



Hyb ACE Cymru
ACE Hub Wales

Gender-Based Harassment in Public Spaces: A Review of the Literature

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CVE	Community Violence Exposure
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FSA	Football Supporters Association
LGB	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and more
MCASA	Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAINN	Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
TGNB	Transgender and Nonbinary
VAW	Violence against Women
VAWDASV	Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence
VPU	Violence Prevention Unit
WHO	World Health Organization

Glossary

Term	Definition
Gender-Based Harassment	A wide range of behaviour based on gender stereotypes, sexual orientation or gender identity. Such behaviour includes verbal, physical, visual or online actions which demean, belittle or threaten a person. It does not necessarily suggest sexual interest or intent; it is often about making a person feel unwelcome, uncomfortable, inferior or vulnerable (University of Auckland, 2023).
Gender-Based Violence	Gender-based violence refers to any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Council of Europe, 2023)
Intersectionality	The concept of intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination “intersect” to create unique dynamics and effects (Center for Intersectional Justice, 2023).
Misogyny	Misogyny is the hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women or girls. It can also refer to social systems or environments where women face hostility and hatred because they’re women (Tower Hamlets, 2023).
Night-time Economy	The night-time economy includes industries associated with nightlife, including pubs, bars and theatres.
Public Sexual Harassment	Public Sexual Harassment is part of gender-based violence. It comprises unwelcomed and unwanted attention, sexual advances and intimidating behaviour that occurs in public spaces, both in person and online. It is usually directed towards girls, women and often oppressed groups within society (Safeguarding Network, 2023).
Sexual Harassment	Any form of unwanted verbal, nonverbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment (Council of Europe. ND).
Sexual Violence	Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (WHO, 2002)
Street Harassment	Street harassment includes unwanted comments, gestures, or acts directed at someone in a public space without their consent (RAINN, 2023).
Violence against Women	All acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UN Declaration cited in Welsh Government, 2016:4).

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) strategy (Welsh Government, 2022) acknowledges the importance of tackling misogynistic and sexual violence that can be experienced in public spaces. The strategy suggests as part of a 'theory of change' that by reducing the level and acceptability of street harassment and the attitudes behind it, there will be an impact at the whole society level thereby reducing the overall likelihood of VAWDASV. Additionally, to tackle street harassment, it is necessary to build an understanding of its causes, improve the environment for reporting, support victims and others to challenge and raise awareness and shift focus to male attitudes and away from expectations placed on female victims to condition behaviours (Welsh Government, 2022).

Following the publication of the National VAWDASV Strategy, Welsh Government and Policing in Wales agreed to adopt a Blueprint approach to support delivery against the Strategy. The Blueprint approach is an established way of working in Wales that brings together agencies and areas that are the devolved responsibility of the Welsh Government with non-devolved Policing and Criminal Justice in Wales. VAWDASV, and the other two Blueprints, Youth Justice and Women in Justice, are policy and legislative areas where both devolved and non-devolved agencies, non-governmental organisations, specialist services and survivors work together to coordinate actions and drive activities to deliver shared priorities. The milestones set out in the VAWDASV Blueprint Programme are being delivered by six workstreams, each workstream will take forward and oversee work on key actions set out in the VAWDASV National Strategy (2022 to 2026) (Welsh Government, 2023b).

This evidence review was commissioned by the Gender-based Harassment in all Public Spaces workstream. The purpose of this workstream is to prevent and protect people from public sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based harassment in all public spaces across Wales, including online spaces, through increasing the unacceptability of the societal beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that underpin it, and by holding perpetrators to account.

1.2 Study Aims

The aim of this evidence review is to consolidate and enhance the evidence base on the prevention of, and response to, public sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based harassment in all public spaces, and the safety of women and girls in public spaces, to understand prevalence, causes and effective interventions.

The review will address the following research questions:

1. What are the causes of gender-based harassment in public spaces?
2. What is the scale of gender-based harassment in public spaces?
3. What protects and supports women and girls from gender-based harassment in public spaces?
4. Where is more research needed?

2. Methods

This evidence review gathers, collates and summarises evidence from the international, national and grey literature around the issue of gender-based harassment in public spaces. The terminology used by the Blueprint is 'gender-based harassment in public spaces'; this title was agreed by the workstream to ensure that it was inclusive of all experiences of harassment in a public space.

This evidence review includes:

1. A database search of international peer reviewed literature.
2. A grey literature search focussing on charity and third sector websites; devolved government websites; documents from the Criminal Justice System and statistics.
3. Reference to a recent Welsh Government Literature Search Report which focussed on public sex-based harassment and provides a comprehensive list of existing research (Welsh Government, 2023a).

2.1 Search Strategy

Initial reading was undertaken to map out the study area, including an exploration of key terms and themes that should be included in the literature search. While the initial focus of the review was based around the term gender-based harassment in public spaces, reflecting the terminology used in the Blueprint, the mapping exercise revealed a broader range of terms used within the literature. As such, it was necessary to expand the search terms to identify all of the literature relevant to the research questions.

Consequently, this review focussed on the following search terms; gender-based harassment; street harassment; public sexual harassment; public spaces. The decision was also made to include literature relating to the night-time economy and music festivals. The following databases: ASSIA; British Nursing Index; Cochrane and Google Scholar were searched, together with webpages from charities, third sector organisations and national and devolved governments. Papers identified were mapped in Microsoft Excel and screened according to the following inclusion/exclusion criteria:

Inclusion Criteria

- Focus on gender-based harassment in public spaces/public sexual harassment/street harassment/night-time economy.
- Focus on scale, cause, or interventions to prevent the above or to protect or support women and girls.
- Published since 2015.
- Focus on high income countries.

Exclusion Criteria

- Online harassment (see below).
- Workplace harassment (subject of a separate workstream within the Blueprint).
- Published before 2015.
- Focus on low- and middle-income countries.

Online Harassment

Examples of online gender-based harassment include gender-based hate speech and online impersonation, and can cover other forms of online sexual harassment, including rape threats and virtual rape (Barak, 2005; Weston-Scheuber, 2012; Henry & Powell, 2018). Such experiences are distinctly unique from in-person sexual harassment, as perpetrators of online sexual harassment can target multiple victims at once without any geographical barriers, and often maintain anonymity (Yar, 2005; Henry & Powell, 2015). Given that a substantial amount of academic literature exists on the topic of online sexual and gender-based harassment, including a number of reviews, these will be reviewed in a separate report.

2.2 Analysis

Fifty-eight papers were included in the final sample (Tables 2-6); these were uploaded to NVIVO, and thematic analysis was undertaken in line with the four key research questions. It has been noted that a range of terms are in use and reviewing the literature reveals the use of different terms within the same work or across different studies by the same writer (Vera-Gray, 2016). While this review did identify a small number of studies which used the term gender-based harassment (n=5), the most commonly used term was street harassment (n=24) followed by public sexual harassment (n=11). The literature is summarised according to these three terms with additional sections which cover the night-time economy and music festivals (n=12) and the scale of harassment (n=6) (Table 1).

Table 1: Presentation of Findings

Section 3	Gender-based harassment in public spaces
Section 4	Street harassment
Section 5	Public sexual harassment
Section 6	Night-time economy and music festivals
Section 7	Scale of harassment

In relation to the 'Causes of Harassment' (Section 8), 'What Protects and Supports Women and Girls' (Section 9) and 'Where is Further Research Needed?' (Section 10), the literature is combined, and key themes identified across the literature.

Language and Terminology

Within the literature identified, the language used may contain words or phrases that are offensive and may express views not held by the authors or agreed by consensus; these have been replicated in this report in order to provide a full and comprehensive outline of current research and the arguments set out within it. Their inclusion should not be read as endorsement of the views expressed.

3. Gender-Based Harassment in Public Spaces

Gender-based harassment in public spaces is a broad term which encompasses behaviour that reinforces heteronormative gender roles; for example, making gender related comments about a person's appearance or mannerisms; bullying someone using gender related comments or conduct or treating a person badly because they don't fit stereotypical gender roles (VAW Learning Network, 2015). A more recent definition is provided as; *"a wide range of behaviour based on gender stereotypes, sexual orientation or gender identity. Such behaviour includes verbal, physical, visual or online actions which demean, belittle or threaten a person. It does not necessarily suggest sexual interest or intent; it is often about making a person feel unwelcome, uncomfortable, inferior or vulnerable"* (University of Auckland, 2023).

Gender-based harassment can include:

- Offensive remarks
- Interference or physical assault
- Generalised sexist slurs
- Obscene humour or jokes about sex or any gender in general
- Degrading anecdotes
- Gender-derogatory nicknames
- Demeaning or insulting conduct that conveys negative attitudes about a particular gender or transgendered person
- Gender-based belittling or patronising comments
- Transmission or display of gender-degrading graffiti or material
- Slurs, taunts, stereotypes or name calling as well as gender motivated physical threats, attacks or other hateful conduct.

(US Department of Health and Human Services, 2021; Upcounsel, 2023)

Table 2: Gender-based Harassment; Included Papers (n=5)

Author	Year	Title
Garcia	2022	Public transit and gender-based harassment: A photovoice project in Portland and Salt Lake City
Hopkins	2021	Uncharted territory review
Lampe	2020	Navigating stigma in neighbourhoods and public spaces among Transgender and Nonbinary Adults in New York City
Mora	2020	Latino/a adolescents facing neighborhood dangers: An examination of community violence and gender-based harassment
Phillimore	2022	Forced migration and sexual and gender-based violence: Findings from the SEREDA Project in Wales

Garcia et al. (2022) focusses on the everyday interactions of women of colour with public transit systems. Participants discussed sexual harassment on buses, streetcar and light rail while walking or waiting for public transportation, in either crowded areas downtown or in desolated spaces. This research shows that women feel targeted based on their racial or ethnic identity as well as their gender. Both the fear and actual experiences of gendered violence are a key mechanism in the gendering of public spaces, as women often feel anxiety and fear and this often results in a diminished use of transit.

“Old man sitting across from me...just staring at me the whole time...I got scared he would follow me off the bus or something like that. So, as I was getting closer to my stop, I was trying to make sure I had pepper spray in my pocket” (Participant; Garcia et al., 2022).

Garcia et al. (2022) found that women used various strategies to feel safe: *“sit on the back of the bus or train so no one can sit behind me” (Participant; Garcia et al., 2022)*; other coping strategies women thought about included hitting their aggressor, using pepper spray, or running away. Some women find a new route or change routes, change the way they dress, call the police, walk with friends, or next to others or to ask strangers for help. All of these strategies are forms of mobility the participants engage in as they navigate around their cities to mitigate the gendered and racialised harassment that is frequent in those spaces (Garcia et al., 2022).

