

Online safety advocates act against gender-based harassment

# Turn digital spaces into safer places



By LYN CHAN

**M**s Nisha Rai, 22, is disgusted by the rampant objectification and sexualisation of women online. And she is channelling her anger into action.

The National University of Singapore political science and South Asian studies undergraduate sees package deals selling nude or revealing videos and images on messaging platforms “almost every day”, and it sickens her.

These can be purchased as easily as a Netflix subscription, she shares.

Ms Rai now works to help equip young digital users with the knowledge and means to protect themselves online.

She is a member of the Singapore Together Sunlight Alliance for Action (AfA) – also known as the AfA to tackle online harms, especially those targeted at women and girls – which was launched by the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) in July 2021.

The AfA seeks to stamp out online gender-based harassment through public education, research, partnerships and support for victims of online harms. Ms Rai is the coordinator of the youth engagement workstream, one of five by the Sunlight AfA.

In January, the Sunlight AfA conducted an online survey with over 1,000 Singaporeans which provided valuable insights on the public’s perceptions, experiences and prevalence of online harms.

Ms Rai was also part of a youth engagement session for 30 peer supporters and student leaders from Republic Polytechnic and the Singapore University of Social Sciences, held on June 29.

With support from the MCI and Sunlight AfA members, she oversaw the development of a workshop to arm youth with basic knowledge of online harms and the avenues where help and support can be found.

Online users need to know that “the onus to ensure safety is never on the victim-survivor, but on the perpetrator...”

“(These comments about how) women are expected to act or behave in a certain way are my biggest motivator in empowering everyone.”



## Shielding the young

Also active in the Sunlight AfA is Ms Carol Loi (left), 50, a mother of two daughters who are active on social media. She is adamant that the prevalence of pornography must be curbed.

“Pornography has a similar impact on the brain as drugs that are illegal in Singapore,” says the founder and principal consultant of Village Consultancy, a digital literacy education company.

Ms Loi has spent a decade supporting children, youths, families, and educators in digital literacy. **She sees an urgent need to educate youth on harmful online content, help them handle potential harms online, and seek help if they are troubled.**

She extends her expertise to the Sunlight AfA, where she coordinates the public education workstream activities. To date, she has led two webinars: one for parents and the other for youths.

“I was reminded to continue creating safe spaces for parents and youths to share their experiences with peers, have healthy communi-



Ms Nisha Rai (third from left) is also the co-president of SafeNUS, a student-led initiative to create safe spaces for their peers and provide avenues for victims of sexual harassment on campus to seek help. PHOTO: COURTESY OF NISHA RAI

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– Ms Nisha Rai

## Building Singapore Together

Launched in June 2019, the Singapore Together movement provides opportunities for Singaporeans to participate in and support citizen-led initiatives.

Partnerships are at the heart of the movement, with opportunities for Singaporeans to co-create solutions for a more inclusive and sustainable Singapore.

ties to turn to in times of need, and to be able to extend help to others who may need it.”

The formation of the Sunlight AfA, she says, has created a platform where initiatives can be consolidated and synergised, with clarity on the big picture.

“The coming together of a community with various expertise and experiences to tackle a common issue is very precious.”

Beyond the Sunlight AfA, MCI has announced two proposed Codes of Practice to enhance online safety in Singapore, especially for young users. A public consultation exercise has been launched from July 13 to Aug 10.

When formally introduced, the codes will require social media platforms to minimise user exposure to harmful content through content moderation, empower users to report and prevent the further spread of harmful content, and make social media services more accountable to users’ reporting.



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## By the numbers

47%

Of over 1,000 respondents polled across all ages in the Sunlight AfA’s survey have experienced online harms

300

Stakeholders from the people, public and private sectors engaged in the formation of the Sunlight AfA

28

Teams pitched ideas to keep online spaces safe and secure in a hackathon organised by DBS, the judiciary and MCI in October 2021