

# STIMULUS TO CATCALLING: A STUDY ON VERBAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explains and investigates catcalling among undergraduate students at Udayana University, Denpasar. The stimulus-response theory of George Herbert Mead was applied in a qualitative approach with a descriptive-explanatory design. Men mostly do catcalling. Meanwhile, the sufferers are primarily women. Catcalling stimulates because students are unaware of it; catcalling is frequently portrayed as commonplace in public interactions, and many undergraduates and members of society have no severe responses to verbal sexual harassment, including catcalling. The victim's responses to stimuli are as follows: avoiding; dismissing the perpetrator; trying to ignore any forms of catcalling experienced; expressing discomfort; striking; making eye contact; and reporting to certain other authorities. Catcalling often occurs in the afternoon and evening when people go out for sports and entertainment. The victim prefers to remain silent and avoids the perpetrator at night because of fear. Victims fear that catcalling at night will lead to kidnappings, robberies, and other forms of sexual violence, such as rape. The study indicates that catcalling most often occurs in a quiet place has the potential to trigger other forms of sexual violence.*

**Keywords:** *catcalling, respon, pelecehan seksual, stimulus, mahasiswa sarjana*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rule of law is significant in overcoming catcalling because of the various efforts made by victims to respond to catcalling, be it by assuming that what the perpetrator did was an act of kindness, silence, or against the perpetrator. The victim still pays dearly for his psychological condition (Dewi 2019). Indonesia does not yet have transparent enforcement of rules, which results in criminal acts against citizens continuing to grow. Legal norms that residents do not yet know well make it easy for residents to violate the rules. One result of a need for more understanding of regulatory norms is catcalling. Indonesians are used to catcalling and are believed to make sense. The community typically acts as if they do not know its effect on catcalling victims (Yudha 2021). Problems related to street

harassment will be rife, along with developments in the era and technology, but it is a pity that precise legal instruments do not accompany them (Putri and Wijanarko 2021).

Sexual harassment among young Balinese girls often involved catcalling, whistling, and comments on the beauty of teenage girls' bodies when they were in a public space with an unknown man. Undergraduate students also experienced catcalling on campus as well as off-campus. Students commonly use catcalling because perpetrators prefer young victims (Sari, Zuryani, and Mahadewi 2021).

Issues related to this research have been studied. Undergraduate students in one faculty regarding sexual harassment through catcalling and analyzed student

responses based on age and student knowledge about catcalling itself (Annisa 2020). Catcalling, as verbal sexual harassment, occurs not only in public places outside the campus environment, such as malls, beaches, busy streets, sports venues, and places to eat but also in universities in Indonesia. Verbal sexual harassment or catcalling also occurred at one of the universities in Yogyakarta (Safitri 2020). Catcalling can affect victims, particularly teenagers; what motivates the perpetrator to commit catcalling, and what types of catcalling are given to the victim (Sari et al. 2021).

Sexual harassment can be interpreted as behavior characterized by unwanted and inappropriate sexual comments or sexually-oriented physical approaches carried out in a workplace or situation, professionally or in other social spheres. Sexually, it is normal for men to have a role as active actors, while women should be passive. Catcalling has received much attention in the media, mainly focusing on convincing the general public that catcalling is not just a compliment, except that no research or scientific studies are investigating the relationship between catcalls and casual praise (Gennaro and Ritschel 2019).

Mead (Blumer 2004) divides the stimulus and response process into four stages: the impulse stage; the perception stage; the manipulative stage; the consumption stage, which presents a response; also, the exchange of interpreted symbols can occur in the stimulus and response stages. The catcalling recipient must go through four stages before responding. The first is in the early stages of reacting to stimuli provided by the senses, for example, by listening to the stimulus or spontaneously looking at the perpetrator. Second, at the stage of perception in terms of the actor, the person who receives the stimulus begins to investigate to react to the response, and the actor begins to be sensitive and sort out what he is experiencing to take initial action. For example, after the person receives a whistle, after hearing and seeing it, she/he experiences catcalling and is

starts to think about what to do in response to whistling.

