



For children and  
equality for girls

# WHAT WORKS FOR ENDING PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT SEPTEMBER 2021

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report has been made possible through the work of Erika Fraser and Kate Bishop from Social Development Direct who conducted the evidence review, and Helena Dare-Edwards and the team from CHILDWISE who conducted the quantitative survey.

A special thank you to all the experts, girls and young people who have taken part in our research on this issue over the past few years. Your voices have been invaluable.

This report - and our work across the UK - is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery.

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All portraits in this report were taken as part of the State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2020 project.

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Pixie, Scottish Highlands

# INTRODUCTION

The social and political climate on public sexual harassment has started to shift in recent years, both globally and in the UK. Awareness of its harmful impact and high prevalence has increased, driven in large part by victims coming forward to share their experiences, whether through solidarity movements such as #MeToo, high-profile sexual harassment cases or in research on the issue. The website Everyone's Invited has uncovered the shocking sexual harassment and assault taking place in UK schools, demonstrating the fact that it happens in the many spaces girls live their lives.

The British Government criminalised 'upskirting', it recently requested that police forces record incidents of sex or gender-based hate crime<sup>1</sup> and it committed to fund local safety initiatives through Safer Streets.<sup>2</sup> A number of promises have been made in the new 2021 – 2024 Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls strategy<sup>3</sup>, including a review of the legislative gaps around public sexual harassment, a public communications campaign, new advice on existing laws for the police and consideration of a new offence

of 'cyberflashing'. Some institutions and organisations have also started to take action against sexual harassment. For example, the Rail Delivery Group is working towards making the rail network a hostile place for harassers through training front-line rail staff and launching a UK-wide campaign.

This attention signals that this behaviour is becoming less tolerated in society, but the continued prevalence of sexual harassment in public shows there is still a long way to go to eradicate it.

The impact on girls and young women is huge, yet often invisible. It affects their lives and choices far beyond the immediate incidents. As this report shows, it affects their mental and physical health, mobility in public, voice and participation, education and economic opportunities. Meanwhile, the holes in our legal framework and the lack of investment in other interventions mean perpetrators are left unchallenged and unpunished, while victims are left unprotected and unsupported – often even blamed for their harassment.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report sets out to fill evidence gaps, including what sexual harassment consists of, based on girls' testimonies, what works to tackle it, and the impact it has on their lives. It draws from international and UK-based evidence and literature, a new UK survey of 1,515 girls and young women aged 12 to 21 and focus group and interview data. It is intended for policymakers, decision makers, researchers and any organisation that sets out to address this problem.

**Section one** outlines the problem in depth and its underlying causes. **Section two** identifies which interventions are most effective and which have limited impact, including legislative and non-legislative. **Section three** includes recommendations to policymakers and researchers, based on the evidence.

# SECTION 1

# THE PROBLEM



Muriel, Annie and Esther, North Wales

# WHAT IS PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT

## BEHAVIOURS, ACTIONS AND GESTURES

Fundamentally, Public Sexual Harassment is unwanted sexual behaviour, actions or gestures. These can be verbal, non-verbal, physical or technology-enabled. Specific behaviours include leering or persistent staring; following; sexual propositions; sexual gestures; sexually explicit comments; intrusive persistent questioning; so called 'wolf-whistling'; non-consensual physical contact, such as kissing, groping and stroking; technology-enabled sexual behaviour, such as 'air dropping' unwanted illicit images to someone's phone (also known as cyber-flashing); 'up-skirting' and viewing or showing pornography in public.

## PUBLIC SPACE

Sexual harassment takes place in the many spaces girls live their lives: at school, in the workplace, online and in public. 'Public places' include any premises, highway or other place to which the public has access; it could be indoors or outdoors and either publicly or privately owned. Examples include shops, parks and leisure centres. Our survey asked those who had experienced public sexual harassment which public spaces they have ever experienced it in:

- 81%** have experienced it outside in a public area
- 46%** have experienced it in school, college or on university grounds
- 37%** have experienced it on public transport
- 33%** have experienced it inside a public building or facility (such as a leisure centre, shop, museum or other type of public building)
- 3%** have experienced it in another public space

## A note on 'street harassment'

Our 2018 report, *Street Harassment: I Say It's Not Ok*, used the term 'street harassment'. This term was used to describe all types of sexual harassment in public places, not only the streets. Using this widely understood term helps raise awareness and build a movement. However, we believe the term 'Public Sexual Harassment' removes misconceptions that incidents only take place on the streets, while 'street harassment' can have the effect of trivialising the harmful and abusive nature of sexual harassment.



## GIRLS' OWN STORIES

These quotes are from Plan International UK's focus groups and interviews with girls and young women for 'The State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019-2020' research.

**“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.”**

**“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.”**

**“When I was around 13/14, I was waiting at a bus stop after being at a friend’s house to go home and there was a drunk gentleman who started to talk to me, and he said he could do anything to me at that time because I didn’t know who he was and he could just get away with it. And it’s one of the things has stuck with me, because as much as that instance scared me, he was right.”**

**“We were walking and there were these builders sitting on the wall and they were visibly checking both of us out. I could see them sort of looking us up and down. ... I firstly felt really disgusted by that ‘cause it was obvious that I was about 11 or whatever and with my mum. And stuff like that happens fairly often. It puts me off like going places really.”**

**“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.”**

**“In fact, yesterday we were on the train. We were with my mum. This man kept on looking at us and smiling at us. Checking us out, up and down. He made it so obvious.”**

**“I’d lost all my friends in a bar and this guy grabbed me by the arm and was like “Where are you from?” and he said, “Where are your friends?” I went to the toilet and when I came out him and his friends were waiting for me. ... he had me against the wall and he was like “You’re so pretty” and I said, “I have a boyfriend” and he said, “I’m sure he won’t mind”. He leaned in and all I could do was duck and literally jump out from under his arms.”**

**“There’s always loads of men who’ll say things like ‘ni-hoa’ or ‘konichiwa’ trying to ask where I’m from ... I’ve never really thought about it being a gender-based thing until now, but they’d never say that to a guy.”**

“We were in 4th year. It was outside a kebab shop; there was a group of men who would follow up and walk into the shop with us and stand either side of the door, so we had to walk through them, and they would say stuff to us. And that was actually terrifying, because they followed us.”

“I can remember walking down a road in Sheffield with my sister and her friend and they were about ten at the time and some older man wound his window down and whistled at them, and it just made me feel sick.”

“I used to be quite ‘breasty’, I used to have the horns beeped at me two three times a day.”

“I was walking down the street the other day, I bought a new dress and I felt really nice in the dress you know, and somebody whistled at me. My boyfriend ended up giving me his jacket so that way I could cover up, as he noticed how uncomfortable I was.”

“I was laughing with my friend as we were walking up the hill, and a guy came up behind and joined in on the laughter. And then he reached into my jacket and touched my bum. I kind of froze.”

“I was in my school uniform, my primary school uniform actually, and this guy honked me and I wouldn’t turn around and he kept honking so he egged me ... It really hurt.”

“I have been approached by people and felt uncomfortable on certain streets ... It can make you feel really uncomfortable. You get cat called and stuff by particularly older men.”

“...they try to use your race as a compliment, but I don’t want to be complimented because of my skin colour. I think it’s a big issue, it’s the kind of thing that only happens to girls. I have a little brother and no one ever comes up to him.”

“We were walking through a station and I remember that this man was walking behind us, and I was like, “Sir are you okay?” because he was mumbling... I was like, “What’s wrong?” He started saying, “You both have lovely arses ... but that’s expected of yours.” It’s so rude, it’s so disrespectful.”

## A FORM OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The widely agreed definition of violence against women, adopted in 1993 by the United Nations General Assembly, is ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life’.<sup>4</sup> Research shows that public sexual harassment causes harm and suffering to women and girls and is therefore a form of violence. In line with other forms of VAWG, a key element is the extent to which these behaviours are experienced or perceived by the victim as threatening or harmful.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than a ‘hierarchical model’ where different types of sexual violence are ordered from most to least harmful, there is a growing consensus around a ‘continuum model’ whereby different forms of violence against women and girls are interlinked and occur along the same continuum of behaviours. Our research into the similarities and differences between public sexual harassment (PSH) and other forms of VAWG identified six intersections:

### Shared Underlying Causes

Both VAWG and PSH are deeply rooted in harmful social norms, gender inequality and power relations. There are a range of shared risk and protective factors from, the individual to societal level.

### Adolescence

Adolescence is a time of elevated vulnerability for multiple forms of VAWG, including PSH.

### Intersectional

Both VAWG and PSH are experienced differently by different groups of girls and young women. PSH often intersects with racialised abuse and there are higher risks of PSH for different groups, including, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer/questioning, and disabled girls.

### Perpetration

Perpetration of all forms of VAWG are under-researched and there is limited evidence on whether perpetrators of PSH also perpetrate other forms of sexual violence. However, evidence shows perpetrators are overwhelmingly male. A key difference is that PSH is more likely to be perpetrated by a stranger than other forms of VAWG.

### Use of Technology

Technology is increasingly being used to perpetrate different forms of VAWG, such as location tracking in domestic abuse and cyberflashing and upskirting in PSH.

### Underreported

Both VAWG and PSH are widely underreported. There are common barriers, such as the fear of not being believed and a lack of awareness of their rights.

# PREVALENCE AND VICTIMS

Data on public sexual harassment often relies on surveys from charities and other organisations. However, these surveys can be designed with different definitions, look at different behaviours, or focus on different groups of respondents (for example, different age groups). The lack of standardised indicators or questions on public sexual harassment for population-based surveys also makes it challenging to compare trends over time or across countries. Crime data is not reliable, since many forms of public sexual harassment are not criminal acts, and when they are, incidents are widely underreported.

Our survey found that three quarters (75%) of girls and young women aged 12 to 21 have experienced these behaviours in public in their lifetime. Broken down by type of harassment:

- 50%** have been leered or stared at
- 45%** have been wolf-whistled
- 39%** have received comments, insults or questions of a sexual nature
- 31%** have been followed
- 30%** have had sexual gestures aimed towards them
- 26%** have experienced physical contact such as unwanted touching, groping, stroking, kissing or grabbing of any part of their body
- 17%** have been propositioned or received unwanted sexual proposals
- 15%** have experienced cyberflashing or airdropping i.e. receiving unwanted sexual images to their phone via Bluetooth or AirDrop
- 13%** have been filmed or photographed by a stranger without their permission, including 'upskirting' (a photograph or film taken underneath a skirt)
- 11%** have experienced sexual exposure such as being flashed at or witnessing sex acts
- 8%** have had someone purposely view pornography in front of them

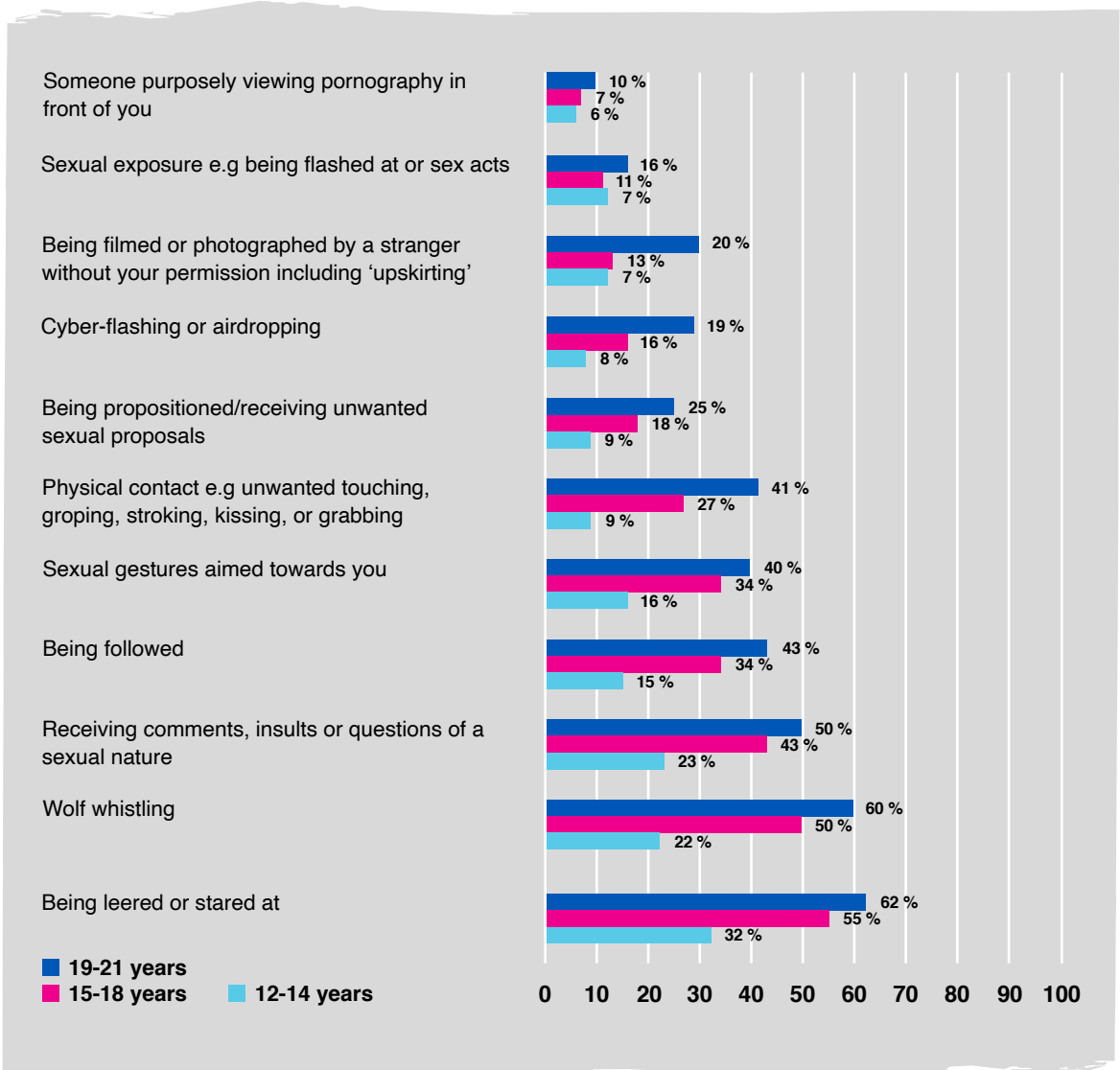
Recent Plan International UK surveys found that half (51%) of girls aged 14-21 experienced public sexual harassment in summer 2020 alone<sup>6</sup> and one in five (19%) experienced it during the first national lockdown<sup>7</sup>, when they were only allowed to leave the house for an hour each day.

