

EMPOWERMENT TOOLKIT FOR AFRICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS



2024

**NAVIGATING HARASSMENT IN
DIGITAL AND BUSINESS SPACES**



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Introduction

Welcome to the **Empowerment Toolkit for African Women**; a comprehensive guide designed to support you in understanding, addressing, and overcoming harassment, whether online or as a business owner. This toolkit acknowledges the strength and resilience of African women while providing practical advice, resources, and solidarity to those facing harassment in any form.

Harassment can take many shapes and often deeply impacts our personal and professional lives. We aim to empower you with knowledge, tools, and a community of support to stand against harassment and advocate for a safer, more respectful environment for all women.

What is Inside?

1. **Understanding Harassment:** Definitions, examples, and the nuances of experiencing harassment as African women.
2. **Immediate Steps:** Guidance on what to do if you or someone you know is harassed.
3. **Protecting Yourself Online:** Tips for safeguarding your digital presence on social media and beyond.
4. **Legal Recourse:** Overview of your rights and legal actions you can take.
5. **Mental Health and Wellbeing:** Resources for coping with the emotional toll of harassment.
6. **Advocacy and Community Support:** How to find or build support networks and engage in advocacy.
7. **Additional Resources:** Further reading and tools for empowerment.

Your Rights, Your Voice

As African women, **our voices are powerful**. This toolkit is a testament to our collective strength and determination to create a world where we can live, work, and thrive without fear of harassment. Together, we can make a difference.

Disclaimer!

This toolkit provides general guidance and information. It is not a substitute for professional legal advice or psychological support. We encourage seeking professional assistance when needed.

SECTION 1

Understanding Harassment

What Is Harassment?

Harassment involves unwanted, unwelcome behaviour that demeans, threatens, or offends the victim and results in a hostile environment for them. It can range from verbal abuse, jokes, and derogatory comments to physical assault and online trolling. Harassment, whether in person or online, is not only about the harasser's intention but significantly about how the actions are perceived and impact the victim.

Forms of Harassment

1. **Online Harassment:** Receiving threatening emails, social media messages, or comments. This also includes cyberstalking, doxxing (publishing private information), and revenge porn.
2. **Workplace Harassment:** Unwelcome comments or actions based on gender, race, religion, colour, ethnicity, national origin, age, sexual orientation (depending on the jurisdiction), marital status, health status, or the presence of any physical, mental, or sensory disability or other personal characteristics in the business environment. This includes sexual harassment, bullying, and intimidation.

2.1 Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is sexual behaviour that is unwelcome, offensive, humiliating, or intimidating. It can be written, verbal, physical, in-person, or online. Anybody can experience sexual harassment, regardless of their gender. Sexual harassment occurs mostly in private offices, but is also common in general work areas, online, at conferences or work-related trips, and in recreational areas. When it happens, sexual harassment may amount to a form of discrimination. It can include acts such as:

- Touching, grabbing, or making other physical contact without your consent.
- They make comments to you that have a sexual meaning.
- Asking you for sex or sexual favours.
- leering and subjectively staring at you.
- They display rude and offensive material so that you or others can see it.
- They make sexual gestures or suggestive body movements towards you or your photos.
- They crack sexual jokes and comments around or to you.
- They question you about your sex life.
- They insult you with sexual comments.
- Behaviour on a phone call that makes you feel uncomfortable.

- Indecently exposing themselves to you
- Outright sexual assault.

2.2 Bullying and Intimidation: Bullying is an unwanted and recurring negative and abusive act aimed at one or more individuals. Attacks are built around a perceived power imbalance between the perpetrator and victim(s) and the inability to engage in self-defence, which results in psychological harm to the victim(s) or monetary losses to their organisation. Bullying can take place in cyberspace, office, or business environments, and it has damaging consequences on its victims, such as; distress, humiliation, anger, anxiety, discouragement, hopelessness, depression, burnout, and low job satisfaction.

- 3. Public Harassment:** Catcalling, unwanted advances, and physical touch in public spaces.

The Impact on African Women

African women face unique challenges that intersect with patriarchy, cultural norms, societal expectations, and sometimes limited legal protection. Harassment can severely impact their personal and professional lives, mental health, and well-being. It is crucial to acknowledge these unique pressures and offer tailored support.

Know Your Rights

Many African countries have laws against harassment, but awareness and enforcement vary. It's important to understand the legal protections available in your country, including laws against sexual harassment, cybercrimes, and discrimination.

