

The Harlow Women's Safety Charter



Women's Safety
In Harlow

The Safer Harlow Partnership

Working together for a safer community



Contents



Women's Safety
In Harlow

- Introduction
- Women's Safety as a priority
- The Harlow Women's Safety Charter
- The Campaign Message
- Campaign Support
- The Pledge
- Toolkit, Reporting & Reviewing
- Survey Responses
- Focus Groups

Introduction



Women's Safety
In Harlow

It's a sad fact that, in 2024, women still do not feel safe on our streets. In the last few years, we have seen some horrific headlines about violence against women – crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls.

When it comes to perceptions of personal safety, the latest Office for National Statistics survey, found that almost three times as many women feel “a bit” or “very” unsafe after dark (31% of women compared to 13% of men) in public spaces. Women and girls face much higher levels of sexual violence than the rest of society and, sadly, our towns and cities in Essex are not immune to this reality.

The National Police Chief's Council reported that “between October 2021 and March 2022, over 507,827 VAWG crimes were recorded, amounting to 16 per cent of all crime over that period”

In a recent survey by Essex County Council, almost half of women reported feeling unsafe at night. But it's not just after dark when women feel susceptible to gendered violence.

Women's everyday experience is marred by having to change their behaviours to reduce the likelihood of experiencing some kind of harassment, assault or worse. From choosing a different route home, taking public transport rather than walking, always staying in groups, women are continuously considering their safety in a way that men don't.

Data from Essex Police demonstrates that, where gender is detailed, over half of victims of Violence Against the Person (VAP) offences identified as female (56.3%). From 2022-2023, there were 47,362 VAP offences committed against women and girls. And we don't think this is right. Women and girls should feel safe wherever they are, whatever the time of day, which is why we have developed the Harlow Women's Safety Charter to improve experiences for women in our town.

Women's Safety as a priority



Women's Safety
In Harlow

In 2021, the police watchdog, HMICFRS, stated that we are facing an “epidemic of violence against women”. Calling on the government for a speedy and meaningful commitment to tackle the increasing rates of these crimes, HMICFRS called on councils, schools, and health and social care bodies to work together with the criminal justice system to address the problem.

At the Safer Harlow Partnership, we believe that women's safety must be prioritised as a matter of urgency and, last year, we began work on the Women's Safety In Harlow Project to improve women's and girls' feelings of safety in our town.

The real, lived experiences of women have shaped the Harlow Women's Safety Charter, with research conducted in partnership with Karen Whybro Consultants to gather the views and experiences of residents and those who work in Harlow. This research indicated that safety is a concern for everyone, but that women feel disproportionately at risk of experiencing harm in every walk of life, during the day as well as at night.

I want to go for a run early in the morning but I can't because I am scared.

Immigrant Harlow Resident

I want my daughter to grow up knowing she is as safe as her male peers. I don't want to explain to her that she has to change her behaviour as I have done my whole life in order to be safe.

Harlow Resident

As an older woman, I worry I can't get away quickly.

Older Resident

There's no footfall in town which makes it scary.

Harlow Resident

The buses are empty and even then I have to walk at the other end.

Harlow Resident

I get followed off the bus regularly.

Teenage Girl

I'm fearful of erratic behaviour – one minute they're nice, to then, turn violent.

Harlow Resident

Harlow's Women's Safety Charter



Our The Safer Harlow Partnership team works hard to ensure our town is a safe place for visitors and residents to enjoy. We also recognise that particular groups of people have specific concerns and needs and the research has indicated that women and girls disproportionately feel unsafe in public spaces in our town.

To year ending September 2023, there were 2,544 violence against women and girls (VAWG) police recorded crimes in Harlow. Of these, 387 took place in public spaces and 705 in organisations. Police data shows that these types offences have decreased from 2022, however, it must always be noted that recorded police data only presents incidents reported to police.

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Charities and services working with victim-survivors of violence against women and girls in Harlow have reported an increase in demand for services, especially in respect of domestic abuse.