# VICTIMS' IDENTITIES

Gender intersects with other identity characteristics, such as sexuality, gender identity, disability, ethnicity and immigration status, to produce unique experiences of violence.<sup>8</sup> It is crucial to understand how different groups experience sexual harassment in order to understand why it happens and to develop strategies to combat it. Our survey findings outlined below show that minoritised groups are generally more likely to experience public sexual harassment.

## Chart 1

**Percentage of girls and young women aged 12 to 21 who have experienced each type of public sexual harassment, by age group.**



## Adolescence

54% of girls aged 12 to 14 have public sexual harassment. 22% of 12 to 14-year-olds have been wolf-whistled at and 32% have been leered or stared at.

Disturbingly, girls in uniform are often a particular target of harassment by older men. A previous Plan International UK survey found that 35% of girls aged 14-21 have experienced it while wearing school uniform; 8% had been filmed or photographed by a stranger without their permission.

UNICEF research found that in all but 3 of the 21 countries compared, most adolescent girls said their first experience of sexual victimisation was between the ages of 15 and 19, although a substantial minority experience it younger – at ages 10 to 14.<sup>9</sup> Girls as young as eight have also described being publicly harassed.<sup>10</sup>

## Disability

92% of girls who consider themselves to have a disability have experienced any of the sexual harassment behaviours listed, compared to 74% of their non-disabled counterparts - particularly being propositioned (28% vs. 16%), having sexual gestures made at them (40% vs. 29%), being subjected to sexual exposure (21% vs. 10%), having unwanted physical contact (34% vs. 25%), or being cyberflashed (24% vs. 14%). 28% of respondents who consider themselves to have a disability feel that their sexual harassment was linked to their disability.

## Sexual orientation

90% of non-heterosexual girls and young women have experienced any of the sexual harassment behaviours, compared to 72%

of heterosexual girls and young women. This aligns with the 2020 Girlguiding survey of its members<sup>11</sup> which found that girls and young women aged 11 to 21 who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or questioning (LGBQ) are much more likely to receive unwanted attention compared to those who don't identify this way.

## Gender identity

92% of those who preferred to self-describe their gender identity have experienced any of the sexual harassment behaviours. Research by Stonewall found that trans students face high levels of harassment in education spaces (including harassment that is not sexual in nature).<sup>12</sup>

## Race

Our survey found that 92% of those who selected 'other' for race have experienced any of the behaviours, followed by 88% of mixed-race girls, 82% of Black, African, Caribbean and Black British girls, 75% of white girls and 70% of Asian and Asian British girls. A survey by Transport for London found that 8% of white and 10% of Black and minority ethnic adults had experienced unwelcome sexual behaviour on or around London's transport network (the data is not disaggregated by gender).<sup>13</sup> Women's organisations report that racialised sexual harassment is common for Black and minority ethnic women and girls.<sup>14</sup>

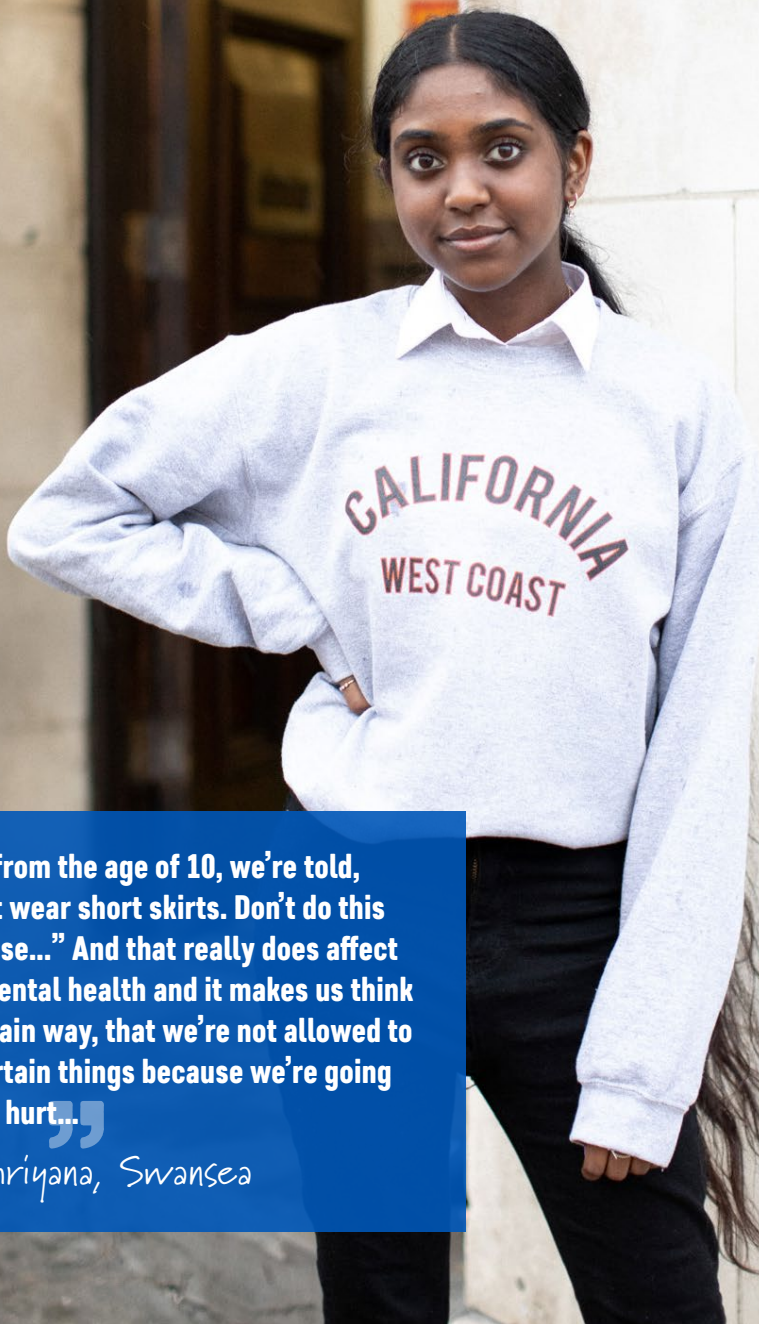
## Urban and rural

Girls and young women from urban areas were more likely than those from rural areas to have experienced unwanted sexual behaviour (76% vs 70%).

## Data gaps

There is a lack of rigorous evidence on intersectional discrimination and public sexual harassment. In particular, there is limited data on gender identity, including the experiences of transgender or non-binary people. Across all identity characteristics, where evidence

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 (for example, gender, disability and age).<sup>15</sup>



“Even from the age of 10, we’re told, “Don’t wear short skirts. Don’t do this because...” And that really does affect our mental health and it makes us think a certain way, that we’re not allowed to do certain things because we’re going to get hurt...”

– Shriyana, Swansea

# IMPACT ON GIRLS' LIVES AND LIBERTIES

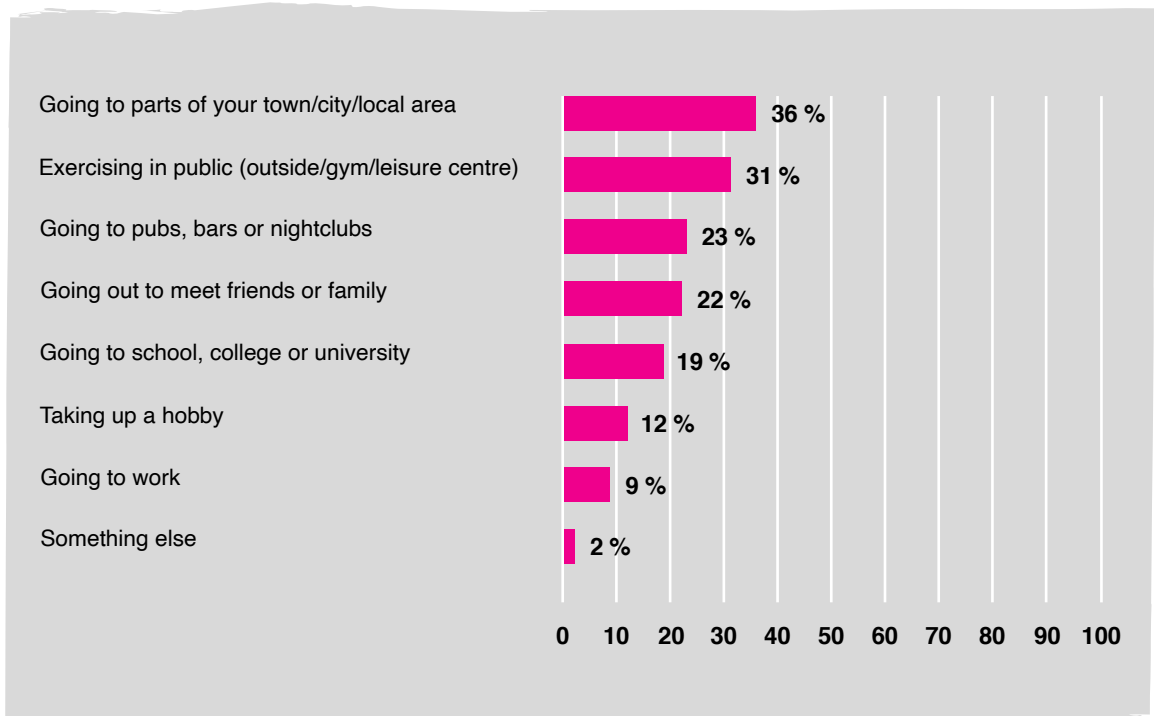
Public sexual harassment has a wider impact on girls' rights beyond the immediate incident. It violates their human dignity, restricts their movements and makes them feel insecure in public spaces.<sup>16</sup> For many girls and young women, it also affects their mental health, physical health, participation and voice, education and work opportunities. The UN Special Rapporteur has noted that it is a 'personal attack on women's minds and

bodies, instilling fear and violating a woman's right to bodily integrity, education and freedom of movement'.<sup>17</sup>

Three in five girls (62%) aged 12 to 21 have avoided doing something due to experiencing or feeling worried about sexual harassment. This is preventing them from realising their wider rights, such as the right to education, the right to leisure and the right to good health.

## Chart 2

**Percentage of girls and young women aged 12 to 21 who have avoided each activity due to experiencing or feeling worried about public sexual harassment.**





**“I do feel like boys have more freedom than girls when it comes to like being able to walk out alone, especially like night and stuff. Like my mum won't let me out past a certain time. I get a curfew and my brother didn't so...”**

The impact on girls' rights is stark for lesbian, gay, bisexual or non-heterosexual girls and for disabled girls. Non-heterosexual girls and young women are significantly more likely to have avoided any of the listed activities, due to experience or worry about sexual harassment, compared to their heterosexual counterparts (78% vs. 58%). Disabled girls are significantly more likely to have avoided any of the listed activities compared to their non-disabled counterparts (83% vs. 60%).

All age groups are just as likely to say this sort of worry has stopped them going to their place of education. Younger girls aged 12 to 14 are less likely to say they feel prevented from doing most of the listed activities, mainly as they are generally less likely, or not allowed, to do them (for example, going to pubs).