Lampe et al. (2020) studied gender-related stigma in neighbourhoods and public spaces among transgender and nonbinary adults (TGNB) and explored how they navigate experiences of harassment and discrimination. Stigma is found not only in neighbourhoods but also in transit, stores and restaurants, creating a complex map of potentially stigmatising areas. Respondents detail how race and gender influence exposure to stigma in neighbourhoods and that the demographic compositions of neighbourhoods influence individual experiences of harassment and discrimination. Specific experiences of stigma include being misgendered (referred to by a pronoun that does not align with one’s gender), experiencing sexual violence, being exposed to discrimination, and being harassed in public (this can include pointing, staring, misgendering, verbal harassment, and denial of services): *“There’s a lotta that where I live. The stigma thing. The pointing and nudging. Especially on the trains” (Participant; Lampe et al., 2020).*

In Lampe et al. (2020), participants described interlocking factors that contributed to their experiences of stigma in public spaces; the main individual identities discussed were gender (and gender presentation), and race however, some participants mentioned that these identities also intersected with religion, weight, and being perceived as gay or straight. Additionally, this research demonstrates that TGNB individuals employ complex methods to respond to and avoid experiences of stigma and discrimination, these include exit strategies, vigilance, avoiding neighbourhoods, bringing friends, dressing differently, and taking different routes. This research demonstrates how individual and neighbourhood demographics interact to create more complex experiences of stigma.

Mora et al. (2020) examined the relationships between community violence exposure (CVE), gender-based harassment and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Latino/a adolescents and found that those exposed to high levels of both CVE and gender-based harassment had worse PTSD symptoms compared to those exposed primarily to gender-based harassment. Gender-based harassment tends not to be an isolated experience and adolescents report being harassed frequently however, given the consistently higher rate of harassment reporting among girls, gender-based harassment is considered to be a form of gender-based violence. This study found that, compared to high levels of exposure to community violence, there was a different response to gender-based harassment; this was explained in terms that adolescents experience gender-based harassment as highly personal, with remarks and behaviour that reference adolescents' appearance and bodies whereas community violence may be perceived as random. Additionally, gender-based harassment was more pervasive among the sample compared to incidents of community violence. The findings indicate that community violence and gender-based harassment are distinct experiences with unique effects on adolescents' psychological outcomes. Mora et al. (2020) recommends that research should include gender-based harassment when examining community violence to fully capture neighbourhood experiences that contribute to adolescents' psychological well-being.

In Wales, Hopkins and Assami (2021) focussed on the experience of violence against migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls and explored experiences including incidents of domestic abuse in the home country, covering a range of specific forms of violence and exploitation such as human trafficking, the experiences of LGBTI asylum seekers, those with no recourse to public funds, children and provision of specialist services. Hopkins and Assami (2021) cite further research which found that women were made destitute at different points during their asylum journey, but the vast majority became destitute after their asylum claims had been refused. This leaves women in a very vulnerable situation and around a third of the women in the study had been raped or sexually abused while destitute in the UK (Dudhia, 2000, cited in Hopkins and Assami, 2021:13).

The SEREDA project sought to understand the nature and incident of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) experienced by forced migrants residing in countries of refuge. Phillimore et al. (2022) outlines the findings of SEREDA interviews in Wales and reveals that women who have experienced forced migration often reported experiencing racial harassment as well as SGBV. Victims of human trafficking and modern slavery and survivors fleeing interpersonal violence remained at risk of exploitation or abuse within Wales; several respondents experienced racist harassment and asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers were subject to structural violence, living in poverty, poor housing conditions and with restricted access to work or study. It is asserted that these women are particularly vulnerable to SGBV due to the following factors: long waiting times and difficult asylum processes, precarious visa status; unsafe or inappropriate housing; negative experiences of authorities and mistrust of authorities; power imbalances with perpetrators and lack of understanding or awareness of violence, rights, and law.

Hopkins and Assami (2021) reveal progress that has been made in terms of legislation in both Welsh and UK Governments. Legislation in place for England and Wales includes specific offences of stalking, forced marriage, failure to protect from female genital mutilation (FGM) and intimate image abuse as well as a domestic abuse offence to capture coercive or controlling behaviour in an intimate or family relationships. Additionally, Wales has made a political commitment to the protection of the rights of migrants and those impacted by SGBV (Phillimore et al., 2022) and there are multiple frameworks in place to support good practice when working with forced migrant SGBV survivors including: the Right to be Safe Strategy; Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015; the Race Equality Action Plan; the LGBTQIA+ Action Plan; and the Action Plan on Disability. Further, in 2019 the Welsh Government announced that Wales would become the world's first Nation of Sanctuary, which is a plan which includes a series of actions intended to improve the lives of sanctuary seekers in Wales.

4. Street Harassment

Street harassment is a type of sexual harassment, and as such should be seen as a form of gender-based violence (PLAN International, 2018). The term street harassment pertains to a broad range of intrusions occurring in public or semi-public space such as shopping centres, public transport, recreational spaces and the street (Vera-Gray, 2016 cited in Cullen-Rosenthal & Fileborn, 2023). As such, street harassment includes unwanted comments, gestures, or acts directed at someone in a public space without their consent. According to RAINN (2023) behaviours include:

- Comments, requests, and demands
- Commenting on physical appearance, such as someone's body or the clothing they're wearing
- Continuing to talk to someone after they have asked to be left alone
- Flashing
- Following or stalking
- Groping
- Intentionally invading personal space or blocking the way
- Persistent requests for someone's name, number, or other information
- Public masturbation or touching
- Sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic slurs, or any comments insulting or demeaning an aspect of someone's identity
- Showing pornographic images without someone's consent
- Staring
- Taking a photo of someone without their consent
- Telling someone to smile
- Up-skirting, which is taking a photo up a skirt or dress without that person's permission
- Using a mirror to look up someone's skirt or dress without their permission
- Wolf Whistling

Although gender and sexuality are often salient components within street harassment, any number of inequalities may interact within an experience. Hutson et al. (2019:770) provide the following holistic definition: *"Street harassment constitutes unwanted attention in public, which psychologically, emotionally, and/or physically impinges on the target's wellbeing. Street harassment is an intrusion, often by a person unknown to the target, which may take a variety of forms, ranging from remarks on physical appearance to sexual touch to brutal physical assaults: no matter the manifestation, street harassment is commonly rooted in inequalities of gender and/or sexuality, and often intersects with the harassed person's race or ethnicity, nationality, religion, class, age, and ability"*.

A wealth of literature reveals the multiple and complex harms caused by street harassment. These include physical symptoms, such as sweating, increased heart rate, shaking, and physical injury; psychological harms, including avoiding particular places, a decreased sense of safety, and engaging in extensive ‘safety work’ or protective strategies to avoid further harassment; negative affective and emotional states, such as fear, anger, distress, and feelings of violation; self-objectification and internalised bodily policing, as well as negatively impacting self-esteem (Cullen-Rosenthal & Fileborn, 2023; DelGreco et al., 2020; Fileborn, 2022).

Additionally, street harassment has a well-documented impact on a woman’s ability to participate in public and civic life as women restrict when and how they access public spaces. This has implications for their sense of freedom and ability to participate in work and education, as a result, the impact is to hinder survivors’ liberty to freely enter public spaces, forcing some survivors out of the public sphere and back into the private sphere (Baptist & Coburn, 2019; Fileborn, 2022).

Table 3: Street Harassment; Included Papers (n=24)

Author	Year	Title
Bailey	2017	Greetings and compliments or street harassment? Competing evaluations of street remarks in a recorded collection
Baptist	2019	Harassment in public spaces: The intrusion on personal space
College of Policing	2021	Street harassment
Cullen-Rosenthal	2023	‘Merely a compliment’? Community perceptions of street harassment in Melbourne, Australia
Davidson	2016	The mediating role of perceived safety on street harassment and anxiety
De Backer	2020	Street harassment and social control of young Muslim women in Brussels: destabilising the public/private binary
DelGreco	2021	Communicating by catcalling: Power dynamics and communicative motivations in street harassment
Ferrer-Perez	2021	Street sexual harassment: Experiences and attitudes among young Spanish people
Fileborn	2017	“I want to be able to walk the street without fear”: Transforming justice for street harassment
Fileborn	2019	Naming the unspeakable harm of street harassment: A survey-based examination of disclosure practices
Fileborn	2022	Mapping activist responses and policy advocacy for street harassment: Current practice and future directions
Fileborn	2023a	‘I’d be in my school uniform’: the informal curriculum of street harassment
Fileborn	2023b	From ghettoization to a field of its own: A comprehensive review of street harassment research
Fleetwood	2019	Everyday self-defence: Hollaback narratives, habitus and resisting street harassment

Author	Year	Title
Herrera	2023	Street harassment interpretations: An exploration of the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity, and mediator variables
Hindes	2023	'Why did he do it? Because he's a fucking bloke': Victim insights into the perpetration of street harassment
Hutson	2019	The harasser's toolbox: Investigating the role of mobility in street harassment
Mason-Bish	2019	Misogyny, racism, and Islamophobia: Street harassment at the intersections
Mason-Bish	2020	'Some men deeply hate women, and express that hatred freely': Examining victims' experiences and perceptions of gendered hate crime
MCASA	2022	Street harassment
PLAN International	2018	Street harassment: It's not OK
Ribeiro	2023	Will boys always be boys? The criminalization of street harassment in Portugal
UN Women	2017	Safe cities and safe public spaces
Vera-Gray	2016	'Men's stranger intrusions: rethinking street harassment.'

According to Ferrer-Perez (2021), street sexual harassment can be characterised in the following ways:

- Harassment occurs in a public or semi-public space and is contextualised by a face-to-face interaction between people who share no stable, long-term or safe connection.
- It occurs within a brief or fleeting interaction, this differentiates it from other forms of violence, such as sexual harassment in the workplace or academic environment.
- The anonymity and the fleeting nature of this event hinder evaluation and criminal prosecution.
- The absence of any relationship results in the behaviour to be perceived as an uncomfortable and/or threatening transgression of physical and psychological space.
- The behaviour is unidirectional (the desires or situation of the victim are not taken into account).
- While the primary targets are women, public sexual harassment may also occur against men, especially those who do not conform to a heteronormative pattern, or against the nonbinary population.

Research by PLAN International (2018) found that street harassment is an almost universal experience for girls around the UK, to the point that some even consider this to be a normal part of growing up. Girls start to experience these behaviours as early as when they are in primary school and go on to be targeted in their uniforms as teenagers, and then continue to be harassed as they become young adults. Echoing these findings, Fileborn & Hardley, 2023a found that street harassment can begin at an early age, and that starting high school is often

associated with the onset or increased intensity of street harassment, with street harassment commonly encountered by participants while they were in their school uniform.

In research by PLAN International (2018), girls could often name specific locations near where they lived which were virtual 'no-go zones', because they feared harassment in those places. Girls and young women described being particularly targeted when on their own, when out walking or jogging, when travelling to and from school, as well as in busy, central areas like main high streets. They talked about being shouted at or beeped at from passing cars, as well as experiencing unwanted touching or staring on public transport, girls also felt particularly vulnerable on nights out or working in night-time venues and were conscious of potentially predatory behaviours around bars and clubs.

"People driving by and shouting at you. That's the worst."

(Participant, 14 years; PLAN International, 2018)

"Nothing's worse than just sitting somewhere and feeling something touching you". (Participant, 18 years; PLAN International, 2018)

A key location for street harassment to occur is public transport. Hutson & Krueger (2019) found that physical mobility, especially that facilitated by public transportation and own vehicles plays a critical role in advantaging the harasser. It is argued that physical spaces in and around areas of mass transit offer unique advantages for harassers since public spaces can offer the opportunity '*for planned and spontaneous encounters*' (Mehta, 2014 cited in Hutson & Krueger, 2019:774).

