



LEEDS WOMEN'S SAFETY SURVEY

WOMEN'S LIVES LEEDS
Empowering Women and Girls in Leeds



Executive Summary
October 2021

Women Friendly Leeds
Website: womenfriendlyleeds.org
Twitter: [@womenfriendlyls](https://twitter.com/womenfriendlyls)
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Foreword by

TRACY BRABIN,

WEST YORKSHIRE MAYOR



A whole societal approach with a collective responsibility.

Tracey Brabin, West Yorkshire Mayor

As we recover from the senseless and tragic murders of Bibaa Henry, Nicole Smallwood and Sarah Everard, women will, as they always have done, continue to take measures to keep themselves safe.

The safety of women and girls is of great concern to me and a key pledge of my Mayoral manifesto. That's why I'm delighted to put safety at the heart of my Police and Crime Plan.

I have had lots of conversations with people about women and girl's safety across the whole of West Yorkshire, and the overwhelming response to Women's Lives Leeds's Safety Survey shows the alarming and shocking breadth of negative experiences women and girls face in Leeds.

In order to create meaningful and lasting change for women and girls in our area we need to tackle the issue

of public safety head on and adopt a whole societal approach with a collective responsibility.

I am dedicated to addressing the issue of women and girl's safety and that all women and girls have the right to both be and feel safe, in their homes, the community, on public transport and in the city centre, regardless of time, location or who they are with.

Women and girls across the whole of West Yorkshire, deserve to be able to enjoy their cities in safety, so that's why I endorse this report and its recommendations and fully support Women's Lives Leeds ambition of becoming the UK's 1st Women Friendly City.

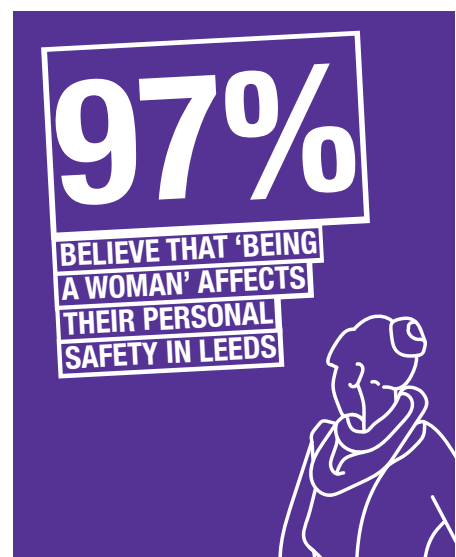
A handwritten signature of Tracy Brabin in black ink.

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INTRODUCTION

The Leeds Women's Safety Survey was carried out in May 2021 and 1,371 women of all ages, and from all parts of the city, took part. The findings provide a powerful insight into their experience of feeling and being safe in the city. They show that despite heightened awareness, successive government strategies and decades of campaigning, day to day abuse and harassment of women remains so common that it is all too often accepted as 'normal'.

A shocking 97% of respondents to our survey said that simply 'being a woman' affects their personal safety in Leeds. And 73% of the women who identified as Black/Black British, Asian/Asian British or mixed heritage thought that their personal safety was also affected by their race or culture.



SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

01 How safe women feel in Leeds has an impact on their wellbeing

How safe women feel in Leeds has an impact on their wellbeing. Feeling unsafe restricts women's choices and freedom of movement. The good news is that overall, most women feel reasonably safe when out and about in Leeds during the day. However, it's a very different picture after dark when 64% of women feel 'not very' or 'not at all' safe. Walking in the city centre at night was of most concern, with 50% of women saying they always or often feel unsafe doing this. However, staying close to home feels only a little safer – 43% of women always or often feel unsafe walking in their local area at night.

Some contexts feel particularly unsafe for some women – for example, 21% of women always or often feel unsafe when getting a taxi or ride-share. While public transport generally feels safer, around 11% of women still always or often feel unsafe in this context. 1 in 5 women always or often feel unsafe when exercising in an outdoor public space and the same proportion feel unsafe if they are on their own in a pub. Other situations that can feel unsafe include cycling after dark, waiting at bus stops or taxi ranks, driving or parking their car, walking in rural or wooded areas, or using unisex toilets.

