

Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (PSSA)

Sexual Harassment Policy

Preamble

For the purposes of this policy sexual harassment is defined as both or either:

- (i) harassment of a sexual nature,
- (ii) harassment related to the sex or gender of the person

(i) Harassment of a sexual nature

This form of harassment involves unwanted conduct, including spoken remarks, of a sexual nature, in circumstances in which a reasonable person, having regard to the context, would have anticipated that the person harassed would be offended, humiliated, or intimidated.

(ii) Harassment related to the sex or gender of the person

This form of harassment involves conduct, including spoken remarks, that undermines or belittles a person, either generally or in some specific domain, on the basis of that person's *sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity*.

Sexual harassment can be carried out by persons of any sex or gender, and persons of any sex or gender may be the victims of sexual harassment. Especially in Southern Africa we must be mindful that instances of sexual harassment may interact with and be modified by the intersecting lines of race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability, etc. Sexual harassment, thus understood, is not limited to one-to-one interactions but may include, for example, remarks made in lectures or seminars that are not specifically aimed at one individual.

Both forms of harassment have the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of the person—which is a moral injury—and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Sexual harassment in either of these two forms can constitute a form of unfair discrimination, as well as a violation of professional ethics, and both harassment and discrimination are rejected by the PSSA. (See the PSSA Statement on Sexual Harassment.)

Members of the PSSA, particularly members exercising authority of any kind, are urged to be aware of this policy, to prevent violations where possible, to take alleged violations seriously, and to protect, as far as possible, those raising concerns about sexual harassment from future retaliation.

Any member of the PSSA may bring concerns about violations of the sexual harassment policy to the attention of any member of the PSSA executive committee.

The PSSA Sexual Harassment Policy

Any member of the PSSA may bring concerns about violations of the sexual harassment policy to the attention of any member of the PSSA executive committee.

(1) The member has three options when reporting:

1. To report the occurrence for record purposes
2. To request that the alleged perpetrator be formally advised to stop the behaviour
3. To file a formal complaint and request that appropriate sanctions be put in place. If and when appropriate the PSSA may ban an individual from attending society-related activities (including the annual PSSA conference); issue a public statement; report the matter in its annual report; and/or communicate its sanction to the individual or department's institution.

(2) If 'reporting' (Option 1) is requested:

- i. The complainant may simply wish to have the incident noted by the society without seeking any further action. (The complainant may take up the matter at a later stage.)
- ii. A record is kept of this interaction by the executive committee. This record will only deal with the alleged incident and does not refer to the name of the complainant or that of the alleged transgressor.
- iii. The benefit of this option for the complainant is that it provides an opportunity to discuss the incident, seek emotional support, find out more about what assistance can be provided, and alert the society to what type of harassment is taking place in the philosophical community.
- iv. In the case that an individual or department is alleged to have violated the policy on multiple occasions, the executive committee may also decide to take up the matter. If it does, it must respect any requests for anonymity on the part of complainants.

(3) If 'requesting formal intervention' (Option 2) is requested:

- i. A complainant may request that the executive committee act on an alleged incident of harassment directly, by addressing the other party in person verbally or in writing.
- ii. In this interaction, the executive committee would describe the alleged unwelcome behaviour and its effect, stating that the complainant has indicated that the behaviour must stop.
- iii. A record is kept of this interaction by the executive committee. This record will deal with the alleged incident but will not refer to the name of the complainant or that of the alleged transgressor.
- iv. The purpose of this particular interaction is not for the alleged transgressor to deny this allegation. Where the alleged transgressor disputes this allegation, the complainant may then seek to proceed with other action against the alleged transgressor.

(4) If 'requesting sanction' (Option 3) is requested:

- i. The complainant must make a written request to the executive committee of the PSSA explaining the violation of the policy, identifying the perpetrator of the violation (e.g., an individual, a department), and presenting available evidence of the violation (this evidence may include a report written after an attempted informal resolution (Option 2 above)). At this stage the complainant should also state whether they wish to remain anonymous.
- ii. The executive committee will appoint an ad hoc committee (constituted by 5 representative members of the PSSA) who are responsible for overseeing the matter as well as making recommendations to the executive committee about the appropriate response or sanction to the alleged violation of the policy.
- iii. The ad hoc committee will decide on a timeline for investigating the alleged violation and will notify the complainant of this timeline.
- iv. The ad hoc committee may seek additional evidence, including a response from the party or parties allegedly responsible for violating the policy, but may decide that the evidence supplied by the complainant is sufficient.
- v. The ad hoc committee will put together a full report of the case as well as provide the executive committee with recommendations for sanctions if it deems these to be warranted.
- vi. The work and report of the ad hoc committee, including evidence and materials gathered during the committee's deliberations, shall be confidential. The board may decide to release their report to the complainant and to the individual/department who/that is alleged to have violated the policy, but may choose not to do so in cases where parties deemed innocent may be exposed.
- vii. Once the executive committee has received the report and recommendations from the ad hoc committee, it shall make the final determination.
- viii. In case the executive committee decides that no violation of the policy has occurred this shall be communicated to the complainant. The department or university should also be notified if it was made aware of the charge during the course of investigating the complaint.
- ix. In case the executive committee decides that a violation of the policy has occurred, both the complainant and the individual, department or university responsible for the violation shall be informed of the judgment, the reasons for the judgment, and any sanctions imposed by the PSSA.
- x. A summary of the complaints received from members of the PSSA and the verdicts of these cases shall be included in the executive committee's annual report.

(5) Anonymity:

- i. In all cases complainants may request that they remain anonymous.
- ii. Requests to remain anonymous are to be respected in applying this policy.
- iii. In cases where a request for anonymity is an obstacle to carrying out the policy (for example, where the incident is such that describing it amounts to identifying the victim) then the PSSA executive and/or ad hoc committee must consult with the complainant regarding whether and how to proceed.

- iv. The complainant must be consulted with regards to public notices, media statements, email circulars, etc., relating to the complaint.

Notes:

1. This policy draws on, and is indebted to, the policies and best practice guidelines of the British Philosophical Association (BPA) and the American Philosophical Association (APA).
2. Most institutions of higher learning in Southern Africa have policies and procedures regarding harassment including sexual harassment. As of 2015 most of them are restricted to deal with harassment between members of the same institution. This policy is to be understood as complementing them.
3. The record of the most recent AGM of the PSSA will make clear who the current office-holders are. At the time that this policy was adopted, the composition of the executive was also listed here: <https://philsafrica.wordpress.com/about/executive-committee/>