Fileborn (2022) found that street harassment is overwhelmingly gendered, with men almost exclusively perpetrating this behaviour, as such, street harassment is both a manifestation and (re)production of gendered power relations. However, while street harassment is typically conceptualised as a form of gender-based violence, it is also deeply implicated within systems of power and oppression relating to race; sexuality; class; and (dis) ability. These systems of power, and the lived experience of street harassment for those situated on different, multiple and intertwined structural positions, cannot be disentangled from one another (Fileborn, 2022). Thus, as Fileborn (2019) notes, street harassment must be viewed through an intersectional lens, which situates experiences and impacts of street harassment within multiple interlocking systems of power.

Intersectional feminist studies have highlighted that people experience harassment in relation to a range of elements of positionality, including disability, sexuality, gender identity, class, body size and race (Cullen-Rosenthal & Fileborn, 2023). For instance, same sex attracted women report encountering heightened harassment when in public with their partner, with this harassment often sexualised as well as being homophobic and heterosexist (Fileborn, 2022). In research by PLAN International (2018), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) and Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) girls talked about the dual discrimination of being harassed both for their ethnicity or sexual orientation, as well as their gender.

De Backer (2020) suggests an intersectionality framework is particularly relevant when studying Muslim women in western societies who may face multiple threats and harms as a result of them being a woman, with a migration background and adhering to a (non-dominant) religion. Mason-Bish & Zempi (2019) assert that veiled Muslim women are at an increased risk of street harassment, which can be misogynistic and Islamophobic in nature, also that veiled Muslim women can experience street harassment in ways that are both similar to and different from that experienced by other women since their experiences can sit at the intersection of religion and gender, coupled with other aspects of their identity. Such experiences are not one-off, discrete, or isolated, rather they are part of a process of being targeted in public which produces a hostile environment for veiled Muslim women. To escape harassment, women must travel with a male companion or in groups which restricts a woman's autonomy and further reaffirms the notion that men control women's *"rights to passage through public space"* (Bowman, 1993, cited in Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019:28).

In recent years, in some of the literature, the term street harassment has been replaced by the term public sexual harassment¹. Vera-Gray (2016) considers that the term street harassment 'de-genders a gendered experience'; in addition, PLAN International (2021b) recognise that the term street harassment can have the effect of trivialising the harmful and abusive nature of sexual harassment and that it can occur in any public place, including parks, gyms, on public transport or shopping centres.

1 For example, the terminology used in more recent reports by PLAN International (2021; 2022) and Vera-Gray (2020) has changed from street harassment to public sexual harassment.

5. Public Sexual Harassment

According to the Safeguarding Network (2023), public sexual harassment is part of gender-based violence. It comprises unwelcomed and unwanted attention, sexual advances and intimidating behaviour that occurs in public spaces, both in person and online. It is usually directed towards girls, women and often oppressed groups within society.

Our Streets Now (2023), notes that public sexual harassment is a result of gender discrimination together with power dynamics which perpetuate an environment and culture that disregards historically vulnerable and oppressed groups of people, diminishing their sense of self-worth and denying equal access to public space. It is also an intersectional issue and intersecting characteristics, for example race, disability and sexuality, can compound a person's experience of public sexual harassment. As such, experiences of public sexual harassment are tied together by the core power dynamic in which the harasser seeks to dominate the harassed.

Table 4: Public Sexual Harassment; Included Papers (n=11)

Author	Year	Title
Barker	2022	What makes a park feel safe or unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire
Cabrera	2023	An analysis of responses to sexual assault against women in public space: Practical gender needs or strategic gender interests?
House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee	2019	Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2017-19
House of Commons Library	2023	Protection from sex-based harassment in Public Bill 2022-23
Lewis	2021	Rhythms, sociabilities and transience of sexual harassment in transport: mobilities perspectives of the London underground
PLAN International	2021a	Parliamentary briefing
PLAN International	2021b	What works for ending public sexual harassment
PLAN International	2022	"Everything is racialised on top" Black and minoritised girls and young women's experiences of public sexual harassment in the UK
PLAN International	ND	Ending public sexual harassment: Legal Briefing
Vera-Gray	2020	Contested gendered space: public sexual harassment and women's safety work
Welsh Women's Aid	2022	Creating an offence of public sexual harassment

Further, RAINN (2023) observe that being harassed in a public space can make individuals worry about their physical safety and creates an environment of fear and intimidation. For many who experience it, it is often not an isolated incident but happens repeatedly, and the cumulative effect can cause a heightened sense of anxiety. Additionally, people who experience harassment are less likely to engage with strangers and participate in their communities.

PLAN International (2021b) uses girls' testimonies to explore what sexual harassment consists of; what works to tackle it; and what impact it has on their lives:

"I remember it so clearly. We were shopping, and a guy came along and whispered in my ear: 'It's national grab an arse day', and he grabbed me ... I was 15, with my mum".

"Once me and my friend were stood talking at the corner of the street, and then this car pulled up and the guy started saying "Your skirts are too short, you're sluts".

"I've never experienced harassment like I did then [at school age]. Men would ask if they could take a picture with me in my uniform. It was awful".

The findings of this report illustrate that the impact on girls and young women is huge, but often invisible, affecting their lives and choices far beyond the immediate incidents. Public sexual harassment affects mental and physical health, mobility in public, voice and participation, education and economic opportunities (PLAN International, 2021b). Welsh Women's Aid (2022) highlight that public sexual harassment does not occur solely because of someone's sex, rather it must be acknowledged that these behaviours are perpetrated to exert power and control. As such, public sexual harassment is prevalent as an intimidation tactic in many communities.

Other research by PLAN International (2022) indicates that mixed race girls and young women and Black, African, Caribbean, and Black British girls and young women aged between 12 and 21 are more likely to have experienced public sexual harassment compared to White girls and young women. Some groups of girls and young women may also be at particular risk of certain types of behaviours, for example, mixed race girls and young women are significantly more likely to have experienced unwanted touching followed by Black, African, Caribbean, and Black British girls, White girls, and Asian and Asian British girls. Mixed race girls and young women were also found to be significantly more likely to have experienced being filmed or photographed by a stranger without consent compared to other ethnic groups and most likely to have experienced sexual gestures. Girls and young women who selected 'other' race were most likely to have experienced sexual exposure/being flashed at followed by mixed race girls, White and Black girls and Asian girls (PLAN International, 2022).

Plan International (2022) found that while the forms of harassment Black and minoritised girls and young women experienced bore similarities to those experienced by (majority White) girls and young women in the wider literature, the public sexual harassment that they encountered was also racialised and indistinguishable from the sexualised nature of the behaviour:

“I can never tell if I am getting looked at because of race or sexual harassment” (Participant, 20 years; PLAN International, 2022)

In this research, Black and minoritised girls and young women recounted how their experiences of sexual harassment centred on their bodies as different from the White norm, treating them as oversexualised, desexualised, undesirable or unattractive, and exotic. These contradictions and inconsistencies are important to highlight, since they illustrate that sexual harassment is centrally about the exercise of power, linked to the privileging of dominant masculinities rather than sexual attraction or desire. The specific dynamics of power operating in Black and minoritised girls’ and young women’s experiences of sexual harassment intersect several axes of inequality relating to gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity and faith (PLAN International, 2022).

A common place for women to experience sexual harassment is public transport. Lewis et al. (2021) identifies three key features of experiences of sexual harassment on the London Underground. First that the rhythms of the city and the Underground facilitate and conceal different forms of sexual harassment. Second, that women frequently do not respond to sexual harassment, in this way respecting the civil inattention (a deference to strangers in a public place) which prevails, and the unwillingness to disrupt fellow passengers’ and their own journeys. Finally, that, due to the transitory nature of the Underground, women may barely register harassment before it had passed. As such, the space is significant, as the overcrowded nature of transport at peak rush hour time permits bodily contact and the perpetration of sexual harassment, other aspects of the environment include poor surveillance and supervision and a lack of patrolling on public transport (Lewis et al., 2021).

Lewis et al. (2021) also asserts that while both are public spaces, the time-space context in public transport is different to that of the streets and the rhythms of the Underground facilitate particular types of harassment to be perpetrated. On the tube, particularly during rush hour, the volume of people in a contained space allows for more physical and embodied acts of sexual violence, such as frotteuring (rubbing one’s pelvic area against a non-consenting person for sexual pleasure) and groping. Equally, the rhythmic jostling of bodies in a restricted space often conceals what is happening, as women struggle to immediately discern whether inappropriate touches are accidental or not, which impacts and delays their response. It has been observed that the crowded nature of transport permits sexual harassment to go undetected (Gardner, 2017 cited in Lewis et al., 2021).

6. Harassment in other Settings: The Night-time Economy and Music Festivals

This section summarises research which focusses on harassment in other settings, specifically, the night-time economy and music festivals. Graham et al. (2017) found that women frequently experience unwanted sexual touching and persistent advances at bars and parties and that within these highly sexist and sexualised settings, the gender imbalance is particularly evident. As a result, women are subject to sexual harassment in drinking settings, often in the form of repeated verbal or physical advances, grabbing or groping (Graham et al., 2017). In respect of music festivals, one study reports that 43% of female festival-goers and 22% of male festival-goers under the age of 40 had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour at a music festival but only 2% reported it to the police (YouGov, 2018, cited in Bows et al., 2023).

Table 5: The Night-time Economy and Music Festivals: Included Papers (n=12)

Author	Year	Title
Becker	2015	"Me getting plastered and her provoking my eyes": Young people's attribution of blame for sexual aggression in public drinking spaces
Bows	2023	'Perceptions of safety and experiences of gender-based violence at UK music festivals.'
College of Policing	2022	Reducing violence in the night-time economy
Graham	2017	When women do not want it: young female bargoers experiences with and responses to sexual harassment in social drinking contexts
House of Commons	2022	Spiking
House of Commons	2022	Spiking: Government response to the Committee's ninth report of Session 2021-2022
Janssen	2020	A rapid assessment of re-opening nightlife whilst containing COVID-19 and preventing violence
Magill	2023	Project Vigilant: Evaluation report
Philpot	2019	Capturing violence in the night-time economy: A review of established and emerging methodologies
Quigg	2020	Sexual violence and nightlife: A systematic literature review
Walker	2022	Preventing sexual violence in the night-time economy
Walker	2023	Preventing sexual harassment in the night-time economy: Encouraging men to be active bystanders

6.1 The Night-Time Economy

Becker & Tinkler (2015) note that social environments that promote drinking along with increased sexualisation have been found to be strongly associated with experiences of unwanted sexual behaviour, including groping, kissing, and touching. More recently, drink and needle 'spiking' in nightclubs has also raised concerns and Magill et al. (2023) argue that this, combined with complaints about stalking, harassment (experienced by two out of three women), exposure, voyeurism ('up skirting'), abuse and unwanted touching have pointed to predatory male behaviour turning the night-time economy into a 'hostile environment' for many women.

A systematic review of sexual violence and nightlife undertaken by Quigg et al. (2020) illustrates that nightlife-related sexual violence is pervasive and that evidence suggests that a combination of factors at an individual, relationship, and community/environmental level are associated with nightlife-related sexual violence. As such, the evidence indicates that the night-time economy does not cause sexual harassment, rather a broad range of associated factors can increase the likelihood of sexual harassment taking place in these settings; notable examples, referenced throughout the literature include, but are not exclusive to, intoxication, overcrowding, and anonymity (Walker et al., 2022; Quigg et al., 2020).

