

What Have We Learned From The Still-Unfolding #MeToo Movement In Taiwan?

Wednesday 13 September 2023, by [WU Weiting](#) (Date first published: 21 August 2023).

On May 31st, a Facebook post by a former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) staffer ignited the long-smouldering embers of Taiwan's #MeToo movement, illuminating local issues of sexual harassment and assault originally left behind by the 2017-2018 global #MeToo movement.

As the first Asian nation to pass [anti-domestic violence legislation](#) in 1998, Taiwan is considered to be the [most progressive country](#) in Asia in terms of gender equality, so it remains unclear why the initial #MeToo movement failed to take root locally. However, some scholars at the time attributed the anomaly to Taiwan's strong anti-sexual harassment legal framework. This legal framework is composed of three pieces of anti-sexual harassment legislation: The [Act of Gender Equality in Employment](#), which addresses incidents in the workplace; the [Gender Equity Education Act](#), which addresses incidents that occur in educational institutions; and the [Sexual Harassment Prevention Act](#), which addresses incidents in all other contexts. Yet, as of July 2023, more than 100 recent #MeToo claims have begun to shine new light on many pervasive systemic flaws.

Among the three acts, the Act of Gender Equality in Employment has proven the most problematic in terms of supporting victims of sexual harassment. While the Act of Gender Equality in Employment requires employers to prevent and address sexual harassment incidents in the workplace, the law does not provide for instances where the employer is the offender in question. Furthermore, the act does not cover instances where the victim and offender are employed by different companies, even if the incident occurred within the victim's workplace.

The legal system failing them, victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault, have been forced to seek recourse by publicly disclosing details of their experiences. In doing so, however, these victims often face all-too-familiar backlash and scrutiny of their motives. These responses have brought to the forefront two critical aspects concerning the state of gender equality in Taiwan.

First, it is clear that patriarchal and Confucian norms remain entrenched throughout Taiwanese society. As a result, victims struggle to speak out. Nor does this reluctance seem to fade over time. For instance, one retired professor of music has been [accused](#) of sexual harassment and assault by more than 100 former students, and even though some of these former students are in their fifties or sixties, they still fear they may upset their parents by speaking out. Clearly, the pervasive notion of "losing face" continues to prohibit discussions of gender violence even in modern-day 2023.

Second, Taiwan's #MeToo movement has exposed a significant generational gap in public attitudes towards gender-related issues. Younger generations have had opportunities to discuss gender-related topics throughout their primary and secondary education due to the 2004 Gender Equity Education Act, which requires all schools to provide gender equality lessons for four hours per semester. For students graduating before 2004, however, such opportunities may have been scarce or non-existent.

An increase in these educational opportunities may then account for why the primary support for the #MeToo movement has seemed to come from the younger generations. In other words, gender-related policies and movements have empowered the younger generations by equipping them with gender perspectives.

Still, at the same time, public discourse continues to be dominated by traditional cultural values. Faced with this dilemma, gender groups have had to remain vigilant in safeguarding gender equality education from interference by conservative interest groups and in lobbying for structural change to legal mechanisms governing sexual harassment complaints.

Though belated, the long-dormant power of Taiwan's #MeToo movement has ultimately pushed the Legislative Yuan to amend all three anti-sexual harassment laws within the next two months. The movement's influence extends beyond the legislative level though, as there are many lessons we have already learned from the still-unfolding #MeToo movement.

In particular, it is clear that the nature of social media influences public support. The amount of public attention given to the victims of sexual harassment appears related to the notoriety of the accused individual. Further, cultural capital plays a significant role in how much attention an allegation receives; in other words, one victim's social media post may receive attention while another does not. For instance, there have yet to be widely shared stories by migrant spouses, domestic workers, or indigenous individuals. There is no doubt that individuals in these communities are the victims of gender-based violence, but they very likely do not have access to social media circles in Taiwan or may be unable to write in fluent Mandarin.

We also know sexual assault crimes will not simply disappear. Though we have seen hundreds of allegations against high-profile politicians, academics, and athletes, we have only read one or two sincere apologies. As this article mentioned, because of the flaws of the Act of Gender Equality in Employment and the Sexual Harassment Prevention Act, most victims cannot seek justice through the proper legal channels. Without such mechanisms in place, it is unclear how to assist victims in this process.

It is also worth noting that only the ruling party, the DPP, has shown they are willing to apologise for wrongdoings and respond to accusations. In contrast, the major opposition party, the KMT, has chosen to nominate a legislator [twice convicted of sexual harassment](#) and has failed to respond to sexual harassment accusations against two KMT politicians.

Clearly, Taiwanese society has yet to initiate a public dialogue regarding standard gender norms. So, while public opinion may lean towards sympathy for the victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault, lewd jokes, and discriminatory gender-based remarks continue to pervade politics, entertainment, and daily life.

Finally, unlike #MeToo movements in other countries, Taiwan has yet to see any incidents of sexual assault receive large-scale media exposure. Instead, the Taiwanese #MeToo movement has relied entirely on the initiative of the victims to tell their stories because media outlets have failed to conduct investigations of systemic issues or structural failures.

The flames of Taiwan's #MeToo movement have provided new opportunities to reflect on Confucian and patriarchal influences throughout society. To do so, however, Taiwan must act and work in solidarity to address the long-repressed suffering of #MeToo victims. Then, the transgender population, ethnic minorities, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and so on, may finally have the power to seek their justice.

Weiting Wu

[*Click here*](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

New Bloom

<https://newbloommag.net/2023/08/21/me-too-unfolding-tw/>