

varied. While some felt that it provided enough resources, others found it a bit obscure and not very helpful. The people who acquired jobs unrelated to science, did so mostly based on their own individual efforts. It has been acknowledged that IISER's policy would be to encourage students to take up research after graduating, so exploring other avenues via the CDC wouldn't receive much support. But given that applying for grad school can be a long and competitive process, some feel it would have been reassuring to have job prospects as a backup. For those who are not sure whether a PhD would be the right choice, our alumni believe that it would be wise not to hurry and instead take a year or so to think, perhaps as an intern or a T.A to get a better idea of the work that goes on. The path to stability in academia is long and one should consider all the variables before embarking on it, instead of rushing in head first. A few of our alumni have decided to leave academia after completing their PhDs, as they are put off by the likelihood of having to do multiple postdocs and the notion of having to work on the same research problem for days and perhaps months at an end.

To tie things up, adopting an optimistic outlook would lead one to say that there are a multitude of possible career options available after completing the BS-MS program and one should always be able to choose a path that fits their needs well, as most of our alumni believe and have done. Pessimistically speaking, one might simply choose wrong, as some of our alumni feel that they did after their BS-MS. There is nothing to be done, except talking to seniors and professors, obtaining timely information, doing relevant research projects and performing some self-reflection to figure out what suits one the best and how one can go about doing it, whether it be research or something else.

Adithyan Unni, Nishant Baruah,
Sanjana Vasanth, Sougato Chowdhury

Misogyny Inc.

TRIGGER WARNING: The following article contains descriptions of incidents that could be disturbing to readers.

Note to the reader: Many of the incidents you are about to read are unreported, often owing to a lack of witness due to the intimate nature of the crime and the stigma associated with speaking up about it. We, as investigators, have done our best to bring to light as rounded a perspective as enabled by our means and we urge you to respect the anonymity of individuals mentioned.

It was near midnight on the last day of her first Karavaan. The concerts had just gotten over. The stalls were folding up and the crowd was spilling out of the stadium, leaving a group of straggling volunteers to clean up when Ria's* email-notification pinged. 'Looking nic today 😞'. She felt a sinking feeling in her stomach. It had started two weeks ago with a 'hello' from a senior she did not know. 'Are u in first year?' and 'why u not reply to me' followed. "He wasn't even the only one," she confessed.

"He texted me that he knew my relationship won't last, so why don't you invest in me," recounted Sarah*, about an incident in the first few weeks of her first semester when she received texts from a stranger, asking her to choose who looked better – her boyfriend or himself, from a collage he had constructed. She later discovered that he had somehow obtained childhood photographs of her, which he was using as his phone screen wallpaper. Speaking to more girls and reading the responses to our survey, such cyberstalking emerged as a prevalent trend across batches. It isn't always limited to the phone screen. Rehana*, in her first year, was followed around by Keshab* who had previously tried to ask her out multiple times, and would drop texts like "blue looks good on you." When he learned that she had confided in a faculty member regarding his advances, he sent a final text: "You don't have to roam around telling people how special you are that you're getting texts from unknown people." The notion that receiving such messages would be flattering is in stark contrast to the hair-raising alarm that the recipient actually experiences.

Akash, a third-year BS-MS student, shared that to his surprise, even in a place like IISER, some of his batchmates harboured regressive attitudes regarding their female counterparts. For instance, comments are often made about first year girls being easy targets for advances. "They have this mentality that...[first years] *ke saath karna easy hai, kar sakte hain* (It is easy to make a move on first years)." Although he clarified that he hasn't personally witnessed such targeting of first years, numerous entries from our survey confirm the existence of such a culture at IISER. "*Ladki se baat nahin karni hai, dar lagta hai ki koi ladki mujhe judge karegi toh?* (they don't even want to speak to girls, they are afraid that what if a girl will judge me?...)" and later they go sit in a room and stalk a girl on Facebook... what's the meaning of that?" Akash added. He believes that this unwillingness to communicate or interact just fosters unhealthy attitudes towards other genders and that the depiction of women in movies and porn perpetuates these regressive attitudes. "The dichotomy is interesting. They are courteous and polite when they talk to women but the moment they are in a room full of boys, they start talking about them in a completely different language. I think it is in their upbringing that if you focus on these body parts you are macho," added Chrisil, a third-year BS-MS. "No one calls it out."