Recognising Harassment

Harassment may be unintentional. What matters is the recipient's perception of harassment, not the intent of the person doing the harassment. Recognising harassment can sometimes be challenging, especially when it involves subtle actions or when cultural norms discourage speaking out. Trust your feelings; it's worth addressing if something makes you uncomfortable or threatened.

It is Not Your Fault

If you've experienced harassment, know that it's not your fault. The responsibility lies entirely with the perpetrator, regardless of your actions, appearance, or presence in certain spaces or online platforms.

Prevention of Harassment

Article 5 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states, "No one shall be subjected to torture, or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment" and **Article 12 also states, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks"**.

As such, every individual has the responsibility of preventing harassment against oneself. However, in corporate settings, the Executives or Unit Heads are responsible for creating and maintaining an environment that prevents harassment and they should take appropriate measures for this purpose. Specific actions to prevent harassment in the workplace, online, or business environment include:

- Be a role model; lead by example.
- Promote a zero-tolerance culture and set the tone from the top of the organisation or company's hierarchy.
- Conduct training sessions on the approved standards of conduct on all forms of harassment and improper conduct promptly.
- Instill pride of purpose. Remind your team of your organisation's mission and the specific mandate of the organisation. Reflect on that mission and mandate regularly.
- Communicate openly and promote an inclusive culture that encourages people to speak up.
- Report harassment cases to approved authorities or an ombudsperson (If applicable), and investigate allegations promptly.
- Establish due diligence in all operations with clients, partners, colleagues, etc.
- Develop a policy against harassment, ensure full compliance by clients, partners, colleagues, etc., and establish penalties for defaulters.

SECTION 2

Immediate Steps to Take if Harassed

Document Everything

- **Keep Records:** Save all communications from the harasser, including emails, messages, comments, or notes. Take screenshots if the harassment occurs online.
- **Record Details:** Note each incident's date, time, and context. This documentation can be crucial for reports to authorities or legal actions.

Seek Support

- **Reach Out to Trusted Individuals:** Share your experience with friends, family, or colleagues you trust. You're not alone, and their support can be invaluable.
- **Professional Support:** Consider seeking help from a counsellor or therapist, especially if the harassment affects your mental health. Many organisations offer support specifically for women facing harassment.

Report the Harassment

- **Online Platforms:** Use the report functions on social media or other platforms where the harassment occurred. These platforms often have policies against harassment.
- **Workplace Harassment:** If applicable, follow your workplace's procedure for reporting harassment. This may involve speaking to your supervisor, the human resources (HR) department, or a designated harassment officer.
- **Legal Authorities:** For severe cases, especially those involving threats of violence, report to the police. Consult legal advice to understand your options based on the evidence you have.

Secure Your Online Presence

- **Privacy Settings:** Review and adjust your privacy settings on social media and other online accounts to control who can see your posts and personal information.
- **Digital Security:** Update your passwords and enable two-factor authentication to protect against unauthorised access to your accounts.

Know Your Rights

- **Educate Yourself:** Familiarise yourself with the laws in your country regarding harassment and cybercrimes. Knowing your rights can empower you to take appropriate action.
- **Legal Assistance:** Consider consulting a legal professional who can advise you on the steps you can take and represent you if necessary.

Take Care of Yourself

- **Self-Care is Important:** Harassment can be emotionally draining. Engage in activities that rejuvenate you and maintain connections with supportive friends and family.
- **Professional Help:** If you're struggling to cope, professional counsellors or therapists can offer strategies to manage your feelings and work through the experience.

SECTION 3

Protecting Yourself Online

The digital world offers vast opportunities for learning, networking, and business growth. However, it also poses unique challenges, especially regarding privacy and safety. Here are steps you can take to safeguard your online presence:

Adjust Your Privacy Settings

Social Media Savvy: Regularly review and adjust the privacy settings on your social media accounts to control who can see your posts, photos, and personal information. Opt for settings that limit your visibility to trusted individuals.

Be Mindful of What You Share

Think Before You Post: Remember that what you share online can be seen by many and is difficult to erase. Avoid sharing personal details that could put your safety at risk or be used against you.

Secure Your Accounts

- ***Strong Passwords:*** Use strong, unique passwords for different accounts and change them regularly. Consider using a password manager to keep track of your passwords securely.
- ***Two-Factor Authentication (2FA):*** Enable 2FA on all your accounts. This adds an extra layer of security by requiring a second form of verification, such as a code sent to your phone, in addition to your password.