02 The thing that makes women feel most unsafe

The thing that makes women feel most unsafe when out and about in Leeds is men's behaviour towards women – this was highlighted by 81% of survey respondents.

Drunken behaviour, lack of people in some areas and poor lighting were also identified as factors by more than 70% of women, and over half cited a lack of visible policing as affecting how safe they felt.

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This is a problem of men not women. Until men's attitudes towards women change, women's safety will continue to be a problem.

03 Women's experiences of abuse and harassment

Women's experiences of abuse and harassment demonstrate that women in Leeds do not just feel unsafe but frequently experience unwanted, frightening or intimidating behaviour in public spaces. 85% of those responding to the survey had experienced being leered at, cat-called or wolf whistled. 74% had experienced sexual comments or jokes, 58% unwelcome touching or groping, 50% unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favours, 45% had been followed or stalked, 27% had been flashed at and 21% - one in five women - had suffered sexual assault or rape.

“I've been spat at, my bag taken and emptied all over the ground with the contents rifled and mocked before my money and anything valuable was stolen. I've been surrounded by men threatening to rape me if I didn't go with them willingly.”

84% of women said that these incidents had taken place in Leeds city centre, 72% in venues such as pubs, clubs and restaurants, 45% in parks and other open spaces and 43% on public transport.

70% of women said their experiences of harassment or assault had impacted on their confidence, 68% avoided certain places as a result and 48% said their mental health had been affected.

“It caused me to avoid certain situations. It made me feel angry and frustrated that I can't be out in public without being harassed for being a woman.”

04 Measures women take to try to protect themselves

Measures women take to try to protect themselves include avoiding certain places (91%), walking fast (83%), crossing the road to avoid men (81%) or avoiding interactions with strangers (77%). 64% said they carry keys in their hands or hairspray/pepper spray and 40% said they dressed in a certain way to try to minimise risk.

05 Reporting of incidents

Reporting of incidents is very low. We asked whether women had reported incidents to anyone official (e.g. the police or a venue manager). Only 1% of women who had been cat called or leered at had ever reported the incident. Fewer than one in ten women who had experienced being followed/stalked or flashed at said they'd reported it. Of the 269 women who had been raped or sexually assaulted, just 80 – fewer than 1 in 3 - had reported it. Asked why they hadn't reported, 73% said it was because they didn't think reporting would help.

Asked what would make them more likely to report incidents in the future, the two most common factors were: knowing they'd be taken seriously (80%) and being confident that reporting would prevent it happening again (73%). Over 60% thought that knowing what could be reported and how to do it or having a convenient reporting tool was important. 48% said that more female police officers to report to would help.

06 Views on existing safety initiatives

Views on existing safety initiatives were sought by the survey but only 229 women responded to this question, and of these 100 said they didn't know of any such initiatives. 30 women referred to the 'Ask for Angela' scheme.

Most liked the idea, and wanted it to be better known, but thought there needed to be much more clarity about how it worked, or in which venues it was adopted, so that women would be confident to use it.



07 Women's views on the changes they want to see in Leeds

Women's views on the changes they want to see in Leeds were gathered via an open question that enabled women to tell us in their own words what changes they wanted to see. Responses included ideas for:

1 Better Policing

Many women said they wanted a more visible police presence and emphasised the importance of female police officers, particularly as first responders to incidents of abuse and assault. Women wanted reports to be taken seriously and not to be blamed or treated in a sexist or derogatory manner. They suggested the need for ongoing training to foster a better understanding of the issues and barriers women face to reporting.

There was also a call for non-legal responses, such as policies and sanctions, to deter sexist and intimidating behaviours such as cat calling and wolf whistling.



We shouldn't have to put up with the small, daily aggressions that wouldn't be taken seriously if reported but when go unchallenged might lead to worse behaviours.