The phrase 'Locker Room Talk' is an umbrella term for the kind of discussions that take place in private male circles regarding women. Koustav, a fourth-year BS-MS student, recalled instances of locker room talk that he has heard, "*Ek haath mein 'Melons' aur doosre mein 'Bra Straps' balance karta hai. Playboy hai playboy* (He handles 'Melons' in one hand and 'Bra straps' in another. Such a playboy)." The explicit nicknames referred to two women Koustav was friends with. "I remember the numerous times when they talked about women I know personally and that remained seared, but they would literally talk about any woman they have looked at. It is almost an embedded culture. They would rate people they would see by the size of their hips, breasts, complexion, and compare. *Iska utna bada nahin hai, yeh gori nahin hai, 6, 6.5, voh toh thi mast* (Hers aren't so big, she isn't fair, 6, 6.5, she was so hot)."

"Like most jokes, you are trying to pass a witty remark, to get some sort of validation. Nobody really means these jokes. It is mostly to act cool," said Amartya, a third-year BS-MS student who condemned popular media for encouraging such jokes. However, like most ironic humor, the distinction between objectification and appreciation is grey. Although we were told that these talks remain within the four walls of boys' hostel rooms, a lot more than just a trickle of these attitudes permeates public and professional spaces. Nupura 2019, IISER's first intercollegiate dance festival, hosted its final round in the C.V. Raman Auditorium in October. What started off as inconspicuous whispering unfolded into an unabashed public slur calling. A witness summarised, "So while Nupura was



'While the lights watched', by Sultan Nazir

going on, every time the girls did a particular move such as swinging their hips, the guys whistled loudly and screamed lewd remarks. One remark I remember hearing was 'good slut' in Hindi and '*Naachne vaali bandiyon ko vaapas lao* (Bring back the dancing girls)' and '*Aa gayi saali bhadvi* (Here comes the damn pimp)'. And these [performers] are outsiders who came to IISER so you can imagine how unsafe and weird they would feel. They have come to a new place and are trying to showcase their dance but this is how they are received."

A similar situation occurred during Hindi Diwas celebrations wherein groups of male students sitting in the last rows of the crowded auditorium catcalled and hurled derogatory comments at performers. "Long skirt, short skirt, any skirt, they whistled," a witness told us. A play on the rape of a young girl became a reason for mindless laughter and jeering in a scene where an actress portraying the traumatized rape victim took off her salwar. These incidents are often heard, sometimes experienced, and eventually forgotten. But when they start seeping into daily routine, into shared workspaces, they leave a lasting impact.

Ila*, a PhD student in the chemistry department spoke about the behavior that is adopted when one is talking to a female in contrast to a male. "Somehow they feel that we (girls) are not interested. If a new research paper has come, they (professors) will come and discuss it with their male colleagues, never with us. Even if he (the professor) wants to discuss something with them (girls), he will ask a boy to accompany them and he will

speak to the boy and the boy will tell the girl. It is too awkward." A conversation with a PhD student highlighted an instance when a professor reportedly said, "Why did I hire girls if the lab is going to be messy?" Another student, speaking about her mentor, said "He also has visions of what and how women should be, but he's more outspoken about the men part." Instructing men on what to wear, how to look, which colours to prefer, what to drink, etc. are all textbook examples of enforcing gender normative stereotypes as well as exercising control over them. "And I actually did tell him [her mentor] that then, that has nothing to do with them (the men) and he was like 'No, this is how it is'. Those kinds of things do affect people. I have seen people look really upset."

Ila* elaborates on how this communication gap between these two genders stretches beyond just personal domains. "If you see communication between males and females, even regarding research, it is almost zero. It is almost like female students miss out on crucial mentorship because of this. Sometimes in group meetings, you will be even neglected by your guide when you give opinions. It is as if I don't have enough knowledge or am unable to take up responsibility. My junior guys are publishing before me. The preference is clear," she said. "If you have to go abroad for conferences, they will always pick the males." When asked about how women were received during their TA-ship, Ila* said, "It has happened that the girl TAs are not taken seriously by the students. When every new batch comes, they rate the girls." Koustav confirmed, "Some TAs, they (his batchmates) would fetishize to no end whatsoever. '*Arey kya mast maal hai* (She is such hot stuff, I wish I was in that batch.' They would sometimes switch classes, presumably to look at them." "Sexist comments, people talking about women's bodies in labs and discriminating on the basis of their intellect, [such as] 'girls cannot study physics', 'there are better ways to fail, why do physics?' [or] 'you shouldn't do organic chemistry because you would have to lift solvent drums'—in general, trash talk knowing some women are listening," mentioned Dhriti Nagar, student representative on the Internal Committee, when recounting the kinds of incidents she has had to hear.