Know Your Digital Rights

Harassment is Not Acceptable: Understand that online harassment is a serious issue, and many countries have laws against it. You have the right to use digital spaces without fear of harassment or abuse.

Report and Block

Take Action Against Harassers: Utilize the report functions on social media and other platforms to report abusive behaviour. Don't hesitate to block individuals who make you feel uncomfortable or threatened.

Use Secure Networks

Safe Browsing: When online, especially when conducting transactions or sharing sensitive information, ensure you are on a secure and private network. Avoid using public Wi-Fi for sensitive activities.

Support is Available

ImpactHER Free Therapy Line: If you're struggling with the impact of online harassment, ImpactHER offers a free phone line where you can speak to therapists and receive the support you need. This confidential service is designed to help you navigate emotional challenges and find ways to cope and heal. Remember, protecting yourself online is not just about technical measures; it's also about being aware of your digital footprint and the information you share. Your safety and well-being are paramount.

SECTION 4

Legal Recourse

Harassment can be a distressing experience, but remember, the law is on your side. This section provides an overview of legal options and steps you can take to seek justice and protection.

Understanding Your Legal Rights

Know the Laws: Familiarize yourself with the **legal protections against harassment** in your country. Laws may cover sexual harassment, cyber harassment, workplace bullying, etc. Understanding these laws can empower you to take decisive action.

Reporting Harassment

- **Document Evidence:** Keep detailed records of harassment incidents, including dates, times, descriptions, and any communications or screenshots. This documentation is crucial for legal proceedings.
- **Police Report:** For serious cases, especially those involving threats, physical assault, or stalking, file a report with the police Gender Desk Unit - with officers who are trained to handle gender-based issues. Provide them with all documented evidence you have collected.
- **Legal Advice:** Seek advice from a legal professional or a legal aid organisation specialising in harassment cases. They can guide you through filing a complaint and pursuing legal action.

Protective Orders

Restraining Orders: If you're in immediate danger or must ensure your safety from the harasser, you can apply for a restraining order. Legal professionals can help you understand the process and requirements.

Cyber Harassment Laws

Digital Protection: Many countries have laws against cyber harassment. If the harassment occurred online, report it to the platform and consider legal action if the behaviour violates local cyber laws.

Workplace Harassment

Employer Responsibility: Employers are often required by law to address harassment in the workplace. Report harassment to your HR department or a trusted supervisor. If your employer fails to take appropriate action, a legal recourse may be an option.

Seeking Legal Assistance

- **Legal Support Services:** Many organisations offer legal support and advice to women facing harassment. Look for services that provide free or low-cost legal consultation.
- **ImpactHER Support:** Through its network, ImpactHER may connect you with legal resources or organisations specialising in supporting women facing harassment. These resources can provide you with the guidance and support needed to navigate the legal system.

Remember...

- **Legal action can be challenging,** but you don't have to go through it alone. Support from friends, family, legal professionals, and organizations can provide the strength and backing you need.
- **Legal proceedings take time,** and outcomes can vary, but seeking justice can be an important step in closure and advocating for your rights and safety. Legal recourse is a powerful tool in combating harassment. By understanding your rights and the available legal avenues, you can take steps to protect yourself and potentially prevent future incidents.

SECTION 5

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Experiencing harassment can take a significant toll on your mental health and emotional well-being. It's important to recognise these experiences' impact and to take steps toward healing and recovery. This section provides resources and advice for taking care of yourself after harassment.

Recognise the Impact

- **Valid Feelings:** Feelings of fear, anger, sadness, or isolation after experiencing harassment are valid. Acknowledge your feelings without judgement.
- **Symptoms to Watch:** Be aware of symptoms that may indicate a need for professional support, such as prolonged sadness, anxiety, sleep disturbances, or changes in appetite.

Seeking Professional Support

- **Therapy and Counseling:** Speaking to a therapist or counsellor can be incredibly helpful. These professionals can offer strategies to cope with the emotional fallout of harassment and guide you toward recovery.
- **ImpactHER Free Therapy Line:** ImpactHER offers a free therapy line that connects African women with professional therapists. This confidential service allows you to speak about your experiences and receive support, helping you navigate your emotions and recovery process.

Building a Support System

- **Reach Out:** Share your experiences with trusted friends or family members who can offer support and understanding.
- **Support Groups:** Consider joining a support group for individuals who have experienced similar situations. Sharing your story with others who understand can be incredibly healing.

