

WHAT I WISH I KNEW

When I was 11, I was walking home when I heard footsteps behind me. Turning around, there were two of my seniors lingering a few feet away, smirks plastered on their face as they watched my confused expression. As if it was a harmless joke, an innocuous prank, they told me they were going to follow me home 'for fun'. As if it was a norm, a usual occurrence, I laughed along to that little game of theirs and continued on my route home.

I wish I knew why I was uncomfortable then.

Girls, there is nothing wrong with feeling uncomfortable.

In a world of commercialized bodies and ['locker room banter'](#), we are constantly being subjected to what men say about and behave towards us. Why should we continue to let this happen?

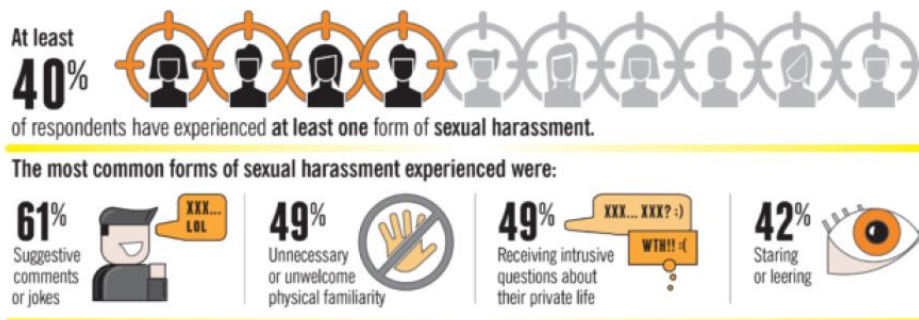
What's it like in Singapore?

The recent resurgence of the #MeToo movement has paved the way for further conversation regarding the climate of sexual harassment. It has even reached the shores of Singapore, where a quarter of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment. And yet, roughly only half of them have mentioned it to someone. Even worse, only 19% of the victims reported such incidents to the police.

There is something to be said about women being silenced when needing help. Not just by the offender, [Singapore's environment](#) has plagued us with an inclination to feel embarrassed or to fear repercussions.

As if we are the ones who should be feeling embarrassed.

Ladies, of all the embarrassing things to happen in our lives, I can assure you that dealing with sexual harassment IS NOT one of them. It is horrible and ugly, but the only person who should be running for the caves is the perpetrator.



What should you be looking out for?

Perpetrators are not always the creepy men lingering in the alleys, waiting for the right moment to strike. He could be someone in a figure of authority, someone you feel compelled by. Or he could be a friend, someone you trust. Or he could even be a lover, someone you rely on for comfort. And this foreboding “it-could-be-anyone” mentality is what brings about the need to feel aware and in control.

Contrary to our societal norms, staying alert is not about dressing appropriately or how much we drink. It is not about placing the responsibility of stopping harassment in your own hands, and it is definitely not about blaming the victim for failing to do so when something happens. Our society needs to dispose of the mentality that avoiding sexual harassment is done so by not enticing men – and us girls *can* start that conversation.

WHEN UNCOMFORTABLE, SPEAK OUT.

We should ultimately focus on not falling prey to such a fear-embedded culture. The most straightforward way to do so is to talk about what has happened, such as in [Arianna O’Dell’s piece](#), which details the importance of doing so.

But will people understand me? Will they side with me... or him?

It is important to note that speaking out means getting your voice heard. Whether it is an adult you trust, or an official who knows what to do, you will be getting your story out there. And once it is out there, while it cannot be guaranteed that everyone will formulate the rightful conclusion, remember this: you did nothing wrong.

I want to assure you that you are doing what is best for yourself. It is definitely scary to be put in the spotlight, to have your story printed in articles, to hear your name come up in discussions. But do yourself a favour – don’t let *him* get away with what *he* has done. We must hold *him* accountable for the fear, for the pain, for every bit of damage he has inflicted upon you.

BE THERE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

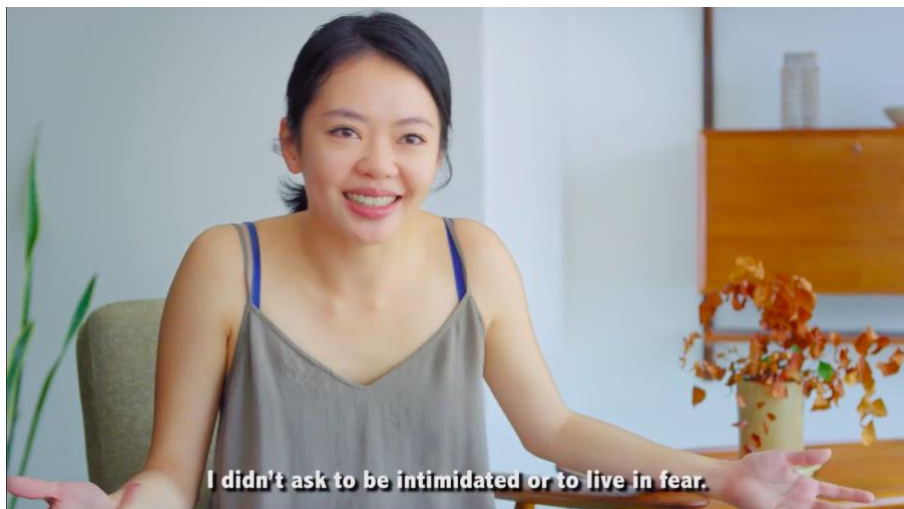
Support goes a long way in helping someone overcome such battles. As such, we girls should do everything we can to stick together, and to look out for one another.

We do not want to relive [the case of Kerstin Ong](#), where her unwanted experience with her assistant coach was worsened when her teammates ostracized her after she had made a police report against him.

“The most painful part of the whole experience was having my team and the person I considered my best friend turn against me. I did not know what to do or who to trust.”⁶”

Let us not allow anyone to feel that way again. Let us take a step forward and do our best to foster an environment of warmth, of love, of empathy.

We should never give the perpetrators of sexual harassment a chance to act upon their sick, twisted fantasies. We should give ourselves a chance instead; to refuse to be silenced and to let our voices be heard.



AWARE (Association of Women for Action and Research) produced [a video](#) as part of their #AimforZeroSG campaign to “press for collective support for survivors of all forms of sexual violence”.

Girls, we’re all here for *you*.