

AIIS MANUAL ON PUBLIC CONDUCT (MPC)

Note: This manual is intended for those who are planning to come to India on any programs that are associated with the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS). This includes students in AIIS language programs, pre- and post-doctoral research fellows, recipients of creative and performing arts fellowships, and students in international learning and internship programs assisted by AIIS offices. Various terms used below, such as “scholars,” “researchers,” and “students” are meant to include all of these categories.

There is almost unanimous agreement that a manual of this nature needs to exist. Whom it is for is a little less clear. AIIS welcomes first-year language students who may never have left the States or even their state, as well as senior scholars who may have grown up in India or spent considerable amounts of time there. Students’ and scholars’ experience of India will depend on a multitude of factors, including how they are visually perceived. One comprehensive manual will never be able to inform everyone’s experience and runs the risk of speaking to no one’s. While we appreciate that some of this manual may seem redundant and even a little patronizing to many of its potential readers, we hope that there is sufficient preamble here to clarify its intentions and scope.

We are guided by a recognition that harassment, especially sexual harassment, is a problem to be taken seriously. This manual discusses precautionary measures that students and scholars can take to familiarize themselves with social conventions and the challenges that any scholar who is working in a foreign country must confront. Grantees often find it hard to know what inferences are being drawn from their behavior or which norms and cultural cues are structuring an interaction in a cross-cultural situation. Furthermore, the norms and cues themselves are constantly changing and vary significantly from one part of India to the next. The more grantees can learn about these inferences and cues, the more effectively and comfortably they can deal with the situations they encounter. However, at no time are we trying to suggest that sexual harassment is ever in any way, shape, or form, the fault of the victim.

What is Sexual Harassment?

We encourage grantees to recognize and confront all forms of sexual harassment. We reject the notion that certain forms of harassment should be trivialized and thus ignored. Sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to:

- (a) any unwelcome sexual looks, words and gestures that cause humiliation, discomfort or an uncomfortable working or learning environment
- (b) sexually colored remarks
- (c) a demand or request for sexual favors
- (d) showing pornography
- (e) physical contact and advances

Cultural Sensitivity

Scholars from the United States are guests in another culture and should pay attention to the propriety of their actions in their new context. The purpose of the suggestions compiled here is not to legislate or constrain the dress, action, and speech of scholars but to provide information about how certain kinds of behavior may be seen, and sometimes misinterpreted, in India. Each individual must decide how to act in light of this information. Once scholars have settled into a community and established themselves as professional researchers, they often find that they have more flexibility in how they speak, dress and behave.

It is important to understand that despite any scholar's best intentions, if they are not thoughtful about how they present themselves and act in India, they could put themselves at risk or inadvertently make others feel uncomfortable themselves. For example, a man in the United States might make eye contact and joke with a younger woman or girl in a way that could cause consternation in many Indian households. Even though most of the sexual harassment in India is directed at women, it is very important for all scholars to act in a way that takes the mores of Indian society into account.

Participation in the Public Sphere

Some forms of sexual harassment reflect the challenges that foreigners experience when they live and work in a country other than their own. American scholars may be unfamiliar or assumed to be unfamiliar with prevailing social norms. There are also certain kinds of behavior that are frowned upon—for Indian and American women—in all but the most cosmopolitan settings. In many parts of India, women might be seen as inviting unwelcome sexual attention if they smoke in public, or drink alcohol, especially in the presence of men. Displays of physical affection between men and women are almost always considered inappropriate, even among married people. While physical affection between same-sex people such as holding hands may be common, physical contact that suggests a romantic relationship will be frowned upon and may be considered shocking.

Likewise, scholars should avoid causing Indian women to end up in places, situations, or sections of town, at times that could be dangerous for them. Plan for the physical and social safety of the women (or men) you might be meeting and consider taking extra steps to ensure that they return home or to a safe place after your meetings. Consider whether you need to meet after dark, and if so, ensure that there is a safe way for you and your interlocutor to get home. Furthermore, male scholars especially should ensure that their behavior towards women is not misunderstood as romantic or sexual in nature. These guidelines need not be hard and fast rules (depending upon region and class), but one should be aware of, and whenever possible avoid transgressing them.

One general suggestion for AIIS scholars is to develop awareness of social norms and foster social networks that enable the scholar to deal with complex situations like sexual harassment and assault, as well as everyday situations, like conducting meetings and making friends. Finding trusted friends, family connections, and reputable community organizations can help in all kinds of ways from determining what kind of resistance to street harassment is most effective in any given space, to understanding appropriate interpersonal behavior in the workplace or home, to getting suggestions for shops, clothes, or food. In the cases of serious harassment or assault, having strong ties can help a scholar make good choices about whether or how to make a report, how to find support, and what kind of next steps to take.

