

Overcoming obstacles: the impact of harassment on women's motivation to pursue solo women travel

Mengatasi hambatan: dampak pelecehan terhadap motivasi wanita untuk melakukan perjalanan sendiri

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

harassment; solo women travelling; women empowerment

Katakunci:

pelecehan; pemberdayaan perempuan; wanita pelancong seorang diri

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.26905/jpp.v9i2.13781>

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ABSTRACT

Solo women travel is a growing and desirable phenomenon in the tourism industry, particularly among women seeking new experiences, freedom and independence. The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations, experiences and challenges women face when traveling independently, particularly in relation to the risk of harassment. Using a qualitative approach, data was obtained through in-depth interviews with purposively selected respondents in the tourist destinations of Nusa Dua, Canggu and Ubud. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and key themes from their experiences. The results show that the main motivations for women to travel alone are to fulfill personal needs, explore their true selves, as well as freedom and self-development. However, traveling alone also comes with risks such as sexual harassment (cat calling, sexual comments, unwanted touching) and racial discrimination. These risks impact women's travel experiences and their motivation to continue traveling alone in the future. Some respondents reported trauma, fear and anxiety as a result of the harassment they experienced. To prevent these risks, women take precautions. For example, not wearing tight clothing, carrying personal protective equipment, and asking others for help. While these challenges were often obstacles, strong motivations such as exploring identity and fighting gender stereotypes still encouraged women to continue their journey. The study concluded that harassment does not fully influence women's motivation to travel alone.

HOW TO CITE ITEM

Rahjasa, S. L., Wiwekananda, P., & Finardi, I. G. A. S. (2025). Overcoming obstacles: the impact of harassment on women's motivation to pursue solo women travel. *Jurnal Pariwisata Pesona*, 9(2).
<https://doi.org/10.26905/jpp.v9i2.13781>

ABSTRAK

Solo women travel adalah fenomena yang sedang berkembang dan diminati di industri pariwisata, khususnya di kalangan perempuan yang mencari pengalaman baru, kebebasan dan kemandirian. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi motivasi, pengalaman, dan tantangan yang dihadapi perempuan saat bepergian secara mandiri, khususnya terkait dengan risiko pelecehan. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan untuk memperoleh data melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap responden yang dipilih secara purposif di destinasi wisata Nusa Dua, Canggu, dan Ubud. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan tema utama dari pengalaman mereka. Fokus penelitian meliputi (1) Motivasi praktik solo women travel, (2) Persepsi dan reaksi terhadap pelecehan, (3) Upaya preventif untuk mengatasi pelecehan di dunia solo women travel, (4) Pengaruh pelecehan seksual terhadap keinginan untuk berlatih solo travel wanita lagi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa motivasi utama perempuan melakukan perjalanan sendirian adalah untuk memenuhi kebutuhan pribadi, mengeksplorasi jati diri, serta kebebasan dan pengembangan diri. Namun, bepergian sendirian juga memiliki risiko seperti pelecehan seksual (cat calling,

komentar seksual, sentuhan yang tidak diinginkan) dan diskriminasi rasial. Risiko-risiko ini berdampak pada pengalaman perjalanan perempuan dan motivasi mereka untuk terus bepergian sendirian di masa depan. Beberapa responden melaporkan trauma, ketakutan, dan kecemasan akibat pelecehan yang mereka alami. Meski tantangan sering kali menjadi hambatan, motivasi kuat seperti mengeksplorasi identitas dan melawan stereotip gender masih mendorong perempuan untuk melanjutkan perjalanannya. Studi tersebut menyimpulkan bahwa pelecehan tidak sepenuhnya mempengaruhi motivasi perempuan untuk melakukan perjalanan seorang diri.

INTRODUCTION

Travel has been an integral part of human life since ancient times allowing for the exchange of cultures, knowledge, and experiences. However, in the midst of the progress of globalization, cultural shifts and social changes, the phenomenon of travel is no longer limited to conventional scenarios. In today's digital era, the role of social media in shaping the image of tourist destinations also affects a person's interest in traveling (Rahjasa et al., 2023). One of the prominent trends in the world of tourism in recent years is solo female travelers or women who explore the world alone. Solo travel has grown into an attractive market for tourists of different genders, especially women (Alonso-Vazquez et al., 2023; Yang, 2021). According to Yang et al., (2017) Women account for half of the tourism market and women do more adventure trips, nature tours, educational tours, and backpacking trips compared to men. As time goes on, the trend of female solo travel increases (Seow & Brown, 2018). However, on the other hand, traveling alone like this can also be an escape from the worldly duties they have (Jonas, 2022).

