



EVERYDAY HEROES

Stories of change by the Akshara team

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**Stories of Change by the Akshara Team
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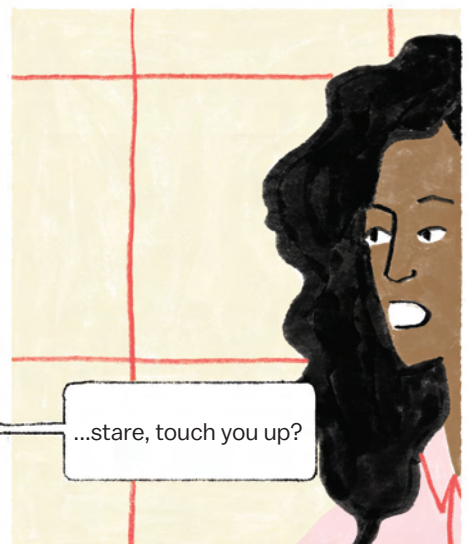
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When I travel in the local train, I put my rucksack in front so no one will touch my breasts.



When I enter my lane I walk with my eyes down...



...so I don't have to see the group of boys hanging around.



Sometimes I feel like having a tea at our nearby stall but I dare not go. The looks I would get!



What about those guys...



...who spread their legs in bus seats?





WHY DO MOST GIRLS TOLERATE SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

SELF DOUBT

You wonder if it was what you were wearing or the time of the day/night or that particular road. Can you call this harassment or was it something too trivial to worry about?

SOCIAL CONDITIONING

That it is fate, a part of a woman's lot or a gender or occupational hazard. You are not sure how many bystanders or people from the public will help you or restrain the harasser. Instead they just might stand and watch!

FEAR OF RETALLIATION

If you tell your parents, they place restrictions on you, like not letting you go to college.

If you tell your friends, you are no longer 'cool', they might laugh or talk behind your back. If you tell your teacher or boss, it becomes official and you are likely to be called before a committee, or even fired on other pretexts.

NO HELP FROM OTHERS

It's your word against the harasser's – there is seldom 'hard evidence', so it's likely you will not be believed. Suddenly, you become unpopular!

"Don't be difficult" is what you hear, or "Don't you have a sense of humor?". Very few people want to stick their necks out for you.







Plan your own Strategy. Fear can be overcome by knowledge. Read up what harassment is and what can be overlooked. You will find info on www.standupagainstviolence.org. Websites like www.howrevealing.com or www.stopstreetharassment.org gives you a lot of stories women have posted about their experiences. It will help you in understanding the different types of harassments.

Read up the law. IPC 354 and 509 are concerned with word or gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of women. These laws are generally used for street sexual harassment.

Remember that harassers are basically bullies who prey on girls and women. They usually try out their stunts in crowds so they are anonymous. You have to show them that you are not afraid. Look at the harasser and shame him with direct statements like "Why do you keep touching me?", "Please move".



Share your stories on blog.blanknoise.org, an Indian blog created in Bangalore. Don't allow harassers to defeat you or curtail your mobility.

Take some action or the situation might get worse. Either talk to the person to back off or find a way to avoid him. Remember the emotional impact of not doing anything is severe. Silence will breed more fear. Explore your options carefully. For one off instances, you can either confront the harasser or find support to help you to confront him.