Third, the manipulation stage involves taking action and handling the object of the perpetrator; for example, when a person gets a catcalling stimulus, they enter the manipulation stage, deciding whether to reprimand the perpetrator or not to respond to the perpetrator. Fourth, the final stage is consumption, or refinement, of the continuation of manipulation. In the manipulation stage, the actor takes action; in the last stage, the actor carries out or performs the action he has decided. For example, after receiving a catcalling stimulus and deciding to report it to the authorities, the object then takes action to report the event to the authorities.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

Qualitative research methods were conducted to analyze interviews and observations in October-November 2022. Informants were undergraduate students from 11 faculties of Udayana University in the Sudirman and Sanglah areas, aged 18 to 23 years unmarried. An observation at the research site does not rule out the possibility of a change in conclusions if new information is found during the research, considering that the research method used by researchers is qualitative.

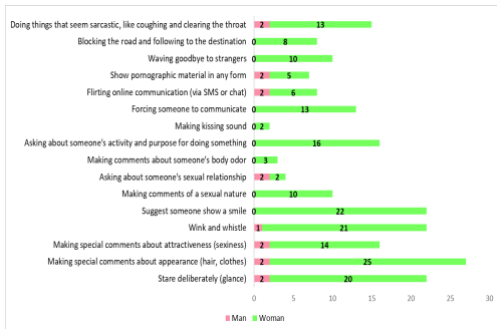
## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **3.1 Findings**

As stated by informants, 18 male students had never experienced catcalling. In contrast, four others had, and 23 out of 24 female students had experienced catcalling.

While an informant claimed never to have experienced catcalling, one out of 12 male informants admitted that they had been catcallers or even often were. The most

common category of stimulus for catcalling is described in Figure 1 below:

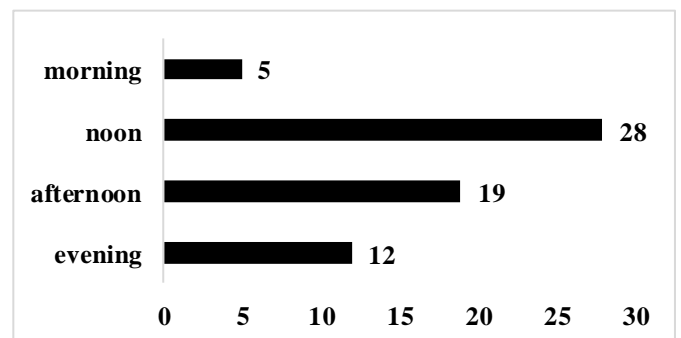


**Figure 1 Number of informants who have experienced catcalling**

There were 203 cases of catcalling experienced by undergraduate students until November 3, 2022, both on campus and in other public places outside the Denpasar campus. A representative of Komunitas Sanggar Puan stated that catcalling victims who reported the incident to related parties admitted that the catcalling occurred because the perpetrator was in a specific group, so they felt they had power. The perpetrator sees the victim as a weak object because the victim is a woman or because the victim is walking alone. Sanggar Puan is a learning community composed of a group of Udayana University students founded in 2021. Programs reach out to feminists and

women's empowerment, follow up on issues of sexual harassment, especially among students, and provide psychological services and legal assistance for victims of sexual violence. Catcalling that occurs on and outside campus is overcome by assisting. Activities that have been carried out dialogue on sexual violence on campus on April 24, 2022, by the Udayana University Student Representative Council.

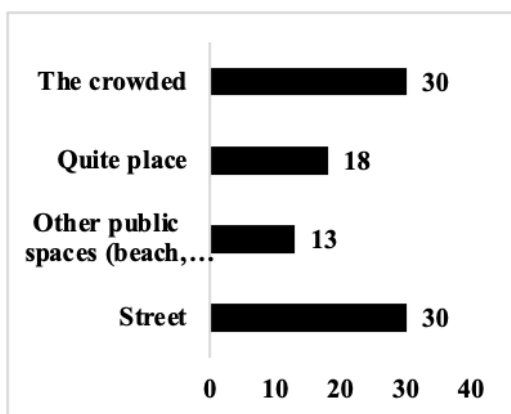
Catcalls possibly occur at any time of day, whether early in the morning or late in the evening. The victim's response at night differs from during the day or evening but most often occurs during the day, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Catcalling Time**

The informants preferred to remain silent and avoid the perpetrator in the evening since they feared kidnappings,

robberies, and other sexual violence, such as rape. They felt very uncomfortable with the slightest act of catcalling, not the least of whom felt scared, traumatized, and angry. Several informants identified as victims chose not to go through the streets or anywhere. They had experienced catcalling and did not dare go somewhere alone.



