

Academics lobby for protection from online sex harassment

PETALING JAYA: Sexual harassment, unfortunately, remains a persistent problem.

This is why academics like Prof Dr Rozanah Ab Rahman, who is a law professor at Universiti Putra Malaysia's school of business and economics, believes the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act should cover digital harassment, including cyberstalking, revenge pornography and other forms of online sexual misconduct.

"There remain key areas for refinement to enhance its effectiveness," she said.

"Even though the Act has provided an essential legal foundation, its effectiveness is contingent on robust enforcement, employer accountability, and stronger support structures for victims.

"Future amendments should prioritise expanding legal protections, streamlining enforcement mechanisms, and embedding the principles of fairness and accessibility within workplace policies.

"Only through such measures can we ensure a safer and more equitable work environment for all," she said when contacted.

Prof Rozanah suggested that the Act be integrated with the Penal Code, thus allowing a streamlined process for severe cases to be escalated to impose criminal liability where warranted.

She also said complainants and witnesses should be given stronger protection as the fear of retaliation remains a significant barrier

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Prof Datuk Dr Mohamed Ridza Wahiddin

er to reporting.

"A formal whistleblower protection provision must be introduced to ensure complainants and witnesses do not face professional repercussions," she added.

At the workplace, Prof Rozanah said employers should be legally obligated to establish sexual harassment policies as well as conduct training and outline a reporting mechanism.

"We can have stronger integration with the Industrial Relations Act whereby employees should have the right to raise sexual harassment claims as a workplace dispute under employment law, ensuring greater remedies beyond the tribunal's framework," she said.

Founder and patron of International Islamic University Malaysia's Centre of Excellence for Cyber Security Prof Datuk Dr Mohamed Ridza Wahiddin said a multi-pronged approach is needed to address online sexual harassment.

Who can file sexual harassment claims with Tribunal for Anti-Sexual Harassment (TAGS)



- a. Victims of sexual harassment;
- b. Victims under the age of 18, to be represented by his/her next friend or guardian ad litem; or
- c. Disabled victims, to be represented by his/ her next friend or guardian ad litem.

How and where can victims file complaints?

- a. TAGS counter at lobby area at Women, Family and Community Development Ministry, Putrajaya during the office hours (Monday to Friday).
- b. Call Talian Kasih **15999** for any enquiries.

How are hearings conducted?

The hearing is conducted before a panel of three (3) Tribunal members-Chairperson (President or Deputy President or another member with a legal background), and two other Tribunal members who have knowledge of or practical experience relating to sexual harassment). During the hearing, parties cannot be represented by an advocate and solicitor unless the matter in question involves complex legal issues. Parties have the right to present evidence and documents or call witnesses in support of their respective complaints and defences.

How are decisions made?

TAGS will either decide in favour of the complainant or dismiss the complaint based on the balance of probabilities, within 60 days from the first day of the hearing. The award (decision) is final and binding on the parties and deemed to be an order of a court.

Source: Women, Family and Community Development Ministry (KPWKM)

"This includes developing and implementing strong laws, promoting responsible online behaviour, and supporting victims through resources and accessible reporting mechanisms, with a focus on both prevention and immediate response.

"People should be cautious in their online postings. Always remember you are never invisible in the cyber world. Whatever you share will always be there. Someone with an evil intention may eventually use it against you," he said.