“
**SAFETY IS NOT THE ABSENCE
OF THREAT - IT IS A
PRESENCE OF CONNECTION**
”

Gabor Maté

Harlow's Women's Safety Charter



As part of our commitment to improve the experiences of women in our town, The Safer Harlow Partnership and Women's Safety Consultant, Karen Whybro, have created a Women's Safety Charter which brings together members of our community to deliver Safe Spaces around the town, with trained staff members who cultivate a safe environment for all.



Local businesses and organisations pledge to prioritise women's safety by ensuring their space is a safe, respectful and inclusive place to be. Signing up to the Charter includes pledging their commitment to a range of tasks, training and continued professional development which ensures staff and members prioritise women's safety as a standard.

In addition, the Charter calls on all members of our community to consider their attitudes and behaviour to become a more positive place for women and girls. We believe that everybody has a role to play in creating and sustaining a respectful and inclusive culture for all.

Through our media campaigns, we will highlight the experiences of women and challenge misogynistic behaviour in order that Harlow is recognised as a progressive place, championing women's safety throughout the town.



Working together for a safer community



The Campaign Message



Women's Safety
In Harlow

WHAT PART DO YOU PLAY?

We believe that every individual can play their part in making our community safer. It is our responsibility to keep ourselves safe but also to help sustain a culture where safety is a protected right for all. Women do not feel safe on our streets and we are calling on every member of our community to improve their experience through challenging current beliefs and behaviours, promoting women's issues and offering a place of sanctity for those who need support.

WHAT PART DO YOU PLAY?

Did you know that when a man is lingering too close and for too long behind a lone woman, she can feel intimidated? There are steps you can take to help her feel safer.

If you are walking behind a woman, especially in a quiet or dark environment, she may be feeling uneasy. She takes her headphones out to hear better, she probably feels anxious about your presence. We ask that you think about your actions in these scenarios and be aware of how others are feeling.

Women's Safety In Harlow encourages you to consider how your words or actions may feel to others. Find out more by scanning the QR code.

The Safer Harlow Partnership | Harlow | KAREN WHYBRO

WHAT PART DO YOU PLAY?

We all like meeting new people and being friendly to our neighbours. Sometimes "harmless chat" can cross the line into being intrusive and it's important to consider whether people feel intimidated or threatened by our behaviours.

Whatever your intentions, it's important to consider whether someone is feeling unsafe by your persistence. To learn more about how to ensure women feel safe in our city, check out the Women's Safety Charter.

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The Safer Harlow Partnership | Harlow | KAREN WHYBRO

WHAT PART DO YOU PLAY?

Have you ever tried to convince a woman who has already said "no" to you? Have you ever repeatedly insisted that someone talk to you when they have already told you they aren't interested? This is harassment and can make a woman feel intimidated and threatened.

What might seem funny or innocent to you when repeatedly bothering someone, is harassing and frustrating for her. This can make her feel unsafe. Think about the impact your behaviour has on others. To learn more about how to help women feel safer in Harlow, check out the Women's Safety Charter.

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The Safer Harlow Partnership | Harlow | KAREN WHYBRO

A 2023 YouGov survey has found that over three-quarters of UK adults think improved safety procedures in bars, pubs and nightclubs is necessary in the wake of high-profile cases of violence against women and girls.

Similarly, a survey by Budweiser in the same year found that 53% of women would be more inclined to visit a venue that has anti-harassment and discrimination policies, compared to men (35%).

Campaign Support



Women's Safety
In Harlow

Whether you're a business owner, manager of a team, community leader or member of any organisation in Harlow, you have a role to play in ensuring our town is a safe and welcoming place.

Being an advocate for women means ensuring that a culture is upheld that is committed to prioritising their safety. Organisations signing up to the Charter will allocate a member of staff who leads on its aims and every person in that organisation must also be committed to being active guardians of the culture that centres women's experiences.

