steps to intervene as bystanders. But even if we are not present, we can contribute as allies in working proactively by helping our institutions to frame and apply appropriate policies and procedures; and to support **victims** in several ways after an incident has occurred.

### Bystanders: what can you do?

Bystanders are commonly understood as those who are present when an incident takes place, but who are not directly involved. The term also includes those who are not actually present, but instead witness the events leading up to an incident.

At a broad level, bystanders have an important role to play in establishing a larger culture of respect and safety in the workplace. Bystander intervention is one of the most effective evidence-based interventions to stop sexual harassment. In contrast to these positive effects, bystanders who do nothing can have two kinds of negative effects: give confidence to the **perpetrator** that their behaviour is condoned, and lessen the **victim's** confidence in being able to effectively seek help. Additionally, remember that silence does not equal consent. The recipient may be visibly uncomfortable but unable to speak up or ask for help.

In the real world, bystanders often do not intervene – why is this so? First, they may not realise that help is needed, perhaps because they do not read the aggrieved person's discomfort, they are not familiar with institutional policies or because they take a sexist culture as normal. Or they may not know how to help, despite recognising that harassment is taking place or they may assume that someone else will step in. Finally, they may worry about repercussions on themselves (particularly if they are of lower power) or on the complainant; or even on the perpetrator, were a formal complaint made – we often hear about people wanting to give perpetrators “the benefit of the doubt”.

It is sometimes difficult to gauge whether intervention is needed. However any behaviour that is clearly in violation of your institution’s code of conduct, or its POSH policy, is unacceptable. If you are not sure, ask others. In a workplace context, your institution should shield you from repercussions against yourself or the victim – if this is not clear in its policies, this is a good thing to advocate for. Worrying about the career or reputation of the alleged perpetrator is usually misguided; *your main concern should be for the (potential) victim.*

If you are witnessing, or have witnessed, a situation that warrants intervention, you could follow the 5 Ds of bystander intervention, which stand for Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Direct. You can use one or more of these depending on your assessment of how safe it is for you to intervene – you don’t want to escalate the risk of harm to yourself or the victim.

<b>BYSTANDER CHOICES</b>	
<b>LOW RISK SITUATION</b>	<b>HIGH RISK SITUATION</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>1. Direct</b></p> <p>In this type of intervention, a bystander confronts the perpetrator directly. It is best to make a short and clear statement:</p> <p>“That’s not appropriate”            “Please stop doing that”            “I am concerned about what you said/did earlier today because it wasn’t respectful”</p> <p>Your goal is to make them stop, and not get into a discussion or argument, since that is how confrontations can escalate out of control.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2. Delay</b></p> <p>You may be unable to act in the moment for a variety of reasons, including fear of your own safety, or because things happened too quickly for you to intervene.</p> <p>However, you can still make a difference afterwards (after a Delay) by being supportive:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Calmly listened to the victim</li> <li>b. Believe the victim</li> <li>c. Stay non-judgemental</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2. Distract</b></p> <p>In a high-risk situation, it is better not to try and confront the perpetrator directly and risk escalation. Rather, attempt to Distract.</p> <p>Start a conversation with the perpetrator - talk about something completely unrelated.</p> <p>For example, ask them for help or advice with something; or drop an object.</p> <p>In doing so, you could also get physically in between the perpetrator and the victim.</p> <p>Doing this distracts the attention of the perpetrator in a way that they don't know that you are intervening in the harassment.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>3. Document</b></p> <p>If someone is already helping the victim, you can help further by documenting the situation in written notes, audio, photos or video.</p> <p>This can help greatly in supporting a formal complaint, should the victim decide to make one later.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>d. Reassure the victim that it's not their fault</li> <li>e. Help them seek medical attention if needed</li> <li>f. Help them make a formal report or complaint</li> </ul>	<p>It is vital that you <u>refrain</u> from distributing or publicising any form of documentation without the victim's consent.</p> <p><b>4. Delegate</b></p> <p>Here, to delegate means to ask another person for help in intervening. This would usually be someone in close proximity. You might then work together to come up with a plan.</p> <p>Or find someone in a position of authority to diffuse the situation.</p> <p>However, do not escalate to a complaint with the institution or the police without the <u>explicit permission</u> of the victim.</p> <p><b>5. Delay</b></p> <p>You may be unable to act in the moment for a variety of reasons, including fear of your own safety, or because things happened too quickly for you to intervene.</p> <p>However, you can still make a difference afterwards (after a Delay) by being supportive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Calmly listen to the victim</li> <li>b. Believe the victim</li> <li>c. Stay non-judgemental</li> <li>d. Reassure the victim that it's not their fault</li> <li>e. Help them seek medical attention if needed</li> <li>f. Help them make a formal report or complaint</li> </ul>
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Examples:

- Three colleagues at the same level are talking over tea. One says to another “No wonder you get a lot of unwanted attention: anyone would see you as a firecracker, a real *patakha*”. The recipient of this comment looks uncomfortable. The third colleague says “that sounds sexist and disrespectful, please don't say this again.”

- In a team meeting, one person says “It is cumbersome to have women in the field team - a headache, frankly speaking.” This is a sexist remark. The team leader says “it is time you let go of such biases. Anyone making discriminatory comments against a particular gender or caste will face serious consequences in this organisation. Instead, let us have an open and respectful discussion of fieldwork challenges.”
- In an office gathering, a senior person begins to lean in very close to a junior woman, and follows her as she backs away, until she has no more space to move. Another colleague notices this, and politely interrupts, calling the woman outside to take a phone call, ostensibly from a family member or friend.
- During a team lunch, a coworker gossips about another colleague’s sexual orientation. The recipient of this information turns around and asks the coworker to refrain from such comments as they are inappropriate.

