

China Has a #MeToo Moment, But Still Lacks Anti-Harassment Enforcement

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The #MeToo movement may have spread to China, but the legal landscape still does not provide significant protections to potential victims. On January 1, 2018, a former doctoral student at Beijing's Beihang University, Luo Xixi, posted on Weibo, China's Twitter, an allegation that her former doctoral supervisor had sexually harassed her while she was a student. Luo included the hashtag #MeToo. In the wake of Luo's allegation, and three other incidents that had been reported within the prior month, Chinese authorities took steps to limit assault on campus. By the middle of January, Luo's former professor was removed from teaching, on January 16, 2018, the Ministry of Education announced that it would be developing policies to prevent sexual harassment at universities in China, and on January 21, more than 50 teachers from Chinese universities issued a joint statement calling for new legislation to stem sexual harassment on campus.

Nevertheless, while these actions may indicate that the #MeToo movement has spread to China, the Chinese government still provides little to no protection for victims of harassment in the workplace. To begin with, the Chinese government has a fraught history with individuals trying to raise awareness of sexual harassment. In 2015, the Beijing police arrested five women who were planning to distribute pamphlets regarding the risks of sexual harassment on public transit. They were detained for over a month.

Furthermore, China still lacks any strong workplace anti-discrimination or anti-harassment laws. China has scattered laws and regulations that generally prohibit discrimination and "sexual harassment against women." Nonetheless, there is no comprehensive law and limited remedies available to plaintiffs who bring suit. This is only further highlighted by surveys that indicate that nearly one third of women in China have experienced sexual harassment at work, and potentially up to 70 of women at Chinese universities have experienced some form of harassment.

It is unclear whether these public reports of harassment, and the Chinese government's seemingly swift response to the allegations, indicates a shift in policy or whether any new legislation will be passed in response.

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