Both intoxication and overcrowding are cited as possible opportunistic factors influencing the occurrence of sexual aggression, for example, a person could take advantage of crowding to touch another person, or someone's intoxication could be exploited by another person (Sanchez et al., 2019 cited in Quigg et al., 2020:4). Overcrowding (in nightclubs or bars) has been reported to provide perpetrators with a sense of anonymity, which in turn empowers them to inappropriately touch another (Quigg et al., 2020; Janssen et al., 2020). As such, anonymity is associated with a reduction in accountability and moral responsibility, in turn increasing the likelihood of sexual harassment and abuse (Philpot, 2019). In terms of intoxication, Graham et al. (2017) suggest that women's level of intoxication influences their risk of being targets of sexual aggression; a possible explanation for this, given by Quigg et al. (2020) is that predatory individuals may target bars and clubs as accessible locations for finding victims, particularly those who are heavily intoxicated.

Savard (2019, cited in Walker et al., 2023) argues that these factors, coupled with problematic attitudes and beliefs, can play an important role in the occurrence of sexual harassment within the night-time economy. If unchallenged, these problematic attitudes and beliefs can reinforce the social norms that suggest sexual harassment is acceptable (Walker et al., 2023). Existing cultural norms suggest that sexual harassment is inevitable for people of all genders, and particularly women, within the night-time economy where the drinking culture places high value on sexual encounters (Walker et al., 2023). Graham et al. (2017) evidence this further, noting that male perpetrators often receive positive reinforcement in the form of encouragement from their male friends and as such, night-time settings are very much "a man's world". Also, bar staff often do not notice unwanted advances or do not intervene if they do notice, as a result, the likelihood of punishment or negative consequences for perpetrating sexual aggression is negligible (Graham et al., 2017).

6.2 Music Festivals

Bows et al. (2023) presents the findings from the first UK study to examine festival-goer experiences and perceptions of safety and crime, with a particular focus on sexual harassment and violence. Camping areas, the walkways between camping and festival sites, and woodlands were the areas of particular concern for these participants, with women statistically more likely than men to report that these spaces made them feel generally unsafe. These areas are separate from the main festival entertainment sites with consequent reduced lighting, security, police, festival staff and often other festival-goers. These environmental (reduced lighting, security and police) and social features (festival staff, volunteers and festival-goers) were important to respondents, either increasing or decreasing their perceptions of safety. These findings are consistent with research examining gender and licensed venues which reports women find dark, long corridors to toilets intimidating (Fileborn, 2016 cited in Bows et al., 2023) and with broader fear of crime literature which typically reports that low levels of lighting create a heightened sense of fear, particularly for women (Bows et al., 2023).

7. The Scale of Public Harassment

International studies have found that at least 65% (but sometimes up to 90%) of people surveyed, reported encountering some form of street harassment throughout their lifetime (DelGreco et al., 2021). A comparison of international studies by Ferrer-Perez et al. (2021) surrounding street sexual harassment found it a serious and far-ranging social problem with a prevalence of women who have experienced it varying between 30% and 95%, with victims most frequently being younger women.

Table 6: The Scale of Harassment; Included Papers (n=6)

Author	Year	Title
Adams	2021	2020 Sexual harassment survey
Centre on Gender Equity and Health	2019	Measuring #MeToo. A national study on sexual harassment and assault
Office for National Statistics (ONS)	2022	Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022
UN Women	2021	Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces
Violence Prevention Unit	2022	Quarterly violence monitoring report
YouGov	2022	Most women have been sexually harassed on London public transport

7.1 International Figures

In 2019, the UC San Diego's Center for Gender Equity and Health and Stop Street Harassment led a nationally representative survey of 1,182 women and 1,037 men regarding sexual harassment and violence (Center on Gender Equity and Health, 2019). This study found that 81% of women and 43% of men experienced some form of sexual harassment or assault in their lifetime with verbal comments the most commonly experienced form of sexual harassment. Of the female respondents, 49% had been groped, 27% had been followed, and 30% had been flashed. Sexual harassment was most frequently experienced in public spaces (e.g. parking lot, street, store, etc.) by 68% of women and 23% of men. Additionally, men and women within marginalised groups were more likely to experience sexual harassment with 35% of Black women and 39% of lesbian or bisexual women harassed within the last 6 months. Of the female respondents, those with disabilities or those who identified as lesbian, or bisexual were more likely to be harassed compared to straight women without disabilities. Of the male respondents, men with disabilities, men living below the poverty line, and men who identify as gay or bisexual were more likely to be harassed. Of those who experienced sexual harassment, strangers were listed as the most frequent perpetrators.

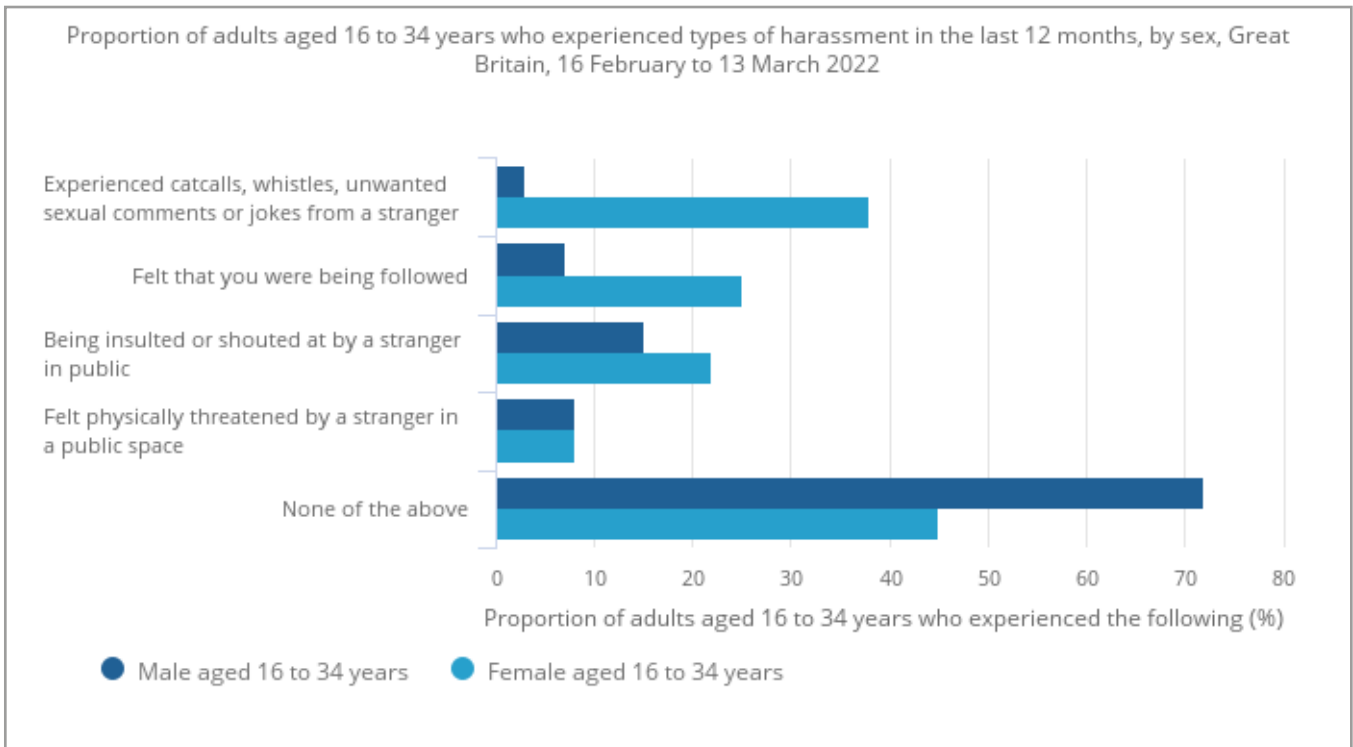
These findings resonate with international surveys cited in the literature previously covered in this review. Cornell's international study on street harassment of 16,607 women from 42 cities found that the majority of women experienced their first street harassment during puberty, over 50% of women in 22 countries had been fondled or groped in public, and 71% of women had been stalked (Livingston, 2015, cited in Baptist & Coburn, 2019). Australian studies have also shown that approximately 87% of young women have experienced street harassment at least once in their lifetime (Cullen-Rosenthal & Fileborn, 2023). Other studies suggest that street harassment is even more prevalent, with higher end estimates indicating that 90-100% of women have experienced it at least once in their lives (Fileborn, 2019).

7.2 UK Figures

In the UK, the Government Equalities Office delivered a nationally representative survey exploring the prevalence and nature of sexual harassment (Adams et al., 2021). Here, 'sexual harassment' was used as an umbrella term to refer to sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape in the workplace and public spaces. A survey of 12,131 participants asked about a set of 15 sexual harassment behaviours that cover a range of types of harassment (Appendix 1). This research found 72% of the UK population experienced at least one form of sexual harassment in their lifetime, while 43% experienced at least one sexual harassment behaviour in the last 12 months. Of these, 33% who experienced sexual harassment in 2020 had formally reported it, with the most frequently experienced behaviours (such as unwelcome staring or sexual jokes) being the least reported, and the least experienced behaviours (such as rape or attempted rape) being among the most commonly reported (Adams et al., 2021).

A study by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) uses the annual Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to identify people's current perceptions of safety and their experiences of harassment in the last 12 months (ONS, 2022). This study found that girls and young women aged 16 to 34 were more likely than any other group to have experiences of public harassment. One in two (50%) female respondents aged 16 to 34 years had experienced at least one form of harassment; a decrease from 58% in June 2021. In a comparison between men and women, the survey data found that in the previous 12 months, 27% of women and 16% of men had experienced at least one form of harassment. The breakdown of men and women aged 16 to 34 who have experienced different types of harassment, along with the types of harassment in the last 12 months can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Proportion of adults aged 16 to 34 who have experienced different types of harassment.



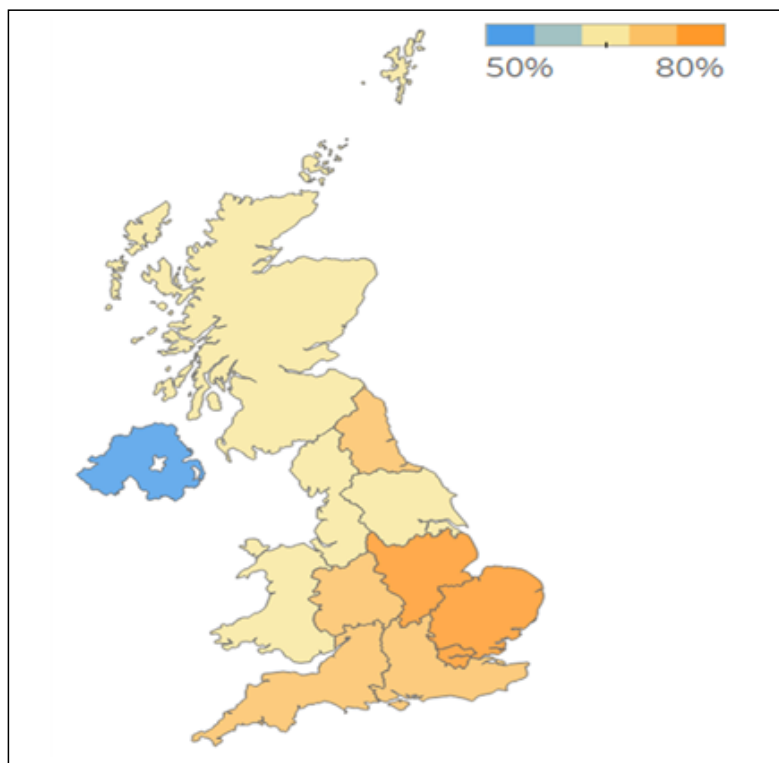
(ONS, 2022:6)

PLAN International’s UK study based on a survey of girls and young women aged 12 to 21 found that 75% of girls and young women aged 12 to 21 have experienced a form of sexual harassment in a public space in their lifetime. This is particularly prevalent in adolescent girls where 54% of girls aged 12 to 14 have experienced public sexual harassment. Girls in uniform are often a particular target of harassment by older men and the same study found that 35% of girls aged 14-21 have experienced harassment while wearing school uniform (PLAN International, 2021).