## THE TOLL OF 'SAFETY WORK'

Girls can feel that they do not have control over their bodies in public spaces,<sup>18</sup> due to fear of being harassed. To try to regain control and avoid harassment, they often spend a large amount of time trying to preempt how to avoid unwanted attention – a strategy that has been termed 'safety work'.<sup>19</sup>

Safety work can lead to girls being hyper-vigilant about their surroundings or monitoring their day to day choices: changing what clothes they wear, using headphones, walking with keys in their hands, changing where

they sit on public transport, taking different routes and pretending to be on their phone are some examples. In the UK, 67% of girls aged 11 to 21 have changed their behaviour to avoid feeling unsafe, according to the 2016 Girlguiding Girls' Attitudes Survey.<sup>20</sup> Research also shows that it leads girls to internalise messages that 'women should be smaller, less visible and unchallenging in public space'.<sup>21</sup> Stonewall found that 52% of non-binary people and 40% of trans people in the UK adjust the way they dress because they fear harassment or discrimination.<sup>22</sup>

**“I just try to stay out when it's light, go home when it's dark... Just because I don't follow gender conformity and I'm small for my age, that's a big reason why I don't stay out till too late.”**

## IMPACT ON MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

**“For me, because I have quite bad anxiety, it’s more the fear of what’s going to happen, what could happen... I think it all does stem from, like, you’re vulnerable and people see you as vulnerable.”**

Harassment has long-lasting emotional and psychological impacts. Common health impacts include depression, anger, anxiety, low self-esteem, shame, and eating disorders,<sup>23</sup> as shown in a survey of 21 countries. A survey of 367 young women aged 18-30 in the United States found that street harassment by strangers is related to PTSD symptoms, both directly and indirectly, via self-blame, shame and fear of rape.<sup>24</sup> It can also lead to physical harm when women and girls are physically grabbed or assaulted by harassers.<sup>25</sup> Although not often

life-threatening, public sexual harassment compounds fears about whether the incident will escalate to violence.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, one of the most common effects of harassing behaviours in public spaces is that women begin to fear men.<sup>27</sup>

A Plan International UK survey found that 92% of girls aged 14-21 associated their incidents with a negative emotion: 49% felt unsafe; 44% felt anxious; 36% felt embarrassed and 32% felt degraded by the experience.<sup>28</sup>

## IMPACT ON EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Girls and young women have the right to learn without fear.<sup>29</sup> Yet in the UK, 58% of girls aged 14-21 have been publicly sexually harassed in their learning environment.<sup>30</sup> A previous survey by Plan International UK found that girls experience several forms of sexual harassment in their school, college or university.<sup>31</sup> Recently, the website Everyone’s Invited has seen over 50,000 students anonymously sharing experiences of sexual harassment, abuse, assault and misogyny in UK schools, colleges and universities.<sup>32</sup> International research shows that harassment undermines girls’ confidence, increases depression, reduces learning and leads to poor school attendance and drop-out.<sup>33</sup>

Fears of sexual harassment can also limit girls’ educational and job choices. Female students can face ‘significant trade-offs’ when choosing which college to go to.<sup>34</sup> In India, a study<sup>35</sup> of 4,000 students at the University of Delhi found that women prefer to attend a college that ranks 25 percentage points lower in terms of educational quality so they can travel to college on a route that is perceived to be safer. The female students were willing to spend Rs.18,800 (£182) per year more than men for a safer route – an amount equal to double the average annual college tuition.<sup>36</sup>

## IMPACT ON VOICE AND PARTICIPATION

### Limiting women's and girls' voices

Girls' right to voice their views on issues that matter to them<sup>37</sup> is key to realising other basic rights, but this is undermined by public sexual harassment. In the UK, girls report that fear of being harassed stops them from speaking out on various issues. The 2020 Girlguiding Girls' Attitudes Survey found that 30% of girls aged 7-16 had not spoken out due to fears of harassment, rising to 50% for young women aged 17-21. Girls aged 11 to 16 from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to agree that fear of being harassed stops them from speaking out (34%), compared to girls who are white (28%).<sup>38</sup>

Both sexual harassment and the threat of it are significant barriers to girls' leadership

ambitions.<sup>39</sup> In the UK, research found that female board members and directors were more likely to have been sexually harassed at work in the past three years (17%) than the average of all female employees (12%).<sup>40</sup> Similarly, women MPs are at a higher risk of abuse than their male counterparts. Research into the 2017 General Election in the UK found the media to be "a toxic place for women" in public life, especially women of colour.<sup>41</sup> The Taking the Lead study by Plan International and the Geena Davis Institute found that 93% of girls and young women across 19 countries believe that female leaders experience sexual harassment. Girlguiding's 2018 annual survey found that of the girls put off politics, 32% said it was due to high levels of

### Motivating women and girls to speak out

However, experiences of harassment can be a powerful driver for girls and young women to demand action against violence against women. In the UK, on recent example is the protests following Sarah Everard's murder, whereby women voiced their concerns about the lack of security they feel while walking alone at night. Girls and young women are also connecting online to raise awareness of sexual harassment and rape culture in

education settings through the Everyone's Invited website, which has collected thousands of testimonies from girls as young as nine.<sup>42</sup> These digital forms of solidarity also offer an online culture of support for girls and women who have experienced sexual harassment.<sup>43</sup> However, in more conservative cultures, girls can be fearful of being labelled as 'immoral' or 'westernised' for raising their voices against harassment.<sup>44</sup>



“There’s a lot of people in our circles who get it walking home in their school uniform, like people will whistle at them and call at them, hoot their horns and stuff like that ... You feel the blame on yourself - oh maybe my skirt’s too short today?”

- Kirsty, Scottish Highlands

## IMPACT ON MOBILITY AND LEISURE

**“Cars have beeped their horn and wound down their windows and shouted stuff. It just makes me not feel comfortable walking anymore, so I’ll actively choose to ask my mum for a lift or I’ll get the bus rather than walk and experience that again.”**

Fear of harassment leads girls and young women to take precautions that prevent them from thriving<sup>45</sup> and enjoying their rights to public spaces, leisure and play. Plan International UK found that there are areas that girls consider ‘no-go’ in their local communities.<sup>46</sup> In one of the largest surveys on the impact of public sexual harassment, almost half (46%) of the 42,000 women surveyed in Europe avoided public places due to fear of being physically or sexually harassed, with the figure for the UK (54%) above the European average.<sup>47</sup> In London, 41% of women have made changes to their clothing, commutes or what time they travel on the London underground in an effort to avoid sexual harassment.<sup>48</sup>

Restrictions can also come from the adults in girls’ lives in attempts to keep them safe. Plan International UK found that 80% of parents worry their daughter will experience public sexual harassment during her lifetime and their concerns are causing them to instruct their daughters not to walk home alone after a certain time (67%), not to go to certain places

(47%), not go out after dark (41%) and not take certain routes home (40%).<sup>49</sup>

**“I wouldn’t really walk around the streets on my own now because of the stories we hear, and people being harassed in the streets, and you know, all the different alleys in the streets. I wouldn’t walk around here on my own, personally.”**

By curtailing girls’ mobility, public sexual harassment infringes on their ‘right to the city’ and their ability to participate in urban life as full and equal citizens.<sup>50</sup> The ‘right to the city’ is part of a global social movement, whereby city inhabitants have equitable access to all that a city has to offer. An interesting extension of the right to the city has been the right to leisure and the right to ‘loiter’<sup>51</sup> – to have fun and hang out in public spaces without the risk of violence. Over two million women posted photos of themselves ‘loitering’ or having fun in public spaces as part of the Indian social media campaign #whyloiter.<sup>52</sup>

# UNDERLYING CAUSES

## SOCIAL NORMS AND ATTITUDES

Public sexual harassment, like other forms of VAWG, is rooted in harmful social norms, gender inequality and power relations. Social norms are shared beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour in a given

context. They include attitudes, beliefs and norms in relation to gender and sexuality; gender roles in the home, community and broader public life; male sexual entitlement; and attitudes condoning violence.

### Traditional harmful masculinities

Research with over 3,000 men in the UK, US and Mexico<sup>53</sup> identified clear links between young men's views on manhood and sexual harassment. 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'.<sup>54</sup> 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 - the 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.

as 'men should be the provider', or 'men should act strong even when they don't feel like it'. 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,<sup>56</sup> suggesting that it is also motivated by a sense of sexual entitlement.

Social norms vary between different forms of violence. For example, norms that are more likely to sustain domestic violence than Public Sexual Harassment include norms around men's authority to discipline women and children, strict gender roles (for example, 'Wives should be obedient to husbands'), and family privacy (for example, 'Others should not intervene in family matters'). Other norms are more cross-cutting, for example around ideals of masculinity and femininity (for example, 'Male sexual entitlement, inside and outside of marriage' and 'Dominant masculinity and submissive femininity').<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, exploratory research<sup>55</sup> conducted on UK YouGov survey data 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

Sexual harassment often intersects with other harmful discriminatory norms around racism, homophobia and ableism.<sup>58</sup> Research in the United States highlighted how racism can intensify harmful gender norms on sexual entitlement, sexual boundaries and assumptions about dress/appearance that drive sexual harassment.<sup>59</sup> There is

also a growing body of evidence showing that the rigid traditional gender norms that underpin sexual harassment can intersect

with homophobic or transphobic norms.<sup>60</sup> However, this is an area where more research is needed.

## PERPETRATORS

Perpetration of all forms of violence against women and girls is under-researched, and this is particularly true of public sexual harassment where there are significant evidence gaps. However, we know from the existing evidence that perpetrators are overwhelmingly likely to be male and hold strong beliefs about traditional, harmful masculinities. In addition, one study found

that men were more likely to sexually harass strangers when in a group, mainly due to the anonymity this context provided and the role that engaging in sexual harassment played in group bonding.<sup>61</sup> Other research suggests men sexually harass to performatively 'prove themselves' in peer groups, with women playing a role as capital in this exchange.<sup>62</sup>



Olamide, Rochelle, Matilda and Esther, London

## Comparison with other violence perpetration

There is limited evidence on whether perpetrators of public sexual harassment perpetrate other forms of sexual violence. There is an argument that some men use groping as a 'rape test' and may escalate to rape depending on how assertively a woman responds to harassing behaviours,<sup>63</sup> however, there is no rigorous evidence to support this hypothesis. In research from other contexts where the perpetrator is known to the victim (for example, workplaces), 30% of female victims of sexual assault reported that the perpetrator sexually harassed them before or after the assault, while 8% reported that the

perpetrator stalked them before or after the assault.<sup>64</sup>

One key difference between perpetration of public sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence is that the perpetrator is more likely to be a stranger. In the UK, research by Nottingham Trent University found that perpetrators were almost always a stranger and often moving quickly in a public space, making it harder for victims to register enough information from a single incident to enable identification.<sup>65</sup>

## RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Beyond social norms, there are a range of risk and protective factors for both perpetration of and victimisation from violence. These factors vary between different forms of violence, and most evidence is on intimate partner violence. However, the table below shows an amended list of risk and protective factors for public sexual harassment, based on the international RESPECT framework for preventing violence.<sup>66</sup> This table suggests the need for interventions at a range of levels from the individual to societal - a widely accepted model in public health and violence prevention.<sup>67</sup>

Further research is needed to confirm whether global evidence is applicable in the UK context. For example, there are studies showing that witnessing and/or experiencing physical violence in childhood homes is associated with men's perpetration of street-based sexual harassment in four Middle Eastern and North African countries,<sup>68</sup> but little research to date has looked at the links in the UK.

Furthermore, there is limited evidence on whether the factors driving other forms of sexual violence, such as intimate partner violence and rape, also drive public sexual harassment.



	<b>Risk Factors for PSH</b>	<b>Protective Factors for PSH</b>
<b>Societal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Absence or lack of enforcement of laws addressing PSH</li> <li>- Lack of accessible, high quality response and policing services, creating a situation of impunity</li> <li>- Gender-blind or gender-neutral infrastructure and urban planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Laws that address PSH</li> <li>- Accessible reporting and response services including justice</li> <li>- Gender responsive and participatory urban planning</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Harmful gender norms that uphold PSH</li> <li>- Unsafe, poorly lit public spaces and crowded public transport</li> <li>- Lack of oversight and violence reporting mechanisms in education institutions and workplaces</li> <li>- Availability of drugs, alcohol and weapons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Norms that support non-violence, respect for diversity and gender equality</li> <li>- Well-lit public spaces, visible sightlines, clear signage, and safe road underpasses</li> <li>- Strong education and workplace management capacity and accountability mechanisms</li> <li>- Social sanctions for PSH perpetrators</li> </ul>
<b>Interpersonal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High levels of inequality in relationships</li> <li>- Men’s sense of sexual entitlement, characterised by multiple sexual partners and transactional sex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intimate relationships characterised by gender equality</li> <li>- Relationship skills to mitigate harassing behaviours and promote consensual sexual relationships</li> </ul>
<b>Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of awareness of PSH including of laws, policies and reporting procedures (women and men)</li> <li>- Attitudes condoning or justifying PSH as normal or acceptable</li> <li>- Men’s experiences of violence as a child</li> <li>- Harmful use of drugs and alcohol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness of and skills to act to prevent to PSH (women and men)</li> <li>- Gender-equitable attitudes and practices (women and men)</li> <li>- Non-exposure of violence in the family</li> </ul>

## SECTION 2

# INTERVENTIONS



“I wouldn't really walk around the streets on my own now because of the stories we hear, and people being harassed in the streets, and you know, all the different alleys in the streets. ... It makes me feel ashamed to not be able to go out of my own house to go into my own village on my own.”

- Hollie, South Wales

# LEGISLATIVE INTERVENTIONS

Laws are the first step in recognising, protecting and enforcing the right to live free from violence and harassment as set out in international instruments, including the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the Istanbul Convention. They also signal commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal target of ending all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and girls by 2030.

## THE CURRENT LAW AND POLICE REPORTING

There is no piece of legislation that has been specifically designed to address public sexual harassment. The result is that many sexually harmful behaviours fall through the legal cracks, despite the immediate and longer-term harm they cause to victims. It is also very difficult to know what to report to the police if victimised.

### Reporting to the police

Our survey of girls and young women aged 12 to 21 found that incidents are significantly underreported, irrespective of whether they could be classed as a criminal offence.