2 Easier Reporting

Women said they needed to know more about what could be reported and how to do so, have confidence that they would be believed and be treated with dignity, and that something would be done as a result. All available reporting options needed to be better publicised.

There was support for reporting options that were an alternative to the police, were easy to use and could be anonymous, such as a safety app. (It was also suggested that an app could be a useful tool for knowing which venues and spaces were rated safe by other app users.)



3 Social change through education and awareness raising

It was widely recognised that real improvement in women's safety depended on changes in the whole of society. Women wanted men to better understand the impact their behaviour could have and to take more responsibility for their own behaviour and that of other men. It was suggested that education needed to start early in schools, and a highly visible public awareness campaign to communicate that Leeds was taking a zero-tolerance approach to the abuse and harassment of women and girls was advocated by many respondents.

4 Place based changes

A variety of place-based changes were suggested by women. These ranged from better lighting and CCTV, to providing better cycling infrastructure, single sex toilets and leisure/fitness facilities. The idea of female safety staff operating in the city at night was widely supported and a city-centre 'safety hub' was also suggested.

5 Safer Transport

Women wanted bus stops with good lighting, accurate signage, clear visibility and panic buttons fitted, and buses themselves to be cheaper, more frequent and later running. Popular ideas for taxis included licencing to be subject to the completion of training in women's safety and a women-only taxi service.