According to Somasiri et al., (2022) women who become solo female travelers are women who choose to travel independently and want the experience of being alone and the experience of interacting with others. According to Hamid et al., (2021) a solo woman travels as a woman who travels independently for the purpose of self-discovery and self-empowerment without being accompanied by friends, family, or organized tour groups. (Su & Wu, 2020) says that a person can be categorized as a solo female traveler if a woman is traveling without a friend or companion, either for vacation, education, work or other purposes and faces unique experiences in her travels, including the challenges and potentials that will be faced. Their curiosity about the outside world and wanting to see foreign cultures firsthand is a motivation for women to travel alone (Osman et al., 2020). (Teng et al., 2023) states that the motivation of a solo woman to travel consists of several relevant theories, namely the Identity Search Theory which explains that traveling alone is an opportunity for a solo woman to discover, strengthen and understand her own identity. After that there was the Theory of Freedom and Empowerment, this theory states that a woman travels alone in search of freedom and self-empowerment as a way to feel more independent and confront the gender stereotypes that exist in society. Finally, Need-Fulfillment Theory emphasizes that solo travel serves as a means to meet personal needs and satisfactions, such as emotional and psychological needs, the need for adventure, relaxation, and self-exploration.

In addition, the motivation of a solo woman to travel also underlies why and what is the purpose of a woman traveling alone. However, the trend of solo women traveling can also have negative impacts such as safety risks, given that they travel without anyone accompanying them (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2020; Yang et al., 2018). Women who want to travel alone often have to face various risks while traveling such as excessive attention, sexual harassment, sexual violence, discrimination and social rejection due to gender issues (Karagöz et al., 2021). Bali, particularly in popular tourist areas such as Nusa Dua, Canggu, and Ubud, women traveling alone often face similar challenges, even though Bali is known as a friendly tourist destination. As the interviewees we interviewed, some women reported experiencing verbal or physical abuse that occurred in public places such as beaches or cafes in the Nusa Dua, Canggu, and Ubud areas that although many women felt safe in the area, they still received harassment, both from tourists and locals. In addition, in some quieter areas, safety-related concerns have also increased, with reports of unpleasant behaviour or discrimination against women travelling alone. On the other hand, there is also gender inequality seen in everyday interactions, for example in the offer of different services or prices based on gender. According to (Buchanan et al., 2018), there are 2 types of harassment, namely sexual harassment that is more gender-based and racial harassment that takes the form of discriminatory behavior against other races or ethnicities. In addition to the risk of harassment, solo travel women are also faced with social psychological risks, where these conditions result in feelings of isolation or isolation (Adam, 2015). This phenomenon also occurs in the Ubud area, especially among women who travel alone in a quieter atmosphere and away from the crowds of tourists. Although Ubud is known for its more open and spiritual community, some of the speakers in this study who are practicing solo female travelers reported feeling lonely and isolated, especially when they interact with groups of tourists or locals who are more composed of couples or families. In addition, in the context of more traditional local cultures, women traveling alone are sometimes seen as more

unusual, which can reinforce feelings of difference and alienation. This has an impact on the social experience of the solo women travel practitioners themselves, making some solo women travel practitioners feel less accepted or even feel awkward in social activities that should be fun, such as taking yoga classes or joining tour groups. According to (Wantono & McKercher, 2020) these social psychological risks can affect the experience when traveling alone due to feelings of loneliness and isolation in certain tourist attractions. This sexual harassment or sexual violence also affects several aspects, such as motivation, confidence, self-empowerment and emotional experience (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2020; Seow & Brown, 2018). In the Canggu and Nusa Dua areas, which are known for their relaxed beach atmosphere and are popular among young tourists, female solo travelers often face similar challenges. Several empirical studies show that although Canggu and Nusa Dua are considered tourist-friendly destinations, many women experience sexual harassment in public areas, such as cafes or beaches, which can have a significant psychological impact. Feelings of fear and insecurity often reduce their motivation to explore further or interact with others, diminishing their confidence in traveling. Additionally, the incident can affect self-empowerment, with women feeling more isolated and less empowered in social situations, ultimately affecting their overall emotional experience while in Bali.