### Allies: what can you do?

In our families, institutions, and in society at large, most of us do not see ourselves as part of the problem of sexual harassment, but rather as part of the solution. Allyship can be thought of in relation to any marginalised group, based on race, ethnicity, caste, gender, and more. In our context, an ally can be thought of as someone who makes a sustained attempt at building a relationship of trust, support and accountability with women. However, for some people, allyship can be an disturbing journey, requiring reflection on their own role in supporting a patriarchal or misogynistic culture, and making the uncomfortable transition from thinking of sexual harassment and violence as a product of our collective beliefs and behaviours.

With this background, what are the various things that you can do in trying to be an ally?

- Learn [how to be an ally](#), and yes, [men can](#) be [allies too](#)
- Educate yourself about gender bias, discrimination and harassment, and start conversations with colleagues about these matters
- Advocate for women’s safety and equality in the workplace
- Lead by example; show that respect for others is important to you
- Be there for victims
  - Calmly listen to the victim
  - Believe the victim
  - Stay non-judgemental
  - Reassure the victim that it’s not their fault
  - Help them seek medical attention if needed
  - Help them make a formal report or complaint

### Examples

- A woman feels uncomfortable about sharing a room with a male colleague in the field. Noticing this, a co-worker privately brings up the matter with the supervisor, requesting them to make different arrangements.

- A supervisor requests sexual favours from a subordinate in exchange for the job, promotion, advancement, or opportunities. The subordinate confides in their coworker about this. The coworker can act as an ally by offering support and encouraging the victim to complain to the IC. Or they may offer to help escalate the complaint to the person that the supervisor reports to.
- A supervisor and a subordinate are in a consensual romantic relationship. Their relationship ended on a bad note, following which the supervisor started taking away opportunities from the subordinate and offering them to someone else in the team. Another person who notices this talks to the subordinate and, with their consent, calls out such behaviour. (Note that many organisations have an HR policy that requires staff to disclose romantic relationships with colleagues to the administration. Moreover, they usually discourage relationships between a person and their direct supervisor. In such cases, they may reassign one or the other person.)

### Other resources:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40596-019-01173-0>

[https://metoomvmt.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2.3.2\\_Moving-from-Bystander-to-Advocate\\_TOOLKIT\\_V2.pdf](https://metoomvmt.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2.3.2_Moving-from-Bystander-to-Advocate_TOOLKIT_V2.pdf)

<https://equalteach.co.uk/no-going-back-allyship-in-the-wake-of-the-harvey-weinstein-trial/>

#### **Box: Sexual harassment online**

With both our personal and professional lives increasingly being conducted through online interactions, harassment over the internet has also grown. In general, online harassment includes behaviours like offensive name-calling, purposeful embarrassment or belittling, stalking, physical threats, and sexual harassment. Although most people report being harassed over social media, harassment can also occur over work-related media like video calls. Taken together, harassment or violence against women, conducted through digital means, is sometimes also called “Technology-facilitated gender-based violence” ([UN Women FAQs](#))

An important point: a [recent judgement](#) has held that, for the purposes of the POSH Act, **online interactions are considered an extension of the physical workplace and are therefore covered under the Act**. This means that the provisions of the Act apply for any online interactions among colleagues that are work-related online, but also potentially for those that are not related to work (see judgement above). [It may also apply among people who are not employees of the same organisation, but whose primary relationship is through a cross-institutional partnership, collaboration, or other work-related matter.]

Apart from the POSH Act, several sections of the Information Technology Act 2000 ([link to Act](#)) are also relevant here. These include taking or sending photos that violate privacy (meaning an image of a ‘private area’, Sec 66E), and publishing or transmitting obscene or sexually explicit material (Sec 67, 67A, 67B).

Some broad examples of online sexual harassment include:

- Sharing real or manipulated sexualised images of female colleagues without their consent.
- Online voyeurism or stalking, sexual extortion and blackmailing, sharing images or descriptions of sexual violence.
- Unwanted requests for sexual contact or sexual images
- Any unwanted communication of an inappropriately personal nature or with sexual innuendos

In the context of video calls (whether one-on-one or in a group call), inappropriate behaviour could include displaying inappropriate backgrounds, showing offensive images, sending inappropriate or offensive comments via the chat box, demanding that video be on for calls beyond regular working hours, taking screenshots or recording without consent.

The onus is on your organisation to articulate clear rules for the online conduct of its employees; and ensure that all employees are fully aware of institutional policy. This needs to be accompanied by a grievance redressal process, including the Internal Committee (for offences under the POSH Act) and any additional mechanism to redress other complaints.

As individuals, if we are subject to online harassment, it is best practice to **document all such incidents** as thoroughly as possible, including taking and saving screenshots of images and chats; and to bring up the matter in a suitable forum as soon as possible.

As team leads, we should repeatedly remind our staff that the organisation's code of conduct and POSH policy applies equally to the online world as it does to the physical world. We can **lead by example** by being kind and respectful in our online communications with the team, and by rapidly shutting down any inappropriate interaction styles we see.

As bystanders, **we can intervene** if we see someone being bullied or harassed in, for example, a team WhatsApp group, or if we see a colleague making sexist or derogatory comments, or sending inappropriate image.