

# Professor sacked over abuse claims in rare win for China's #MeToo movement

Sunday 4 August 2024, by [HAWKINS Amy](#), [LIN Chi Hui](#) (Date first published: 28 July 2024).

## Swift response by Renmin University to student's post creates shockwave in a country where accusers are often ignored or sued

Public allegations of sexual harassment are rare in [China](#). Swift responses to punish the accused are rarer still. So a recent case at one of China's top universities, in which a student posted a video online accusing her supervisor of sexually harassing her, leading to his sacking, has created shockwaves.

On 21 July, a woman who identified herself as Wang Di posted an hour-long video on Weibo, in which she accused her PhD supervisor at Renmin University in Beijing, Wang Guiyuan, of physically and verbally abusing her for more than two years. The professor, a former Chinese Communist party representative at the university, threatened to block her graduation prospects, Wang Di said.

Her video included an audio recording of one encounter in which a man is asking to kiss a woman, who repeatedly refuses. "I am reporting my professor, Wang Guiyuan ... for sexually harassing and forcibly molesting me, and requesting to have a sexual relationship with me," Wang Di said. The audio could not be independently verified.

By the following evening, the student's video had received more than 2m likes and prompted an outpouring of supportive comments. A related hashtag soon surpassed 110m views. Within a day, the university said that after an investigation, the allegations were proven to be true, although the university's statement referred to "moral misconduct", not sexual harassment. Wang Guiyuan was fired from the university and expelled from the CCP. Local police said they were investigating the claims. Wang Guiyuan did not respond to a request for comment.

But the speed at which the Renmin case was dealt with masks the facts that allegations of sexual harassment and abuse are often dismissed or downplayed if made privately, and that women face enormous risks in speaking out, Chinese feminists and legal experts say.

The Renmin case demonstrates the consequences of a university lacking a proper internal procedure for handling complaints, said Feng Yuan, who founded a helpline for victims of domestic violence. "It is assumed that the victim must reveal his or her identity and speak out in this way."

On Weibo, [Zhou Xiaoxuan](#), a screenwriter who goes by the pen name Xianzi, wrote: "Universities systematically cover up teachers' behaviour and systematically ignore the situation of students. Only a very small number of students who can't stand it, risking slut-shaming and cyberbullying, seek help from public opinion."

In 2018, Zhou discovered her own uneasy fame after she publicly accused a famous television presenter, Zhu Jun, of [forcibly kissing and groping her](#) during an internship. Her lawsuit against him ultimately failed because of insufficient evidence. Sexual harassment cases in China often require

“smoking gun” evidence such as audio or video recordings of the alleged abuse.

Other women have come forward on social media with their own accounts of campus harassment. “Thank you sister for speaking out. I too was sexually assaulted by my post-doctoral professor 3 years ago and still have no outcome after calling the police and reporting it,” one user wrote on Weibo.

On 24 July, Shaanxi normal university said that it had suspended a professor accused of “violating teacher ethics” in 2017, adding that it had “zero tolerance” for misconduct.

The statement didn’t provide details about the nature of the allegation: sending explicit photographs to female students.

Feminists have pointed out that Chinese institutions – schools, courts, the police – tend to avoid naming sexual abuse directly, preferring instead to treat the matter as a misunderstanding or moral failing between two people. Such a strategy is a way of dealing with gender-based violence “in a way that does not touch the essence of the problem”, Feng said.

Organised feminist activity has largely been squashed in China, with activists facing severe punishments. In June, [Sophia Huang Xueqin](#), a journalist who reported on China’s nascent #MeToo movement, was jailed for five years for inciting state subversion.

Feminism in China has been forced to become “very decentralised and individualised”, said Li Maizi, a veteran activist who is now based in the US. That means that women who speak out against abuse by people in positions of authority shoulder all the risks themselves.

One of those risks is being sued – by the alleged harasser. In May, a court in Beijing heard a [defamation case](#) filed by Li Songwei, a celebrity counsellor, against a woman who accused him on social media of engaging in an inappropriate sexual relationship with her when she was his client.

And Xianzi, the screenwriter, was sued by Zhu for defamation after she made her MeToo accusation against him (he dropped his lawsuit due to poor health last year).

Research [by Darius Longarino, Wei Changhao and Yixin Ren](#) of the Paul Tsai China Center at Yale Law School [suggests that](#) only 8% of civil lawsuits relating to sexual harassment are cases in which an alleged victim is suing an alleged perpetrator. The majority of lawsuits are lodged by the accused, often for defamation.

But despite the risks, some women will continue to speak out publicly, Li predicts, “because where there’s repression there’s resistance”.

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