Every business or organisation who signs up to the Harlow Women's Safety Charter will benefit from a range of support to positively impact your space and the experience of everyone using it. We will provide training for your team, guidance, support and a bank of resources for you to use to help create and sustain a positive culture for women throughout your space and your team.



We will train your team on how to create a safe space for women, how to introduce and implement gender equality policies and practices and embed positive culture to ensure the Charter is effective in the long term.

The Pledge



Women's Safety
In Harlow

Being part of the Harlow Women's Safety Charter requires a commitment from each business or organisation to make a pledge. The pledge forms the actions an organisation must take to be considered a "Safe Space".

This involves committing to staff culture training, considering physical changes to your space and utilising our bank of resources to ensure your intentions towards making a safe space for women is prominent and clear.

Organisations are required to make 5 pledges, as follows, to verify their space as safe for women:

1

Allocate a nominated Charter Leader



2

Train staff members to become "custodians of culture"



3

Clearly display media which sets expectations of behaviour, both physically and online



4

Signpost people who require support to the best source of help



5

Consider making changes to physical space to promote safety



Toolkit, Reporting & Reviewing



Women's Safety
In Harlow

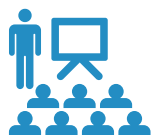
Every organisation committing to the Harlow Women's Safety Charter is provided with a package of resources and guidance to ensure that they are supported from signing up, through to reviewing the impact of their safe space on women's experiences long-term.



A bank of physical and digital media resources



Audit for staff and visitors to identify what can be improved and what is working in your space



Training for staff and members in creating a positive culture



Resources for implementing positive change in the physical space and working policy and practice



Support and information on organisations to signpost members/visitors to who may be in need

Localised Survey Responses

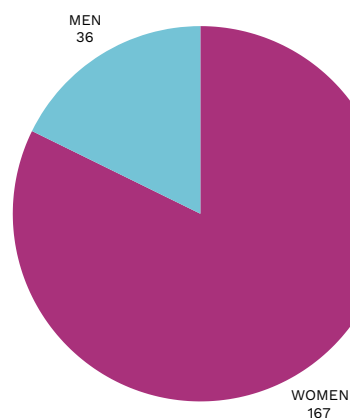


Women's Safety
In Harlow

203 RESPONDENTS

167 WOMEN

36 MEN

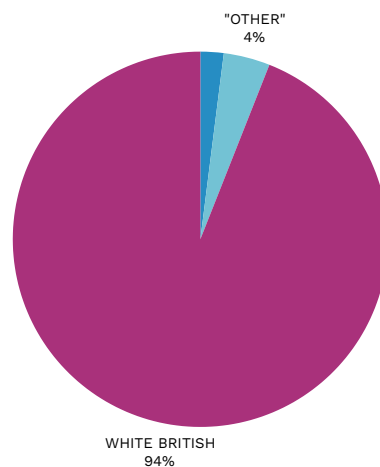


ETHNICITY

94% WHITE BRITISH

2% ASIAN

4% "OTHER"