Clothing

It is important for an AIIS scholar to dress in a way that enables her to fit in with the region of her research. Paying careful attention to underlying codes concerning dress in the area will help her fit in. In general, adult men and women should refrain from wearing shorts or shorter skirts. If visiting religious sites or formal spaces, women and men may be asked to cover their shoulders and knees.

Certain kinds of clothing will identify scholars with a particular religious or social group within the wider community. Therefore scholars will want to be aware of the implications of their choice of clothing. In any given area, dress styles may differ according to religious affiliation and social status. While in large metropolitan cities, Indian people often wear clothes similar or identical to what is currently worn in the West, in other areas Western clothes denote foreignness, class position, and wealth.

Buying clothes in India is generally relatively inexpensive and buying clothes locally can allow scholars get a sense for what is generally accepted in dress in the areas where they are staying.

Travel

A number of AIIS scholars find that their research entails a great deal of travel. You may find you need to engage in activities at places and times where it is not customary for women to be traveling alone. Therefore, a number of suggestions for traveling are given below, in order to make the process of travel safer and more comfortable. It is usually wise to arrive before dark if you are going to a new place. If you need to travel after dark, you may want to hire a research assistant or ask a friend to accompany you.

Men should always pay attention to the impact that their behavior may have on those sitting near them while traveling. Please be reminded that it is considered inappropriate for men and women travelling together to display acts of public affection (touching, holding hands, kissing). Such behavior would likely be seen as indicating the “bad character” of the woman and may compromise her safety.

Trains

There are several things to keep in mind when traveling by train. First, many women scholars buy train tickets to travel in the ladies’ compartment. This second-class seating (or berth) puts the woman in a part of the train that is limited entirely to women and children. Some scholars have found this a pleasant way to travel, although the women’s compartment can sometimes be more crowded or noisy (because of the many children) than other parts of the train. Second-class air-conditioned (“2-tier AC”) is generally a safe, comfortable way for women to travel alone, if the train is a corridor train with berths along the side, not separate compartments (not always the case on trains in South India). If a woman who prefers to travel first-class arrives at the train and discovers that her compartment (coupe) is full of men, it is perfectly acceptable for her to find the conductor and politely ask to be moved to a coupe with women or a family. This is considered a reasonable request. It is usually a good idea for all scholars, but especially women, to get an upper berth, instead of a lower one, if possible, in order to be inaccessible to unwanted attention during the night.

When traveling on an overnight train, one should wear clothing that keeps one’s body covered. One is sleeping in a public space, rather than a private one, so a salwar-kameez, for example, is often both practical and appropriate for a woman. Also if a man looks or acts overly “friendly,” it is probably better for a woman to move or at least not respond to his overtures, keeping in mind that he would be unlikely to display this kind of “friendliness” toward an Indian woman. It is always appropriate for a woman to request that a man stop uncomfortable or inappropriate behavior.

Buses and Local trains/subways/ metros

Often when traveling by bus or on local trains, subways, or metros, one section is reserved for women traveling. This “ladies’ section” is often the left side of the bus as you face forward. There is less chance of a woman getting jostled by a man, either intentionally or unintentionally, if she is in the women’s part of the bus. Even if they are traveling with a woman, male presenting scholars should not go into ladies compartments or sections. Except when traveling with a man, it is not recommended that a woman scholar sit on the men’s side, since that kind of action can give the message that she is not aware of regular norms of behavior.

Male scholars should take extra care not to graze against the bodies of women standing on a bus. This will be seen as sexual harassment. Given how crowded buses, trains and metros can be, some amount of accidental jarring or bodily contact may be unavoidable, but repeated actions need not be ignored. Many scholars do not know at first that it is culturally acceptable to respond immediately to such attacks. Indian women in these situations often respond as soon as inappropriate behavior begins, rather than waiting until it escalates. It is

considered appropriate to do so in a polite but firm way.

Rickshaws and Taxis

Many scholars use auto rickshaws or cycle rickshaws for traveling short distances. In getting into a rickshaw, it is important to act as though one knows where one is going and what is the shortest route is to that place. For major cities such as Delhi and Bangalore, detailed street maps are available. If you are traveling to someone's residence, ask her or him for specific directions when coming from a generally known landmark (cinema, hospital, government building, temple). Generally, it is useful to speak to drivers of rickshaws and taxis in the local language, to indicate that you know your way around the area.

If a taxi or auto driver stops in order to pick up one of his buddies, especially at night, it is perfectly reasonable to tell the driver not to do so and to threaten to leave his rickshaw if he refuses. If a man and a woman are traveling in the same rickshaw to different places, it is wise to drop the woman off first and then drop off the man.