From the above background, solo travel women will think twice if they want to repeat their adventures alone, given the negative risks and trauma that impact on women's solo travel psychology, it is necessary to understand that responses to abuse during travel can be varied and complex. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the travel experiences of a solo woman while traveling. In addition, this research will address an in-depth analysis of solo women travelers' decisions to continue or discontinue the practice of solo travel in the future, as well as what their motivations are for continuing the practice of solo women travel considering the risks and reinforcing factors that may influence their perceptions and decisions in pursuing travel independence.

METHODS

A qualitative approach was used in this study to obtain information through descriptive data collection and explore an in-depth understanding of context, meaning, and individual experiences (Gerring, 2017). In collecting data, the main method used is the in-depth interview method in order to provide a flexible approach in exploring topics and exploring subjective narratives from interviewees (Creswell, 2013). Interviewees will be selected by considering variables such as age, cultural background, and travel experience and using purposive sampling techniques to obtain informative respondents who meet the criteria as female solo travelers (Patton, 2002). Interviews will be conducted in the tourist areas of Nusa Dua, Canggu and Ubud which are frequently visited by solo female travelers. According to (Dwi Kristanto *et al.*, n.d.) Data were analyzed using a thematic approach to enable the identification of patterns, themes and variations in the experiences of female solo travelers who experienced harassment, therefore the data obtained from interviewees who practiced female solo travel is more accurate and reliable. In addition, this research also applies coping strategies, which are individual efforts to cope with emotions when experiencing pressure and tension and neutralize stress that can occur physiologically and psychologically (Maryam, n.d.). Coping strategies are used to find out what actions are taken to overcome or deal with problems arising from the harassment. A qualitative approach was used in order to provide in-depth insights into the complex dynamics and personal context involving women's solo travel experiences, as well as provide a better understanding of their decision to continue or discontinue the practice of solo travel in the future. After obtaining consent to be interviewed, the interview process was conducted face-to-face and in the process of writing the article the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were guaranteed by including the pseudonyms of the respondents.

As a supporting instrument in the research, this article uses references from data collection through the interview process, previous research and literature from several journals related to solo women travel. The research focus includes (1) Motivation to practice solo women travel, (2) Perception and reaction to harassment, (3) Preventive efforts to overcome harassment in the world of solo women travel, (4) The influence of sexual harassment on the desire to practice solo women travel again.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted based on a phenomenon in the world of tourism that is in great demand by tourists, especially among women, namely solo women travel. Referring to the results of observations and interviews that have been conducted with various sources ranging from generation-Z to the millennial generation and there are also several foreign sources who give opinions about their experiences when doing solo women travel. The results of interviews with several interviewees will be the answer to the 4 aspects that are the focus of this research, and there are several responses about the 4 aspects of the interviewees, namely Motivation to practice solo women travel, Perceptions and reactions to harassment, Preventive efforts to overcome harassment in the world of solo women travel, The influence of sexual harassment on the desire to practice solo women travel again motivation to practice solo traveling, perceptions and reactions to harassment, preventive efforts against harassment and the influence of harassment on the motivation to continue practicing solo traveling, 4 aspects that are the focus of the research, it is also very relevant to the opinions of the interviewees who have been interviewed,

many of the interviewees stated that the sexual harassment experienced had an effect on their psychology and motivation to continue solo traveling activities themselves. These aspects are also very relevant to some of the quotes discussed earlier in the introduction section of this article. According to (Karagöz *et al.*, 2021) Women who want to travel alone often have to face various risks while traveling such as excessive attention, sexual harassment, sexual violence, discrimination and social rejection due to gender issues. Interviews with several interviewees revealed that harassment of women traveling alone often receives less attention from society and is less recognized, and these four issues are the main factors for women to travel solo in the future. However, with the personal drive and initiative to learn ways to protect themselves, the interviewees stated that these issues can still be avoided.

