

Global study finds women hold different views of harassment

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Australian women were less likely to consider wolf-whistling in the street, being asked for sex at a social event and a man overstaying his welcome in their home as unacceptable behaviour than women in other countries, research by Curtin University and Edith Cowan University has found.

The survey of 1,734 female undergraduate students in 12 countries showed women had different perceptions of inappropriate [behaviour](#) by men across 47 different categories, ranging from forced sexual contact, physical harm and death threats to being asked out as friends, receiving gifts and a stranger striking up a conversation.

Lead author Dr. Lorraine Sheridan, from the School of Psychology at Curtin University, said the research found most female undergraduates agreed on the most overt inappropriate behaviours, but there was little consensus about less explicit actions.

"There was no unanimous agreement among the surveyed women from around the world on any of the different behaviours surveyed, even for those relating to forced sexual violence," Dr. Sheridan said.

"However, women from Western countries, like Australia, generally had a lower acceptance of behaviour associated with attempts to monitor them, while women from non-Western countries were less tolerant of discussions and behaviour relating to sexual activity and dating."

The research found just 26 per cent of Australian women believed a man asking for sex at a social event was inappropriate, in comparison to 100 per cent of Egyptian women, 99 per cent in Indonesian, 97 per cent in Japan and 88 per cent in Portugal.

Co-author Dr. Adrian Scott, from Edith Cowan University, said 64 per cent of Australian women surveyed believed a man 'visiting places because he knows you may be there' was inappropriate, compared to seven per cent of Italian women and six per cent of Egyptian women.

"These results suggest that culture may take precedence over personal interpretations of the unacceptability of intrusive behaviour that is not obviously harmful or benign in nature," Dr. Scott said.

The study surveyed female psychology [undergraduate students](#) from Armenia, Australia, England, Egypt, Finland, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Scotland and Trinidad.

The common Western custom of a man offering to buy a woman a drink in a bar was considered inappropriate by just 12 per cent of Australian women, compared to 71 per cent of Indonesian women.

Only 25 per cent of Australian women thought wolf-whistling was inappropriate, in comparison to 98 per cent of Egyptian women, and 74 per cent of Australian women felt a man 'giving or sending you strange parcels' was not appropriate, but just 23 per cent of Italian women said that was unacceptable.

Overall, the activities most often perceived to be unacceptable by [women](#) from all 12 countries were 'forced sexual contact' (97 per cent), 'physically hurting someone you care about' (96 per cent) and 'making [death threats](#)' (95 per cent).

The behaviours that were least often considered unacceptable included 'asking you out just as friends' (14 per cent), 'talking about you to mutual friends after meeting you just once' (15 per cent) and 'telephoning you after one initial meeting' (16 per cent).

The research also involved Goldsmiths, University of London, University of Central Lancashire and the University of Western Sydney.

The full paper, "Female undergraduate's perceptions of intrusive behaviour in 12 countries," is published in the journal *Aggressive Behaviour*.

More information: Lorraine Sheridan et al. Female undergraduate's perceptions of intrusive behavior in 12 countries, *Aggressive Behavior* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/ab.21711](https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21711)

Provided by Curtin University

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