Self-Care Strategies

- **Routine:** Maintain a routine that includes activities you enjoy and find relaxing. The structure can bring a sense of normalcy and control.
- **Physical Activity:** Engage in physical activities that you enjoy, such as walking, yoga, or dancing. Exercise can help reduce stress and improve mood.
- **Mindfulness and Relaxation:** Practice mindfulness, meditation, or relaxation techniques to manage stress and anxiety. Apps and online resources can guide you through these practices.

Setting Boundaries

- **Online Boundaries:** Take breaks from social media or online platforms if you find them overwhelming. It's okay to limit your exposure to potential triggers.
- **Personal Boundaries:** Feel empowered to set boundaries in your relationships and at work to protect your mental health.

Empowerment Through Education

- **Learn:** Educating yourself about harassment and its impact can empower you to take control of your recovery process. Knowledge can also prepare you to help others who may be experiencing similar situations.

Remember...

You are not alone, and what happened does not define you. Taking steps to care for your mental health is a crucial part of overcoming the impact of harassment. Whether through professional help, support from loved ones, or personal care strategies, healing is possible.

SECTION 6

Advocacy and Community Support

Connect with ImpactHER: ImpactHER Network

Join the ImpactHER network to connect with a supportive community of African women in business and beyond. ImpactHER provides resources, training, and a platform for women to share their experiences and learn from each other.

- **Website:** ImpactHER.org
- **Contact Email:** support@impacther.org
- **Social Media:** Follow ImpactHER on social media @impacther for updates on events, workshops, and advocacy opportunities.

Report and Support

- **Online Harassment Reporting Platforms:** If you encounter harassment online, report it directly on the platform where it occurred. Additionally, consider using reporting tools provided by:
 - **SaferSpaces:** An online resource for reporting and finding support against online harassment. They offer guides on navigating legal options and protecting your digital presence.
 - **End Cyber Abuse:** A platform dedicated to ending cyber harassment, providing tools for reporting abuse across various social media platforms.
- **Physical Harassment Reporting Platforms:** If you experience harassment in the workplace or business environment, report it to the appropriate authorities within the institution. If it occurs in public, especially sexual harassment, report it to the Gender Unit/Desk Officer of any Police Station nearest to you.

Engage in Local Advocacy Groups

- **Women's Rights Organizations in Africa:** Connect with local women's rights organisations for support and to participate in advocacy efforts. These organisations often run campaigns, and workshops, and provide legal advice for women facing harassment.
 - **International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA):** Offers legal support to women and advocates for women's rights across several African countries.
 - **Gender-Based Violence Prevention Network:** A coalition of organisations across Africa focused on preventing gender-based violence and providing support to survivors.

Participate in Educational Workshops

Engage with ImpactHER for Empowerment and Support

- **ImpactHER Workshops and Training:** ImpactHER is committed to empowering African women through education, support, and advocacy. By participating in ImpactHER's workshops and training sessions, you can access valuable tools and networks designed to strengthen your resilience against harassment and bolster your personal and professional development.
- **Find Upcoming Workshops:** Visit www.impacther.org and subscribe to the newsletter to stay informed about upcoming events tailored for African women in business and beyond.

Building a Supportive Community

- **Join the ImpactHER Community:** Becoming a part of the ImpactHER community offers you a chance to connect with like-minded women, share experiences, and support each other in overcoming challenges. Through this network, you can find mentorship opportunities, access resources, and contribute to a collective voice advocating for the rights and empowerment of African women.
- **Connect Now:** Explore the ImpactHER website to learn more about how you can engage with the community and find support tailored to your needs.

Your Journey Towards Empowerment

Remember, you are not alone in this journey. By leveraging resources like ImpactHER, engaging in advocacy, and connecting with a supportive community, you can navigate the challenges of harassment and emerge stronger. Your voice and actions contribute to creating a safer, more equitable world for all women.

SECTION 7

Additional Resources

This section compiles a list of resources, including websites, articles, and books, designed to provide you with further information on understanding, combating, and healing from harassment. Empower yourself with knowledge and find additional support through these valuable resources.