Motivation To Do Solo Travel Practice

Motivation is an internal force that comes from individual needs, drives and goals which can influence individual behavior in various aspects of life (Yang, 2021). Motivation can come from internal or external factors that encourage a person to achieve goals, satisfy needs, or fulfil desires (Pariwisata Bali *et al.*, 2022). In the practice of solo women travel, motivation is what underlies why a woman travels solo. Based on the results of interviews with women who have the desire to practice solo traveling, who are currently traveling solo and who have previously done solo traveling, there is a motivation that underlies why they want to practice solo traveling and the motivation they convey is also different. According to several sources, the opinion is that:

"Solo Traveling has always been my desire, because I think Solo Traveling is fun, we can do various things such as meeting new people, learning new cultures, traveling to places we have never visited"
(Ky, February 15, 2024)

"Traveling alone is quite an interesting thing to do because we will feel the challenge and get an experience that will be very different than traveling with other people or a group"
(Fm, 03 March 2024)

If related to the motivation theory explained in the introduction, the underlying motivation is more dominant in the Needs Fulfilment Theory because the subject undertakes solo traveling to fulfil his desire to explore the outside world. Most people assume that women want to become solo women travel because they want to fulfil personal desires, the need for content on social media or simply FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) who have ever travelled alone. However, other sources argued that:

"Traveling alone is one way to show people that not only men can travel, but women can also travel anywhere alone and a way for me to go beyond my own limitations." (Ib, 13 April 2024)

Apart from fulfilling personal desires, there are also motivations that fall into Identity Seeking Theory and Freedom and Empowerment Theory. Women travel solo because they want to seek freedom and self-empowerment in facing gender stereotypes that exist in society and searching for their own identity. As we know in social life, women are seen as weak creatures and always want to be protected. According to the subject, one way to fight the stereotypes that exist in social life is to become a solo women travel to show that they are not creatures who always look weak and always want to be protected and can live independently without being dependent on other people.

Perceptions and Reactions to Harassment

The solo women travel trend is indeed being followed by many women, but every action will definitely pose a risk. Solo women travel is a woman who travels alone without a companion, of course traveling solo will not be free from the risk of harassment. Based on the results of interviews, it shows that women are always victims of sexual harassment behavior such as whistling, sexual comments, excessive staring, sexually suggestive invitations, sexual jokes and racial harassment such as discrimination, words containing elements of racial hatred. Different ethnicities and intolerant attitudes towards other ethnicities. Women who practice solo women's travel often become victims of harassment because they travel alone.

"When I was studying at a university in China, I often experienced discrimination in public places, even some of my friends on campus did it too, and their treatment was more special towards students from western countries. I often received insults and was shunned which made me close myself even more."
(Ky, February 15, 2024)

"Sometimes I feel afraid and worried if I travel to a crowded place and there are lots of people because I have had an unpleasant experience. When I visited a bar in Thailand, the man there whistled and teased"

me and I got touched on the back of my body. But I don't know who the perpetrator was because there were so many people there."
(Gk, 02 May 2024)

"I thought about taking a hiatus from practicing solo women's travel, because on my last trip in 2014, I was harassed by an unknown man who traumatized me from traveling alone again because it took me quite a long time to get rid of the trauma caused. From this harassment, I also felt traumatized to the point where I felt afraid to meet a man in a public place, this really made me tired and also felt uncomfortable..."
(Ib, 13 April 2024)

The statement above shows that the first subject experienced racial harassment and the second subject experienced sexual harassment. The first subject said that the subject received discrimination because the face shape and skin color were different from students from the western continent. Apart from that, students from the western world are treated very special while subjects never receive special attention because they are considered to come from the same continent and the subjects are forced to get used to the treatment given which makes the subjects more closed to the people around them. In addition, acts of harassment can occur in all places other than public places, for example schools or universities, bus stops, hospitals and other public facilities. Meanwhile, another subject shared his experience when visiting a busy place. Women who are in crowded places often become victims of sexual harassment by perpetrators who take advantage of the situation of people being crowded together so they can carry out the action without being seen by the victim. As a result, acts of harassment often cause trauma and reactions such as fear, worry, and sadness, feeling dirty towards women who are victims of harassment and often make them no longer want to travel alone.