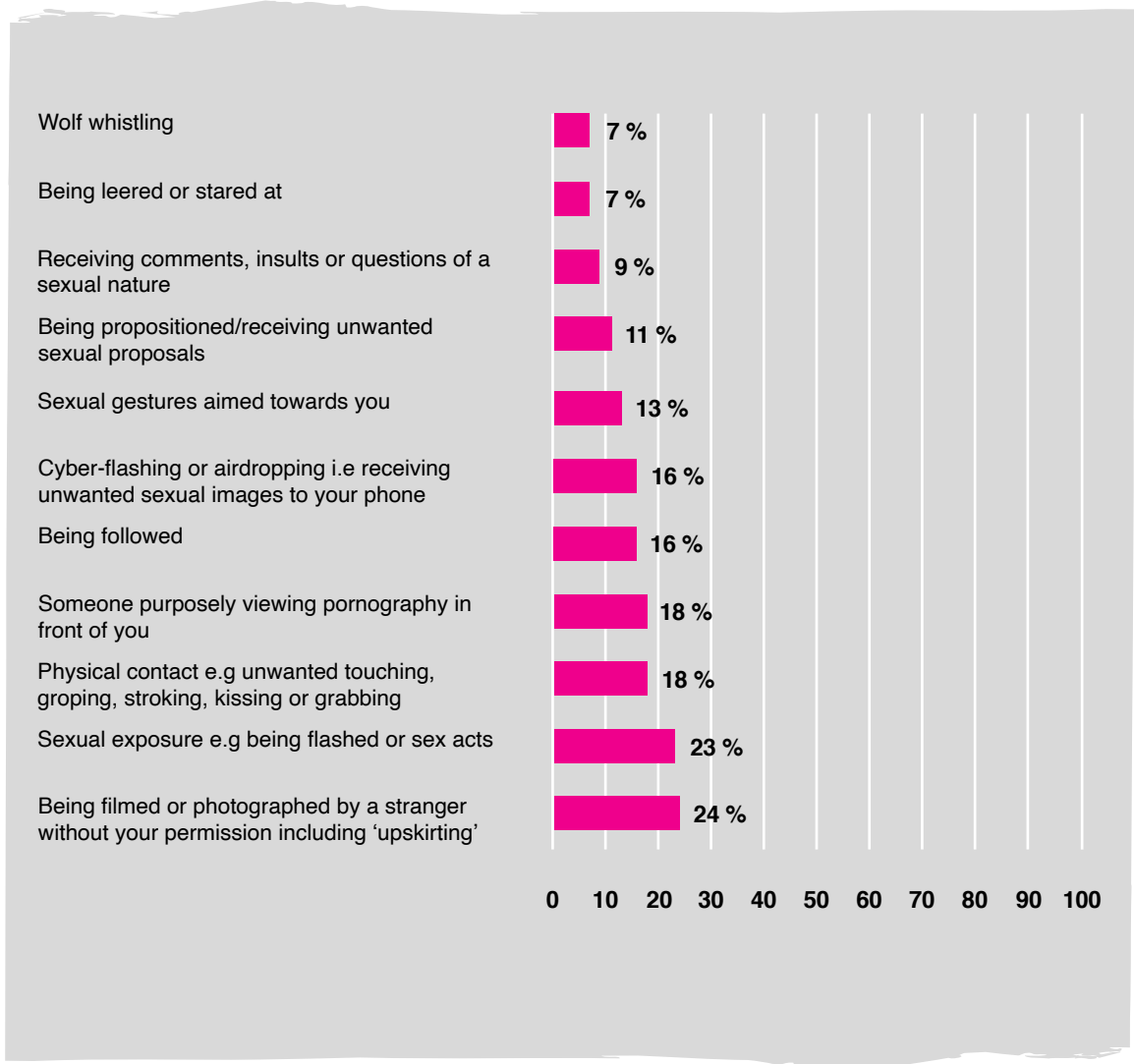
Of those who have experienced public sexual harassment (75% of total respondents), only 26% have ever reported any incident to the police. There are some significant differences in reporting between different groups of girls and young women:

- Half (**49%**) of girls and young women who consider themselves to have a disability have reported an incident, compared to **22%** of non-disabled girls and young women
- Girls and young women from urban areas were more likely than those from rural areas to have reported any incident to the police (**27% vs 16%**)
- Black, African, Caribbean and Black British respondents are the most likely to have reported any incident to the police (**35%**), followed by **28%** of mixed-race respondents, **25%** of white respondents, **25%** of respondents who selected 'other' and **20%** of Asian and Asian British respondents
- There is no significant difference in overall reporting between heterosexual and non-heterosexual respondents (**26% and 25%**)

There could be a range of reasons for the differences in reporting levels. These could include (but are not limited to): girls' unique experiences of incidents and how threatening they were, how often they experience it, or whether there was a campaign to increase reporting in their area or a police officer nearby. Further research is needed to understand the different reporting levels and girls' motivations to report or not.

### Chart 3

**Percentage of those who reported a type of public sexual harassment that they experienced to the police.**



We asked those who reported their incident to the police how the police responded:

- 30%** said the police told them they couldn't do anything about it as it isn't a crime
- 26%** said the police took their case forward and dealt with it as a crime
- 29%** said the police took their case forward as a crime, but it was later dropped or unresolved
- 6%** selected 'don't know'
- 7%** selected 'prefer not to say'

Public sexual harassment is widely underreported in the UK for a range of reasons, such as victims thinking they will not be believed, thinking it is not serious enough to report<sup>69</sup> or fearing reprisals from the perpetrator.<sup>70</sup>

A previous Plan International UK survey found that 42% of girls aged 14-21 who had experienced public sexual harassment didn't tell anyone about it.<sup>71</sup> Over a third (37%) of parents said they would not know where to report it if it happened to their daughter.<sup>72</sup> An overwhelming majority (72%) of girls aged 14-21 said knowing an act was a criminal offence would make them more likely to report it to the police.<sup>73</sup>

If crimes are reported, the complex legislation means it is very difficult to counter them through legal avenues. If an incident makes it to court, a legal dilemma is knowing which offence it was and which penalty should apply; a dilemma that all too often leads to inaction and injustice. Clarity is urgently needed – both for the public and for those in authority.

## Current Laws

This table outlines current related laws and whether they are fit for purpose in addressing public sexual harassment.

Behaviour	Relevant Existing Law	Is the Law Fit for Purpose?
<b>Examples of Non-Verbal, Non-Contact Harassment</b>		
Leering or persistent staring	None	N/A
Following, persistent following, cornering, isolating	None	N/A
Sexual gestures	(Possibly) Outraging Public Decency – but this requires more than one person being present ('the two person rule') rather than acts confined to one person	No – the requirement is for the behaviour to go 'considerably beyond the susceptibilities of, or even shocking, reasonable people'
Exposure	Sexual offences Act 2003, s66	No
<b>Examples of Verbal Harassment</b>		
Sexual propositioning	None	N/A
Sexually explicit comments	None	N/A
Intrusive persistent questioning	None	N/A
So called 'catcalling' and 'wolfwhistling'	None	N/A
<b>Examples of Physical Contact Harassment</b>		
Groping of genitalia, breasts, buttocks	Sexual Offences Act 2003	Yes – subject to the lack of confidence of young women and girls that the law takes it seriously, it being so much part of 'the way the world is'
Kissing	Context specific – not necessarily covered	No
Stroking body; rubbing/pressing against (non-genitalia)	None	N/A
<b>Examples of Non-Contact Technology-Enabled Harassment</b>		
'Airdropping' unwanted illicit images to someone's phone (also known as cyberflashing)	None	N/A
'Upskirting'	Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019	Introduced in 2019; too soon to say
Viewing or showing pornography in public	None	N/A

The best way to test whether the laws are effective is to consider specific scenarios. In all of these scenarios, the existing laws do not apply.

A girl of 14, who is out for a walk during lockdown, has a series of sexual comments about his genitalia and her genitalia made to her by a 50 year-old man.

**She is not protected.**

A girl of 16 is approached and sexually propositioned by a man suggesting that he can grope her breasts and buttocks.

**She is not protected.**

A 15-year-old girl is out jogging and is slowly followed by an unmarked van. The van pulls alongside her in the dark and the driver makes sexually explicit comments to her about her body. As she jogs away he beeps the van horn repeatedly.

**She is not protected.**

Another girl is being leered at in a park by a man; she is wolf-whistled at and, as she leaves, he cat-calls persistently and make sexual comments about her breasts and buttocks.

**She is not protected.**

A girl is walking home in her school uniform when two men approach her from opposite directions and corner her - she backs into an alley. They leer at her body, ask her about her sexual experience, and say no one could do anything to them as she doesn't know who they are.

**She is not protected.**

A young woman is going to work on the Tube, holding onto a strap as there are no seats. A man leans against her; he presses his body against her, although not with his genitalia or against hers; but he invades her space and whispers obscene comments in her ear.

**She is not protected.**

A child is on the way to school. A man makes gestures that only she can see, imitating sexual acts.

**She is not protected.**

A 16-year-old girl has distressing pornographic images air-dropped to her iPhone.

**She is not protected.**

A man approaches a 17-year-old girl and shows her sexual images on his phone.

**She is not protected.**



Donna, Eva and Eliza, Liverpool



## A NEW LAW FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Plan International UK and Our Streets Now have worked with two leading human rights lawyers who developed a tailor-made bill, learning from best practice around the world and applying it to the UK's unique context. This bill includes the crucial elements of public space, the 'sexual' element and the mental element, which includes intent to harass and 'recklessness' (disregarding the effect of the harassment). It covers all forms of public sexual harassment and proposes a proportionate penalty of a fine or up to one year's imprisonment, in line with legislation in other countries. This bill would clarify the law for the police, prosecutors, the judiciary and members of the public – including those who experience it.

### How a new law would relate to hate crime

Hate crimes are acts of violence or hostility directed at people because of their identity. Current hate crime law recognises five protected characteristics: race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and transgender status.<sup>74</sup> The Law Commission undertook a review into whether sex and/or gender should be added as a hate crime characteristic. This form of hate crime is often discussed within the context of addressing sexual harassment in public. However, a new law differs from making misogyny a hate crime because it would criminalise public sexual harassment, while hate crime would not change what is currently unlawful or not.

Our proposed bill would complement a possible new sex/gender hate crime. As part of a new pilot scheme for a new sex/gender hate crime, victims can report an incident of public sexual harassment to the police and it will be recorded. However, if it is not a criminal act, there will be no further action taken. With a new law that criminalises public sexual harassment, prosecutors would be able to apply hate crime in the courts, and if incidents are found to be motivated by sex or gender-based hostility, these would be prosecuted as hate crimes as well.

### How a new law would relate to workplace law

Our proposed bill would fill the gaps in workplace law. Sexual harassment in the workplace is unlawful under civil law under the Equality Act 2010. However, the legal obligations placed on employers to take action on workplace sexual harassment no longer extend to harassment carried out by 'third parties' (such as customers). For example, if an employee is sexually harassed by a client or a customer, they may not be protected by workplace sexual harassment law. The Government

recently committed to 'explicit protections for employees from harassment by third parties (for example, customers or clients)' in their new Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy<sup>75</sup> (as well as a new proactive duty on employers, requiring them to take 'all reasonable steps' to prevent their employees from experiencing sexual harassment). However, as it currently stands, there is a gap – and our proposed legislation would help keep workers safe in the workplace.

## EVIDENCE ON THE IMPACT OF THE LAW

Four in five countries (82%) do not have laws on sexual harassment in public places<sup>76</sup> and most laws have been introduced within the past five years, so it is still too early to see their long-term impact. In addition, there is little publicly available information which

evaluates the effectiveness of legal reform. Therefore, this section also draws on lessons from other equalities laws to explore the potential impact of a new law (please see Appendix 1 for a mapping of relevant laws and lessons learned).

### Practical value in recognising, protecting and enforcing the law

A new law is an important step in providing legal protection against public sexual harassment. France's former minister of gender equality, Marlène Schiappa, has observed how the country's 2018 legislation, Loi Schiappa (the Schiappa law), gives 'a real tool to law enforcement officers and transportation agents. They are not powerless when facing this type of behaviour anymore'.<sup>77</sup> The law provided for training of law enforcement officers on public sexual harassment, which is of huge practical value in itself.

A clear law, rather than a set of complex, disjointed laws, could empower victims by making it clear what is or is not an offence. This is especially the case for younger women and girls, who are currently significantly less likely to report harassment to an authority figure than older victims,<sup>78</sup> yet more likely to experience it. This could in turn increase reporting and improve crime data, which can inform policing strategy.

There are arguments for and against making public sexual harassment a crime rather than a finable offence. In France, the law allows

on-the-spot fines for sexist insults, degrading or humiliating comments, or hostile and offensive sexual/sexist behaviour towards a person in public spaces and is recognised as a misdemeanour (minor wrong doing) rather than a felony (crime). The minister who introduced this law, Marlène Schiappa, argued that the Belgian experience of making it a crime was too complicated; it takes time to file a complaint, investigate, go back to the prosecution and so on.<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, there are risks with on-the-spot fines. Firstly, most fines involve perpetrators being caught in the act and therefore require police officers to witness the incident, which is clearly a small proportion of actual cases. Secondly, making it a fineable offence does not recognise the seriousness and harm – especially to vulnerable adolescent girls. And thirdly, there have been incidents in France which should have been prosecuted as more serious sexual assault cases, punishable by five years in prison and a €75,000 fine, but have instead had the facts 'déqualified' and seen the perpetrator issued with a small fine (see Appendix 1 for details).