Educational Resources

1. Websites

- **Partners West Africa - Nigeria:** Offers a free online course on harassment and improper conduct in the workplace for corporate workers, entrepreneurs, etc. Website: <https://sexualharassment.partnersnigeria.org/>
- **CIPD:** Offers insights on harassment and bullying in the workplace, responsibilities of employers and employees, how to deal with complaints, and other relevant guiding resources on handling harassment issues, workplace conflicts, etc. Website: <https://www.cipd.org/en/knowledge/factsheets/harassment-factsheet/>
- **Cyberbullying Research Center:** Conducts research and provides resources on cyberbullying. Website: <https://cyberbullying.org/>
- **Anti-Defamation League (ADL):** Fights anti-Semitism and all forms of hate with a strong focus on combating cyberhate. Website: <https://www.adl.org/>
- **Hollaback:** An international movement to end harassment in all forms, including online. Website: <https://righttobe.org/>
- **National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV):** Provides resources to combat online abuse as part of broader efforts to end domestic violence. Website: <https://nnedv.org/>
- **Online SOS:** Supports individuals experiencing online harassment with resources and assistance. Website: <https://onlinesosnetwork.org/>
- **Working to Halt Online Abuse (WHOA):** Provides education and assistance for victims of online harassment. Website: <https://www.genderit.org/working-halt-online-abuse>
- **The Pixel Project:** Uses social media and online platforms to raise awareness about gender violence. Website: <https://www.thepixelproject.net/>

- *National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)*: Works to prevent child exploitation and provides resources for victims of online harassment. Website: <https://www.missingkids.org/home>
- *TechSaavy Global*: Aim to promote safe and responsible technology use and prevent online abuse. Website: <https://www.techsafety.org/>
- *StopBullying*: Provides information and resources to prevent and address bullying and cyberbullying. Website: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/>
- *Without My Consent*: Provides resources for individuals dealing with online privacy violations and harassment. Website: <https://withoutmyconsent.org/>
- *Feminist Frequency*: Provides resources and commentary on the portrayal of women in media and fights online harassment. Website: <https://feministfrequency.com/>

2. Articles and Reports

- *"Understanding Sexual Harassment in Africa: A Guide for Women:"* An article offering insights into the cultural and legal aspects of sexual harassment in African societies.
- *"Online Violence Against Women: A Global Issue:"* A report by Amnesty International highlighting the impact of online harassment on women and the need for global action.

3. Books

- *"Speaking Out: A 21st-Century Handbook for Women and Girls" by Tara Moss*: This handbook provides practical advice on how to speak out and protect yourself online and in the workplace.
- *"We Should All Be Feminists" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*: A personal and powerful essay by the renowned Nigerian author on what it means to be a feminist today.

4. Toolkits and Guides

- **Digital Rights Foundation's Cyber Harassment Helpline:** Provides a toolkit for online safety and dealing with cyber harassment. <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/>
- **"A Guide to Staying Safe Online:"** Offers practical tips for women on protecting themselves online, dealing with cyber harassment, and maintaining digital privacy.

5. Support Services

- **ImpactHER Free Therapy Line:** Connects African women with professional therapists for free, offering support and counselling to those affected by harassment. For access, visit ImpactHER.org or directly visit our designated website here to request therapy services.
- **Local Women's Shelters and Crisis Centers:** Many countries have shelters and crisis centres that offer support, advice, and sometimes legal assistance to women experiencing harassment or violence. Look for services available in your country or community.
- **Sexual Assault Referral Centres:** In Nigeria, there are designated SARCs across the 36 states with trained professionals who specialize in handling cases of sexual harassment or assault including providing psychological first aid. The professionals can help you recover, especially from the physical effects of harassment or assault. You can get the SARC nearest to you [here](#).
- **Crash Override Network:** A crisis helpline and advocacy group for targets of online harassment. Website: <http://www.crashoverridenetwork.com/>
- **Institute for Gendered Innovation (IGI):** Addresses the intersection of gender and technology, including online harassment. Website: <https://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/>
- **Democracy Fund Voice:** Focuses on addressing online violence and harassment targeted at women.
- **Website:** <https://democracyfundvoice.org/stop-online-violence-against-women/>
- **HopeLine:** service offering support to victims of domestic violence, including digital abuse. Website: <https://www.hopeline-nc.org/>
- **Victim Support:** Provides free and confidential support to victims of crime, including online harassment. Website: <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>

Empowerment through Learning

The journey towards understanding, combating, and healing from harassment is continuous. These resources are here to provide you with knowledge, support, and empowerment. Remember, you are not alone, and there are numerous tools and communities ready to stand with you.

The End