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# Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces

A report by the APPG for UN Women



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## Foreword

In 2020, a group of MPs and Peers set up the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for UN Women to support UN Women's work in the UK. The APPGs first objective was to promote and advance the UN's Safe Spaces Now campaign, which focusses on identifying game-changing solutions for women's safety in public spaces (including online).

It is now commonly accepted that women have a right to feel safe in their day to day life, particularly to feel safe from sexual harassment; yet all too often experiences of those who are subject to harassment and abuse continue to be covered up, diminished, ignored, or normalised. In my former role as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, the committee conducted inquiries into sexual harassment. These reports revealed the need to change the culture that enables sexual harassment to go unchallenged, along with the need for more effective policies to give women confidence to report the abuse they experience.

This new APPG report looks in detail at the important issue of sexual harassment in public spaces, including both physical and virtual spheres. Drawing on new data from UN Women and YouGov, the report identifies that women and girls face similar challenges in public spaces, adding robust data on the scale of the problem, along with details of the deterrents that prevent cases of harassment from being reported. Only by strengthening reporting systems and increasing trust in their efficacy can we challenge and change the current societal culture of ignoring or accepting this abuse.

We hope that this report acts as a further catalyst for positive change, so that mechanisms are improved to provide women and girls with greater confidence that reporting incidents of abuse would have a preventative effect, and would pave the way to create safer spaces for all.

Rt Hon Maria Miller MP, Co-Chair APPG UN Women

## Acknowledgements

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We would also like to acknowledge the work of all the charities, community groups and activists named in this report, and to thank them for their contributions to making public spaces safer for women and girls.

# The All-Party Parliamentary Group for UN Women

The purpose of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on UN Women is to take action to mitigate the disproportionate burdens carried by women and girls and to advance UN Women's work in the UK, through three specific focus areas:

1. Creating game-changing solutions for women's safety in public spaces (both physical and virtual) across the UK, through work to promote and advance the Safe Spaces Now campaign;
2. 'Building back better' for women in the UK post COVID-19;
3. Accelerating action for the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals.

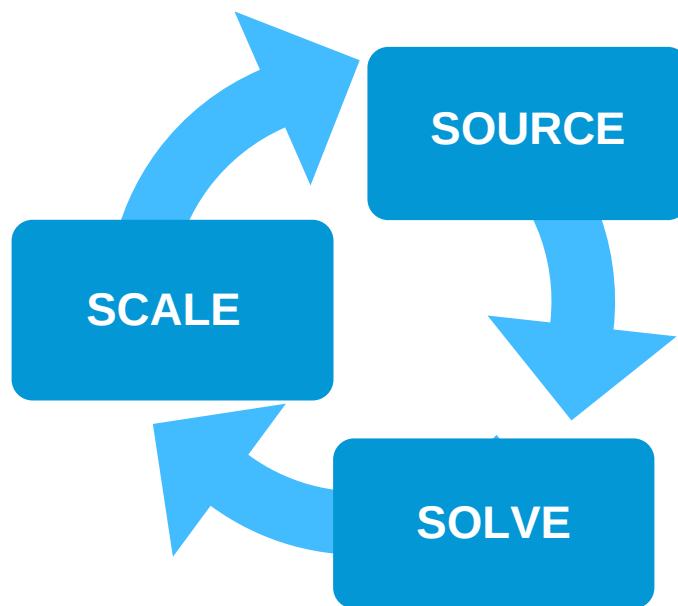
Advance Pro Bono has conducted bespoke research for the Secretariat of the APPG, in support of the organisation's advocacy work to raise awareness about sexual harassment in public spaces in the UK.

For more details on the APPG please visit: [unwomenuk.org/appg-unwomen](http://unwomenuk.org/appg-unwomen)

## Executive Summary

UN Women UK's Safe Spaces Now campaign is a unique and ambitious project that seeks to make the UK's public spaces safer and more inclusive for women, girls and marginalised groups.

The project is divided into three stages of action: **source** data and stories to build up an accurate picture of the problem, **solve** the issue by co-designing game-changing solutions with owners and administrators of public spaces, and **scale** the approach using technology and legislative review to create lasting global change.



As part of the 'source' stage, UN Women UK has brought organisations and groups together to conduct in-depth qualitative and quantitative research about the problem. In January 2021, UN Women UK commissioned a UK-wide survey on sexual harassment, reaching more than 1,000 respondents. This report compares these data to historical figures and research, to bring to light the reality of the violence and harassment that women and girls experience in public spaces, including both the physical and virtual spheres. It explores the widespread under-reporting of incidents of sexual harassment, measures that would help increase understanding and visibility of the issue, and how more trusted routes for reporting can be created. This report contributes to the work being done for the source and solve phases of Safe Spaces Now programme.

**Source: Key survey findings**

- 1. 71% of women of all ages in the UK have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space** – this number rises to 86% among 18-24-year-olds.
- 2. The two main reasons women of all ages cited for not reporting incidents** are: “I didn’t think the incident was serious enough to report” (55%) and “I didn’t think reporting it would help” (45%)
- 3. 44% of women agreed that having more confidence that reporting the incident would prevent it from happening again** would encourage them to report.