7.3 Comparison of UK Nations

Across the UK, the UN Women YouGov survey (UN Women, 2021) reveals that rates of sexual harassment, range from approximately 50% in Northern Ireland, 65% in Wales, and Scotland, and 80% in the East of England (Figure 2).

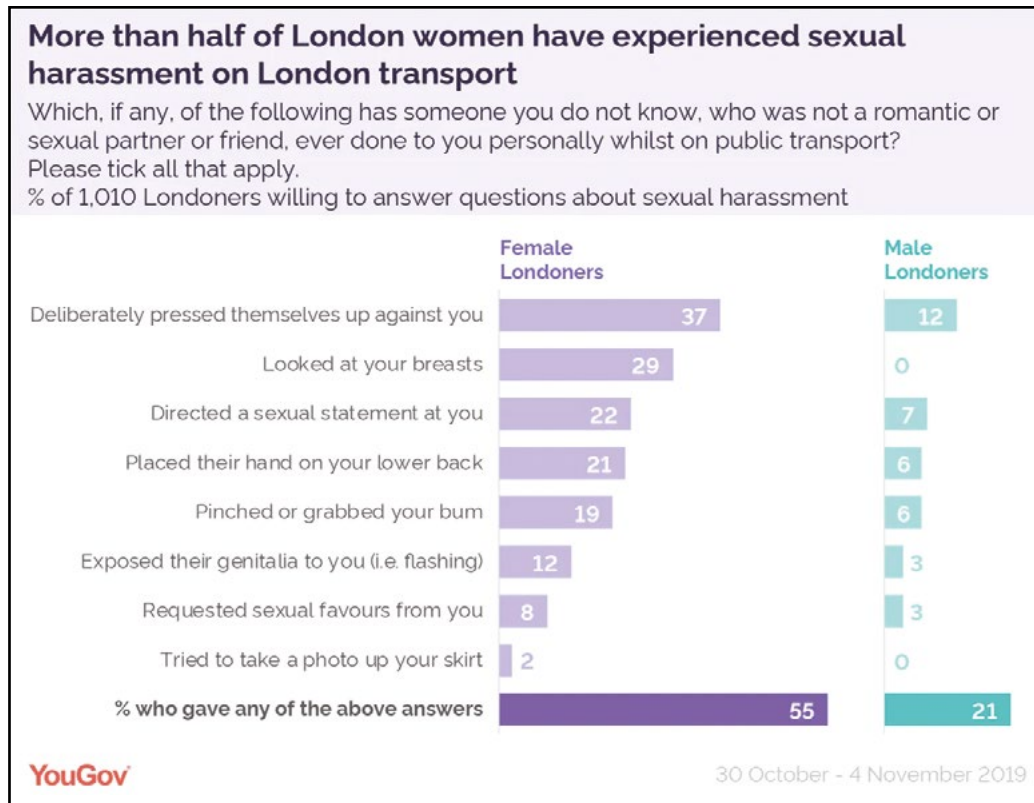
Figure 2: The percentage of women who reported 'ever' experiencing sexual harassment in a public space across different regions of the UK.



(UN Women, 2021)

In London, a study found that 39% of respondents said they have experienced some form of sexual harassment on public transport; a majority of women (55%) and one in five men (21%) had been victims (Figure 3). Findings also revealed the most common locations for the incidences of sexual harassment on public transport were the tube (64%), bus (38%) and train (31%) (YouGov, 2022).

Figure 3: Sexual Harassment on London Transport



(YouGov, 2022)

In Wales, data from the ONS found that 8% of respondents had felt physically threatened by a stranger in a public space, a higher proportion than any geographical region outside London (ONS, 2022 cited in Welsh Women’s Aid, 2022). Further, data from the Live Fear Free helpline, funded by Welsh Government and run by Welsh Women’s Aid found that between January 2021 and June 2022, the helpline reported a 229% increase in the number of survivors contacting the helpline about stalking and harassment (Welsh Women’s Aid, 2022). In respect of the prevalence of sexual harassment in the night-time economy, the Wales Violence Prevention Unit (VPU) routinely collates data from health boards and police forces across Wales which show that sexual offences, rape offences, stalking and harassment offences have continued to increase across Wales (VPU, 2022). This is particularly prevalent in the night-time economy which has also seen an increase in night-time economy-related assault, violence and spiking in the last year.

7.4 Where Harassment Occurs

The ONS survey found that women aged 16 to 34 years felt the most unsafe of any age and sex group using public transport alone after dark. Overall, participants felt most unsafe in 'a park or open space' rather than any other public area. This was particularly evident after dark, where reports of feeling unsafe in these areas increased to 63% compared to 11% during the day for both men and women. The results showed that more people had stopped walking in quiet places such as "parks or open spaces" after dark by March 2022 because of feeling unsafe; when compared with figures for June 2021, this was an increase in men (18%-24%) and women (32%-37%) (ONS, 2022).

This corresponds with the UN Women YouGov survey (UN Women, 2021) which found that 71% of women of all ages have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space (public space includes public transport; hospitality venues such as pubs and clubs; public events such as concerts, sports games and festivals; streets; parks; commons and other public recreational spaces). These findings are echoed by PLAN International's UK study which found that the most common spaces in which public harassment is experienced is outside in a public area (81% of participants), followed by in a school, college or university grounds (46%), on public transport (37%), inside a public building or facility (33%) (PLAN International, 2021).

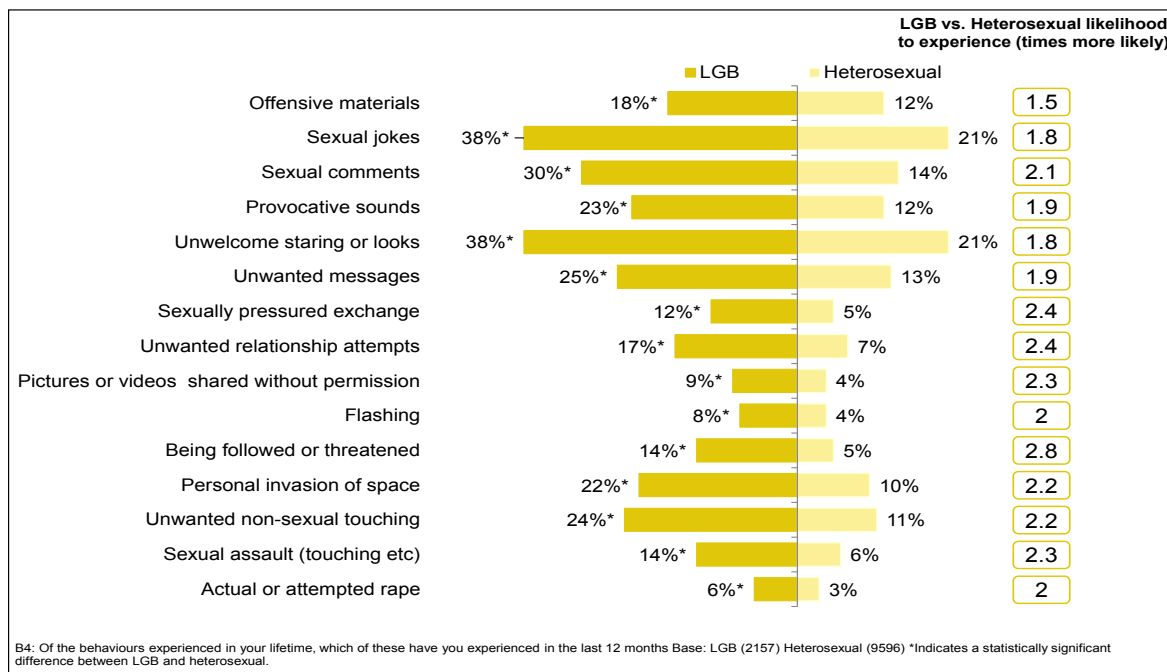
In the night-time economy, overall, figures regarding the scale of sexual harassment within the night-time economy vary, however, a review of the literature surrounding nightlife-related sexual violence indicates a lifetime prevalence reaching over 50% amongst most study samples (Quigg et al., 2020). This echoes other UK data which indicates that 54% of women and 15% of men aged 18-24 experience sexual harassment on a night out (Drinkaware, 2015, cited in Bows, 2023).

7.5 Demographic Factors

Adams et al. (2021) also found that certain demographic groups were significantly more likely to have experienced at least one form of sexual harassment. These include women, young people (ages 15 to 24 and 25 to 34), ethnic minorities (excluding White minorities), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) individuals, and those with disabilities. Most people who had experienced sexual harassment (75%) felt that at least one protected characteristic (e.g., sex, age, disability, race) was a factor in their harassment.

This was particularly evident in the LGBT community where 64% had experienced at least one form of sexual harassment in the last 12 months and 86% had experienced it at some stage in their lifetime. This is significantly higher compared to heterosexual people (42% and 72% respectively) but lower than transgender participants (80% and 92% respectively). From these responses, the Government Equalities Office (Adams et al., 2021) calculated that Lesbian Gay Bisexual (LGB) people were more than twice as likely to experience most sexual harassment behaviours. The likelihood of other forms of sexual harassment can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Experience of Sexual Harassment in the last 12 Months in the LGBT Community



(Adams et al., 2021: 44)

For minoritised groups, figures are higher with people who hold multiple marginalised identities more likely to experience street/public harassment. For instance, studies have found that women of colour experience more incidents of street/public harassment and sexual violence than White women. Women of colour often experience both racist and sexist forms of sexual harassment, making them particularly vulnerable (Baptist & Coburn, 2019). PLAN International’s study found that 88% of mixed-race girls and 82% of Black, African, Caribbean and Black British girls have experienced public sexual harassment, compared to 75% of white and 70% of Asian and Asian British girls (PLAN International, 2021).

This was also true for those with disabilities, 92% of girls who consider themselves to have a disability have experienced some form of sexual harassment, compared to 74% of non-disabled participants. The difference between disabled and non-disabled participants was particularly clear when; being propositioned (28% vs. 16%), having sexual gestures made at them (40% vs. 29%), and being subjected to sexual exposure (21% vs. 10%). Additionally, 28% of respondents who consider themselves to have a disability felt that their sexual harassment was linked to their disability (PLAN International, 2021).

