



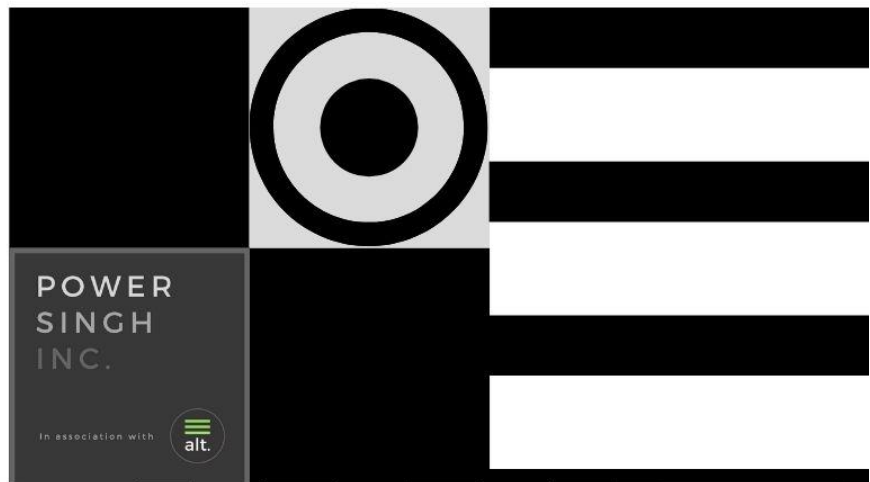
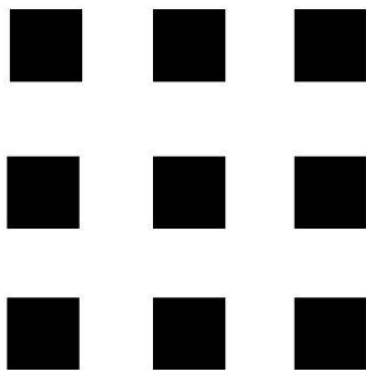
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A Power Singh Inc. Initiative

OGBV //

**ONLINE GENDER-
BASED VIOLENCE**

DECONSTRUCT //
ONLINE SEXUAL
HARRASMENT
Toolkit



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In association with alt.



DECONSTRUCT // Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV)

Online Sexual Harassment Toolkit

A Power Singh Inc. Special Project

South Africa, 2021

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UNPACKING ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is a pervasive manifestation of gender-based violence. It is unwelcomed and non-consensual sexual attention, which may manifest through direct or indirect conduct, and may be implicit or explicit, but is of a sexual nature and can have the effect of offending, intimidating or humiliating a person. At the outset, it is important to recognise that sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence, which encompasses “a spectrum of different forms of violence against women or other genders outside of the male-female binary.” Framing sexual harassment in this way is imperative. Dávila-Ruhaak explains that sexual harassment is not “merely inappropriate and uncomfortable” but is a human rights issue.

It is becoming increasingly accepted that the various forms of gender-based violence that occur offline form part of the same continuum of gender-based violence that occurs online. The Internet Government Forum (IGF) lists a number of actions that form part of online gender-based violence. The IGF explains that these acts are often an extension of existing gender-based violence such as sexual harassment. Online sexual harassment, has become a common manifestation of online gender-based violence (OGBV).

For purposes of these toolkits, and while online sexual harassment broadly falls under the umbrella term of online gender-based violence (OGBV), it has certain distinct elements and legal and technical remedies which may differ from some of the definitions and options found in the first toolkit on OGBV. In addition, the prevalence of sexual harassment online warrants particular attention.

What is online sexual harassment?

Online sexual harassment is a concept that includes a wide range of abusive behaviours and sexual misconduct which occur in the digital domain, such as on websites, messaging apps, through online work platforms, or social media. Although it often manifests as hateful speech or online threats, according to Project deSHAME, online sexual harassment can be defined as any unwanted sexual conduct on any digital platform.