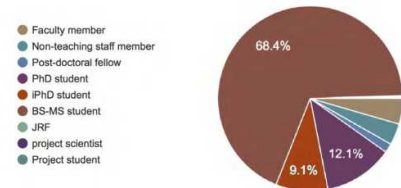
Female faculty are no strangers to these everyday battles. From her experience, Dr. Srabanti Chaudhary said that men who haven't seen women in positions of importance find it hard to accept a female professor when it comes to teaching. Owing to the smaller number of female faculty and the recommended requirement of having one of them as a member in every committee, they end up handling positions where they are often given stereotyped roles such as 'decoration' or 'welcoming'. Confirming this, Dr. Mayurika Lahiri recounted her experience of walking out of a committee in frustration. "The person [organiser who assigned me to the committee] did not mean it in that way, it's again, society. It is ingrained. It came out as if it is a natural thing to say." Dr. Chaudhary, Dr. Nadkarni and Dr. Lahiri have noted that emails sent by the admin are regularly addressed to 'Dear Sir.' "When you know who you're writing to, [when] they're a faculty... In spite [of knowing better, if you're] still writing 'Sir', it really really angers me. Even a general mail should be [addressed as] 'Sir/Madam.'" Even when they wrote back to the admin, it wasn't resolved. "I know people in admin who are even uncomfortable to look at me and talk. They talk to me while looking somewhere else. They don't take complaints from this gender seriously."

"If there are two faculty getting fellowship, one male and one female, they don't make any comments about the male faculty getting it, while with the female faculty, it is 'nowadays they are promoting girls,'" said Dr. Chaudhary. In Dr. Nadkarni's words, "I think most women just have their own algorithms about what battles to let go and what to take on. In the beginning, I thought I should take the important battles, but now I have changed my opinion. Even the little things matter". Little things such as including women guards marching in the Republic Day parade, sarees or not.

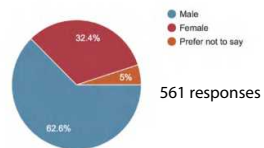
So far, we have only looked at words shouted from a distance or from behind a screen, but

WORRYING NUMBERS

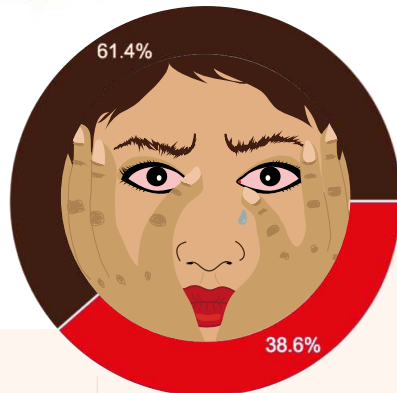
Demographics of the survey takers



561 responses



561 responses

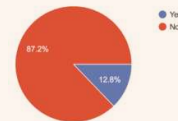


Have you ever witnessed/ heard of gender-based discrimination or harassment on campus?

● Yes
● No

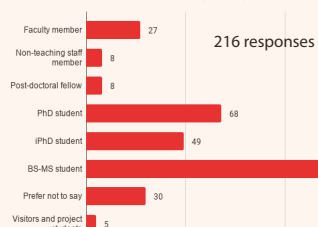
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% willing to be interviewed about their experience



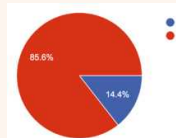
562 responses

Who committed this (these)?



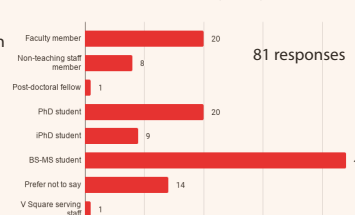
216 responses

Have you ever personally experienced gender-based discrimination or harassment on campus?



562 responses

Who committed this (these)?