7.6 Reporting Sexual Harassment

A sexual harassment survey found that 38% of respondents has witnessed sexual harassment, but of those respondents, only 16% reported intervening (Adams, 2021). Furthermore, Graham et al. (2017) found that many victims do not report their experiences of sexual harassment, with the normalisation of sexual harassment acting as a possible contributor. This is supported by research from the House of Commons (2023) that stated that the main reasons for not reporting sexual harassment was due to instances not being ‘serious enough to report’ (55%) and that reporting instances of public sexual harassment ‘wouldn’t help’ (45%). Equally, 44% of women agreed that having more confidence that reporting the incident would prevent it from happening again would encourage them to report.

8. Causes of Public Harassment

This section draws out key themes across the literature and focusses on: the continuum of men's violence against women; traditional harmful masculinities; and intersectionality.

8.1 The Continuum of Men's Violence against Women

Cabrera et al. (2023) notes that the discourses and practices that construct gender, situate women both symbolically and materially, in positions of subordination, intersected by other experiences of inequality. As such, it is this differentiation in terms of prestige and power that is considered to be the ultimate cause of sexual violence over women. Further, Hindes & Fileborn (2023) argue that violence towards women in both the public and private spheres is often understood as a mechanism to maintain and reinforce hegemonic masculinity and gendered power structures. Sexual violence is understood as a tool through which men can establish their dominance, and attitudes and norms relating to gender and sexuality at the individual, societal and institutional levels can work to normalise and justify gendered violence.

House of Commons (2023) acknowledge that sex-based harassment should be considered part of a continuum of violence against women and girls. A number of the included literature refer to the 'continuum of men's violence against women' developed by Kelly (1987); this continuum recognises that all forms of sexualised harm, ranging from the seemingly minor, to sexual assault and rape are interconnected and underpinned by the same gendered power relations. Further, the continuum model understands experiences of sexual violence as lived alongside one another and operating in a cumulative way, so rather than focusing on individual incidents, the continuum model considers encounters of sexual violence across the life course (Kelly, 1988, cited in Fileborn, 2022).

Building on the notion that street harassment constitutes a form of sexual violence, research has worked to develop understandings of its function. Crouch (2009 cited in Fileborn & O'Neill, 2023b) conceptualises the purpose of street (and other) harassment is *"to keep women in their place"*. In this way, *"sexual harassment is a means of maintaining women's status as subordinate in society; it is also a means of keeping women in certain physical spaces and out of others, or, at least, of controlling women's behaviour in those spaces"*. This suggests that encountering street harassment reminds women of their vulnerability to, or the possibility of, more serious forms of sexual violence (Fileborn & O'Neill, 2023b). DeBacker (2020) maintains that the use of street harassment as a means to control women, limiting their presence in public spaces is not new and Ferrer-Perez et al. (2021) notes that as street sexual harassment sends a message to victims and witnesses that highlights the limitations that a patriarchal society imposes on the freedom and mobility of women, restricting their use of public spaces at certain times and in certain places.

8.2 Traditional Harmful Masculinities

Research with over 3,000 men in the UK, US and Mexico identified clear links between young men's views on manhood and sexual harassment (PLAN International, 2021b). After controlling for age, income, and education, the key factor driving young men's harassment is 'how much they believe in, or have internalised, toxic ideas about masculinity' (Hellman & Barker, 2018, cited in PLAN International, 2021b:21). For example, 'men should be the provider', or 'men should act strong even when they don't feel like it'. Additionally, people who find it acceptable for men to pay for sex or to use legal pornography also tend to find public sexual harassment more acceptable, suggesting that it is also motivated by a sense of sexual entitlement. Using a tool called the 'Man Box' (a scale of 17 attitude statements on toxic masculinity around being self-sufficient, acting tough, looking physically attractive, sticking to rigid gender roles, being heterosexual, having sexual prowess, and using aggression to resolve conflicts), this research found that young men who held the most harmful attitudes were nearly 10 times as likely to have harassed as young men who had the most equitable attitudes. The research also found that one of the attitudes and norms that uphold sexual harassment is the belief that men have the right to sex regardless of consent (PLAN International, 2021b).

PLAN International (2021b) cite UK YouGov survey data which shows a significant relationship between the belief in traditional male gender norms and acceptability of public sexual harassment. In particular, men who believe that public sexual harassment is very acceptable are more likely to agree with traditional masculine gender norms; such social norms vary between different forms of violence. For example, norms that are more likely to sustain domestic violence include norms around men's authority to discipline women and children, strict gender roles and family privacy. Other norms are more cross-cutting, for example around ideals of masculinity and femininity which include male sexual entitlement, dominant masculinity and submissive femininity.

According to Herrera & McCarthy (2023) the politicised feminist perspective frames street harassment as a consequence of inequalities between women and men and part of a continuum of discrimination women face at school, the workplace, and in public spaces. The male gaze, leers, winks, and other forms of street harassment function as reminders of women's lower statuses and the social acceptability of men's evaluation of them as sexual objects. According to the romanticised traditionalist perspective, street harassment is flattering, trivial, and/or an invitation woman welcome, by their clothing or physical appearance. Grounded in heteronormativity, the view assumes women desire to have their attractiveness affirmed by heterosexual men with the hope "something significant could eventuate" between them (Gardner, 1995, cited in Herrera & McCarthy, 2023:456). This heteronormativity, the upholding of heterosexuality as the norm and superior form of sexuality, is a foundational power structure perpetuated and sustained through social and cultural institutions. In one study, most men upheld the romanticised traditionalist view and some women also described certain street interactions as flattering, emphasising that ones with younger and attractive men were more acceptable (Gardner, 1995, cited in Herrera & McCarthy, 2023).

This resonates with later research by Bailey (2017) which acknowledges that street remarks are not necessarily characterised by vulgar or threatening words. Remarks can be as simple as 'have a nice evening' and for many, street-based remarks are considered harmless or good natured. This is justified because it is felt that there is often a difficulty in articulating the way that street remarks are detrimental, and this is what veils their harm (Bailey, 2017). However, it is argued that, regardless of the perpetrator's intent or how street harassment is subjectively experienced, they represent a disruption to the victim's individual subjectivity and breaches the norm which dictates that we don't interact with strangers (Cullen-Rosenthal & Fileborn, 2023; Fileborn & O'Neill, 2023b). As such, street remarks impose inappropriate intimacy on passing strangers with women who are targeted by street remarks, treating them as breaches of the interaction order. Women often felt that men did not have good intentions or had hidden sexual intentions and as a result, did not respond to them. In this way, street remarks masquerade as civil greetings which in other contexts create a basis for civil engagement, but in this case undermine trust (Bailey, 2017).

When asked about motivation, DelGreco et al. (2021) found that there was a discrepancy between how men and women view street harassment. Men were significantly more likely than women to report 'affection' as the motivation for street harassment, meaning they engaged in the behaviour to express care or liking, while women in the study believed that men enjoy street harassment, but they also believed men do it for control reasons, such as to feel more powerful or to cause the recipient to change their behaviour. This indicates that men use street harassment as a way to change recipient's behaviour, but they do not believe it is a negative experience and do not expect negative reactions from women.

A study by DeBacker (2020) found that some forms of harassment are used as a strategy of social control by men 'hanging out' and that young women apply defence tactics to protect themselves against the perceived dangers in the public domain. As such, street harassment is embedded in dual affective dynamics, which generates feelings of belonging among young men and feelings of threat in young women. In this way, street harassment emerges as a mode of social control which 'keeps them in their place'. One study with self-professed harassers presented five central motivations that led a perpetrator to engage in street harassment: normalisation, sexual objectification, women's position in society, to punish women and because the perpetrators believed that they were oppressed (Henry, 2017, cited in Hinde & Fileborn, 2023).

However, the dominant framing of street harassment as a gendered practice may have implications for those who experience forms of street harassment that do not sit as neatly within this frame. Fileborn (2019) argues that this dominant framing may exclude forms of harassment mired in homophobia or transphobia as "not counting" and, thus, not being named as such. This is not to suggest that these experiences are not also gendered, but rather that the particular iterations of gendered performance and power, and the ways in which these are shaped by and intertwine with homo and transphobia, are not well accounted for within dominant framings of harassment (Fileborn, 2019).

8.3 Intersectionality

While the impact of gendered norms, gender inequality and hegemonic masculinity are critical in considering the perpetration of gendered violence, Hinde & Fileborn (2023) assert that such frameworks are not sufficient in fully accounting for street harassment. This is illustrated by the fact that women, rarely, are also identified as perpetrators and that harassment is also directed at people due to their race, disability, sexuality and diverse gender. The findings of this study highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of power that extends beyond the understanding that street harassment is only a function of men's oppression of women.

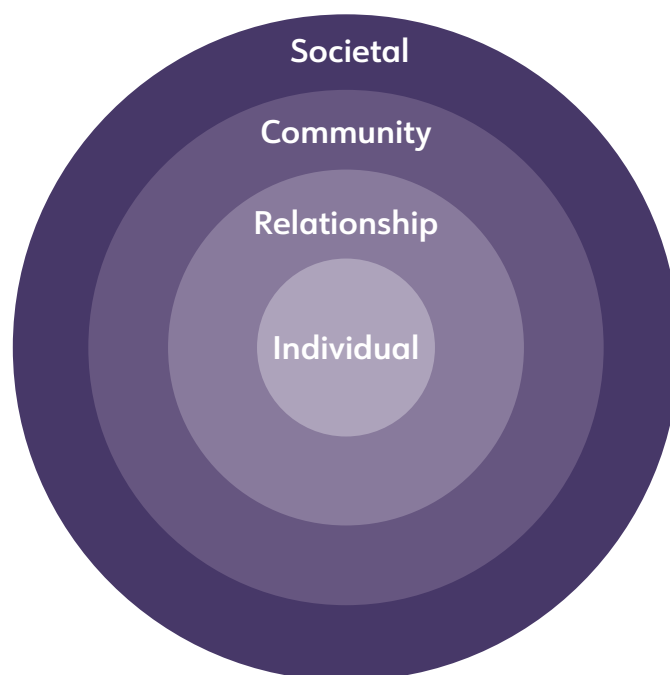
Hinde & Fileborn (2023) extend this to understand that everyone is differentially located on an axis of oppression and privilege, and that these forces are relational and context dependent. Using this lens makes sense of the diversity of experiences of street harassment and to understand that people can be implicated in furthering certain forms of oppression, while simultaneously experiencing marginalisation themselves. So, while it is essential to situate street harassment firmly within the spectrum of men's violence against women, this research also indicates that a holistic approach is required in working towards the prevention of street-based harassment. As such, this approach aims to move our understanding of street harassment as a purely gender-based phenomenon and seeks to understand gender as also shaped in and through factors such as race, class, and sexuality, while drawing attention to differentially located, contextual, and fluid experiences (Hinde & Fileborn, 2023).

Herrera & McCarthy (2023) state that, grounded in Black feminist thought, intersectionality breaks from the single-axis framework and highlights a matrix of domination where various attributes, including gender, race, class, and sexual orientation operate to construct social inequalities. An intersectional analysis examines problems of sameness and difference in relation to power and using those insights to understand how both race/ethnicity and gender inform understandings of street harassment. As a result, street harassment must be viewed through an intersectional lens which situates the experiences and impact of street harassment within multiple interlocking systems of power. Such an approach shifts the understanding of street harassment as a purely gender-based phenomenon to one which is shaped in and through factors such as race, class, and sexuality (Fileborn, 2019; Fileborn & O'Neill, 2023b). Seen through this lens, street harassment is also a manifestation of interlocking structural forms of oppression, such as ableism, homophobia, cisnormativity, racism and classism (Fileborn & O'Neill, 2021, cited in Cullen-Rosenthal & Fileborn, 2023). Consequently, street harassment can be understood as both a product of, and actively reproducing and co-constituting these complex and fluid relations of power (Fileborn, 2023b).