Here is a helpful procedure for scholars traveling home alone at night by rickshaw or taxi. Have someone accompany you to the rickshaw or taxi stand. Make an explicitly public act of writing down the license plate or car number and give it to the person with you before getting into the vehicle. You can also loudly tell the person that you will call when you arrive home. Drivers in taxis that have a central office reached by phone often know that a passenger can lodge a complaint if their behavior is offensive. Also, several Indian professional women who regularly have to work late caution against offers of rides from male colleagues whom one does not know well. It is always better to travel with another woman. As in any urban area, it is safer for a woman waiting at a bus stop late at night to not engage in conversation with the drivers of cars that may pull up and offer her a ride.

Uber, Ola, and other ride-sharing services

Many scholars have started using such services and consider it a safe way to travel. The GPS system ensures you and the driver know where you are going, and you can let other people know where you are through the app.

Housing

It is atypical for a woman in India to live alone, regardless of her class or status. It is even more unconventional for a single woman to entertain male visitors in her private residence. Such behavior will often be interpreted in sexual terms, even if the male is just a friend. If possible, a woman scholar should try to share an apartment with some other woman or rent a room from a family. Male scholars who want to visit a woman living alone would do best to visit her in the company of another woman, if possible. If the female scholar lives with an Indian family in which there are daughters living at home, and a male scholar wants to visit her, he should be sensitive to possible concern on the part of the parents. For a male to flirt or be overly familiar with, joke with, or touch those daughters may be interpreted as offensive behavior.

Female scholars sometimes encounter harassment by landlords from whom they have rented flats (apartments). In several cases, the landlord begins by being “friendly,” that is, coming to the scholar’s flat when she was alone, and staying to chat. Gradually, in some cases, such visits escalate, becoming more and more intrusive. If one combats such behavior as soon as it begins, there is less chance for this kind of escalation of behavior. A woman can politely keep the landlord at the doorway rather than inviting him inside, and tell him she does not let male company enter when she is alone. Alternatively, she can make arrangements to drop off the rent at the landlord’s home at a time when his wife and family are there. If the landlord has to supervise repairs in a woman scholar’s flat, she can arrange to be elsewhere while a workman and the landlord are there, or she can arrange to have a friend stay with her in the flat during that time. When a male scholar goes to drop off his rent at the landlord’s house, he should demonstrate respect for women and the norms that govern the household. If a woman scholar brings a respected older local person, a trusted professional contact, or a friend with some status with her to introduce her to the landlord, this often conveys that she has a respectable “guardian,” which may reduce the likelihood of her being perceived as a vulnerable target. Grandmothers are particularly good people to accompany a newly arrived female scholar, since they are generally respected because of their age and experience. When a scholar is first beginning research, especially in an out-of-the-way place, it may be difficult to find such a person; any prior contacts will be helpful. A letter of introduction from the AIIS would also help.

Scholars may discover different kinds of residential issues in rural settings. When a highly educated, English-speaking researcher comes to a small village, while this is not always the case, many report that there is a tendency for this person to be attributed high status and shown more respect than in a city. Furthermore, if female scholars are more likely to spend a fair amount of time with women during the day, sexual harassment may be less of a problem in that context. This may be the case especially if the scholar lives with an Indian family and practices the customary avoidance behavior toward older males. A female scholar may find it helpful to learn some terms of relationships with male members such as “uncle” or “brother” in the local language. Addressing a male person with an age-appropriate relational term of this type can help set a boundary of behavior.

In rural areas, power outage is common and roads and pathways tend to be deserted after dark. Women tend to remain indoors after dark. For this reason, a woman scholar will find it safer to avoid going out alone after sunset. If she is required to go out, it would be safer to request someone trusted go with her.

Academic Settings

AIS has some specific suggestions for dealing with the relationship between research fellows and their academic advisors at the university to which they have been affiliated by the Government of India. It is always best for the scholar to begin the relationship with the advisor in a formal way.

It is customary to use the proper title when addressing one's advisor: Professor, Doctor, Sir, or Madam. A scholar should not adopt a tone of intimacy or use a pet name or shortened form of the advisor's name. Similarly, when scholars give their own names, they should include their title if they have one, and give their full name.

Female scholars should not suggest or accept offers to drink liquor or smoke cigarettes with their academic advisors. Male scholars should not suggest or accept offers to drink liquor or smoke cigarettes with their female academic advisors. Although such behavior might occur under certain circumstances in the United States or in urban India, there is also the chance that it could be considered a sexual overture in certain Indian circles.

Reserve on the part of the woman scholar usually results in respect. Attention to the propriety of certain actions on the part of the male scholar usually results in appreciation. These rules of thumb will not, of course, be applicable in every situation. For example, if a woman is dealing with a male advisor whose wife is an activist in women's issues, the scholar may find she can be more informal with both of them. But it never hurts to begin with formal behavior and then, if it proves to be unnecessary, become more informal later.