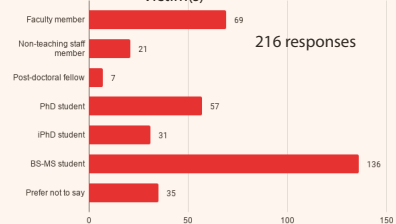
81 responses

Nature of the harassment



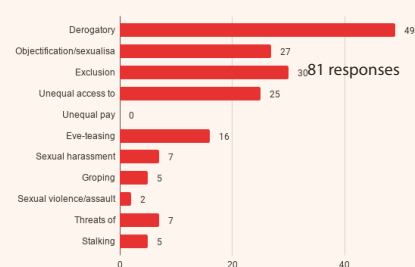
217 responses

Victim(s)



216 responses

Nature of harassment:



81 responses

when they turn into deeds, it can derail lives and more often than not, the perpetrator is someone close. Ria* spoke to us about an experience which still haunts her till this day. "I had made it very clear that I did not want to get physical, at least for a while. However, he tried to kiss me nonetheless, when we got there." She had walked away and he apologized, promising never to repeat it. Three or four days later, however, it happened again. "I went rigid and showed no reciprocation. But he continued to touch me all over." Though she broke up with him after this, he continued to call her, saying that his apology should be enough for her to forgive him, and he eventually tried to gain sympathy from her friends. "While this was happening, I went through one of the worst depressive episodes I have ever had. The smallest thing would trigger me and I would end up crying for hours." In the end, she decided to go to the IC. "Even though they were very cooperative," she said, "it is never easy to talk about it with so many people."

In Razia*s case, she realized she was in an abusive relationship. "Some of the things that I did were consensual, but a lot of the things weren't. I consented to the acts at that time because I thought he wouldn't hurt me in the future. It wasn't informed consent." "He used to send me Psychology Today articles that 'justified' why 'women are shallow human beings that care about only physical attractiveness and money'. He even started insinuating I knew nothing about anything."

He would rate other women and their body parts and compare them with hers. He sent her porn videos, pestered her into sending nudes. "I could feel myself throwing away everything that mattered to me – he turned me into a mere shell of who I used to be." After a pregnancy scare that he dealt with very dismissively, she realized that it was 'narcissistic abuse'. Razia* told us that she is still reeling from the impact. "It would be great to wake up one morning and forget this ever happened. But you can't, you have to live with it and confront it." The incident took a toll on her mental health and her academics. "I couldn't focus in class, I used to get flashbacks. It totally trashed my self-esteem."

Recounting her own experiences, Ria* expressed, "For months after, I was afraid to walk alone on campus. Years later, I still get flashbacks and anxiety attacks which affect me for hours. Everyone deserves to feel safe in their body, but assault victims are robbed of that basic right."

The perpetrator's friends often have trouble believing such allegations. Ria* added, "People seemed to be more worried about his reputation than my safety." One of her classmates made light of the situation. Though he was rebuked, "There were no repercussions, no change in his social life. Mine was irrevocably altered though. I stayed away from the group. It was very isolating though, and still is."

When Razia* told her friends, they either reduced contact with him (the perpetrator) or cut it down entirely. "But my best friend (whom I have since cut off contact with) still continues to talk to him because 'it is too difficult to make new friends' and tries to invoke sympathy for him. But I have no sympathy left and I'm sick of being treated as a doormat and playing into men's ideas of how women should respond to trauma."

These aren't isolated incidents, and we received accounts of many more cases, across the spectrum of severity—from sexist remarks to alleged cases of rape on campus.

The stories we have talked about are soul-crushing for the victims but they only worsen when power hierarchies step in. Abhinaya, a PhD scholar in the HSS department, revealed that she knows of three cases of harassment by Dr Basheer*, a man considered charismatic and talented by many. She had personally spoken to two of his victims. "One of them, Parvati*, told me that she had faced something inappropriate, but she did not tell me the nature of the incident itself, she was just very upset about what had happened. The other person, Tarini*, spoke to me at length about what had happened, about receiving text messages and emails from him that were sexually loaded." Abhinaya learnt that Dr Basheer* seemed to believe that he was romantically involved with Tarini*, even getting upset when she dated another student, accusing her of not spending enough time with him. Abhinaya also mentioned having heard that this professor had been formally charged with harassment within the institute a few years prior to these incidents. She remarked that by not taking those charges seriously, the institute has failed to protect its



students, as the same behaviour continued to take place unchallenged.

Dr Vidya* recalled being shocked when she heard about the allegations. She explained what she called the 'stereotypical assessment of a serial harasser'—"They enjoy strong support and they enjoy a strong fanbase." But one professor who turned up repeatedly in our investigation was Dr Kawade*, a popular figure around campus. We have had similar accounts given to us by different people. "His eyes would wander." "He would stare at my breasts, not my face, while talking to me." Aari*, a PhD student in his lab recounted his experience. "This was something that I was told about earlier, in informal circles. I have seen this happen twice, once in his office and once in the lab, there weren't a lot of other people." As we reached out, we met Aisha* who joined his lab after her MSc. "Once, I was in his office off-campus and he was sitting very close to me. He came up from behind and put his hand around my waist. That is when I got very furious. I got up and I went home." When we asked her why she had not approached the then Women's Cell, she said, "When it was actually happening I didn't know about it. I should have talked, now I realize that. But I had talked to my lab members, who said that this was common. I thought if they didn't say anything, should I?"