9. What Protects and Supports Women and Girls?

The principles of a Public Health approach provide a useful framework to investigate and understand the causes and consequences of violence and for preventing violence from occurring through primary prevention programmes, policy interventions and advocacy (Violence Prevention Alliance, 2021). The World Health Organization's ecological framework for violence prevention presents a model which represents the complex interplay between four levels which interact: individual, relationship, community and societal factors (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The Socio-Ecological Model



Such models are a feature of public health, based on the idea that influence and determinants are interrelated, reinforcing the importance of a comprehensive approach in which actions at each level work to support other levels. This section focusses on factors which protect, and support women and girls and findings are presented according to the four levels outlined within a socio-ecological model.

9.1 The Individual Level

Fleetwood (2019) reveals that there are a variety of strategies that women employ to resist harassment. These include speaking back, calling on others for help, physically fighting-back, walking away and an array of 'small', everyday actions and gestures that aim to resist harassment. Female self-defence has also been presented as one potential avenue of prevention, as well as a means of transforming women's sense of self and capacity to act on the world (Vera-Gray, 2020, cited in Fileborn & O'Neill, 2023b). Gardner (1995, cited in Fleetwood, 2019) developed a typology of women's 'strategies' for responding to street harassment, including ignoring, deny, blocking, staged compliance (such as smiling and

nodding, feigned surprise and answering back). Whilst these strategies are physical in so far as they involve bodies, they do not require physical strength and represent women's strategies to 'redefine the situation'.

Kelly (2012, cited in Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020) conceptualises that women and girls need to undertake a form of invisible work, conceptualised as 'safety work' as they respond to the gendered message that they need to be less vocal, less visible, less free, in order to be safe. Strategies used by women and girls to stay safe include creating a separation, such as using headphones and sunglasses or being distracted with a phone or choosing to sit away from people on public transport to create a sense of private space in public (Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020). Other reported strategies to avoid harassment on public transport include changing clothing and commute times (Peake, 2020).

Vera-Gray and Kelly (2020) report that underpinning women's safety work is an understanding of the 'unsafety of femininity' with physical characteristics associated with a feminine appearance: long hair, jewellery, red dresses and lipstick, are all positioned by women to be avoided, either always or in particular contexts such as being alone or at night. In Wales, the VAWDASV strategy recognises that we should challenge misogynistic attitudes behind the abusive behaviours to encourage behavioural change in the abusers, and prevent women having to modify theirs (Welsh Government, 2022).

PLAN International (2018) note that in terms of formal reporting, street harassment is widely underreported in the UK, with 42% of girls aged 14-21 who had experienced public sexual harassment not telling anyone about it. Reasons include victims thinking they will not be believed; the incident was not serious enough to report, or the fear of reprisals from the perpetrator. Gender stereotypes and expectations, as well as victim-blaming, present significant barriers to reporting sexual harassment and violence for girls and young women. These barriers affect Black and minoritised girls and young women in different and specific ways and Black and minoritised young women conceptualise 'justice' and solutions in a range of ways. As such, PLAN International (2022) argue that a blanket solution or response to all forms of sexual harassment is not always desirable. These findings highlight the need to understand the unique experiences of Black and minoritised girls and young women, including the specific barriers to disclosure and reporting that girls and young women from different communities may face, situated within wider contexts of structural inequalities and marginalisation including misogyny and racism, also to ensure this does not occur as a process of 'othering' which reproduces racist and sexist dynamics.

As an alternative, some grass roots organisations, (e.g., Hollaback) encourage women to share experiences through storytelling. Fileborn (2014, cited in Fleetwood, 2019:33) note that this acts as a form of feminist resistance and provides a '*counter-narrative to the mainstream silencing and exclusion of women's experiences of street harassment*'. Fileborn & O'Neill (2023b) note that some of the most substantial responses to street harassment have occurred through, or as a result of, digital activism and advocacy on social media and that digital reporting mechanisms constitute a substantial response to street harassment in many countries and provide a space for survivors to resist harassment in contexts where formal avenues to justice fail to hear their experiences.

9.2 The Relationship Level

According to Plan International (2018), evidence indicates the paramount importance of working with boys and young men to improve their attitudes, knowledge and awareness about how unwelcome stranger harassment is, and the impact it can have on girls' lives. Girls wanted work to be done with boys from a young age to challenge their attitudes, to question gender stereotypes, to develop empathy with girls and help "solve the problem at the source". There was a strong call from both professionals and girls for better education and awareness for all young people to explore consent, healthy relationships, street harassment and other forms of gender-based violence through relationships and sex education across the UK.

Cabrera et al (2023) argues that programmes that involve men and boys in gender transformative interventions can support the reduction of intimate partner violence as well as prevent violent relationships against women and girls. Additionally, parenting programs that integrate specific content on gender relations can be effective in reducing both violence against children and violence against women, as well as improving other parenting and health outcomes. Parenting programs work with parents and serve to generate healthy family relationships, non-violent forms of conflict resolution, positive approaches to parenting, and healthy and safe home environments.

Fileborn & O'Neill (2023b) note that bystander programmes focus on equipping people with the skills to safely intervene when they witness behaviours that can result in violence against women. Such interventions held both practical and symbolic importance, with interventions increasing participants' sense of safety, reducing the perceived harm of an incident, and providing a sense of justice by holding the perpetrator to account. Additionally, in research by PLAN International (2018), for girls, a positive bystander intervention can make a big difference when harassment happens and in many cases the inaction of witnesses to street harassment played a key role in the negative impact an incident had on girls, intensifying feelings of embarrassment, frustration, shame or anger when people saw but did not help. Girls said they wanted bystanders to step up and take action if it was safe to do so; check in with girls if they saw something happen and ask them if they were OK; acknowledge and recognise what had happened, helping to validate girls' feelings about the experience; and listen to girls about what they wanted to happen next.

In the night-time economy a number of studies explored bystander opportunities or approaches for preventing and responding to sexual violence with findings suggesting positive impacts on altering rape myths and barriers to intervention including bartender's willingness to intervene as a result of bar staff training (Powers & Leili, 2018, cited in Quigg et al., 2020). Additionally, evaluation of bystander programmes implemented in other settings, predominantly in the USA (e.g., college campuses) suggest that they may be associated with reductions in violence, including sexual violence (Coker et al, 2016, cited in Quigg et al., 2020).

9.3 The Community Level

Cullen-Rosenthal & Fileborn (2023) note that despite the substantial body of research highlighting the harms of street harassment, it has frequently been trivialised, minimised and normalised within the broader community. Where street harassment is normalised, this causes harm, and evidence indicates community attitudes can play a significant role. PLAN International (2018) found that the lack of common understanding about what constitutes harassment, and whether those behaviours are socially acceptable, contribute to fear about not being believed or having their experiences minimised. Girls said it was important to know their rights and felt there should be advertisements stressing this in public places where harassment happens, such as public transport and the high street. Additionally, girls also want to be supported by professionals in public spaces, tackling and preventing harassment and responding seriously to their complaints. They wanted professionals in positions of social responsibility who may witness harassment, including in schools or universities, on or around public transport or bouncers and staff in night-time venues to be there for girls to report to and get help from if they want it (PLAN International, 2018).

College of Policing (2022) list a number of community initiatives such as community mobilisations, citizen patrols, street pastors and Drinkaware crew that look to reduce the prevalence of 'alcohol-related' violence and alcohol-related sexual harassment within the night-time economy. In 2019, Thames Valley Police introduced Project Vigilant in Oxford in response to the suggestion that police should scale up their policing of the night-time economy. Project Vigilant is a perpetrator focused proactive initiative to tackle sexual offending in the night-time economy and aims to prevent sexual offences by perpetrators by proactively identifying predatory sexual behaviour and intervening to prevent this behaviour escalating (Magill et al., 2023). Non-uniformed officers, specifically trained in behaviour observation skills, patrol designated areas, such as outside bars and clubs, between specific times on nights identified to be the highest risk. The officers identify both potentially vulnerable people and predatory behaviour. The latter may include individuals loitering, interfering with, leering at, or harassing others, or following lone intoxicated females. Once such behaviour has been identified, non-uniformed officers communicate with uniformed officers who then directly intervene, using body worn video to record their interventions. Data from Thames Valley Police showed some differences in police recorded sexual offences in the night-time economy in 2021 compared to data from earlier years (2018, 2019). However, the numbers are too small to draw any firm conclusions (Magill et al., 2023).

Walker et al. (2023) notes that norms (which are a representation of cultural attitudes and beliefs) can evolve over time and be challenged; as such, they are a modifiable risk factor and offer a possible opportunity for violence prevention efforts in the night-time economy settings.

The review by Quigg et al. (2020) highlights that nightlife-related sexual violence is related to a combination of factors, many of which are also related to broader harms in nightlife and sexual violence at a population level. Consequently, preventing sexual violence should form part of a suite of programmes that aim to prevent harms in nightlife settings more broadly, including those to reduce excessive alcohol consumption, modify the drinking environment to make it safer, and the implementation of laws to ensure inappropriate sexual behaviour specific to sexual violence is both discouraged and addressed. Further, programmes are needed that aim to promote gender equality and address norms that promote sexual violence at a societal level (Quigg et al., 2020).

The Wales Violence Prevention Unit's #SafeToSay Campaign sought to encourage prosocial bystander responses toward individuals who demonstrate inappropriate and harmful behaviours in the night-time economy. More specifically, the campaign sought to encourage and equip people to speak up about sexual harassment and the behaviours that underpin it by providing them with the awareness needed to identify behaviours that are problematic, and the skills to act as prosocial bystanders. Overall, the campaign met its four objectives by encouraging prosocial bystander behaviours in response to sexual harassment within the night-time economy (Walker et al., 2023).

Building on this, Phase Two of #SafeToSay was targeted at men (age 18-35), encouraging them to speak up and challenge any sexual harassment behaviours, or the problematic attitudes that may underpin sexual harassment displayed by friends. This process and outcomes evaluation explored the delivery, reach and impact of Phase Two and found that while the campaign did highlight an important issue, it did not enhance awareness of sexual harassment within the night-time economy, unlike Phase One. Similarly, whilst social media engagement rates were higher than the average for similar campaigns, a lot of this engagement was negative. Participants felt that the campaign had helped them know how to intervene, but it did not necessarily increase their confidence to take action. Finally, distinct gender differences were noted in the effects of the campaign, with more men indicating that the campaign had not helped them recognise sexual harassment within the night-time economy, nor increased their confidence to take action, and that the overall campaign had no effect on them (Walker et al., 2023).

The House of Commons, Home Affairs Committee (2022a) released a report urging the Government to work with local authorities to develop an anti-spiking strategy. In response, the UK Government have agreed to reviewing guidance within the Licencing Act 2003 *"with a view to requiring licensing authorities to consider the prevalence, prevention and reporting of sexual harassment and misconduct and gender-based violence in statements of local licensing policy."* (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2022b).