Negotiating Sexual Harassment

In spite of all the precautions people take and all the culturally sensitive behavior to which they adhere, scholars may still find themselves harassed. No one should think that they have been harassed because they have not followed guidelines properly. Finding out from local people how they negotiate harassment will help you feel supported and may provide you with useful strategies.

Same-Sex Relationships/LGBTQIA+ identities

Despite some positive developments in recent years and the presence of advocacy and Pride groups in major urban areas, the topic of same-sex relationships and gender-non-conforming behavior remains uneasy or even taboo for many Indians, including middle-class urbanites. Grantees might receive unsolicited personal questions from acquaintances or host families such as whether they have a "girlfriend" back home, or why they are not married. Open lesbian identification is likely to provoke discomfort or discrimination.

Several former students have reported having to uneasily "go back into the closet" during

their stay in India as the path of least resistance, while others have found it comfortable and safe to discuss sexual preference with friends and some acquaintances. This is a personal matter on which you will have to use your own judgment, but we recommend caution in revealing non-hetero-normative sexual preference, unless you are certain that doing so will not provoke prejudice or hostility. However, students and fellows may also find that because of the taboo nature of the topic, they can often easily divert the conversation when such a strategy is necessary. AIIS endeavors to make its own staff and teachers supportive of LGBTQ students and fellows and sensitive to their concerns. Working with local advocacy groups may offer further avenues of support.

II: Sexual harassment within the AIIS program: Seeking Redress

The AIIS is committed to providing work/study conditions that ensure a safe environment for its students, fellows, and staff on its campuses and for scholars while they engage in field work. Accordingly it has formulated policies and procedures to address and adjudicate acts of sexual harassment. The AIIS will handle all complaints of sexual harassment and assault with sensitivity and impartiality. The treatment of complaints relating to sexual harassment will be time-bound. The Officer will consult with the complainant before providing information about the incident to other parties. An alleged perpetrator of sexual harassment shall be presumed to be innocent until the contrary is established following an inquiry. A separate handbook, "Procedures Regarding Sexual Harassment." provides detailed guidelines.

The AIIS has created an internal Complaints Committee which is charged with dealing with complaints of sexual harassment. The AIIS Director-General in India is currently the Presiding Officer. Other members of the Complaints Committee will include at least two AIIS employees, one member of an NGO or organization that addresses women's rights and/or sexual harassment and the head of the language program at the place where the complaint is issued. The AIIS will ensure that the policy is implemented and well-publicized in each of the areas in which it has language study programs.

The Presiding Officer and other Committee members hold annual workshops to provide staff with information about what constitutes sexual harassment, and with its penal and disciplinary consequences. The sessions will be conducted in the local language, publicized and held at a time when most office staff can attend. The legal issues involved in maintaining a workplace free from sexual harassment will be explained at these sessions. The Officer will direct staff and scholars to external resources including legal advice, medical care and psychological counseling. We have appended some helpful information at the end of the manual

Should scholars experience sexual harassment by another scholar, or by a staff member, teacher, landlord, translator, research assistant or anyone else, they should bring this to the attention of the Presiding Officer in charge who will apprise the Director-General and the President of the situation. In the event the conduct amounts to an offense under Indian

law, AIIS shall file complaints with appropriate authorities in accordance with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

This revised manual builds on earlier efforts. After AIIS resolved to provide educational materials about preventing and combating sexual harassment (spring 1993), the Professional Conduct Review Task Force and members of the AIIS Board of Trustees collected materials on the topic. In 2001-2002, a task force revised and updated the materials and developed AIIS Policies and Procedures for Sexual Harassment. In 2013 the AIIS executive committee formed a task force that revised the 2001-2002 AIIS Manual and Policies and Procedures guidelines and produced this document.

In writing and revising the manual, committee members have drawn on scholarly studies, solicited comments from grantees and spoken with people who have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment and assault. The committee examined the practices of other funding organizations and consulted with legal and women's advocacy organizations in India. All the people we have consulted are familiar with both American and Indian cultural contexts and are committed to preventing sexual harassment.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

If you have been the victim of sexual assault, please contact your local police and AIIS in Delhi as soon as possible.

Useful Contacts:

The American Embassy can be reached 24/7 at +91-11-24198000 in our manual. Please ask to speak to the American Citizens Service. The Embassy has valuable information on its web site: http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/emergency_contact.html.

Police control room (24X7 helpline): 100

Centralized ambulance for accident and trauma services (24X7): 102

Women's Helpline: Police: 1091

Women in distress helpline (24X7): 181

Delhi Commission for Women:

Rape helpline:23370557/23074344 mobile: 1800 11 9292

Human Rights Law Network: 24374501/24379855 (9:30 am -6 pm)

Lawyers Collective Women's Rights Initiative: 46805555

Jagori (NGO):26692700/8800996640

National Commission for Women 23234918/23237166

Lawyers Collective (24X7): 24377101