It, therefore, exists in various forms and is closely related to a variety of other types of online abuse, such as cyberbullying, trolling, and cyber sexual abuse, to name a few. What differentiates online sexual harassment from other forms of online abuse is that it specifically relates to sexual misconduct on online platforms. It also disproportionately targets people who identify as women and/or LGBTQIA+. For example, the Pew Research Center found that 33% of American women under 35 had been sexually harassed online, while 11% of American men under 35 said the same. Likewise, Pollicy found that 36% of women in five cities in Sub-Saharan Africa had experienced sexual harassment online.

This is because harassment is rooted in deep-seated, structural gender inequalities. As a result, it often intersects with discrimination and hate crimes related to a person's gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, or disability.

Online sexual harassment is particularly problematic because the online sphere provides easy opportunities for anonymity, a larger audience size, faster replication and spreading of content, and a variety of media. The lack of physical interaction may also play a role in enabling behaviour that would be less likely offline. The harassment may be direct – sending inappropriate sexual content directly to a person – or indirect – sharing or posting sexual content about a person on social media or other shared spaces online. In some instances, you may know and be able to identify the person harassing you, and in other cases, you may not know the person at all or may have trouble identifying who is behind the profile that is targeting you.

In short:

- **Sexual harassment forms is a type of gender-based violence and is a human rights issue.**
- **Online sexual harassment occurs in various forms and overlaps with other online forms of abuse, but is specifically related to sexual misconduct and is often gendered.**
- **Online sexual harassment is a reflection of structural gender inequalities and beliefs and often intersects with discrimination based on a person's identity.**
- **It often relates to offline harassment in some way but is particularly problematic because of the nature of online communication.**

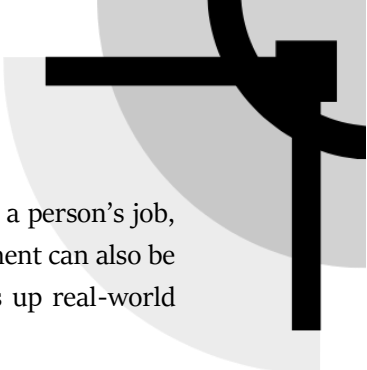
Examples of online sexual harassment

There are numerous examples of online sexual harassment. Pollicy's recent study revealed that online violence manifested as sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, offensive name-calling, and repeated contact.

- Under the banner of OGBV, the Association for Progressive Communication (APC) and the IGF have envisaged online harassment to include the following:
 - Cyberbullying and/or repeated harassment through unwanted messages, attention and/or contact;
 - Direct threats of violence, including threats of sexual and/or physical violence;
 - Abusive comments;

- Unsolicited sending and/or receiving of sexually explicit materials;
 - Incitement to physical violence'
 - Hate speech, social media posts and/or mail; often targeted at gender and/or sexuality;
 - Online content that portrays women as sexual objects;
 - Use of sexist and/or gendered comments or name-calling;
 - Use of indecent or violent images to demean women; and/or
 - Abusing and/or shaming a person for expressing views that are not normative, for disagreeing with people (often men) and also for refusing sexual advances
- PEN America's Online Harassment Field Manual outlines numerous examples of online sexual harassment, such as:
 - **Unwanted Sexualisation:** communicating with a person in a sexual manner that is unwelcome, including sexual requests, comments or other content. A similar phenomenon is that of sexualised bullying, in which gossip, rumours or lies about sexual behaviour is posted online to shame or intimidate someone.
 - **Lollipopping:** infantilising a person, usually someone who identifies as a woman, such as by calling her names or inferring she is too young or immature to understand something. The name is a reference to the common practice of doctors handing out candy to children to placate them.
 - **Deadnaming:** revealing a person's former name against their wishes to harm them, usually in reference to members of the LGBTQIA+ community who have changed their birth names for various reasons. Outing someone's gender or sexual identity online without their consent is a related concern, as is bullying related to someone's actual or perceived gender identity or sexuality.
 - **Denial of Access:** This usually entails using the "features of a technology or platform to harm the target, usually by preventing access to essential digital tools or platforms". It may include abusers coordinating to falsely report a target's account as abusive or otherwise harmful to try to get it suspended or shut down. It may also manifest in the form of "message bombing or flooding" where abusers flood individual accounts with unwanted messages meant to limit or block the target's ability to use that platform.
 - **Denial of Service:** PEN defines this as a "cyberattack that temporarily or indefinitely causes a website or network to crash or become inoperable by overwhelming a system with data. These attacks can prevent you from accessing your own devices and data, and they can compromise sensitive information stored on your devices."
 - **Doxing:** Another common form of online sexual harassment is doxing, in which a person's personal information is shared non-consensually online in an attempt to encourage sexual harassment. Cyber mob attacks are a form of harassment that involves "a large group gather[ing] online to try to collectively shame, harass, threaten, or discredit a target," and because they are often targeted at people from traditionally marginalised groups, they frequently incorporate a gendered or sexualised element.