It is recognised that the design of public places can be used to protect women and improve safety. In terms of public parks, Barker et al. (2022) identified a number of measures that can be introduced by authorities to support women's independent use of parks. These include better lighting, visible security, help points, and more staff presence. Open parks which are well used feel safer, while fences and walls limit escape and visibility. Additionally, parks do not feel safe after dark, and fears are heightened by a lack of lighting, limited sightlines, secluded areas or dense vegetation (Barker et al., 2022). Bows et al. (2023) focussed on music festivals and found that areas which make women feel unsafe are those which are separate from the main festival entertainment sites and have reduced lighting and security, police, festival staff and other festival-goers. These findings are consistent with research examining gender and licensed venues which reports women find dark, long corridors to toilets intimidating (Fileborn, 2016, cited in Bows et al., 2023).

As public transport has been noted as a key location for harassment to occur, there have been efforts by the police and transport authorities in London to increase reporting of unwanted sexual behaviour on public transport (PLAN International, 2018). A campaign against “intrusive staring” on the London Underground aims to challenge the normalisation of this kind of behaviour and the introduction of ‘safe stops’ allow women passengers to request to get off at any point on the official route of a night bus (Cabrera et al., 2023). Also in London, Pink Taxis are easily recognisable and locatable by GPS, offering a service for and by women. The female drivers have been trained in personal defence and passengers must be members and pay a subscription; users receive a call a few minutes before the arrival of the taxi, so they do not have to wait in the street, and when the taxi arrives the driver waits until the passenger has entered their destination. In Edinburgh, Strut Safe is an independent non-profit platform that offers free walking accompaniment in Edinburgh and an accompaniment phone service throughout the United Kingdom. Funded by private donations it provides training to those who volunteer for the telephone service and performs a background check on those who accompany women home. Volunteers include men, though the bulk of the organisation is made up of women (Cabrera et al., 2023).

The Welsh Women’s Aid ‘Change that Lasts’ model provides ‘Ask Me’ training for community ambassadors to improve awareness, understanding and responses within the wider community as well as training of non-specialist professionals to enable them to identify and respond better to survivors and perpetrators. The model also provides specialist support services provision of needs-led trauma-informed specialist services for survivors and a complementary strand of work provides a course working with those using abusive behaviours in relationships at an early stage (Lovett & Kelly, 2020). A recent report which assesses the impact of Change that Lasts (Welsh Women’s Aid, 2023) notes that ‘Ask Me’ has made a cultural and societal change and is a movement that reduces and removes barriers to help seeking. They assert that Ask Me makes VAWDASV everyone’s business by including the wider community and addresses an important gap in terms of prevention and early intervention.

All aspects of the Change that Lasts approach align with the five principles of the Wales Trauma Informed Framework (ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022). As a result, training supported professionals to recognise that traumatic experiences had a huge impact on health seeking and keeping the survivor at the centre and building a trusting relationship promotes choice, collaboration, safety and transparency. The impact assessment found that the approach had been successfully embedded although monitoring returns did not reflect the full extent of organisational change (Welsh Women’s Aid, 2023).

9.4 The Societal Level

In the UK, the Crown Prosecution Service defines a hate crime as being any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on one (or more) of the five legally recognised personal characteristics. These are racial identity, religious affiliation, disability, sexual orientation and transgender identity. All are included in legislation which allows for sentence enhancements to recognise the presence of hostility, while both racial and religious aggravation are additionally recognised as separate offences. Gender is not currently recognised as a protected characteristic informing UK hate-crime legislation in any respect (Mason-Bish & Duggan, 2020).

In July 2016, Nottinghamshire Police announced that it would become the first UK force to treat misogynistic street harassment as a form of hate crime. It is of note that Nottinghamshire Police chose to use the term misogyny rather than the more neutral 'gender hostility' so as to be clear that they were talking about hatred and hostility towards women. This was the first time that gender had been officially recognised in hate-crime policing policy in England and Wales; since then, several other forces have followed suit (Mason-Bish & Duggan, 2020).

In 2019, the UK Government took an important step recognising street harassment as a form of gender-based violence in its refreshed national strategy to end Violence Against Women and Girls. In December 2022, Greg Clark MP's Private Members Bill, the 'Protection from Sex-Based Harassment in Public Bill' was debated in Parliament. This Second Reading stage in the House of Commons was a success and the Bill passed with Government backing and support from both Parties. Welsh Women's Aid (2022) believe that creating a specific offence of public sexual harassment is important and sends a clear message to both perpetrators that this behaviour will not be tolerated and to survivors that we believe them. It would further indicate that sexual harassment is serious and is not 'banter' with real consequences for survivors. However, this should not stand alone but must sit alongside strong, sustainable non-legislative actions that tackle sexual harassment alongside all forms of violence against women.

Fileborn & O'Neill (2023b) note that some grassroots activist organisations firmly oppose the criminalisation of street harassment and focus instead on prevention and educational efforts. Where legislation has been introduced, while the literature of its impact is scant, it is argued that the impact is limited however, little research has considered how street harassment might be prevented or redressed outside the Criminal Justice System.

Finally, it is noted that public sexual harassment is a part of a wider culture of gender inequality and cannot be tackled through one mechanism or single approach; House of Commons (2019) assert that it is necessary for policy makers to seek to change the cultural acceptability of sexual harassment and develop a long-term, evaluated programme of public campaigns to tackle the attitudes that underpin sexual harassment, targeted at both adults and children. Policy and practice responses require ongoing and systematic evaluation in order to monitor their impact and effectiveness.

10. Where is Further Research Needed?

10.1 Intersectionality

Fileborn & O'Neill (2021, cited in Cullen-Rosenthal & Fileborn, 2023) argue that to date, much research has focused on sexualised, gender-based harassment perpetrated by male harassers towards white, heterosexual, middle-class, non-disabled, cisgender women. This has been highlighted by intersectional feminist studies as neglecting that people experience harassment in relation to other elements of positionality, including disability, sexuality, gender identity, class, body size and race (Cullen-Rosenthal & Fileborn, 2023). As a result, Hutson & Krueger (2019) notes that there is a tendency to homogenise 'women's experiences' and there is limited data on the way that race, ability, gender and sexuality, religion, nationality, class and occupation affect the tenure, tone and experience of street harassment.

PLAN International (2021) found that where evidence on intersectional discrimination and public sexual harassment does exist, it mostly focuses on increased risk of harassment due to gender and a single form of discrimination (for example, gender and age, gender and disability), rather than on how multiple forms intersect (gender/disability/age); consequently, the intersectional approach is an underdeveloped area of research. Fileborn and O'Neill (2023b) note that Black and critical race scholars have developed detailed analysis of how race operates in relation to street harassment, yet these do not often appear to inform empirical work and other categories of analysis such as (dis)ability or religion have received even less attention. It is necessary for research to adopt intersectional modes of research design and analysis which will result in tailored and culturally appropriate prevention efforts and interventions.

A further potential area for further research is the issue of street harassment for survivors of sexual exploitation. Welsh Women's Aid (2022) assert that while data are minimal, some research shows that survivors who have experienced street based sexual exploitation have often faced disproportionate levels of sexual harassment as well as other forms of violence and that this violence is often perpetrated in public settings such as car parks and side streets.

10.2 Methodology

Fileborn & O'Neill (2023b) argue that while qualitative approaches are common, there is little literature that examines how victims of street harassment understand and make sense of their experiences and in order to develop rich insight, qualitative work needs to provide scope for participants to articulate their experiences in detail. Also, there is differentiation in the conceptual framing and definitions of street harassment used in research to date, making comparison across studies and research contexts challenging. Measuring prevalence and frequency are influenced by what counts as street harassment, since studies will draw on different definitions. For quantitative work, it is necessary to develop clear definitions of what is meant by street harassment, and this may overcome the often subjective and context dependent nature of street harassment. Additionally, there is a tendency for quantitative work to categorise different types of harassment as discrete incidents which may obscure the lived experiences of victims and the way that harassment may overlap or co-occur (Fileborn & O'Neill, 2023b).

10.3 Perpetrators

PLAN International (2021) found that there is little research into the motivation of boys and men who harass girls and women, and research is needed to understand pathways to perpetration, including risk factors, childhood experiences of violence and overlap with different types of violence. There is a major evidence gap in relation to perpetrators of street harassment, including who (beyond “men” as a generic category) perpetrates, in what contexts, what motivates this behaviour and what perpetrators’ attitudes and understandings are in respect to the impacts and harms of their actions. Fileborn (2022) found that while perpetrators’ intentions have little bearing on victims’ lived experiences of harassment, insights gained from this type of research may be vital in informing preventative and behaviour change work with men. As such, questions remain in terms of who harasses, in what contexts and for what reasons, also what are the social and institutional structures that prop up their behaviour and how those structural drivers can be unravelled (Fileborn & O’Neill, 2023b).

10.4 Policy and Practice Responses

Fileborn & O’Neill (2023b) identify another avenue for future research which relates to the development and evaluation of policy and practice responses to street harassment. Street harassment has only rarely been addressed through formal government policy and practice responses however this is changing, particular in respect of legislation. However, while no work to date has evaluated the impact of legislative responses where they have been introduced, the focus continues to be on legislative frameworks. A small body of work examines victim’s preferred responses and suggests that the preference is for a diverse range of responses which is at odds with the strong emphasis on legislation. There is therefore a need for further research to identify and develop victim-centered responses to public harassment and consider how any responses might change according to context (Fileborn & O’Neill, 2023b).

Preventative work should be clearly based on the available research evidence about the cultural factors, attitudes and norms that lead to, or enable sexual harassment to take place and how these can be effectively challenged. The available research is not sufficient and ongoing; large-scale research into these factors in the UK to inform its programme over the longer term is needed (House of Commons, 2019).

10.5 Further Gaps in Evidence

This review identifies the need for further research in a number of areas: Sexual harassment in crowds is rarely covered in peer reviewed literature, however the Football Supporters Association (FSA) found that one in five women report experiencing unwanted physical attention while attending men’s football matches, more than double the proportion from the same survey in 2014 (FSA, 2021). Similarly, harassment in live music venues has been covered in the media (The Guardian, 2021) but there is little published research which focusses on music venues, with only one study identified and included in this review (Bows, 2023). Further, there was little evidence in respect of the harassment of street-based sex workers, suggesting the need for further research in this area.

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Appendix 1

15 sexual harassment behaviours asked in a survey by the Government's Equality Office (Adams, 2021).

- Displays of pornographic or sexually offensive materials which made you feel uncomfortable, including it being viewed near you
- Unwelcome jokes or comments of a sexual nature about you or others that made you feel uncomfortable
- Unwelcome comments of a sexual nature about your body and/or clothes
- Unwelcome cat calls, wolf whistling or other provocative sounds
- Unwelcome staring or looks which made you feel uncomfortable
- Receiving unwanted messages with material of a sexual nature, e.g., by text/messaging app, email, social media or another source
- Feeling pressured by someone to date them or do a sexual act for them in exchange for something
- Someone making persistent and/or unwanted attempts to establish a romantic/sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it
- Someone taking and/or sharing sexual pictures or videos of you without your permission
- Flashing (e.g., the deliberate exposure of someone's intimate parts)
- Someone physically following you without your permission in a way that made you feel sexually threatened
- Someone intentionally, brushing up against you, or invading your personal space in an unwelcome, sexual way
- Unwanted touching (e.g., placing hand on lower back or knee)
- Unwanted, overt sexual touching (e.g., touching of the breasts, buttocks or genitals, attempts to kiss)
- Rape and/or attempted rape



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