AGE DEMOGRAPHICS

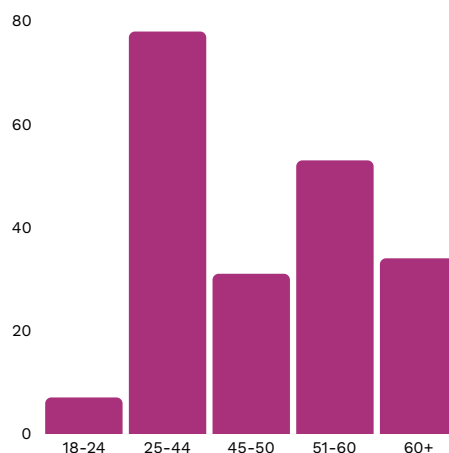
18 -24

25 - 44

45 - 50

51 - 60

60+



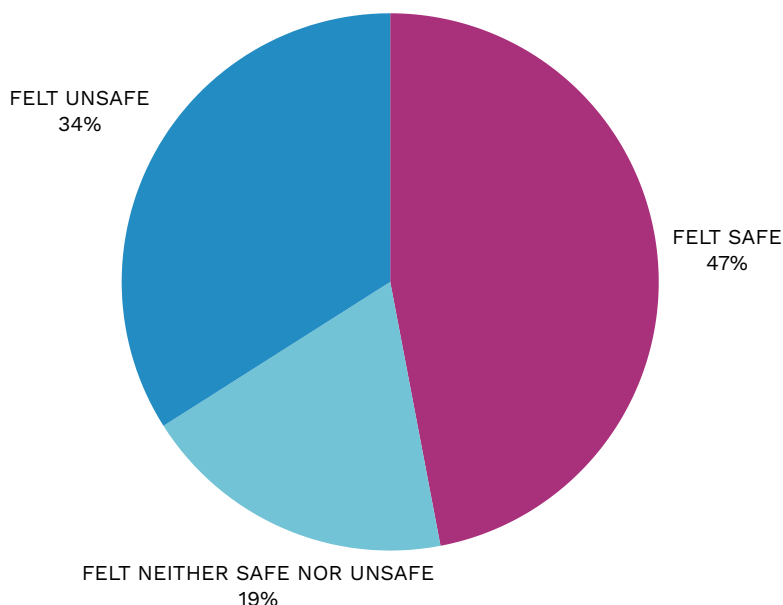
SURVEY RESPONSES

Topline Findings

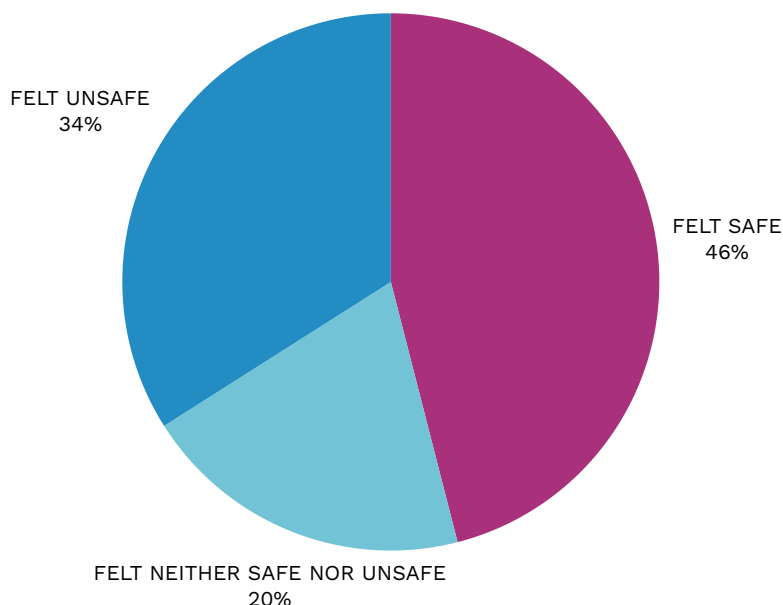


HOW SAFE PEOPLE FEEL IN HARLOW (DAYTIME)