## Symbolic value as a deterrent

Laws can signal political commitment to ending public sexual harassment. In the Philippines, for example, the chair of the Senate Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality said the passage of the bill on 'Safe Streets and Public Spaces Act of 2017' sent a 'strong signal to violators, perpetrators and apologists that their behaviour and actions will not be tolerated and will not go unpunished'.<sup>80</sup>

The symbolic value is only gained if there is public awareness of the law. In the Argentinian city of Buenos Aires, a new law on public sexual harassment was introduced in 2016, but there was only one reported incident during the first year. The first prosecuted case occurred by accident when a 25-year-old woman was being chased by an abusive taxi driver and ran into a police

officer who explained the behaviour was now illegal: 'It became a symbolic case'.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, in Portugal, there were no cases in the first three years after the law was introduced in 2015. To have symbolic value as a deterrent, prosecuted cases need to be publicised so that perpetrators see that there are consequences.

Similarly, in the UK, researchers studying Nottinghamshire Police's policy of making misogyny in public a hate crime found that the lack of public awareness of the policy had hindered its effectiveness. There were also reservations about the framing of 'misogyny hate crime', with members of the public and police viewing it as too elitist/academic. Nevertheless, researchers recommended a national roll-out as women who knew about the policy felt safer and that the police would take them seriously.<sup>82</sup>

## Cultural value in changing social norms

The relationship between equalities-focused laws and cultural change is 'complex and context-dependent'.<sup>83</sup> It can be hard to untangle the 'cause-and-effect' of laws and cultural change, as many laws on gender equality are a result of cultural trends. In addition, there is little evidence available on the extent to which laws on public sexual harassment have been able to change social norms, because most legislation is recent and cultural change takes time.

However, evidence from other laws on gender equality, and equalities-focused law in general, shows that legal reform is essential to progress - but it is unlikely to change social norms, and ultimately behaviour, on its own. Instead, laws that are introduced gradually with accompanying measures (such as

awareness-raising) can positively change behaviour and norms.<sup>84</sup>

Research on the impact of equalities-focused legislation in the UK concluded that outlawing discriminatory behaviour was 'an essential part of the battle',<sup>85</sup> but not enough to combat inequalities that are deeply rooted in social structures. For example, studies of laws on child marriage<sup>86</sup> and female genital mutilation (FGM)<sup>87</sup> find that legal changes alone cannot shift deeply-rooted behaviours. Similarly, research on parental leave and pay finds that although legislation is a useful tool for changing gender attitudes, it needs to be accompanied by other non-legislative measures, such as availability of preschool education, childcare, flexible and part-time opportunities.<sup>88</sup>

There can be backlash when new laws are in strong conflict with existing norms. In Portugal, the 2015 street harassment law faced backlash, with the issue downplayed and victims ridiculed on social media. Analysis of 1,759 online Facebook comments found only a small minority (13%) saw street harassment as a systemic issue, while the majority (60%) saw it as harmless and an irrelevant topic for public policy, followed by those who framed it as a form of cultural backsliding or legal challenge (16%) or a few individual deviants (11%).<sup>89</sup> It is important to note that this sample of Facebook comments is not a representative sample of public

attitudes, however it highlights the resistance shown by some members of the public. Therefore, accompanying activities aimed at shifting attitudes and norms were required.

Part of the challenge of understanding the impact of law on cultural change is the complex interplay of multiple interventions. Legislation sits in a broader context of risk and protective factors operating at individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels – the ‘ecological framework’ proposed by Heise in the seminal 1998 paper.<sup>90</sup> It is widely accepted that to prevent violence, we need action at all these levels.

## Financial value in attracting resources for prevention

Laws have the potential to reduce public sexual harassment by mobilising funds for prevention.<sup>91</sup> Most public sexual harassment laws are not accompanied by budget allocations, despite UN guidance that laws on violence against women should mandate a budget for implementation.<sup>92</sup> However, a systematic review of the evidence on prevention of VAWG highlights the potential positive impact of funding associated with a new law. An example is the 1994 Violence

against Women Act (VAWA) in the United States, which authorised US\$1.6 billion in funding in the first five years.<sup>93</sup> A study of panel data from 10,371 jurisdictions between 1996 and 2002 found that jurisdictions that received VAWA grants had significant reductions in sexual and aggravated assault, compared with those jurisdictions that did not receive a grant. This relationship persisted after controlling for general downward crime trends and effects of other justice grants.<sup>94</sup>



“ I think it’s important to recognise that it’s wrong, anyone touching you, whether you know the person or you don’t know the person. You have the right to your personal space and you have the right to say yes or no to who can touch you and who doesn’t. It’s [sexual harassment] completely normalised and it’s wrong.”

– Muriel, North Wales

## HOW TO MAKE A PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT LAW WORK

By observing practices in other countries, we can see that effective implementation of public sexual harassment laws require political commitment, resourcing, trained personnel, awareness-raising campaigns in conjunction with a new law, reporting mechanisms, ongoing monitoring, and working with the private sector.

### Political commitment and resources

The most effective laws have clear political champions, commitment and dedicated resources for implementation. In France,

the 2018 law was spearheaded by Marlène Schiappa, who was the minister of gender equality and is now at the Ministry of Interior.

### Training public officials, including police and transport officials

Providing training on the new law is essential for ensuring that it holds perpetrators accountable. In Peru, the law on public sexual harassment notes that regional, provincial and local governments must provide training to their staff on sexual harassment in public spaces (Article 7). It also requires the Ministry of Education to train teachers and education

staff (Article 9), the Ministry of Transport and Communications to provide training courses for urban transport public service personnel (Article 11), and the Ministry of Interior to incorporate training against sexual harassment in public spaces as part of training courses for the National Police of Peru (Article 12).

### Efforts to raise awareness and change attitudes <sup>95</sup>

Key to the effective implementation of a new law is shifting attitudes and norms around public sexual harassment, both amongst enforcement agencies and the wider public. A comparative study<sup>96</sup> in five European countries found that laws on corporal punishment were more effective when accompanied by awareness-raising measures. The most effective law was in Sweden, which was accompanied by intensive, ongoing efforts to publicise the law and promote nonviolent parenting.<sup>97</sup> In Germany and Austria, where laws

were adopted later and supported less intensively, the decline in the use of corporal punishment<sup>98</sup> has been slower. Progress in shifting attitudes was slowest in France and Spain, which did not have a law. Indeed, awareness-raising measures alone (without a law) produced little effect, especially in the case of lighter corporal punishment. This study suggests the need for legislation coupled with intensive, long-term information campaigns in order to shift behaviours around violence.

## Reporting mechanisms

It is essential that official incidence data is collected and recorded, particularly after the introduction of a new law. In Portugal, an investigation into the implementation of the 2015 law found that neither the police nor the Public Prosecutor's Office held data with "the intended specificity" on reported incidents or convictions.<sup>99</sup> Although Peru has one of the most comprehensive laws on public sexual harassment, it does not collect national data on reported incidents. Four years after the law was first passed, an investigation found that four municipalities had no complaints, while the other three registered less than three complaints. The Ombudsman's Office verified that most cases are not reported due to lack of awareness of the law. By contrast, when Plan International Peru launched an interactive platform Free to Be, they recorded over 500 incidents of street sexual harassment in Lima in just seven days, suggesting the value of monitoring tools to collect data on the scale and location of the issue.<sup>100</sup>

The most effective laws have introduced innovative reporting mechanisms, regularly evaluated their use and made any necessary adaptations. For example, the city of Quito in Ecuador introduced 'Cabinas cuentame' (Tell me booths) in public transport stations. The booths received 274 complaints in the first

nine months, two of which led to judgements – the first of their kind in the judicial system. However, an evaluation found that people felt ashamed or afraid to spend time in the booths to report an incident, so Quito introduced 'Bajale al Acoso' (an SMS text message system) for women to report sexual harassment. By July 2018, there had been more than 1,900 reports, with 53 cases under investigation and 11 convictions.<sup>101</sup>

Digital mapping solutions for women to report and crowdsource incidents have been developed in several countries, for example HarassMap in Egypt and SafeCity in India, Kenya, Cameroon and Nepal. These platforms enable women and girls to report the location, date and time they were harassed, creating a map of 'hotspots'. These innovative solutions can be a powerful advocacy, prevention and response tool; however, they are not a 'sufficient substitute' for disaggregated data that is collected and analysed by professional researchers, as noted by Caroline Criado Perez in her book on gender data bias.<sup>102</sup> The risk with crowdsourced platforms for urban and transport planning is there is no guarantee they will continue indefinitely, and there are several examples of data platforms closing after a few years due to lack of funds.

## Ongoing monitoring and research

Lessons taken from wider laws on violence against women have highlighted the importance of regular monitoring by civil society and women's organisations, for example through observatories and diagnostic surveys.<sup>103</sup> The UN has observed that monitoring can identify gaps in the scope and effectiveness of laws, for example the need for further training of public officials or any unintended consequences of the law.<sup>104</sup>

It is important to note that trends in data on violence against women and girls are often unpredictable and nonlinear, with reporting

increasing in the short term due to increased awareness and not necessarily increased prevalence.

There is also a need to invest in the evidence base on the effectiveness of other interventions to prevent and respond to public sexual harassment. It would also be useful for evaluations to measure changes in attitudes towards harassment, because it is challenging for short interventions to make a meaningful impact on reducing violence or harassment within a 3 to 5 year programmatic timeframe.<sup>105</sup>

## Working with the private sector

There are overlaps between public and workplace sexual harassment, with women working in the hospitality, retail and transport sectors experiencing some of the highest levels of sexual harassment of any sector, from customers as well as supervisors and colleagues.<sup>106</sup>

The private sector can play a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of laws on sexual harassment in public spaces.<sup>107</sup> In the Philippines, private companies in the hospitality and retail sectors are required to adopt a zero-tolerance policy against harassment. Restaurants, bars and cinemas risk non-renewal of their business permit for non-compliance. All establishments must display warning signs with the anti-harassment hotline and designate at least one anti-sexual harassment officer to receive complaints.<sup>108</sup> Workplaces and educational institutions are mandated to create an independent internal mechanism to investigate and address complaints.

After the introduction of the 2020 law on public sexual harassment in Costa Rica, the Government is working with the private sector and UN agencies to roll out training workshops with construction and infrastructure workers. The workshops include safe learning spaces which use role play, dramatic performances and collective reflection to challenge social norms about the acceptability of sexual harassment in public spaces and workplaces.<sup>109</sup>

The UK Government is currently taking steps to consider ratifying the ILO Convention 190 on Ending Violence and Harassment in the World of Work.<sup>110</sup> The convention protects workers from gender-based violence and harassment in both public and private workspaces, including from third parties – a gap that is currently not covered by UK workplace sexual harassment law.



## **Angéla's Plan: France's plan to fight <sup>111</sup>**

To help with the implementation of the 2018 law, France announced a major plan to combat public sexual harassment called 'Angéla's plan'. It has six components, many of which involve Government collaboration with the private sector.

- 1. The creation of a network of 'safe places' through the "Ask Angela" system in partnership with UN Women and HeForShe. When a woman is harassed in a public space, she can ask a worker "where is Angela?" and the worker will call the police or provide help.**
- 2. A major communication and awareness campaign to reaffirm the notion of consent for the victims, particularly timely as the lockdown ends.**
- 3. The commitment of VTC platforms (VTC is a French acronym for private taxi services not affiliated with taxi companies), including a compulsory sexual and gender-based violence module as part of driver training.**
- 4. On-demand bus stopping service for people travelling alone who need to get off between two bus stops at night, so they are closer to their destination.**
- 5. Immediate justice (fast-track to court) in the event of a recurrence aggravated by criminal acts.**
- 6. Mobilising social media platforms such as partnering with Snapchat to raise awareness among young people about cyber-harassment and in particular the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images.**



Pako and Hanya, Middlesbrough

# NON-LEGISLATIVE INTERVENTIONS

## ASSESSMENT OF EVIDENCE

A wide variety of interventions have been used to prevent and respond to public sexual harassment or its underlying causes. These include approaches at the national, local, Government and grassroots level. However, only a few of these interventions have been rigorously evaluated to assess their impact on public sexual harassment, due to the lack of funding for research. There is a need for greater investment to build the evidence base on what works in addressing public sexual harassment.

Some evaluations exist that show it is possible to prevent other forms of violence against women and girls within 3 to 5 years, for example using schools-based approaches or community activism to change social norms.<sup>112</sup> Several evaluations have measured changes in risk and protective factors, such

as knowledge or attitudes to public sexual harassment and gender equality. However, as few studies have measured changes in public sexual harassment, it is difficult to identify the key pathways of change.

Furthermore, in multi-component interventions, it is difficult to attribute outcomes to individual intervention components. Where evidence does exist, there is rarely any follow-up to understand how change is sustained or can be scaled up.