Aari* confirmed that people had confronted Dr Kawade* directly, "His response is that these are cases of misinterpretation and that all he had was 'paternal affection.'" We asked Aari* about how practical it is to leave the lab in such circumstances, "This might be true on paper. But anyone doing a PhD knows how impractical it is, even if your department is being completely cooperative. Let's say it happens 3 years into your PhD, even if the new advisor is okay with you working on the same project, it is not easy." Dr Srabanti Chaudhury elaborated on dealing with PhD cases, "IC can ensure they will solve the case but we cannot ensure anything afterward. That is the hard truth. If the faculty decides to not write you a recommendation then that's it." Later in an interview with another IC member, we came to know that the guide can be removed from the referee list and the Director or the Dean can provide a recommendation in their stead.

These cases are far from isolated, as our statistics clearly show. But we were in for a rude surprise when we came to know that the Internal Committee has had a mere 10 cases brought before it since its creation a year and a half ago. Dhriti says, "There is a lot of embarrassment associated with the idea that 'I was sexually harassed,' where it is absolutely uncalled for, it is the perpetrator who should be embarrassed—but this is so

rampant. Many people think that they were responsible for having led them on."

Abhinaya spoke about the normalisation of sexual harassment and violence on campuses. "You share a laugh about it, so this guy is a creep. You don't think that somebody saying something to you that makes you feel uncomfortable is sexual harassment. You don't think your PI (Principal Investigator) rubbing his hands down your back is harassment. It is sexual harassment and it's important to recognize that it comes in various forms," she said, suggesting that while there is a need for institutional changes in policy, it is important that a culture of dialogue and discussion about all these issues develops within the student community, to enable people to combat sexual harassment despite the fear of the professors. Dr. Suneeta Vardarajan said, "If such an incident has happened, they have to report. They have to bring it to the notice of the authorities. It will get worse if they don't. Even if it's stressful, they need a circle of friends who will support them." She also emphasized that one must try to report as early as possible as evidence is lost with time. "Your complaint has to be investigated. And the person you are complaining against has [their own] rights. So the IC is limited by how much investigation it can do, given the evidence that it has. But it stops the harassment."

Many of our conversations revealed that it isn't easy to overcome the initial period of denial, especially when one isn't able to communicate well. Ria* said, "It took me a long time to come to terms with what had happened. There are still days when I wonder whether it (complaining) was worth all the pain. And then I remember how he had done this to other girls, how he had even taken one to the same place to assault her, months before he did the same to me. And that it could have happened to someone else had I not spoken up. It helps to know that I was part of breaking that cycle of serial abuse." But this structured oppression we see all around doesn't begin when a hand is forced up your skirt. It begins when we fail to call out those remarks made in passing that had made us laugh nervously. As Ria* puts it, "People believe that if they are not the person making the comment, they are doing their best. But this does not absolve them of their collective responsibility. If you don't call out problematic behavior in your circles, if you choose to look away from a comment or a rape joke, which may make a survivor relive one of the worst things they have been through, then you are part of the problem."

* Name changed

Gowri Niranjana, Kunjal Parnami, Likhith Chandragiri, Misal Bedi, Nikita Gupta, Saimit Naik, Satavisha De

Note- If any incident(s) similar to those above have happened to you, you have the right to act on it. Complaints from students of all genders are accepted by the Internal Committee of IISER Pune and we urge you to reach out to them formally or informally.

- The IC can be contacted at ic@iiserpune.ac.in
- The presiding officer of the IC can be contacted at ic_po@iiserpune.ac.in
- Visit the IC webpage: <https://www.iiserpune.ac.in/links/internal-committee-posh> for contact details of all IC members including that of the student representative.
- IISER Pune's Policy and Procedures on the Prevention and Redressal of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace can be found at [http://www.iiserpune.ac.in/userfiles/files/IC%20\(IISER%20Pune\)%20Policy%20and%20Procedures%20Jan%202019.pdf](http://www.iiserpune.ac.in/userfiles/files/IC%20(IISER%20Pune)%20Policy%20and%20Procedures%20Jan%202019.pdf)