

Tougher anti-online bullying laws expected next year

Amir Hussain

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Stronger laws to better protect against harassment — whether in the form of new legislation to be enacted or amendments to current laws — are expected to be in place early next year, Law Minister K Shanmugam said this morning (Nov 18).

Mr Shanmugam was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an Institute of Policy Studies Conference on harassment in Singapore.

In his opening speech at the conference, Mr Shanmugam cited a recent study by Microsoft which found Singapore to have the second highest rate of online bullying of youths.

A recent poll by Government feedback unit REACH last month also found that over eight in 10 of those surveyed felt online harassment to be a serious issue, he said, adding that 87 per cent of those polled agreed that those who harass others should be dealt with under the law.

Meanwhile, sexual harassment "is an issue in many different contexts", not only at the workplace but also in other social settings, Mr Shanmugam said. And stalking, "can be highly disruptive to many people's lives, often in devastating ways", he added.

Singapore's concerns with harassment, Mr Shanmugam said, is reflective of those in other countries, and many of them have responded with strict legislation to combat harassment. But Singapore is "behind the curve" compared to other jurisdictions in dealing with the issue, he said.

For instance, the UK introduced stalking as a specific offence last year, while Japan this year amended its anti-stalking law to expressly make it an offence to make threats by email. Various US states and Australia also have comprehensive state or territorial laws providing for civil and criminal remedies for harassment, Mr Shanmugam noted.

He urged conference participants to discuss how the law can better protect people from harassment; and how individuals can be empowered with more accessible self-help remedies so they can better protect themselves from harassment.