Based on the evidence reviewed and drawing on lessons learned from programming on other forms of violence against women and girls<sup>113</sup> and work with men and boys on gender equality,<sup>114</sup> key considerations when developing an intervention on public sexual harassment include:

- **Address risk and protective factors**, including social norms and gender inequity
- **Adapt and tailor approaches** to the local context
- **Use group-based and age-appropriate** participatory learning methods that emphasise critical reflection and communication skills
- **Carefully select staff and volunteers** for their gender equitable attitudes and non-violence behaviour, who are thoroughly trained, supervised and supported

- **Work strategically and politically** to challenge, negotiate and shift power around gender norms
- **Use a coordinated approach** to awareness-raising through media, advocacy and popular education
- **Work with both women and men / girls and boys**, especially in highly patriarchal contexts
- **Combine both prevention and response elements**, including linking with reporting mechanisms and high-quality services for survivors
- **Include multiple training or awareness sessions** to reinforce key concepts and allow time for reflection and learning rather than one-off sessions
- **Prioritise well-designed interventions that address groups at high risk** of experiencing or perpetrating sexual harassment in public spaces, for example adolescent girls, who may require more tailored approaches.

This table summarises the results from the evidence review on interventions used to address public sexual harassment (PSH) and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

	Impact on PSH	Impact on preventing VAWG	Area of Controversy
<b>Life skills / schools-based interventions</b>	No evidence	Promising	
<b>Community activism to shift harmful attitudes and norms</b>	No evidence	Promising	
<b>Public awareness campaigns (ineffective if standalone)</b>	No evidence	More evidence needed	
<b>Training for police / transport workers (without changing institutional environment)</b>	No evidence	More evidence needed	

	<b>Impact on PSH</b>	<b>Impact on preventing VAWG</b>	<b>Area of Controversy</b>
<b>Gender-responsive urban and transport planning</b>	No evidence	More evidence needed	
<b>Provision of essential services, including police and legal support</b>	No evidence	More evidence needed	
<b>Women's social movements and organisations</b>	No evidence	More evidence needed	
<b>Workplace interventions</b>	No evidence	More evidence needed	
<b>Bystander approaches, typically in schools or university campuses</b>	No evidence	Conflicting evidence	
<b>Perpetrator interventions</b>	No evidence	Conflicting evidence	Area of controversy
<b>Direct work with men and boys only (i.e. without work with women and girls)</b>	No evidence	Conflicting evidence	Area of controversy
<b>Female-only transport options</b>	No evidence	No evidence	Area of controversy
<b>Informal security patrols and vigilante movements</b>	No evidence	No evidence	Area of controversy

## LIFE SKILLS AND SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Life skills or schools-based interventions can have positive impacts on improving young people's attitudes about gender equality and harassment. Global research in 15 countries,<sup>115</sup> including Scotland, found that early adolescence is a key age when children internalise gender norms and learn about what is acceptable behaviour through messages such as 'do not dress like that' and 'cover up or there will be consequences'. It is also when young people first start to experience or perpetrate sexual harassment in schools and in public spaces.

Successful approaches typically use critical reflection on gender roles, attitudes and behaviours, often using games, role play, or play-based learning. There is good evidence that schools-based interventions can prevent peer violence and improve gender attitudes, even in fragile settings in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but they require intensive, longer programmes (16 or more sessions) focused on transforming gender relationships.<sup>116</sup>

The most effective approaches work at multiple levels, known as 'whole school (or campus)' interventions. Actions include staff training, codes of conduct, engaging parents, improving the built environment, and improving reporting, monitoring and accountability.<sup>117</sup> An example is Peru's law on public sexual harassment, which makes specific provisions (Article 9 of Law No. 30314) for the Ministry of Education

to include preventative teaching against sexual harassment in public spaces in the curriculum, as well as mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment, training for teachers and administrative staff, reporting systems, and strategies for local and national Educational Management Units to implement activities.

In England, a three-year student safeguarding programme, 'Catalyst', invested £4.7 million in 119 projects led by universities and colleges. The first round of projects aimed to address student-to-student sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment on campuses. Activities included bystander training, consent training, specialist staff training in how to respond to disclosures, and other forms of awareness-raising and training. An evaluation report found that awareness-raising activities had decreased student tolerance for sexual misconduct within the higher education sector. Students were increasingly likely to report incidents and express confidence that their education provider would respond to reports and disclosures. However, the evaluation noted that it will take time before harassment is considered unacceptable on campus. Interestingly, a few projects recognised the importance of addressing norms around harassment before students reached higher education and had therefore begun awareness-raising activities with local secondary schools and sixth form colleges.<sup>118</sup>

**49%** of girls and young women aged 12 to 21 say they have received workshops or lessons on sexual harassment at school, university or college

**91%** believe it should be taught

## COMMUNITY ACTIVISM TO SHIFT ATTITUDES AND NORMS

This is one of the most effective ways to improve gender equality, address power imbalances and tackle violence against women and girls, although the evidence for public sexual harassment specifically is so far limited. Examples of effective interventions which show a positive reduction in partner violence include SASA! and Safe Homes and Respect for Everyone (SHARE) in Uganda, COMBAT in Ghana, and Transforming Masculinities in the Democratic Republic

of Congo.<sup>119</sup> However, these interventions require extensive engagement over a period of 2 to 3 years and need to be strongly designed and implemented in order to ensure enough community members are exposed to the intervention to sustain change.<sup>120</sup> These approaches can work on partner violence, but further research is needed before adapting their use to prevent public sexual harassment within large, highly mobile communities.

## PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Public awareness-raising campaigns have huge potential to reach large numbers of people. There are many examples of campaigns that use mass communication, such as billboards, adverts, television, radio or digital campaigns, to raise awareness, increase knowledge about a law or a reporting hotline, or to challenge ideas about the acceptability of sexual harassment in public spaces. These approaches are often seen as attractive due to their wide reach and comparatively low costs. In Brazil, there are awareness-raising campaigns about sexual harassment at public events such as carnivals, festivals and public concerts. Police officers distribute rape whistles and inform carnival-goers of the women-only police station and the reporting hotline.

Evaluations show that these types of campaigns can raise awareness and influence attitudes, but on their own they are unlikely to change behaviour. Instead, researchers recommend using awareness-raising campaigns as part of a wider multi-component intervention with other activities designed to change behaviour.<sup>121</sup> In London, the number of reports to police doubled during the 'Report it to Stop it' campaign,

which encouraged people to report incidents of sexual harassment via text or a phone line.<sup>122</sup> An evaluation found that the campaign was more effective on underground trains and the Docklands Light Railway than on buses, partly as the campaign featured a woman on a tube specifically, as well as confusion over the jurisdiction of the British Transport Police. There was no evidence that passengers' fear of crime increased during the campaign. The report concluded that while the campaign was effective in increasing reporting ('report it'), there is little evidence that it changed behaviours ('stop it') within the timeframe of the evaluation.<sup>123</sup>

Although there is limited evidence that looks directly at how to design and implement awareness-raising campaigns that change attitudes and behaviour on public sexual harassment, there is a good body of evidence from other types of behavioural change campaigns on violence against women and girls. Key findings<sup>124</sup> include the importance of piloting messages, using multiple communications methods and forms of exposure, and following a three-stage process to shift social norms:

**Change** social expectations about behaviour by targeting norms rather than attitudes. Evidence shows that positive messaging is more effective in changing behaviour (for example, 'I'm the kind of guy who takes a stand. Where do you stand?') than messaging that suggests a certain type of behaviour is 'normal' or widespread (for example, billboards that show that nine in ten women experience public sexual harassment). Creating space for girls and young women to lead the public discussion without fear of recrimination is also important.<sup>125</sup>

**Publicise** changes in attitudes and behaviour, for example by working with trusted celebrities, religious figures or community leaders as visible role models for positive behaviour.

**Reinforce** new norms and provide opportunities for new behaviour, for example by encouraging bystander action or providing hotlines for people to report harassment.

## TRAINING FOR POLICE AND TRANSPORT WORKERS

Training on sexual harassment for police, transport workers and other public officials can help them understand sexual harassment and respond to incidents. For example, all transport staff in Delhi are required to undergo a one-hour refresher training course on sexual harassment when any transport vehicle comes for the yearly renewal of registration.<sup>126</sup> Few studies have looked directly at the impact of training on public sexual harassment, but there is evidence from workplace sexual harassment training that short training courses in multiple doses can be useful and effective. However, one-off compliance-focused courses are unlikely to have a positive impact and could even have a polarising effect on gender attitudes.<sup>127</sup>

There is some evidence from three evaluations that the training of police personnel can bring about positive changes in the attitude and behaviour of police towards women and girls who have experienced violence (no research on public sexual harassment), which as a result increases victims' willingness to report cases to the police.<sup>128</sup> There is also evidence that regular, specialised training of police officers can improve knowledge of how to receive, investigate and prosecute cases. However, discriminatory gender norms are often deeply rooted and institutionalised within police forces, and are therefore hard to shift through short training programmes.<sup>129</sup>



## GENDER-RESPONSIVE URBAN AND TRANSPORT PLANNING

Gender-responsive urban and transport planning considers women's and girls' use of public areas and safety risks and involves them in designing public spaces,<sup>130</sup> which can help reduce sexual harassment. Understanding when and where sexual harassment is most likely to happen is important when improving the built environment. Hotspots can be identified through safety audits, engaging with women and girls and reporting/mapping apps.<sup>131</sup>

Plan International developed the Girls' Safety Walk tool, used in Cairo, Delhi, Hanoi, Kampala, and Lima. Adolescent girls used the tool to help identify factors that make them feel safe and unsafe in their city. Researchers found that as girls and boys used the tool, they were increasingly empowered to speak out and raise issues of safety and inclusion in their cities.<sup>132</sup> Examples of design interventions that have been identified through safety audits include:

- **Safe transportation options** for night-shift workers
- **Adequate and well-maintained locks and door latches** on staff and customer toilets
- **Emergency buttons** on public transport and at transit stops
- **Lighting at bus/metro stops** and en route to them (the 'last mile')
- **Surveillance cameras and security guard presence** at stations and on trains
- **Digital timetables** to say when the next bus/train is coming
- **Transparent bus shelters**
- **On-demand request stops** for passengers at night

However, few rigorous evaluations have measured these interventions' impact on public sexual harassment.<sup>133</sup> Often physical design interventions form part of a broader programme, such as Safe Cities

interventions, which have other elements (such as awareness campaigns, training and capacity building) and so it is challenging to isolate the effectiveness of design components.



“Occasionally, you’ll have like that one person who’s just sitting at the back [of the bus] and is staring at you. And occasionally, they’ll make their way and sit right next to you and just start talking to you.”

– Abby, Norfolk

## PROVISION OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES (POLICE AND LEGAL)

Provision of essential services is vital for enforcing laws, punishing perpetrators and supporting people who experience public sexual harassment. However, there are few studies which look at how best to support the delivery of police and legal services specifically targeting public sexual harassment.

There is some evidence that highlights the importance of system-wide approaches to preventing various forms of violence against

women and girls, particularly when applied systematically across the health, security and justice sectors. Specialised and fast-track courts can have a positive impact on increasing the speed and rate of conviction, but there is no evidence that they can prevent future violence. Women's police stations/desks, paralegals and community interventions can all help improve support to survivors, but there is no evidence they can increase the speed or rate of convictions.<sup>134</sup>

## WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ORGANISATIONS

Women's and girls' social movements and organisations are on the frontline of addressing public sexual harassment and its underlying causes. They have pioneered effective models including community mobilisation strategies, awareness campaigns, providing informal services to survivors, and innovative digital technologies to monitor public sexual harassment. There is also evidence that women who identify more strongly as feminists and have solidarity with women's movements have lower levels of self-blame and PTSD symptoms when sexually harassed by a stranger.<sup>135</sup>

Women's movements have also advocated for legal reform and social change. A study of 70 countries from 1975-2005 concluded that a strong, autonomous feminist movement is both substantively and statistically significant as a predictor of government

action to redress various forms of violence against women – more so than other factors considered, such as the wealth of nations, left-wing political parties or the number of women politicians.<sup>136</sup>

Despite the role played by women's and girls' organisations in driving social change on gender equality and various forms of violence, they are significantly underfunded. In order for these movements to continue to drive efforts on preventing public sexual harassment, it is important to invest in, build on the work of, resource and support women's and girls' organisations.<sup>137</sup>

Examples of movements and organisations that are advocating for change on sexual harassment include #MeToo, Our Streets Now, Everyone's Invited, Hollaback! and Everyday Sexism.

## WORKPLACE INTERVENTIONS

Workplace interventions are increasingly being trialled to address sexual harassment by customers or staff in public spaces, particularly within the transport and hospitality sectors. Measures include establishing written codes of conduct, policies and procedures, training and awareness raising, physical design, and safe and confidential systems to report concerns without the fear of retaliation. For example, hotels in the US are installing emergency panic buttons for workers who provide in-room services to report sexual harassment or violence.<sup>138</sup> Restaurants are also implementing colour-coded systems to identify customers who sexually harass staff; each colour triggers a pre-determined response ranging from the manager taking over service for the table to asking the customer(s) to leave.<sup>139</sup> However there are few evaluations of their effectiveness in preventing public sexual harassment.

## BYSTANDER APPROACHES

Bystander approaches have been used in US college settings, mostly with young men aged 18-22. These approaches recognise that young men can be allies and encourage them to intervene in situations whereby women are being sexually harassed or assaulted. Bystander interventions often use opinion leaders, such as sports teams or coaches, to try and change attitudes about gender equality and the acceptability of harassing or violent behaviours.