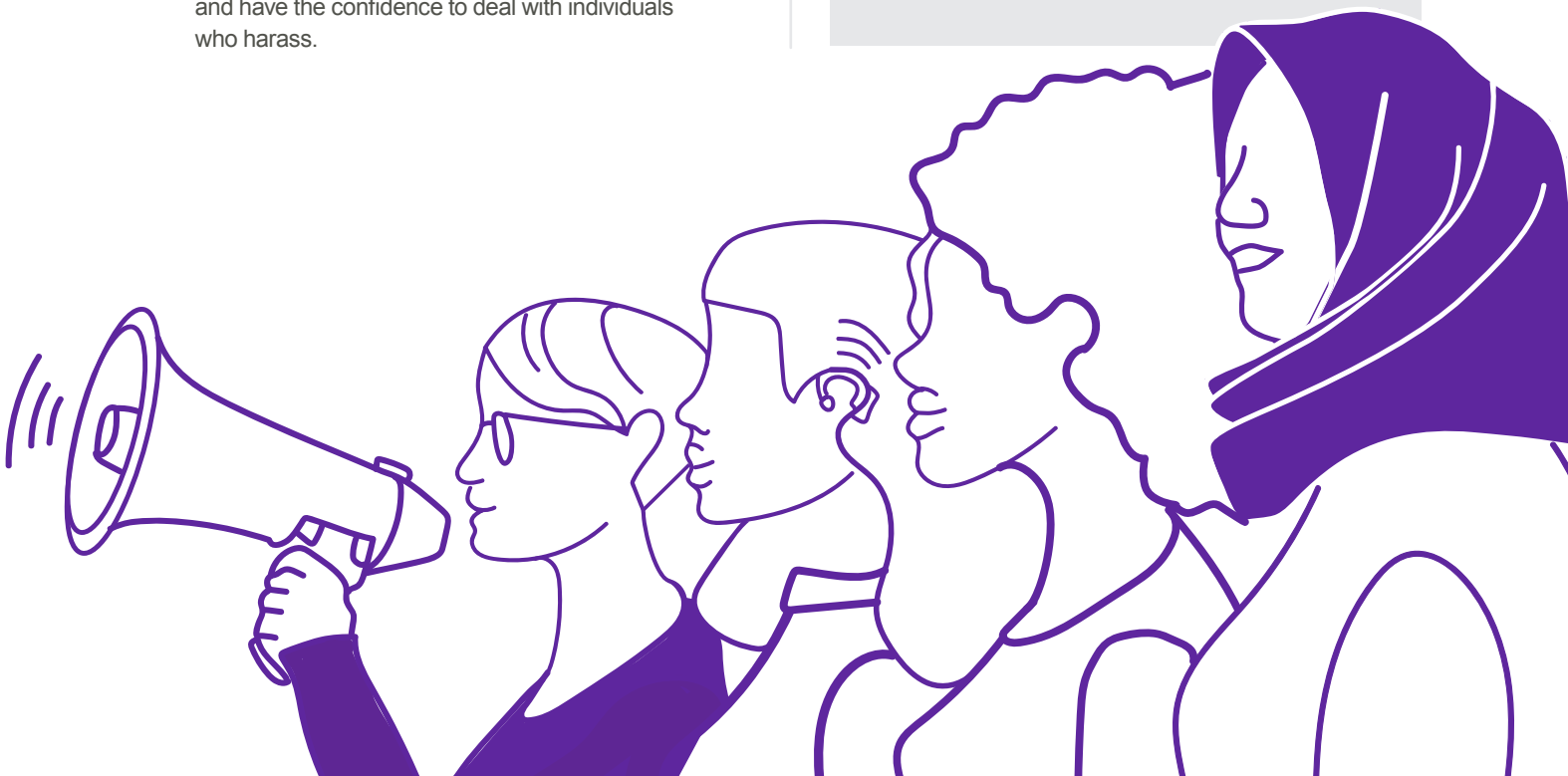
6 Venues

Respondents called for the greater promotion of safety schemes such as "Ask for Angela" or the development of a 'Women Friendly Venue' scheme and training for all night-time economy staff. They wanted venues to take harassment more seriously and have the confidence to deal with individuals who harass.

We need to work on changing men's attitudes towards women in the first place. I think there should be a push for initiatives and campaigns where men stand up and call other men out...

To normalise calling someone out for even the small things that we usually dismiss, a rude comment or joke. When respect for women becomes ingrained then we will hopefully have less rape and sexual abuse.

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CONCLUSION

The report of our Leeds women's safety survey has coincided with the publication by the Home Office of a new national strategy on violence against women and girls. Many of the issues and priorities identified by women in Leeds are reflected in this strategy, providing an opportunity for Leeds and West Yorkshire to get ahead of the game in developing robust regional and local plans.



Three main priorities emerge from this survey:

1

Tackling the attitudes and behaviour which underpin violence against women and girls

2

Making city environments safer

3

Increasing reporting and improving responses

The responsibility for addressing these lies with a wide range of organisations and individuals. All need to play a role but none can achieve change on their own. We need a whole societal approach to raise the profile and awareness of the issue of safety for women and girls. We need to give all citizens the tools to take action and give a clear message that Leeds takes a zero-tolerance approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Develop and implement a Women and Girls Safety Campaign** clearly conveying that Leeds takes a zero-tolerance approach to sexist behaviour, violence, abuse and harassment of women and girls. "Don't do it, Call it out, and report it"
2. **Prioritise programmes of education and awareness raising** to include whole school approaches to challenging violence against women and girls in schools and other education establishments; the development of accredited workshops for men with the aim of supporting them to actively be part of the solution, consider women's experience and make pledges to support women's safety.
3. **Develop a night-time city centre safety plan** which includes creating a safe space where women can get help; an increase in visible women safety wardens and the implementation of a Women Friendly Venue scheme to ensure that venues play their part in creating safer environments and challenging abusive behaviour.
4. **Promote safer transport** including additional staff on buses, an audit of bus stops to identify and address poor lighting and other unsafe features; the commissioning of a women-only taxi offer.
5. **Create more accessible mechanisms for women to report incidents** of abuse and harassment, including for Leeds to implement the women and girls on-line StreetSafe tool launched by the Home Office', and for West Yorkshire Police to actively consult with women and girls around their existing reporting processes and act upon the findings. We further recommend that female police officers respond to every report of sexual violence, not just when this is specifically requested.
6. **Involve Women and Girls in decisions so that leaders "Ask us and Include us, before you decide"** by ensuring that women and girls are included in partnerships and conversations that address women and girl's safety and that West Yorkshire leaders and partnerships commit to enabling women and girls from Leeds to represent their communities in regional conversations.

THANK YOU



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