

PhD student's harassment complaint against IISER guide under probe

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Chandigarh: A complaint of mental and physical harassment recently filed by a PhD scholar against his supervisor at Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Mohali, is under investigation.

Using the hashtag 'PhDMetoo', the student submitted the complaint to the Union human resource and development ministry and Prime Minister's office stating that he had to quit his doctorate as he "suffered mental and physical torture from his supervisor".

As per sources, after the student gave the complaint to the board of governors of IISER, the institute's director took suo motu cognizance of the matter. "The board got the complaint in April this year, and we have formed a three-member committee to investigate the case," said IISER director Prof Arvind.

He said, "In a PhD course, there is a lot of personal interaction and, therefore, things are not always objective. We need to be open about documenting things and a code of conduct should be in place. This includes the rights of faculty and students. We need to put all these things in place. IISER has many such committees which sees regular participation from students too."

Being from a poor background, the complainant said he tried to complete his MS under the professor and was forced to choose him again as his PhD guide. He said, "There was a student under the same professor who attempted suicide, while others left because of his torture," adding, "I didn't do anything wrong to him. Then why did he ruin my career? I demand justice and his punishment. I request the PM and MHRD to look into this case." Confirming the attempt to suicide case, IISER director said, "There was an incident, which has been sorted out."

The student joined IISER in 2015 as an integrated PhD student. His overall cumulative performance index (CPI) score was 7/10. "I have given everything to his lab, but he mentally as well as physically tortured me a lot so I had to quit the PhD programme. He had slapped me several times and held my neck," the student stated in the complaint. He has also levelled charges that despite he being the main contributor to the four papers published during his MS course, his supervisor did not give him first authorship.