Online sexual harassment can be deeply disturbing for its targets, making them feel threatened, scared, hurt, humiliated, discriminated against, and more. Moreover, online sexual harassment frequently spills



over into the offline world, for example when the release of certain content might affect a person's job, or when an online abuser moves their efforts to the offline world. Online sexual harassment can also be a reflection of offline abuse happening in other ways, such as when an abuser follows up real-world bullying with online attacks.

Online sexual harassment can cause significant long-term effects on a person's mental health and wellbeing. The nature of online abuse means that there is often a risk of re-victimisation when content is reshared online, and completely removing the offending content from the online world can be extremely difficult to achieve. It is important to note that online sexual harassment has an impact on bystanders or others who view it online as well as the targets of the harassment themselves.

Because it is online, the methods of sexual harassment evolve rapidly, making it challenging to build a response system, such as automated identification and removal. Online sexual harassment is also a particularly common hazard for women journalists operating online, with implications for freedom of speech, risking pushing women out of the industry. It is crucial to understand that each person will respond to and deal with online sexual harassment differently, and should be supported to cope and heal successfully in ways that work for them.

LEGAL OPTIONS

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment online, there are some legal options you may want to consider. This section unpacks relevant laws and reporting options.

As noted in the toolkit on OGBV, it is important to remember that pursuing a legal remedy is one of several options that you may want to consider. While the law is intended to protect and support you, and while the law can play an important role in preventing a person from committing further harm, our legal system is not always victim and survivor friendly. Some legal processes may take a long time, may cost money, and may not result in the outcome you want. While other legal processes may be more efficient, and affordable the process may still be overwhelming. Legal processes can also be triggering and result in further emotional and physiological trauma or harm. Pursuing a legal option is an inherently personal choice. Whether or not you choose to pursue a legal route should not have any bearing on the legitimacy of your experience.

What does the law say about sexual harassment online?

Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000

The Constitution enshrines equality under the law and freedom from discrimination based on one's gender. This right is further enhanced through supporting legislation such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (Equality Act), which explicitly outlaw's harassment and hate speech on the grounds of gender. Pollicy notes that "the provisions of the Equality Act have previously been applied to online behaviour related to other grounds of discrimination such as race and sexual orientation" so there is reason to believe it would apply to gender as well.

The Equality Act establishes the Equality Court to hear relevant matters and provides for various civil remedies, such as monetary damages, restraining orders and unconditional apologies. The Equality Court may also refer matters to other institutions for further investigation.

Promotion of Equality and the Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Amendment Bill

Recently the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development called for comments on the Promotion of Equality and the Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Amendment Bill. The proposed changes to the Equality Act include broadening the definitions of discrimination and equality. Notably, the amendments suggest an inclusion against retaliation whereby no person may retaliate or threaten

to retaliate against a person who objects to discrimination or intends to report discrimination in terms of the Act. This may be a helpful addition and provide further protections in the context of online sexual harassment.

Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011

South Africa's Protection From Harassment Act (Harassment Act) protects the rights of victims against harassment and provides for the issuing of protection orders against harassment. The Internet Service Providers' Association (ISPA) explains:

“You have the same rights online as you do offline. If someone is engaging in online conduct with the intention of causing you harm, the Protection from Harassment Act can help you.”

