



Finanziato  
dall'Unione europea



# CATCALLING

WHAT IT IS AND  
HOW I CAN DEFEND MYSELF





**Gender equality must be a lived reality.**

Michele Bachelet



**After more than 20 years of training and sacrifice, I find it nothing short of HORRIBLE and it really hurts my heart to read this horde of people making jokes that sexualise my body. Is a butt and two legs really what's left, the main topic to talk about?**

Linda Cerruti



**In 2021 this crap still happens. I am often a victim of it, whatever I wear.**

Aurora Ramazzotti



# SUMMARY

WHAT CAN THIS BROCHURE BE USED FOR? .....	3
FOREWORD .....	4
WHAT IS CATCALLING AND VERBAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT? .....	5
THE ORIGIN OF THE PHENOMENON .....	7
WHAT DOES THE WOMAN EXPERIENCING CATCALLING FEEL? .....	7
HOW TO REACT TO CATCALLING IN THE STREET .....	9
STRUCTURED SPORTS .....	11
PREVALENCE, RISKS AND CONSEQUENCES IN ELITE SPORTS ATHLETES .....	12
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES .....	13
WHAT TO DO IF WE ARE IN THIS SITUATION? .....	14
AGENDIN .....	17

## WHAT CAN THIS BROCHURE BE USED FOR?

In this guide you can find clear and useful information on a topic that we have been hearing more and more about since last year: catcalling and verbal sexual harassment. You will also find practical tips on what to do if you find yourself in a difficult situation.

**It can happen, in fact, to experience situations in which the attention received is considered heavy, invasive, excessive, to the point of being perceived as inappropriate and intrusive, causing fear, anxiety and worry.**

As in any case of abuse, the main thing is to recognise without shame that one is in an uncomfortable condition and to activate one's resources to be able to return to a peaceful life.

The booklet is intended to be a tool in the service of your awareness: it can help you recognise the phenomenon of catcalling and verbal sexual harassment, give you guidance on what you can do to protect yourself and tell you who you can turn to.

Finally, you will find a small diary that you can detach and carry with you at all times: an ally that could be used as a logbook to record all incidents deemed persecutory.

## FOREWORD

Sport represents a microcosm of society. This means that what happens in society, can also happen in sport. Unfortunately, within this concept, harassment is no exception.

Harassment is defined as all unwanted behaviour with sexual connotations or any other type of discrimination based on gender. Gyms and sports centres are places where athletes of all ages should be able to develop their skills and practice the sport they love.

For this reason, people should go there to move freely, feeling safe and comfortable.

Sometimes, however, this is unfortunately not the case.

# WHAT IS CATCALLING AND VERBAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

The term catcalling refers to 'a series of acts that, as an expression of a sexist and devaluing mentality, constitute a specific type of sexual harassment and street harassment'.

This phenomenon, which falls under the criminal offence of harassment, mainly consists of unwanted and/or vulgar comments directed at women's bodies or attitudes, intrusive questions, gestures, whistles, chases, sexual advances, insults and even outright insults usually directed at women while they are walking down the street, playing free sports or in clubs.

This behaviour may occur in public areas or areas open to the public - such as parks and gardens -, on means of transport or in gyms.

Catcalling is often mistakenly perceived as a compliment and not as harassment.

More specifically, it is a form of verbal harassment, rightly falling under forms of emotional abuse.



The perception of the same sentence changes depending on the context; how it is said, where, when, by whom it is said.

What, then, is the line that separates an appreciation from catcalling or verbal sexual harassment? What distinguishes compliment from harassment is the relational context in which they are made and the purpose behind them. In fact, without a relational context and the consent of one of the two parties involved, or in the case of power asymmetry, this type of behaviour is connoted as a real form of prevarication.