DAYTIME MEN & WOMEN



DAYTIME WOMEN



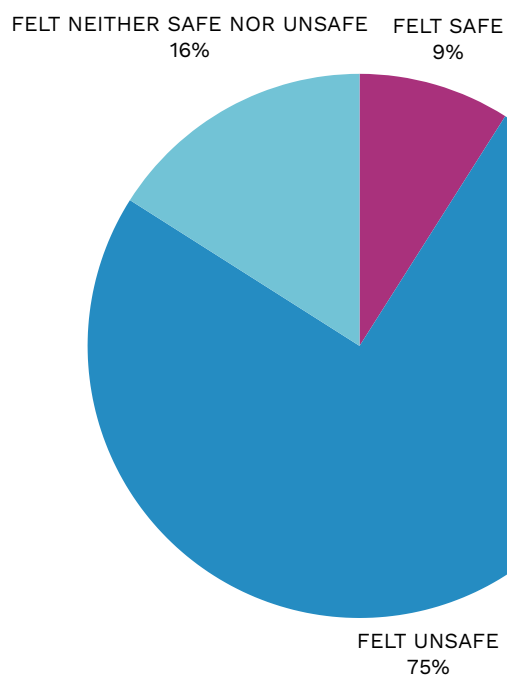
SURVEY RESPONSES

Topline Findings

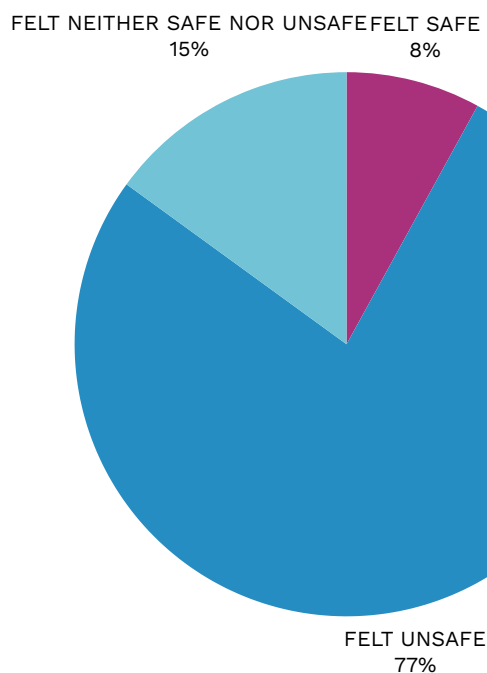


HOW SAFE PEOPLE FEEL IN HARLOW (NIGHTTIME)