In the UK, the Good Night Out initiative is an example of a promising workplace intervention aimed at reducing sexual harassment in privately-owned public spaces.<sup>140</sup> It supports nightlife spaces and organisations to better understand, respond to, and prevent sexual harassment through specialist training and policy support. It provides a one-year accreditation programme to licensed premises (nightclubs, bars, pubs), student unions, event organisers and festivals across the UK and Ireland. To date, it has worked with 185 nightlife spaces and trained 2,641 workers.

A similar initiative is the Mayor of London's *Women's Night Safety Charter*, which sets out guidance for venues, operators, charities, councils and businesses to improve safety at night for women, including better training of staff, encouraging reporting of harassment and ensuring public spaces are safe. 568 organisations have signed up to the Charter to date.<sup>141</sup>

Evaluations of bystander interventions show no impact on perpetration of non-partner sexual assault or other forms of violence.<sup>142</sup> One study of a bystander intervention with fraternity members in a US college found a modest impact on attitudes and behaviours related to sexual violence, but this impact was short-term and not sustained when researchers followed up five weeks later.<sup>143</sup> It is likely that most bystander interventions are too short in duration (typically a 1-2 hour session) to have any impact.<sup>144</sup>

## PERPETRATOR INTERVENTIONS

Perpetrator interventions aim to reduce reoffending by working with perpetrators who have been mandated by courts to participate in the intervention. These interventions typically involve group or one-to-one sessions with perpetrators of intimate partner violence around anger management, power and control in relationships. Some interventions also include alcohol/substance

abuse programmes or couples counselling. There is conflicting evidence about whether working with perpetrators is an effective approach to changing behaviours, and there are high drop-out rates, particularly among the men most likely to reoffend.<sup>145</sup> To date, there have been few interventions that have worked directly with repeat perpetrators of public sexual harassment.

## DIRECT WORK WITH BOYS AND MEN

Direct work with boys and men recognises that preventing sexual harassment needs to begin by promoting healthy, positive norms of masculinity. Interventions that work exclusively with men and boys have been critiqued for diverting resources away from work with women and girls or for not engaging with notions of gender. Others have expressed concerns that some interventions reinforce a particular idea of what it means to be a man (for example, ‘strength’, ‘warrior’, ‘leader’) that excludes and marginalises men who are different.<sup>146</sup> Examples of programmes that have been shown to have a positive impact on young men and boys’ attitudes and behaviour include Yaari Dosti in India and the Young Men Initiative in the Balkans. These are based on Promundo’s Program H, which was first developed for use in Brazil.<sup>147</sup>

Most interventions with men and boys have not specifically measured changes in levels of public sexual harassment, but do show improvements in gender attitudes and behaviour on partner violence. In India, an evaluation of a programme delivered in

schools and local communities to young male athletes aged 10-16, ‘Parivartan: Coaching Boys into Men’, found positive changes in gender attitudes. The programme used cricket coaches and mentors to raise awareness about abusive behaviour, promote gender-equitable and non-violent attitudes, and teach the skills to speak up when witnessing disrespectful behaviour. Athletes who took part in the intervention reported fewer negative bystander behaviours (such as laughing) compared with athletes in the comparison group, but this difference was only marginally significant at a follow-up after 12 months. There were no differences in positive bystander intervention behaviours or in self-reported abuse perpetration at home, in school or in the community.<sup>148</sup> Interestingly, the athletes in the non-intervention groups reported an increase in negative behaviours – a trend that has also been noted in US evaluations and suggests the value of targeting adolescent boys to prevent further decline towards more negative attitudes and behaviour.<sup>149</sup>

## FEMALE-ONLY TRANSPORT OPTIONS

Female-only transport options are a contentious solution<sup>150</sup> and Plan International UK does not support this intervention. Options include female-only passenger cars on underground trains and female-only buses and taxis. Evaluations have found that these options, such as the Meri Seif bus service in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, have high levels of satisfaction, with women and girls rating it 10/10 for safety, freedom and affordability. When some of the free Meri Seif buses trialled introducing a bus fare, women said they still preferred using the buses as they were more reliable and safer than the regular public transport.<sup>151</sup>

However, there are concerns that female-only transport options are temporary ‘quick win’ strategies that do not address women’s broader concerns about sexual harassment.

Worse still, there is research showing that women-only transport options risk exacerbating social norms that blame women for harassment. A study in Rio de Janeiro found that women who did not ride in the ‘safe spaces’ were stigmatised; ‘to be safe, a woman should stick to her reserved space’. Both men and women associated women travelling in the public, non-reserved space with ‘sexual provocation’.<sup>152</sup>

From a practical perspective, female-only public transport is unlikely to be effective as most harassment happens while women are waiting for the transport to arrive or on the ‘last mile’ to or from the transit stop.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, female-only transport does not consider the experiences of people who are transgender, gender-fluid, non-binary or gender-nonconforming.

## INFORMAL SECURITY PATROLS AND VIGILANTE MOVEMENTS

Informal security patrols and vigilante movements are a form of collective ‘active bystander’ approaches aimed at intervening against public sexual harassment.<sup>154</sup> These informal initiatives are often youth-led, organic movements with a high representation of young men. Examples include Bassma (Imprint), Shoft Taharosh (Harassment Seen) and OpAntiSH (Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment) in Egypt.

Although some vigilante groups have been accused of playing into a ‘causative culture of machismo by employing violent vigilante methods’, other groups use more persuasive

methods to raise awareness.<sup>155</sup> The groups were also accused of being unsustainable, both temporally and spatially,<sup>156</sup> although there is some evidence of the potential of initiatives which emerge organically when men mobilise around gender issues.<sup>157</sup> For example, Imprint was able to transform itself from a ‘patrol and rescue operation’ to a non-profit organisation in 2016. Imprint has worked in partnership with universities to develop policies on sexual harassment on university campuses, provided training and advocacy workshops and engaged with the UN Women’s Safe Cities programme.<sup>158</sup>

# SECTION 3

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Melvie and Elsa, Scottish Highlands

# CONCLUSION

The increasing attention on public sexual harassment - whether by Government, the media, education institutions or companies – signals steps in the right direction. But our work on the Crime Not Compliment campaign with Our Streets Now makes it clear that much more needs to be done in the UK to increase people’s understanding of this issue and to respond effectively.

This evidence review makes it clear that very few interventions specifically aimed at addressing public sexual harassment have been designed or delivered, and of those, few have been evaluated for their effectiveness – often due to a lack of funding. However, by assessing both international and UK-based interventions that aim to address the underlying causes and other forms of violence against women and girls, the review provides invaluable insights into what works to address public sexual harassment.

This report shows the negative impact that this harmful behaviour has on girls’ lives. To prevent incidents and support and protect girls, policymakers and other institutions must act now.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are designed based on the evidence. A multi-component approach is needed to address public sexual harassment in the UK, therefore this is not a menu of options to choose from, but actions that must be taken together.

## Recommendations to policymakers:

- **A law that makes public sexual harassment a criminal offence.** This would fill the gaps left by current, incomplete legislation. It would help protect and enforce the right to live free from sexual harassment. It also has symbolic value as a deterrent, cultural value in changing social norms around acceptable behaviour, and financial value in mobilising resources for prevention.
- **Accompanying investment in the effective implementation of laws,** including political commitment and resources, training of public officials (including police and transport workers), awareness-raising of the law, reporting mechanisms, ongoing monitoring and research to identify areas in which further reform is needed, and collaboration with the private sector.
- **Investment in promising pilot initiatives** aimed at tackling the underlying causes of public sexual harassment, including impact evaluations. Pilot interventions should include educational or skills-based initiatives.
- **A national behavioural change campaign** designed to reduce perpetration of public sexual harassment. This should use behavioural change techniques and learn from other types of behavioural change campaigns on violence against women and girls. Awareness-raising campaigns should be delivered alongside other activities designed to change behaviour and not on their own.
- **Funding for women's organisations** so they can continue to drive efforts on preventing and responding to public sexual harassment and build on the work that is already being delivered.
- **Engagement of girls and young women in the development of policy and practice solutions,** particularly listening to the voices of adolescent girls who so often experience public sexual harassment.

## Recommendations to researchers:

There are a number of gaps and limitations in the evidence base where further research is recommended:

- **Disaggregated data and research** on the experiences of girls and women who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, to help design more inclusive interventions.
- **Girl-led research** (research by girls and for girls) to understand their unique experiences, as well as the involvement of girls in monitoring and evaluation interventions, using participatory approaches such as maps, transect walks, video and photo diaries, games and role plays.
- **Research to understand pathways to perpetration**, including risk factors, childhood experiences of violence, and overlaps with different types of violence.
- **Collaboration with technology companies and innovative research methods** to understand how to prevent technology being used to perpetrate sexual harassment, such as airdropping, up-skirting, and viewing or showing pornography in public spaces.
- **Standardised measurement approaches** to enable comparisons over time and between researchers.
- **Rigorous evaluations** to assess the effectiveness of different types of interventions in preventing and responding to public sexual harassment.
- **Measurement of the social and economic costs of public sexual harassment**, including the costs to society of not intervening.



“You know, you say, “Oh, I’ve never really had any of the serious stuff” ... But it doesn’t mean I haven’t been sexually harassed. I’ve been whistled at, I’ve been sworn at for not accepting flowers and I’ve been followed by an old colleague. None of it’s ok at the end of the day.”

– Annie, North Wales

## METHODOLOGY

This report uses a mixed methods approach. We commissioned Social Development Direct to undertake a literature and evidence review. In total, 140 documents/sources were reviewed, including academic and grey literature. Sources were published between January 2000 – June 2021, were publicly available and include both UK and international studies. Searches were identified using Google and relevant electronic databases (PubMed, Science Direct, and Google Scholar) for priority sources. This literature and evidence review focussed on four key themes: (1) how public sexual harassment relates to other forms of violence against women and girls; (2) the impact of legal interventions; (3) the impact of other (non-legislative) interventions; and (4) the impact on girls' access to their rights.

We commissioned CHILDWISE to undertake a new quantitative survey for the purposes of this report. CHILDWISE

used a proprietary online panel of adults to reach 12–15-year-old girls via their parents, allowing for parental consent to interview to be given, and girls and young women aged 16-21 directly. The panel is one of the largest in the UK and globally, and strives to be as representative as possible. Quotas were set on region, area (urban/rural), socio-economic class, ethnicity and age. The final sample was 1,515 12–21-year-old girls and young women.

The report includes quotes from young women and adolescent girls who took part in focus groups and interviews commissioned by Plan International UK in 2019. The interviews and focus groups were on a range of topics related to girls' lives, which included public sexual harassment and safety in public spaces. Experienced youth researchers were commissioned across the UK and ethical research and safeguarding measures were adhered to.

## APPENDIX 1

### Analysis of laws on public sexual harassment (PSH) in other countries.

	Year Passed	Overview of Law	Penalty	Lessons Learned on Implementation of the Law
<b>Belgium</b>	2014	The law aims to combat sexism in public places. Courts can impose fines or prison sentences where the behaviour seriously and publicly despises a person because of their sex, including PSH. The concept of sexism is understood as “any gesture or act that, in the circumstances of Article 44 of the Penal Code, is evidently intended to express contempt for a person because of his gender, or that regards them as inferior or reduces them to their sexual dimension and which has the effect of violating someone’s dignity”. <sup>159</sup>	Prison sentence of one month to one year and/ or a fine of €50-€1000.	<p><b>Importance of publicising court convictions:</b> The first court conviction took place in November 2017 for an offence in 2016, but was only reported by the media in March 2018.<sup>160</sup> Belgium’s Institute for the Equality of Women and Men has emphasised the importance of media reporting to raise awareness of the law and encourage others to report cases.<sup>161</sup></p> <p><b>Potential for digital tools to encourage women to file police reports on PSH:</b> The Secretary of State for Equal Opportunities introduced a new app ‘HandsAway Brussels’ which allows victims and witnesses to report harassment to the police. The app was a result of cooperation by the Department with a local NGO. It aims to help the police with data collection and to adapt their patrols accordingly.<sup>162</sup> There is no data on the effectiveness of this app.</p> <p><b>Female plain-clothed police patrols</b> have been used to combat PSH in Liege and Brussels. It is not clear how effective the all-women patrols have been in stopping incidents, but they have been widely reported as part of International Women’s Day which could raise awareness of the law.<sup>163</sup></p>

	Year Passed	Overview of Law	Penalty	Lessons Learned on Implementation of the Law
<b>France</b>	2018	The law prohibits sexist insults, degrading or humiliating comments, or hostile and offensive sexual/sexist behaviour towards a person in public spaces. The fines can reach €1,500 for repeat offences or for offences involving a minor younger than 15, abuse of power, or a range of other aggravating circumstances. <sup>164</sup>	On-the-spot fines of €90-€750.	<p><b>On-the-spot fines avoid lengthy court processes:</b> The measure was chosen because of the high number of women who do not want to engage in long, difficult formal complaint processes.<sup>165</sup></p> <p><b>Over 700 criminal procedures</b> were registered in the first year of introduction of the new law.<sup>166</sup> Most fines have involved being caught in the act (“in flagrante delicto”) and have involved police officers being present. It remains challenging to secure direct evidence, and therefore the number of fines issued do not measure the true extent of PSH.<sup>167</sup></p> <p><b>Risks of under-punishing more serious offences:</b> The law has been critiqued for issuing small on-the-spot fines for serious sexual assaults. One case has been highlighted of a sexual assault case which should have been punishable by 5 years in prison and a €75,000 fine, but the Lyon Public Prosecutor’s Office ‘dequalified’ the facts and prosecuted for a simple sexist outrage.<sup>168</sup></p> <p><b>There remain many more unreported cases,</b> for example, the website ‘paye ta shnek’ recently recorded over 15,000 testimonials in the last few years<sup>169</sup> and Osez Le Féminisme, a feminist organisation, has observed that “the law represents progress, but is insufficient”.<sup>170</sup></p> <p><b>The need for laws to be accompanied by national plans and resources:</b> The proposed <b>Angela’s plan</b> includes six key components to implement the law: a network of safe places, a major communication plan, VTC platforms, on-demand bus stops, immediate justice and social media campaigns.<sup>171</sup></p>