**In verbal sexual harassment, the approach is directed at the woman as a sexual object and not as a person. This is a phenomenon that conceals the asymmetrical male-female power dynamics and is therefore a true manifestation of gender- based violence and toxic masculinity.**

The woman who is the target of catcalling or verbal sexual harassment is in fact considered almost a 'prey', so as to justify behaviour bordering on legality. Catcalling, therefore, is neither a compliment nor an attempt at courtship, but a male chauvinist attitude of prevarication in which the woman becomes a female sexual prey.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE PHENOMENON

Men who report having engaged in catcalling in their lives demonstrated greater adherence to sexist beliefs, traditional/conservative masculinity, social dominance orientation and tolerance of sexual harassment than men who had never done so. This form of harassment, in fact, implies a desire to assert one's dominant masculinity, thereby promoting and/or maintaining an imbalance of power between genders.

Tolerance to sexual harassment is supported by strong beliefs about traditional stereotypical gender roles, the degree of social dominance and hostile attitudes towards women. In other words, by a normalisation of predominant behaviour of one gender over the other.

Although the tendency is very often to play down the problem, catcalling is a phenomenon that has a very profound impact on both the psyche and the habits of its victims.

Studies report that the emotions most aroused in women by catcalling are depression, low self-esteem, feeling of violation of one's space, dirtiness, fear. Other consequences include a change in clothing style or choosing not to walk certain streets, socialise or come home at a certain time. Catcalling therefore not only creates unpleasant feelings for the recipients, but also prompts them to change their behaviour, habits and lifestyle.

This behaviour ignores the emotional impact that every woman suffers, but not only that: what is ignored is the fear that, by responding to those unwanted remarks or otherwise ignoring them, serious retaliation may occur for the victim.



# HOW TO REACT TO CATCALLING IN THE STREET

- **Always assess the context well:** if you are in the company of other people and you feel 'safe', then you can try to retort. Turn around, look him straight in the eyes and let him sense your annoyance, but don't waste too many words. You can venture something like 'Leave me alone' or 'That's enough'. Remember, however, that it is important to always remain calm and not take unnecessary risks. If, in fact, there is no one or few people around, leave it alone: your safety is not worth the risk.
- **Stay on the phone:** in addition to allowing you to call for help, the mobile phone can be a deterrent for the harasser. You can make him believe that your caller is about to reach you, or simply tell him what is happening to you
- **Show self-confidence:** if you happen to pass one or more strangers addressing you with persistent comments and compliments, make an effort to appear indifferent. Walk with a firm step and a watchful gaze. This attitude will discourage any kind of harasser, because these people derive pleasure when they see fragile, weak and/or defenceless victims.

- **Don't be intimidated:** remember that catcalling should not restrict your freedom of action and expression.
- **Discuss it with friends and team up with other women:** it will make you feel less alone. Talking about it helps to confront ideas and develop possible solutions.



**Do not change your habits:** these behaviours cannot and should not limit your freedom in any way. Don't feel guilty and don't keep what happened only to yourself. Talk about it and confront it with your friends or those you trust most. You will see that you will no longer feel alone and will regain the self-confidence that those sensual flatteries had undermined.

# VERBAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN STRUCTURED SPORTS



# PREVALENCE, RISKS AND CONSEQUENCES IN ELITE SPORTS ATHLETES

Harassment and abuse occur in all sports and at all levels.

Athletes of all ages and types are subject to harassment and abuse, but elite athletes are at higher risk.

Psychological abuse is at the heart of all other forms of harassment and, in addition to being victims, athletes can also be perpetrators.

Moreover, it is often carried out by individuals who are in positions of power and/or exploit the relationship of trust that exists with athletes. For this reason, figures who can potentially engage in verbal sexual harassment include: coaches, staff members, friends, fans and even teammates.

Generally, harassment and abuse have serious and lasting negative repercussions on the physical, social and psychological health of athletes. They can cause reduced performance, recurring injuries, lower self-esteem and concentration, and even lead to sports drop-out. They can also lead to psychosomatic illnesses, anxiety, depression, malnutrition, eating disorders, substance abuse, self-harm and suicide. It may happen that the athlete who suffers this type of abuse develops post-traumatic stress disorder and, indeed, the effects of harassment may persist long after the athlete has left their sport.