Preventive Efforts to Overcome Harassment in the World of Solo Women Travel

The journey of a solo woman travel is definitely not free from acts of harassment that occur. With this negative impact, a solo woman travel must have several preventive measures or minimize the negative impact of harassment that occurs when a solo woman travel, travels alone. Preventive efforts are preventive measures taken to minimize a negative impact that will occur (Neupane & Chesney-Lind, 2014) in this case for prevention in the world of solo women travel. However, each individual solo woman travel must have several different preventive measures, based on the results of interviews with several sources who are involved in the practice of solo women travel, they have opinions on how to prevent harassment, namely:

"I have worn clothes that I thought were polite in the area where I lived before, but in the place where I studied, not everyone can accept that the clothes I wear can be considered polite, and this indirectly invites perpetrators to commit harassment. "For me, my way of anticipating the harassment was to directly reprimand the perpetrators at the place where they were carrying out the harassment, so that people around me could also know and help when I was being harassed, and I started wearing more closed clothes when I was traveling."
(Ly, 15 February 2024)

Based on the opinion expressed by the resource person above, it provides an illustration that a habit that was carried out in an area that was frequently lived in before cannot be practiced in several areas that have different levels of public awareness, and in the case of harassment experienced by the resource person above, it is about how dressing while traveling, which can invite perpetrators to commit acts of sexual harassment. This can also increase the awareness of solo women travel that the culture in the new area they visit is not the same as the area they lived in before.

"When I travel alone, I feel it is very important to bring tools that can protect myself and are easy to carry everywhere, therefore, when I travel alone, I always bring several tools that I think can protect myself, one of which is a taser gun and pepper spray in case I get harassed."
(Fm, 3 May 2024)

The Influence of Sexual Harassment on the Desire to Enter Into the Practice of Solo Women Travel Again

There are certainly several factors that influence someone's desire to practice solo women travel, but behind someone's desire to practice solo women travel it cannot be denied that there are several influences that make solo women travel practitioners afraid to practice solo women travel again, such as there is harassment that occurs when traveling alone and also some inappropriate treatment when traveling alone, this can influence the desire of a solo woman travel to resume the practice of solo women travel. Several sources we have interviewed are of the opinion that:

"Sometimes when I want to travel alone, I have excessive fear and prefer to invite some of my friends to take me when I want to travel somewhere, but if I have to be alone, I still prepare myself with several ways to avoid the second occurrence of sexual harassment. As well as preparing myself with several ways to protect myself"

"My initial aim in wanting to practice solo women travel was to fight the stereotypes that exist in the social environment in the area I visited. In my own opinion, I myself have experienced sexual harassment in an area I visited, but this happened. "I still want to practice solo women travel, because this harassment cannot reduce my interest in traveling to the place I want, because I think this incident can still be anticipated with some self-protection."

(Ky & Ib, 13 April 2024)

Based on the opinions of the sources above, it can be interpreted that the understanding that occurs can influence the desire of a solo woman travel to return to traveling alone, and this is one of the facts that the understanding that occurs has a negative influence on the desire of a solo woman travel to travel again. Alone. However, not all cases reveal that this can be an obstacle to continuing to travel alone, with this it can be concluded that a solo woman travel must know the consequences if they want to continue the practice of solo women travel.

CONCLUSION

Being a solo women travel is something that many women are interested in and they have their own motivation to become solo women travel. Motivation greatly influences a woman to become a solo women travel. Based on the results of interviews with several interviewees, their motivation to become solo women travel tends to want to feel new challenges and experiences as well as self-empowerment in social life to break gender stereotypes that exist in the community. However, behind the motivation to become a solo women traveler, often a solo women traveler faces the risk of crime, especially the risk of harassment. The acts of harassment experienced by a solo women traveler also vary from acts of sexual harassment in the form of whistling / catcalling, sexual comments, to unwanted and intentional touching. The acts of racial harassment carried out in the form of discrimination and exclusionary actions by looking at certain races or ethnicities. This risk of harassment often causes fear, anxiety, and anxiety in a solo women traveler and also affects their motivation to become a solo women traveler so that women will think again about continuing their journey or not. Although the risk of harassment is a challenge that is often faced by solo women travelers and causes fear, in fact many women have managed to overcome this challenge with various efforts to defend themselves from such acts of harassment, starting from carrying self-defense tools or asking for help with people who are in the area where we travel alone. With some of these self-protection measures, it can reduce anxiety and fear when practicing solo women travel, and also with strong motivations such as self-discovery or wanting to become a more independent person.

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