NIGHTTIME MEN & WOMEN



NIGHTTIME WOMEN

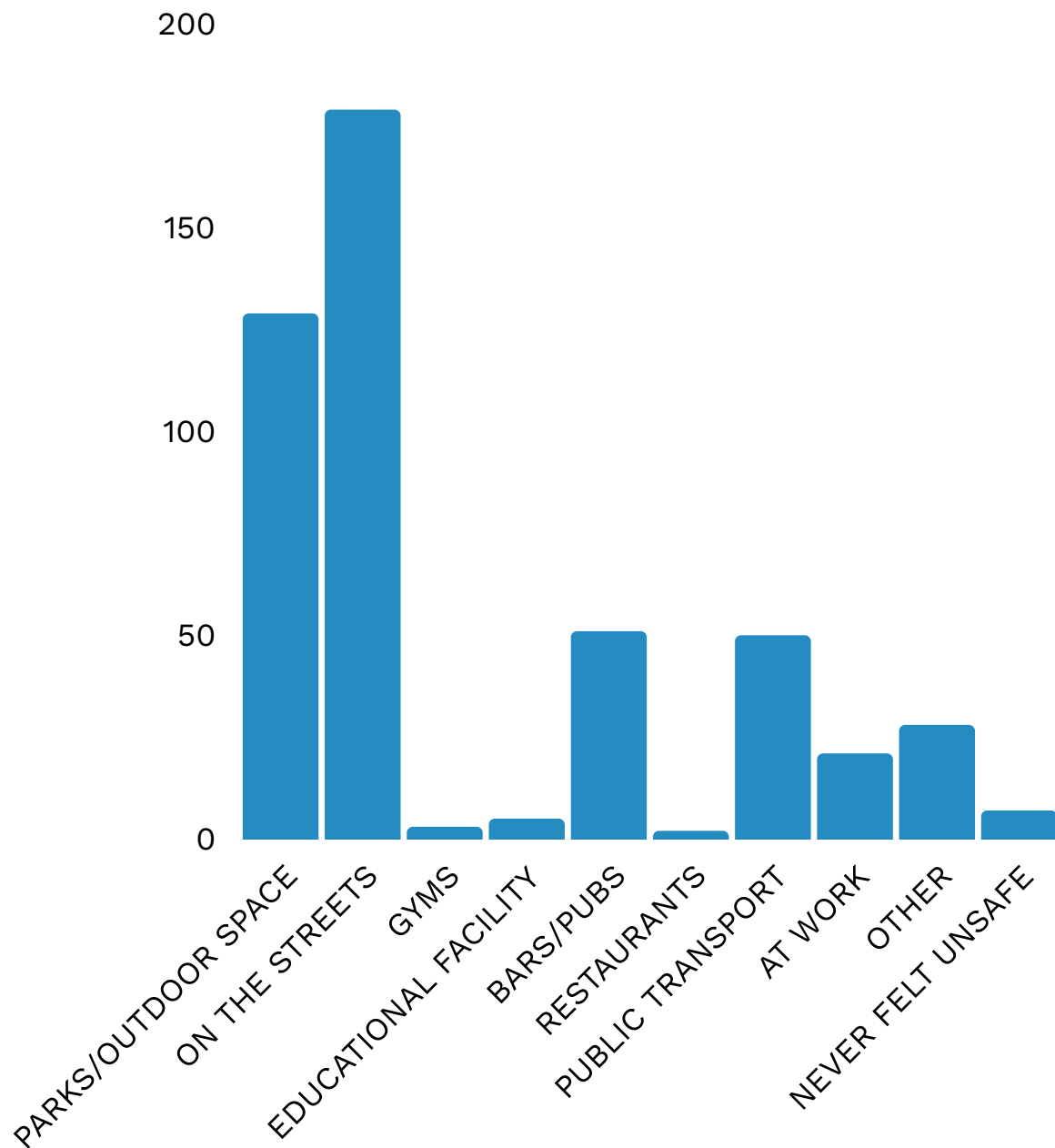


SURVEY REPSONSES

Unsafe Places



SPECIFIC PLACES WOMEN FEEL UNSAFE IN HARLOW?



Unsafe Spaces



UNSAFE IN HARLOW?



TOP 3 RESPONSES

1. Market square/town centre
2. The Stow
3. Staple Tye

Reported Behaviours



shouting

people groups

staring

behaviour drug

fighting

drinking

dealing

smoking

begging

public

alcohol

youths

loud

fights

dark

taking

verbal

around

cars

drugs

feel

young

bikes

streets

catcalling

men

police

night

arguing

drunks

large

swearing

following

deals

scooters

antisocial

town

hoodies

just

walking

comments

intimidating

drunk

abuse

drunken

hanging

- 1.Groups of men/young people hanging around
- 2.Shouting/catcalling/intimidating behaviour
- 3.Street drinking

What would help?



WHAT WOMEN SAY WOULD HELP THEM FEEL SAFER IN HARLOW.



1. Better lighting
2. Increased Police presence
3. Behaviour change

Focus Groups



As a second phase of research, individual and focus group interviews were held with different demographics of women and girls to gain further insight into their feelings of safety and unsafety.

Discussions started with asking women and girls how safe they feel in their local area on a scale of 1 (not safe at all) to 5 (extremely safe). Further questions explored ideas around features of their local area, types of behaviours they witnessed and experienced and what could be done to effect better feelings of safety for women and girls. The most common themes of these discussions have been pulled together through thematic analysis to illustrate pertinent findings from this research.

How safe do you feel in Harlow during the daytime?

ACTUAL RESPONSES
<i>"I would score Harlow 3/5 on how safe I feel in daytime but 1/5 at night"</i>
<i>"I would score Harlow 2/5 on how safe I feel in daytime but 1/5 at night"</i>
<i>"I wouldn't go into town on my own at night"</i>
<i>"I'd scored Harlow 2 on how safe I feel at night" (female teenage resident)</i>

Common themes

- After dark evokes most fear
- Feelings of unsafety changes how women move around Harlow after dark

Overall observations

- Feelings of safety vary throughout day

Focus Groups



Women's Safety
In Harlow

How safe do you feel in Harlow after dark?