Passive attitudes, non-action and denial and/or silence by persons in positions of power increase the psychological damage caused by harassment and abuse. Lack of action on the part of bystanders also gives victims the impression that harassment and abusive behaviour is legally and socially acceptable and/or that those in positions of power are unable to object.

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Although there is often a tendency to play down the problem, verbal sexual harassment in sport is a phenomenon that, as we have seen, has a very profound impact on both the psyche and the habits of its victims.

These behaviours provoke depression, low self-esteem, feelings of violation of one's space, dirtiness, fear in women.

Other consequences may include a change in clothing style, deciding to change sports clubs or even dropping out of sport.

In short, being subjected to these abusive behaviours not only creates unpleasant feelings for the recipients, but also prompts them to change their behaviour, habits and lifestyle.

In addition to underestimating the emotional impact these behaviours entail, the fear that, by rebelling or ignoring unsolicited appreciation, the athlete may become the object of severe retaliation is often overlooked.

Many women victims of verbal sexual harassment have reported feeling angry, dirty, useless and guilty. Faced with this kind of harassment, in fact, the most difficult part for the victim is to choose how to react: this feeling of helplessness most often results in frustration and anger. Generally, in fact, although denouncing such behaviour would be the best choice to make, often, for fear of reprisals, people prefer to keep silent to avoid triggering further reactions.

Instead, the feeling of being dirty and useless is associated with the fact that at that moment one feels like an object about which one can say whatever is on the harasser's mind. Guilt is associated with the thought that, perhaps, if we had worn different clothes, if we had not given the harasser space or if we had not 'provoked' him, the harassment would not have happened. And so, as with rape, the attitude is one of blame.

# WHAT TO DO IF WE ARE IN THIS SITUATION?

The fact that often no one intervenes to stop these incidents should not lead you to question the context you are experiencing.

Don't think that if a few will come forward to help you then you won't be believed.

It is understandable that before you put a stop to this kind of harassment you evaluate everything carefully, but remember that any form of abuse is, first and foremost, a **violation of human rights!**

Every athlete has the right to practise a sport safely through the creation of a respectful, fair environment, free of favouritism and abuse of any kind, and in which psychological safety is also promoted, i.e. being able to express oneself freely without fear of negative consequences with respect to one's image, status and/or career.

 **So, in the light of the above,  
what can you do?**





## **TALK ABOUT IT!**

Talk to your teammates, the coach, the sports doctor, the club managers, your family.



## **I HAVE RECEIVED MESSAGES OR E-MAILS WITH UNPLEASANT CONTENT**

Retain any messages or e-mails with offensive or intimidating content. Do not reply so as not to give the harasser the opportunity to continue the cycle of correspondence.



## **I DECIDE TO GO TO THE POLICE**

If you feel your privacy or your person has been violated, if you recognise yourself in the examples given in this booklet, perhaps it is time to ask for reinforcement. If you have already made attempts at deterrence and they have been to no avail, you have the option of filing a complaint. Contact the nearest police office.



# DIARY

Carry it with you at all times: it doesn't weigh you down and makes you feel lighter. It will be a useful tool to record inappropriate behaviour suffered and to monitor any escalation.

Above all, it will be a daily diary for your mood.

The diary is useful for you because it is not always easy to remember details. Sometimes, moreover, you prefer to forget bad episodes.

It is also useful for those who will help you: in the event of a complaint, you will have a detailed report that will help the police and/or counselling services to identify and punish the persecutory conduct.



**[whistleproject.eu](https://whistleproject.eu)**





Finanziato  
dall'Unione europea

## WHOM CAN I TURN TO?

**1522** Numero verde Antiviolenza

**0444 230402** Centro Antiviolenza Comunale  
VICENZA  
[ceav@comune.vicenza.it](mailto:ceav@comune.vicenza.it)

**375 7419316** Si Può Fare - Cooperativa Sociale  
[spfcoopsoc@gmail.com](mailto:spfcoopsoc@gmail.com)  
VICENZA

**0444 542377** Donna Chiama Donna  
VICENZA  
[ceav@comune.vicenza.it](mailto:ceav@comune.vicenza.it)



SI PUÒ FARE - COOPERATIVA SOCIALE