The Harassment Act, which explicitly includes “verbal, electronic or any other communication”, defines **sexual harassment** as:

- Unwelcome sexual attention;
- Unwelcome explicit or implicit behaviour, suggestions, messages or remarks of a sexual nature that have the effect of offending, intimidating or humiliating a person;
- An implied or expressed promise of a reward for complying with a sexually oriented request; or
- Implied or expressed threat of reprisal or actual reprisal for refusal to comply with a sexually oriented request.

Similarly to the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) discussed in the OGBV Toolkit, the Harassment Act makes provisions for the application for a protection order. A **protection order** is a court order that sets out the things that the person who is harassing you – the respondent – must stop doing. The purpose of the protection order is to stop the respondent from:

- engaging in or attempting to engage in harassment;
- getting the help of another person to engage in harassment; or
- committing any other act as specified in the protection order.

The Harassment Act provides a notable inclusion that can assist in the context of online sexual harassment. Section 4 allows for the court to order that an electronic service provider must give certain information to the court in instances where the harassment occurred through some form of electronic communication. Kathleen Rice explains:

“If you are being harassed by a person who is using electronic communications such as email, text or telephone or harmful content is being posted on a website, the court may direct the electronic communications service provider concerned to provide details of the perpetrator.”

This is referred to as a **direction** and can be used when a court is seeking further information about the person who has been harassing the complainant. Form 5 is used for these directions.

Deconstructing section 4

- A court will issue a direction to an electronic service provider (ESP) where the identity of the respondent is **unknown**.
- The direction will ask the ESP for the following information:
 - **Details** (the electronic communications identity number) about where the harassing electronic communications or electronic mail originated.
 - The name, surname, identity number and address of the **respondent** to whom the electronic communications identity number has been assigned.
 - **Date and time** on which electronic communications were received by the complainant.
 - **Duration** of communication received by the complainant.
 - Any other information that is available to an electronic communications service provider may be of assistance to the court to identify the respondent.

If you would like further details on directions see IPISA's [guidance](#) note.

The Cybercrimes Act

As noted in the OGBV Toolkit, protection orders can be granted in the context of the sharing or removal of non-consensual intimate images. Interestingly, the [Cybercrimes Act](#) provides some protection in the context of harassment as well. If a person has been convicted (found guilty) or acquitted (found not guilty) and there is evidence to suggest that the person engaged in, or attempted to engage in, harassment as contemplated in the Harassment Act, the court may issue a protection order in terms of the Harassment Act.

Domestic Violence Act and Domestic Violence Act Amendment Bill

The DVA was covered in detail in the OGBV toolkit, however, there are a few points to raise that may be of use when considering your legal options in the context of online sexual harassment.

- **First**, the DVA **defines harassment** as engaging in a pattern of conduct that includes the fear of harm to a person, including:
 - repeatedly watching, or loitering outside of or near the building or place where the complainant resides, works, carries on business, studies or happens to be;
 - repeatedly making telephone calls or inducing another person to make telephone calls to the complainant, whether or not conversation ensues;
 - repeatedly sending, delivering or causing the delivery of letters, electronic mail or other objects to the complainant'.
- **Second**, the **process** for a protection order in terms of the DVA is very **similar** to the process in terms of the Harassment Act. There are however some differences to point out. The table below highlights some key differences between the DVA and Harassment Act.

DVA	Harassment Act
<p>You are required to show a “domestic relationship”.</p> <p>The DVA presently does not define sexual harassment but does provide for harassment as noted above. The conduct must be repeated in order for it to amount to harassment.</p> <p>The DVA presently does not include the option of ordering directions to service providers.</p> <p><u>Form 2</u> in terms of Regulation 4 of the DVA must be used to make an application for a protection order.</p> <p><i>Note: Relevant <u>Forms</u> for the DVA can be accessed in our resources section or from the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development.</i></p>	<p>You do not need to prove a relationship between yourself and the person harassing you.</p> <p>You can bring an application for a protection order even if you do not know who the person is that is harassing you.</p> <p>Both harassment and sexual harassment are defined. The conduct does not need to be repeated.</p> <p>Directions can be ordered to obtain further information about the person harassing you. <u>Form 5</u> is used for directions to the electronic communications service provider.</p> <p><u>Form 2</u> in terms of Regulation 3 of the Harassment Act can be used to make an application for a protection order.</p> <p><i>Note: Relevant <u>Forms</u> for the Harassment Act can be accessed in our resources section or from the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development.</i></p>
<p>Notwithstanding these differences, both laws seek to provide protection against harmful conduct, and both caters for applications to be made for protection orders.</p> <p>Relevant Forms for the <u>DVA</u> and <u>Harassment Act</u> can be accessed from the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development or in our resources section.</p> <p>While there are some differences between the powers of the court and the orders the court can make, the process for obtaining a protection order is substantively similar in both laws. For more on the process around protection orders, see the OGBV Toolkit.</p>	

