



**AGHARKAR RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
G.G. AGARKAR ROAD  
PUNE 411 004**

# **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)**

## **Prevention, Receipt, Inquiry and Disposal of Complaints of Sexual Harassment**

(As per the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013)

# 1. Purpose

To establish a transparent, fair, time-bound, and confidential mechanism for prevention, prohibition, and redressal of sexual harassment within the research institute, including laboratories, field sites, collaborative institutions, and virtual work environments.

# 2. Scope

This SOP applies to:

- Faculty members and Principal Investigators (PIs)
- Scientists and research staff
- Postdoctoral fellows
- Ph.D., M.Sc., and project scholars
- Laboratory technicians and support staff
- Administrative staff
- Visiting scientists, collaborators, consultants
- Interns and trainees
- Field investigators
- Any woman visiting the institute or participating in institute-related activities

It applies to conduct occurring:

- Within institute premises (labs, offices, seminar halls, hostels)
- During fieldwork, conferences, workshops, travel
- In online/virtual meetings, email, messaging platforms
- In research collaborations under the institute's authority

# 3. Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Unwelcome physical contact or advances
- Demand or request for sexual favours (including linked to research supervision, authorship, funding, grades, evaluation)
- Sexually coloured remarks
- Showing pornography
- Any unwelcome verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of sexual nature
- Abuse of supervisory or evaluative authority (e.g., threats affecting thesis approval, funding, recommendation letters)

## 4. Constitution of Internal Committee (IC)

The Institute shall constitute an Internal Committee (IC) as per Section 4 of the Act.

### Composition:

- Presiding Officer: Senior woman faculty member
- Minimum two internal members (preferably with experience in social/legal/gender issues)
- One external member from NGO/legal/social sector
- At least 50% women members

### Tenure:

- 3 years from date of nomination.

The IC shall function independently and free from administrative interference.

## 5. Receipt of Complaint

### 5.1 Submission

- Complaint must be submitted in writing within **3 months** of the incident (extendable by another 3 months for valid reasons).
- Complaints may be submitted via:
  - Official IC email ID
  - Sealed written submission to IC
  - Through designated grievance portal (if applicable)

If the complainant is unable to write the complaint, the IC shall assist in recording it.

### 5.2 Special Circumstances

- In case of physical or mental incapacity, complaint may be filed by:
  - Relative or friend
  - Co-worker or scholar
  - Legal heir (if applicable)

### 5.3 Acknowledgment

- Written acknowledgment within **3 working days**.
- Confidential case number assigned.
- Entry made in secure complaint register.

## 6. Preliminary Assessment

The IC shall:

- Confirm jurisdiction (incident connected to institute activities).
- Determine whether conciliation is requested.

## 7. Conciliation (Optional)

- Initiated only upon written request of complainant.
- Monetary settlement not permitted as sole basis.
- Written settlement recorded and signed.
- No further inquiry unless terms violated.

## 8. Formal Inquiry Process

If conciliation is not requested or fails:

### 8.1 Notice to Respondent

- Notice issued within **7 working days**.
- Copy of complaint shared.
- Respondent given **10 days** to submit written response.

### 8.2 Conduct of Inquiry

- Inquiry to follow principles of natural justice.
- Both parties may:
  - Present documents and digital evidence (emails, messages, lab records)
  - Produce witnesses
  - Provide written statements
- Direct cross-examination not permitted; questions routed through IC.
- Proceedings to be completed within **90 days**.

### 8.3 Special Safeguards in Research Context

- Ensure no academic retaliation (e.g., thesis delay, authorship exclusion).
- Protect research data access rights during investigation.
- If the supervisor is the respondent, a temporary change of guide may be recommended.
- Funding continuity for scholars shall be protected.

## **9. Interim Relief**

During inquiry, IC may recommend:

- Temporary transfer of either party
- Change of research supervisor
- Suspension of reporting relationship
- Grant of leave up to 3 months
- Restriction from lab or specific facilities
- Ensuring uninterrupted stipend/fellowship

Institute must implement recommendations promptly.

## **10. Confidentiality Measures**

As per Section 16 of the Act, strict confidentiality shall be maintained.

### **10.1 Non-Disclosure of:**

- Identity of complainant and respondent
- Witness identities
- Complaint details
- Evidence and proceedings
- Recommendations and findings

### **10.2 Confidential Handling Protocol**

- Physical files stored in locked cabinet under IC custody.
- Digital records stored in encrypted, access-restricted folders.
- IC members sign confidentiality declaration.
- No circulation of documents via unsecured channels.
- Proceedings conducted in private setting.
- Annual reports anonymized.

Breach of confidentiality shall invite disciplinary action.

## **11. Inquiry Report**

### **11.1 Submission**

- Report submitted within **10 days** of completion.
- Copies provided to both parties and Director/Head of Institute.

## **11.2 Report Contents**

- Allegations summary
- Defense summary
- Evidence analysis
- Findings
- Recommendations

## **12. Disciplinary Action**

### **12.1 If Allegation is Proved**

Recommendations may include:

- Written apology
- Warning or censure
- Withholding promotion/increment
- Withdrawal of supervisory privileges
- Removal from project leadership
- Suspension or termination
- Deduction from salary as compensation
- Mandatory gender-sensitization training

Institute must act within **60 days**.

### **12.2 If Allegation Not Proved**

- Case closed.
- No punitive action against complainant unless malicious intent is proven.

### **12.3 False or Malicious Complaint**

- Action only if malicious intent established.
- Inability to prove allegations does not amount to malicious complaint.

## **13. Appeal**

Either party may appeal to the appropriate authority within **90 days**.

## **14. Record Maintenance and Reporting**

IC shall maintain:

- Number of complaints received
- Number disposed
- Pending cases
- Nature of action taken

Annual report submitted to employer and district officer as required under Section 21.

## **15. Preventive Measures**

The Institute shall:

- Display POSH policy prominently (lab notice-boards, hostels, website).
- Conduct mandatory annual sensitization programs.
- Include POSH briefing during scholar orientation.
- Provide safe reporting mechanisms.
- Ensure representation of women in decision-making bodies.

## **16. Protection Against Retaliation**

- No victimization of complainant, respondent, or witnesses.
- Any retaliation (academic, professional, financial) shall be treated as misconduct.