RESPONSES, QUOTES AND COMMENTS
<i>"There are some corners where no one can see you"</i>
<i>"We need to consider this in planning stages!"</i>
<i>"Get rid of some of the alleyways and blind spots"</i>
<i>"The cycle tracks are so nice but I wouldn't do them alone"</i>
<i>"No footfall in town makes it scary"</i>
<i>"Areas look unkept and untidy"</i>
<i>"We need staff on transport"</i>
<i>"Cameras make me feel safer"</i>
<i>"Cameras are spray-painted and broken"</i>

Common themes

- Certain design elements/lack of light/structures increase the feeling of unsafety
- "Busyness" affects feelings of safety
- Surveillance increases the feeling of safety

Overall observations

- Design has impact on how safe/unsafe women/girls feel

Focus Groups



Women's Safety
In Harlow

Do you think intersectionality impacts how safe women and girls feel? (For example, do women who are from marginalised groups, disabled or race and/or age, impact their feelings of safety?)

RESPONSES, QUOTES AND COMMENTS
<i>"Being an older women, I can't get away quickly"</i>
<i>"Being older, I'm unobvious as a target"</i>
<i>"Having a visible disability makes you more vulnerable"</i>
<i>"Young girls experience it just for being female"</i>
<i>"I get followed regularly" (teenage resident)</i>
<i>"More police presence is needed"</i>
<i>"Vandalism is a problem"</i>
<i>"Men drinking on the street"</i>

Common themes

- Age makes women feel more vulnerable, whether young or older
- Disability makes you more vulnerable
- ASB is big issue in terms of safety

Overall observations

- Intersectionality affects women's feelings of safety
- Social issues are significant for feelings of safety

Focus Groups



Women's Safety
In Harlow

Where would you say are hotspots in your local area where you feel particularly unsafe?

RESPONSES, QUOTES AND COMMENTS
<i>"My husband walks me to work" (professional in Harlow)</i>
<i>"Town centre"</i>
<i>"Underpasses"</i>
<i>"Cycle paths"</i>
<i>"Market square"</i>
<i>"The Stow"</i>
<i>"I never walk by the bus station"</i>

Common themes

- Empty places are scary
- Lack of lighting is an issue
- Unkempt/untidy areas aren't appealing

Overall observations

- Feelings of safety/unsafety differ from place to place

Focus Groups



Women's Safety
In Harlow

What types of behaviours do you witness or experience that make you feel unsafe?

RESPONSES, QUOTES AND COMMENTS
<i>"Known people but police don't do anything about him"</i>
<i>"Vandalism makes me feel unsafe"</i>
<i>"Groups of people are intimidating"</i>
<i>"Mask wearing – you can't tell who they are"</i>
<i>"Catcalling and erratic behaviour"</i>
<i>"Groups of boys are intimidating"</i>

Common themes

- It's a regular occurrence that women and girls are intimidated
- Harassment is common
- Groups/gangs make women/girls feel very unsafe

Overall observations

- Male behaviour impacts feelings of safety

Focus Groups



Women's Safety
In Harlow

What do you think could be done to make you feel safer?

RESPONSES, QUOTES AND COMMENTS
<i>"We want more safe spaces" (teenage girl)</i>
<i>"People to help us if we're feeling unsafe or need help"</i>
<i>"We need work in schools so young people know what is/isn't acceptable"</i>
<i>"Women need to be seen as equals"</i>
<i>"People need to call out each other's behaviour"</i>

Common themes

- Safe spaces for women and girls throughout town are needed
- Education is key
- Active bystandership training would help

Overall observations

- Biggest changes needed are cultural

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KAREN WHYBRO

WOMEN'S SAFETY CONSULTANT

Please contact Safer@harlow.gov.uk for further information