- **Third**, and interestingly, the proposed amendments to the DVA – in the Domestic Violence Amendment Bill of 2020 – envisage a far more comprehensive definition of sexual harassment, and include similar but also more substantive provisions in relation to directions to service providers. This is hopefully a recognition by South African lawmakers of the urgent need to advance protections in the context of OGBV and online sexual harassment. These toolkits – as a living document – will be updated to reflect the legal positions as they develop and change.

Alternative avenues

Reporting your experience of online sexual harassment to the [South African Human Rights Commission](#) or to the [Commission for Gender Equality](#) may be an alternative approach for you to consider. These avenues may provide you with different options, recourse and support that you may prefer over the legal options. You may also choose to report online harassment through platforms such as the [Real411](#).

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Because of the nature of work today, a large portion of workplace interaction takes place through digital channels, such as email, messaging apps or online video calls, opening the door to potential online sexual harassment.

In 2020 South Africa [published](#) a draft code of good practice on the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the workplace in South Africa in terms of the [Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998](#). The draft policy aims to protect workers by addressing issues such as sexual harassment and online bullying. The code sets out a test for sexual violence and harassment, which relies on evaluating the **subjective feelings** of the complainant against the **objective standard** of a “reasonable person/complainant” and how they would have reacted in the circumstances. The code is still in draft form. Further details and updates will be provided when necessary.

TECHNICAL OPTIONS

Blocking content

As highlighted in the OGBV Toolkit, the first and simplest step that victims or survivors of online harm can take is to block an abuser. This is often cited as the most common action taken: according to [Pew](#), 49% of people who chose to respond to an online harassment incident did so by unfriending or blocking the person. This can be effective in halting communication or abuse immediately and prevents the offender from continuing the harassment through the same platform.

However, users should be aware of various other responses by a person who has been blocked, such as continued communication or harassment on other online platforms or even shifting it offline into the real world. An alternative to blocking is merely ignoring an abuser online, which [Pew](#) cites as the single most common response, representing 61% of people who experienced online harassment. However, in instances of severe harassment, especially of a sexualised nature, this can be difficult to do, especially if it enables continuing harm to a person.

For guidance on the blocking processes of different social media platforms visit PEN America's [Manual on Blocking, Muting, and Restricting](#).


Removing and moderating content

Another common response by victims or survivors is to remove the offending content from their own accounts and any other spaces over which they have control to do so. Although this may not completely remove the content from other online spaces, it can help **create a safe** space for the person and can be the first step to other complementary responses. The removal or moderation of content can be done by social media or other online platforms. See the OGB Toolkit for notes on community standards and takedown notices.

Removing and moderating content is a common approach, which has varying degrees of efficacy. In the case of [child sexual abuse material](#), content moderation and takedown process are likely to be swift and effective given the more blatantly illegal and stringently policed nature of the offence. Whereas online sexual harassment often falls in a **grey zone**, as highlighted below.

The complexities of content moderation

For starters, community standards can vary significantly between different platforms, along with the strictness with which they are enforced, which creates varying levels of safety in these environments, especially for women and LGBTQI+ persons. The [EDRi network](#) has raised concerns that:



“Powerful platforms’ practices result in many LGBTQ+ accounts, posts and themed ads being taken down on, while homophobic, transphobic and sexist content often remains untouched. In practice, these double standards for reporting and banning contents mean that when queer and transgender people use typical slurs to reclaim and take pride from them, social media reviewers often disregard the intent and block them; whereas attackers use identical offensive terms without fearing the same punishment. More, the process being automated just worsens the injustice as algorithms are incapable of making the difference between the two cases. This leaves the LGBTQ+ community disenfranchised without reasonable explanations and possibilities to appeal the decisions.”