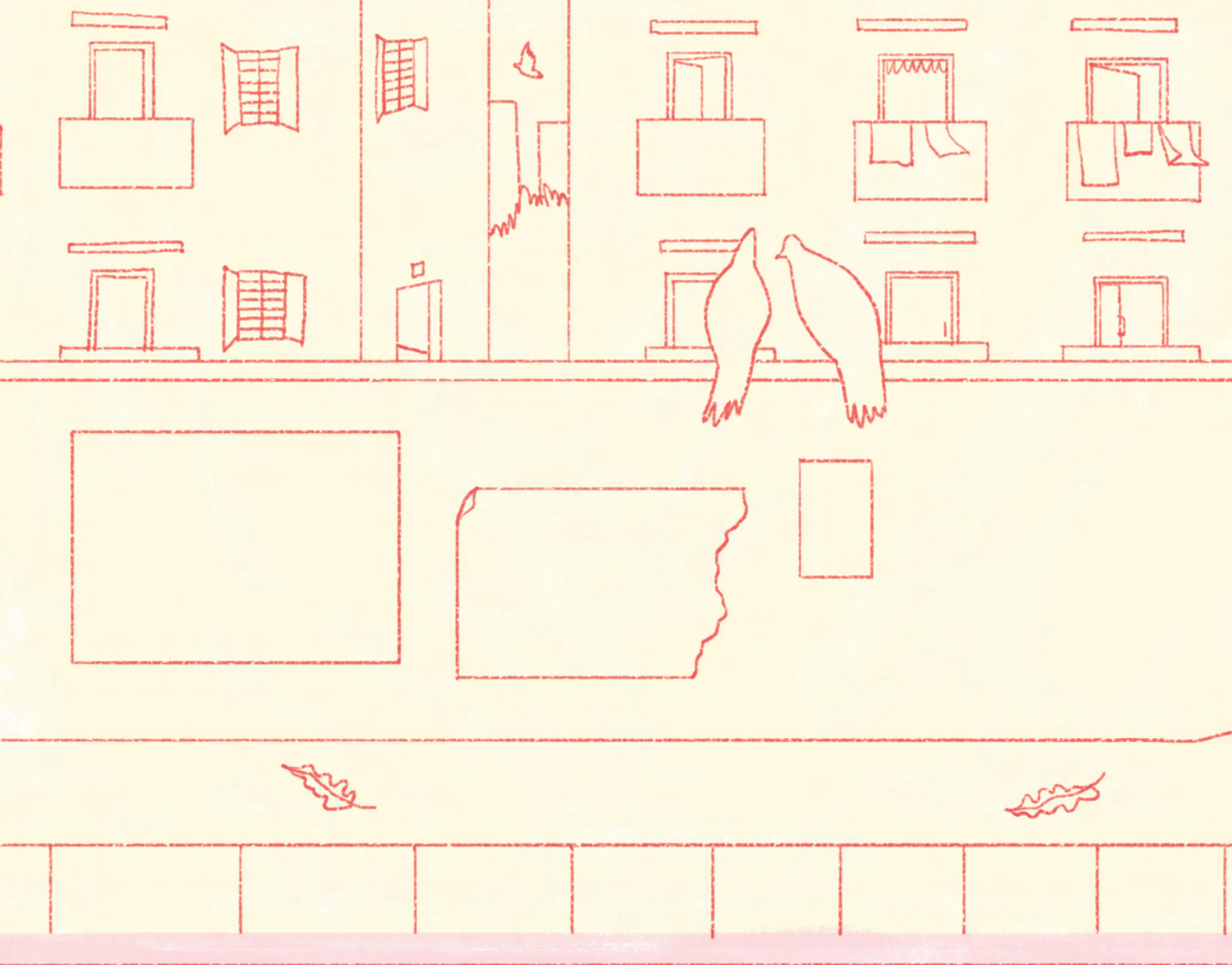
If you think of going to the police, take some friends or elders with you so there is pressure on them to register your complaint. If you can, consult a lawyer beforehand. For official complaints you will need to gather evidence like conversations on your mobile, letters, sms or emails, etc.

In many cities there is a helpline for women. Call them and talk to them about your case. In Mumbai, **103** is the helpline number for women. Nationally, the helpline number is **181**.



This booklet was conceptualised and written by Nandita Gandhi based on the stories of change which emerged from the innovative evaluation tool used during the Mapping Change Project.

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Akshara's focus is on half the population of India or its women and girls especially those who are socially and economically underprivileged and bear the brunt of violence. Akshara, a Mumbai-based, non-profit women's organisation and resource centre, has for 22 years been working for the empowerment of women through educational scholarships, building livelihood skills and understanding one's gender rights. In order to curb and prevent violence against women so that women can lead productive and dignified lives, Akshara engages with young men to introspect and work towards gender equality and the State to implement laws and provide services for a Safe, Inclusive and Sustainable City.

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