**Figure 3. Where the catcalls occurred**

Catcalling, which most often occurs on the street and is known as "street harassment," appears in a quiet place and can potentially trigger other forms of sexual violence. Catcalling in a crowded place feels safer than in a calm place. In a crowded place, the perpetrator can still think about not committing a more dangerous act of sexual violence because there are many people there.

Catcalling victims respond more to catcalls by avoiding the crowd of perpetrators. The perpetrator then feels normal about his actions. No perpetrator dared to take the same catcalling action when he was catcalled. The victims also chose not to respond to the perpetrators by doing other activities, such as making phone calls. Few victims dared to show their discomfort and give a firm answer. Meanwhile, the younger informants should have dared to respond. Factors that influence it include the older age of the offender.

### **Discussions**

A stimulus is defined as something that comes from outside of a person. Psychology says that a stimulus is something that stimulates a certain response. Stimuli, both internal and external, can cause a person's illness and health. Stimuli or stimuli can be in the form of physical, visual, or verbal communication that can affect individuals (GaoI 2016). The stimulus comes from someone who can stimulate others. Every individual can stimulate those around him. The stimulus also often occurs in teacher-student learning interactions. Teachers must have a

creative and innovative stimulus when creating learning strategies by using all learning styles in the form of visuals. Learning media in the form of e-learning is an example of a stimulus provided by the teacher to get a good response in learning between teacher and students (Sudarti 2019).

Social Service Department in Bali stated that sexual violence affects not only students who often experience it but also high school, junior high school, and even elementary school-aged children. Sexual violence in elementary school-aged children is still relatively high compared to sexual violence in junior high-aged children. The head of the Women's Empowerment Section for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection stated that sexual violence in children occurs because children are frequently perceived as weak.

Another factor is the lack of sexual education among children. Sexual education for children in Indonesia is still considered taboo. Cases of sexual violence reported to social services are also common. They are often perpetrated by those closest to the victim, such as uncles, brothers, husbands, and even biological

fathers; there is a high rate of sexual violence among family members.

Catcalls are possibly triggered by the attractive appearance of women and, secondly, because the perpetrator sees the victim as a weaker object. As stated by 36 informants, 18 male students had never experienced catcalling. In contrast, four others had, and 23 out of 24 female students had experienced catcalling, while one person claimed to have never experienced catcalling. Tomboy women are often considered equal to men. As perpetrators, men perceived tomboyish women as more rude and courageous than other women.

The response is the result or impression of the stimulus obtained. A person's reaction to a certain trigger is called a "response." Responses can also be obtained from observations about subjects, events, or relationships, which are obtained by summarizing information and interpreting messages. Learning is an association of observed events with a stimulus, and the response gets positive feedback (Sudarti 2019). Kissling (1991: 459, as cited in Gennaro and Ritschel 2019) uses the recipient's perspective,

where catcalling can damage and threaten women wherever it occurs. Many women respond to comments on the street because they feel flattered and praised, while some men claim to have positive intentions when making statements of a sexual nature. Kissling classifies comments that occur on the street as a type of sexual harassment because they objectify women. Statements of a sexual nature that fall into the category of "catcalling" create an unfriendly environment and generate fear in the recipient of the catcalling. This study found women dared to get angry and yell at the perpetrator. Another chose to remain silent and even say harsh words, making the perpetrator fearful and avoiding her — catcalling incidents involving male students riding motorcycles and teasing women walking. Male perpetrators tend to want to continue teasing or catcalling the victim because the victim's response is not firm. Showing discomfort with a firm response makes the perpetrator aware that this action can harm others. The perpetrator also usually performs catcalling based on curiosity and how the victim will respond. Giving a firm answer can make the perpetrator stop catcalling.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Misappropriating interactions involving men and women could lead to catcalling, particularly reported by informants in this study. Such interaction is unpleasant to one individual since she/he is harassed or embarrassed through body language, speech, and thoughts. Catcalling is still prevalent on campus and in other public locations. Men usually do catcalling, and the victims are mostly women. The findings were all four stages of action in stimulus and response theory to respond to the catcalling stimulus received.

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