Context and language have also been raised as common concerns when it comes to content moderation. The Global Alliance on Media and Gender explain:

“Misogyny may be universal, but it assumes a million different mutations based on the unique, contextual intersections of patriarchy with other social markers such as caste, class, race, and sexual orientation.”

While content moderation can be a useful tool for removing harmful content, the complexities and complications of this process should not be discounted.

Countering community standards with activism

In light of generic responses to reports of online harassment, and a decrease in content moderation capacity as a result of COVID-19, Morgan Barbour American model, circus artist, movement director, and writer, launched a new Instagram account called @CumminityStandards. Her stream was filled with abusive messages superimposed over photos of her. She explained that the account “was born in a moment of frustration and feeling of helplessness, a bid to make people laugh and to vent and to regain control of the narrative all at once.” The response was swift; women writing to share their own experiences and commiserate; men writing to apologise ‘on behalf of all men’, and some taking on empty reminders that not all men are trash.

Barbour’s activism – a powerful sign of resilience – is a creative response that highlights the limitations of content moderation, and the pervasiveness of online harms.

Reporting to intermediaries

Reporting practices differ by social media platform, and differ based on the type of content being reported, while there is some overlap with the OGBV Toolkit, the tables below break down the reporting procedures for differing forms of online sexual harassment for each of the most commonly used social media platforms in South Africa.

WHATSAPP

What is not allowed?

- “Submitting content (in the status, profile photos or messages) that's illegal, obscene, defamatory, threatening, intimidating, **harassing**, hateful, racially, or ethnically offensive, or instigates or encourages conduct that would be illegal, or otherwise inappropriate”.
- For more, see the “Acceptable Use of Our Services” section of the Terms of Service [here](#).

How to report it?

- On Android: go to WhatsApp > tap More Options > Settings > Help > Contact us.
- On iPhone: go to WhatsApp > Settings > Help > Contact Us.
- You can also report a contact or a group from their profile information:
 - Open the chat.
 - Tap on the contact or group name to open their profile information.
 - Scroll to the bottom and tap Report contact or Report group.

How will they respond?

- Because WhatsApp is an encrypted service, they do not have the ability to see the content of messages unless you have shared a screenshot of a conversation with them when reporting. It is therefore important to provide as much information as possible – to your level of comfort – when reporting to WhatsApp.
- It is also important to be aware that after you have reported contact or a group, WhatsApp receives the most recent messages sent to you by a reported user or group, as well as information on your recent interactions with the reported user.
- WhatsApp may ban users without notification, but reporting does not guarantee that a user will be banned. It is therefore important that in addition to reporting, a user takes their own precautions such as changing privacy settings or blocking a user, where necessary.

FACEBOOK

What is not allowed?

- Facebook distinguishes between private and public individuals; for the latter, the content will be removed “that's meant to **degrade or shame**, including, for example, claims about someone’s sexual activity.”

How to report it?

- There are various ways to report content on Facebook. You can report a profile, a post, a message, a page, a group, a comment, an event or an advert, all of which have their own reporting process which can be seen [here](#).

How will they respond?

- Depending on the type of content and the type of complaint, Facebook will respond differently. In most cases, a number of prompts will be provided to guide you through the

type of complaint you seek to make. In some cases, this might also be followed by an opportunity to submit a report.

- Facebook will usually – though not always – alert you to the outcome of content you have reported, or at least thank you for reporting.

INSTAGRAM

What is not allowed?

- Instagram’s [Community Guidelines](#) state “We remove content that contains credible threats or hate speech, content that targets private individuals to degrade or shame them, personal information meant to **blackmail or harass** someone, and **repeated unwanted messages**,” and “it’s never OK to encourage violence or attack anyone based on their race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, disabilities, or diseases.”