	Year Passed	Overview of Law	Penalty	Lessons Learned on Implementation of the Law
<b>Portugal</b>	2015	Article 170 of the Penal Code defines PSH as “anyone who harasses another person, performing acts of an exhibitionist character, formulating proposals of a sexual nature or embarrassing them to sexual contact”. More serious sentences of 3 years are available for PSH against minors (under 14 years). <sup>172</sup>	Prison sentence of up to one year or a fine of €120.	<p><b>Importance of working with national media to clearly explain the scope of the law.</b></p> <p>The Portuguese amendment covers verbal harassment, but this was not clearly explained to the public. Sections of the media referred to the abuse as piropos (compliments) and false information was spread on social media. It was also important to explain that not every verbal comment was a crime; only threatening and intrusive comments in the form of a sexual proposal.<sup>173</sup></p> <p><b>Lack of official data on reported cases or convictions.</b></p> <p>A newspaper investigation into the implementation of the law found that neither the police nor the Public Prosecutor’s Office held data with “the intended specificity” on reported incidents or convictions.<sup>174</sup> It looks like in the first 3 years there were no convictions.<sup>175</sup></p>
<b>Netherlands (Cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam)</b>	2017	The cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam introduced the <i>Algemene Plaatselijke Verordening (APV)</i> – a municipal ban on street harassment, also known as the <i>sisverbod</i> (‘hissing ban’).	Fines of up to €100.	<p><b>Local legislation needs to align with national laws on freedom of expression.</b></p> <p>In 2018, a man was ordered to pay two fines of €100 for sexually harassing eight women on the street in Rotterdam. However, the ruling was overturned in the Court of Appeals because the local law was considered unconstitutional per Article 7 (Freedom of Expression) of the Dutch constitution.<sup>176</sup></p>

	Year Passed	Overview of Law	Penalty	Lessons Learned on Implementation of the Law
<b>The Philippines</b>	2017	The Safe Streets, Workplaces and Public Spaces Act seeks to penalise “unwanted comments, gestures, and actions forced on a person in a public place without their consent, and is directed at them because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation and identity”. <sup>177</sup> It outlines three categories (light, medium and severe) of acts constituting gender-based street and public spaces harassment. <sup>178</sup> The law also covers online sexual harassment, including threats made either publicly or through private messages.	Fines of up to 500,000 pesos (£7,790), community service or prison sentences of up to 6 months.	<p><b>Privately owned places open to the public are required to adopt a zero-tolerance policy against harassment.</b></p> <p>Restaurants, bars, cinemas and shops risk non-renewal of their business permit for non-compliance. All establishments are required to display clearly-visible warning signs with the anti-harassment hotline and to designate at least one anti-sexual harassment officer to receive complaints.<sup>179</sup></p> <p><b>Builds police capacity to enforce the law:</b></p> <p>The police are required to deputise as Anti-Sexual Harassment Enforcers (A-SHEs) who have the power to issue on-the-spot fines or orders for community service.<sup>180</sup></p> <p><b>Includes a register of offenders</b> to keep track of perpetrators’ offences, which is monitored by A-SHEs and Women and Children’s Desks at police stations.</p>
<b>Peru</b>	2015	Law No. 30,314 sees PSH as acts of a sexual, verbal or gestural nature, comments and advances of a sexual nature, obscene gestures that are unbearable, hostile, humiliating or offensive, improper touching, rubbing against the body, friction against the body or masturbation on transport or public places, exhibition or showing genitalia in transportation or public places.	Fine.	<p><b>Importance of prevention through national education systems:</b></p> <p>Article 9 of the law notes that the Ministry of Education must include preventive teaching against sexual harassment in public spaces in the curriculum, as well as other activities aimed at training education staff and establishing reporting mechanisms.</p> <p><b>Importance of the need to build the capacity of public officials</b> responsible for implementing the law, including training the police, transport staff, teachers, health workers, regional authorities and relevant ministries (Articles 7, 9, 10, 11, 12).</p> <p><b>Includes a register of public spaces offenders</b> which is publicly available (Article 12).</p>



	Year Passed	Overview of Law	Penalty	Lessons Learned on Implementation of the Law
<b>Brazil</b>	2018	Law no. 13.718 defines PSH as a crime. Article 215-A states: “to practice against someone and without their consent, a libidinous act with the aim of satisfying their own lust or that of a third party”. It also includes the disclosure of a sex scene, pornography, rape scene or rape of vulnerable person.	Prison sentence of 1-5 years.	<p><b>Importance of raising awareness about sexual harassment at public events</b> such as carnivals, festivals and public concerts. In Brazil, police departments distribute rape whistles and inform carnival-goers of the women-only police station and the reporting hotline.</p> <p><b>Reporting may increase in the short term due to increased awareness.</b> The success of national campaigns led to an increase in reports of sexual harassment during festivals. A 2020 survey found almost half (48%) of women who attend carnival events experience some form of sexual harassment.<sup>181</sup></p>
<b>Argentina – City of Buenos Aires</b>	2016	The city of Buenos Aires approved law no. 5742 to “prevent and punish sexual harassment in public spaces or public access, verbal or physical, that harass, mistreat or intimidate and generally affect the dignity, freedom, free movement and the right to the physical or moral integrity of persons, based on their gender, identity and/or sexual orientation”. The act does not constitute a crime. <sup>182</sup>	Fine of 200-1000 pesos or 2-10 days of public utility work.	<p><b>A law alone is not enough:</b> In the first year of the law, there was only one report of PSH. The Department of Women then introduced other measures to complement the law and raise awareness.</p> <p><b>Now includes regular public education campaigns</b> to change attitudes towards harassing behaviour in public spaces. In 2018, the Government ran an advertising focused on believing and supporting women. There are also annual Anti-Street Harassment Days.</p> <p><b>Research and data collection is important</b> to raise awareness of the scale of the issue and monitor the law.<sup>183</sup></p>

	Year Passed	Overview of Law	Penalty	Lessons Learned on Implementation of the Law
<b>Chile</b>	2019	Law no. 21153 covers acts of a verbal nature or those performed by means of gestures, acts of obscene exhibitionism or explicit sexual content and those who capture, record, film or photograph images, videos or any audio-visual recording of the genitalia or other intimate part of the body of another person for purposes of sexual significance and without their consent.	A fine of 1-10 monthly tax units with the option of a prison sentence.	<b>Increase in reporting:</b> Between January and June 2020, calls reporting sexual harassment more than tripled. Rape, sexual abuse, and other sex crimes reported to police rose to 17,950, the highest in a decade (although it should be noted that this coincided with the COVID-19 period). <sup>184</sup>
<b>Costa Rica</b>	2020	Law no. 9877 understands PSH as “all conduct or conducts with sexual connotations and with a unidirectional nature, without the consent or acceptance of the person or persons to whom it is directed, with the potential to cause annoyance, discomfort, intimidation, humiliation, insecurity, fear and offence, which generally comes from a person unknown to the recipient and which takes place in public spaces or public access”.	Prison sentence of up to one year.	<b>Safe learning spaces</b> can help challenge norms around sexual harassment in the workplace and public spaces. In Costa Rica, UNOPS has worked with the Government and private sector to roll out training workshops with construction and infrastructure workers aimed at ending sexual harassment. <sup>185</sup>
<b>Ecuador</b>	2012	Quito’s Municipal Council adopted legislation to prevent sexual harassment in public spaces and on the transport system in the City Ordinance. <sup>186</sup>	Prison sentences of up to 3 years	<b>High levels of reporting of cases due to awareness-raising campaigns and reporting mechanisms.</b> For example, ‘Cabinas cuentame’ (Tell me booths’) and ‘Bajale al Acoso’ (SMS text message systems) for women to report sexual harassment on public transport. By July 2018, there had been more than 1,900 reports, with 53 cases under investigation and 11 convictions.  <b>Quito is part of the global Safe Cities for Women and Girls</b> , coordinated by UN Women, which has involved strengthening the capacity of the municipal authority and communities to address sexual harassment in public spaces. The programme has also involved extensive training of police and transport officials.

				<b>Design of gender-sensitive transport infrastructure</b> to prevent sexual harassment, for example, the Trolebus bus stops include glass-walled design to give better interior and exterior visibility for passenger safety. <sup>187</sup>
<b>Egypt</b>	2014	The law amends article 306A in the penal code to criminalise harassment in the form of words, gestures and actions expressed in person or through other means of communication. More severe sentences are available for offenders in a position of authority over the complainant and for over the complainant and for perpetrators. <sup>188</sup>	Prison sentences of 6 months and a fine of 3000 Egyptian pounds (£138)	<p><b>A new women’s police unit</b> was established within the Ministry of Interior to enforce the law and counter sexual harassment.<sup>189</sup></p> <p><b>In 2020, a new law was introduced to protect victims’ identity and address low levels of reporting.</b> The law protects the identity of victims of sexual harassment and assault and is aimed at encouraging women who are worried about retribution or stigma to report such crimes.<sup>190</sup></p>

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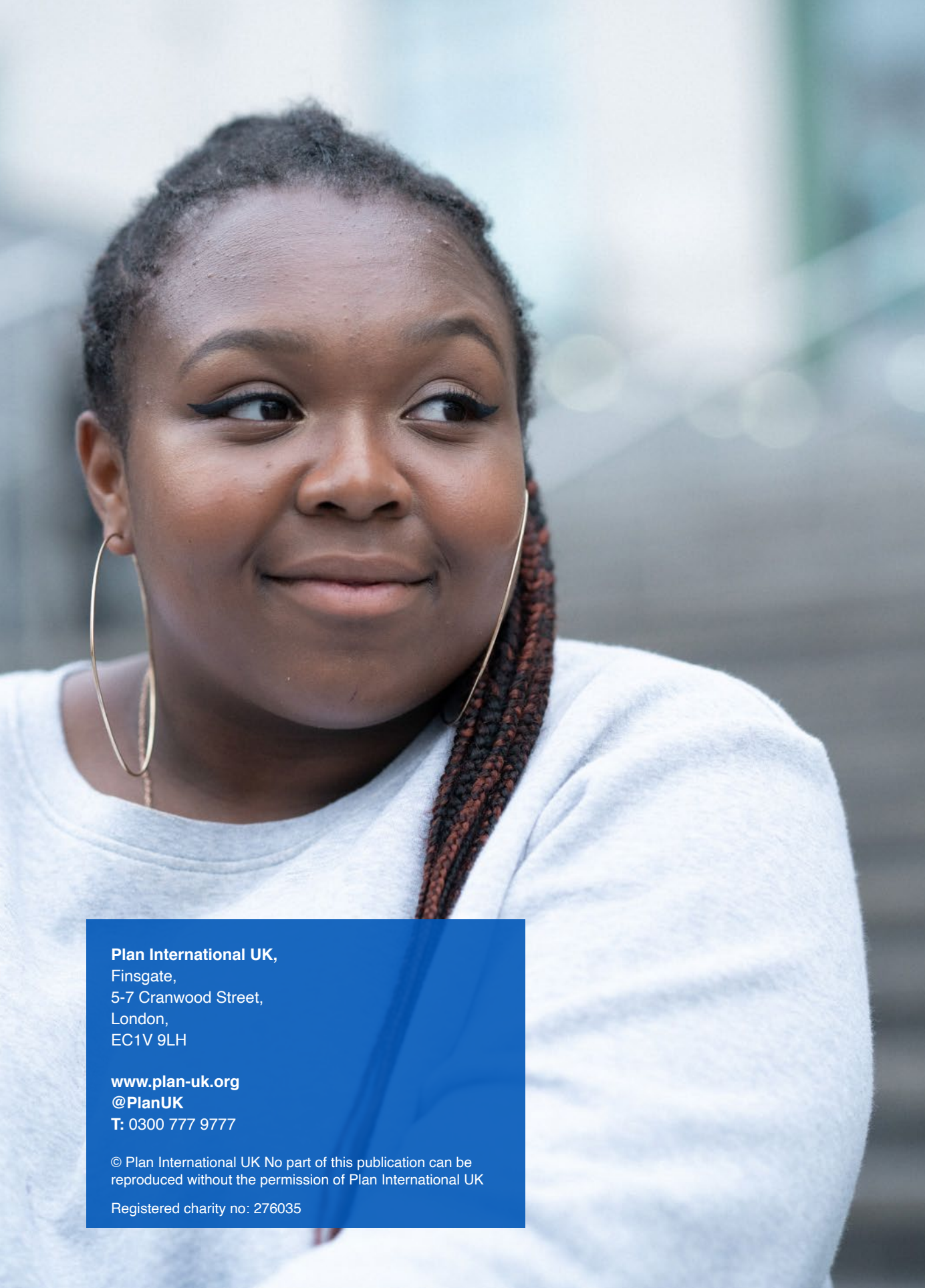
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