How to report it?

- Users of Instagram may report a post, a profile or a comment on the platform if it potentially contains harassing material, usually by clicking the three-button icon at the top of the post or profile.
- To report a comment, one should click on the comments icon, swipe left over the comment (iPhone) or tap the comment (Android) and tap the exclamation mark icon.

How will they respond?

- After filing a report, Instagram will notify you through the Support Requests function (Profile > Menu > Settings > Help > Support Requests) on its status, and which will let you know, after it’s been reviewed, whether it violated the Community Guidelines.
- Usually, when content has been determined not to go against the Community Guidelines and has been left up, Instagram will provide you with another opportunity to request a review. If you disagree with the decision again, you may – only in some circumstances – be able to appeal to the Facebook [Oversight Board](#), although the Board only selects a small number of appeals to review.
- If your content has been removed and you believe it was done erroneously, Instagram may also provide an opportunity to request a review, but not in all circumstances.

TWITTER

What is not allowed?

- The [Twitter Rules](#) provide arguably some of the strongest protections against abuse of all social media companies, stating, for example, that “You may not engage in the **targeted harassment** of someone, or incite other people

How to report it?

- Anyone may file a report from a tweet, profile or direct message (including group messages), usually through the three-button icon at the top of the content.

<p>to do so. This includes wishing or hoping that someone experiences physical harm.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Twitter also does not allow “hateful conduct,” defined as “[promoting] violence against, threaten, or harass other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Multiple tweets can also be provided in a report, to help Twitter get all the relevant context necessary to understand whether the content is abusive. ○ A user may request a review of the content of which they are the target or a bystander.
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<p>How will they respond?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ After reporting, Twitter will provide updated emails and notifications on your case when Twitter takes action, although you may opt-out of receiving these. They may also request additional information from you. ○ After submitting a report, Twitter will provide additional recommendations for actions you can take to improve your Twitter experience. ○ Twitter evaluates the context of the content to determine the relevant consequences and penalties, including the severity of the violation and the person’s prior record of rule violations. Consequences may include removing the content, requesting someone to remove the content, making them serve a period of time in “read-only” mode, or – after repeated violations or if an account is engaging primarily in abusive behaviour – permanent suspension of the account. Twitter provides a range of other enforcement options. 	
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TIKTOK	
<p>What is not allowed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ TikTok’s Community Guidelines prohibit “hateful behaviour” which includes attacks on the basis of protected attributes such as gender or sexual orientation. ○ They will remove “all expressions of abuse, including threats or degrading statements intended to mock, humiliate, embarrass, intimidate, or hurt an individual.” ○ TikTok also does not allow content that “encourages coordinated harassment” or that “sexually harasses others, regardless of user's intent.” ○ Likewise, threats of doxing or blackmail are not permitted, nor is “sexually exploitative content” or impersonation, misinformation or intellectual property violations. 	<p>How to report it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ TikTok enables the user to report a live video, a live comment, a regular video or comment, a direct message, a user, a sound, a hashtag, or another issue. ○ Usually, this is done by tapping “share,” long-pressing the piece of content, or clicking the three-button icon.

How will they respond?

- TikTok will notify users of their decisions on reported content and users will be provided with the opportunity to appeal.
- Accounts and/or devices that involved in severe or repeated violations may be suspended or banned. TikTok states that they “consider the information available on other platforms and offline in these decisions.”



PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

Pre-emptive steps

Unfortunately, being online as a woman or LGBTQI+ person today comes with a likelihood of experiencing online sexual harassment. It can be useful to take some pre-emptive steps to protect oneself and mitigate this risk. However, it should be firmly stated that experiencing online sexual harassment is never, in any way, caused by the behaviour of the target of the abuse, and is never justified.

- Understand what online sexual harassment is, so that if it occurs you are able to identify it and take appropriate steps to respond.
- Take steps to protect your account and general digital security, such as by regularly reviewing your privacy settings.
- You may want to consider turning off notifications at night, or other times when you may be less prepared or willing to deal with online abuse.

Immediate steps after experiencing online sexual harassment

Below are some suggestions that you may want to consider, these, as with the legal and technical responses, are options that are available to you. That does not mean that you have to take these steps, or that these steps are right for you. As always, do what is best for you, and to the extent that you feel comfortable reach out to someone you trust for support.

- Stop looking at the content if it is negatively affecting you, and if need be, consider logging off and staying offline until you are better prepared to handle it.
- Consider blocking the user, or reporting them or the content to the platform. You may also want to change your notifications settings to limit the messages and notifications you see.
- Seek out someone who will be empathetic and supportive, whether a friend, family member or colleague. If the harassment is experienced in the context of your job, consider reporting it to your manager or employer, so that they can take steps to protect and support you.
- Conversely, do not feel the need to share information with others if you do not feel comfortable doing so, or if it may exacerbate the situation in any way. However, it is recommended to confide in someone you trust so that the full burden of the experience is not solely on you.

- Conventional wisdom recommends not responding to abusers or harassers, as it may further encourage or enrage them. However, this has been questioned as limiting women's freedom of speech and playing into the problematic trend of blaming victims.
- Document the content by taking screenshots or downloading it. Even if you do not intend to report the incident immediately, you may change your mind in the future and will need evidence to do so.
- Consider reporting the incident to the police or pursuing the alternative legal strategies detailed above.

Taking care of yourself

Dealing with sexual harassment can be a difficult, potentially traumatic experience. Firstly, and most importantly, it is crucial to understand that sexual harassment is never the fault of the victim or survivor, and is never justified, encouraged or 'asked for.'

If you have experienced online sexual harassment, your priority should be your own health and wellbeing first and foremost. Take whatever steps are necessary to take care of yourself, such as seeking out a friend or therapist to speak to, taking time off work, or other methods of self-care such as taking a walk or journaling. For more, see the Heart Mob resources on self-care for people experiencing harassment.

It is important not to isolate oneself in such a scenario, but rather to seek out appropriate social support. However, because there is still so much stigma around sexual harassment in general, and because victim-shaming remains prevalent, victims of online sexual harassment may find it difficult to reach out to friends and family for support. Nevertheless, this can be an important tool for dealing with the traumatic effects of online sexual harassment. Friends or family may be able to help you report online sexual harassment, to get the content removed, you may wish to warn others who might be at risk, or you may simply need the emotional support of those closest to you to get through a challenging time.

An added challenge with online sexual harassment, in contrast to the offline version, is that friends and family who are not active online or are unfamiliar with particular apps or platforms may struggle to understand what a person has gone through and the extensive repercussions on other aspects of their life.

The PEN America Online Harassment Field Manual provides some guidance for victims seeking to speak with friends and family about an incident of online sexual harassment, which includes:

- Identify your goal in order to clearly understand what you want to achieve with it and what you want to convey.
- Assess your audience's tech fluency and start with the basics, in order to establish a foundation for them to understand what has happened to you.
- Have language and documentation prepared, while this may be difficult and require you to revisit your traumatic experience, it may make it easier to speak to someone about it.

Finding safe spaces and spaces of support both on and offline

Although social media and the online world can be a scary and dangerous place, especially for women and LGBTQI+ individuals who are frequently the target of sexualised and gendered abuse, they can also provide positive opportunities for finding like-minded communities, advocating for positive change, and expressing solidarity across geographical borders and other real-world limitations.

If you are looking for such opportunities, try reaching out to someone you trust or admire on social media to ask if they know of groups or resources you can be a part of. For example, perhaps there is an outspoken political leader, journalist or activist who has spoken about an experience similar to what you have had online who can recommend a group or other connections to you.

You may also try searching relevant hashtags that could provide insight into wider movements against online sexual harassment, such as #MeToo or #AmINext.

Here are some accounts you may consider following if you're interested in getting more involved in online activism on related issues:

- @FeministingWhileAfrican on Twitter
- @TakeBackTheTech on Twitter
- @GenderITorg on Twitter
- @GirlsAgainstOppression on Instagram

Always remember:

- **It is not your fault**
- **It is your choice how you respond**
- **You are not alone**



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