The 2021 UN Women UK YouGov survey clearly shows that sexual harassment in public places continues to be highly prevalent and concerning. It is also clear that there is a serious lack of trust in the reporting mechanisms and systems that are in place to protect women. While steps are being taken in the right direction, through campaigns against sexual harassment, actual change in the incidence of sexual harassment and rates of reporting have been limited.

Fundamentally, women have a right to feel safe in public places and to know that should their safety be threatened, there are reliable mechanisms that they could turn to for support and protection.

This report and new survey data demonstrate that this approach must be considered a cycle of self-reinforcing change. If national and local government, as well as owners and administrators of public spaces can use these data to take concerted action towards the safety of women and marginalised groups, public trust in the efficacy of reporting systems could increase and lead to greater reporting and visibility of the issue in future.

## **Solve: Three important ways to incentivise women to report**

- 1. Public trust in the system must be increased** such that women believe reporting incidents of sexual harassment will create change, and that reports will be treated anonymously. The system should also appropriately action data found in reporting such that women feel making reports will result in consequences.
- 2. The reporting processes themselves must be strengthened** to give women a better understanding of what can be reported and how. This would make it easier for women to find a convenient way to report, to speak to a woman police officer, or to be supported through the process, and as a result, would increase reporting.
- 3. Wider attitudes towards sexual harassment must be changed** shifting away from viewing people who report sexual harassment as victims. As more people start to report, it will create a virtuous circle; women are more likely to report if they see their peers are doing so. It is therefore important to feed back progress on mitigating harassment to the public.

**UN Women UK is conducting a series of workshops to engage members of society in forming solutions for improved safety in public spaces.**

## **Scale: Our recommendations**

- **Call to action** for leaders and decision-makers to gather data by clearly defining what can be reported, and how this reporting can be done. The government should take action on the lack of comprehensive data on this issue and enlist local authorities to assist with joined-up data collection. Reporting channels that are easier to navigate must be provided, built with survivors' needs in mind.
- **Bring together** local grassroots campaigns and authorities to create a national action plan that includes all regions. Work on changing wider attitudes towards what is acceptable behaviour and what should not be tolerated.
- **Diversify** ways in which reports are dealt with. Underline that there is a role for legislation and emergency services, but also much work to be done on preventing sexual harassment from occurring in the first place. Ensure these solutions are visible and engage the public, demonstrating their voices are being heard.

# Introduction

The report will begin by examining **the challenge of defining sexual harassment** and how varying definitions of sexual harassment may contribute to under-reporting. It will then explore **the current state of sexual harassment in the UK** – how prevalent the issue is, the most common spaces where it occurs, locations, and types of sexual harassment, and examines sexual harassment online. This will then lead to an examination of the **reporting of sexual harassment**, from the current frequency of reporting to the barriers to reporting and why, despite the clear prevalence of sexual harassment, so many incidents go unreported.

There is also reason for optimism, as public awareness grows, and media coverage and campaigning to end sexual harassment increase. The report will examine the impact of rising public awareness, including through campaigns such as #MeToo and #TimesUp, UN Women UK's Safe Spaces Now campaign as well other grassroots campaigns in the UK as forces for change.

Finally, the report will conclude with recommendations for solutions to both increase reporting and prevent future violence against women – including by changing perceptions about sexual harassment, and building a more trustworthy and reliable reporting system.



## The challenge of defining sexual harassment

Women's attitudes towards reporting incidents of sexual harassment are intrinsically linked to their definition of sexual harassment.

UN Women defines sexual harassment as the **continuum of violent practices against women and girls**. It can take the form of various acts including rape, other aggressive touching, forced viewing of pornography, taking and circulating sexual photographs, as well as verbal sexual conduct. In effect, sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual conduct (UN Women, 2018). The new UN Women UK YouGov Survey has followed this definition of sexual harassment, defining a range of examples of sexual harassment along this continuum.

However, there can be differences between official and commonly used definitions of sexual harassment. Although the consensus is one of "unwanted behaviour", the specific acts included vary. From "unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment" (Equality Act 2010, 2010) to "anything that makes you feel uncomfortable" (Transport for London). Most definitions necessarily refer to the subjective experience of the individual concerned, e.g., was the individual made to feel unsafe, humiliated, or intimidated.

These differences could assist in explaining why certain acts of sexual harassment are so frequently unreported. A unanimous definition and understanding of sexual harassment could be part of the solution.

# The current state of sexual harassment in the UK

## Prevalence of sexual harassment

Studies have consistently shown that a significant number of women and girls have experienced sexual harassment throughout their lives, and that it continues to be a problem. The numbers have often varied, and historically data have underrepresented the number of women affected. Studies have also shown that location, time of day, and intersectional factors such as ethnicity and sexual orientation, can play a role in women's experiences of sexual harassment.

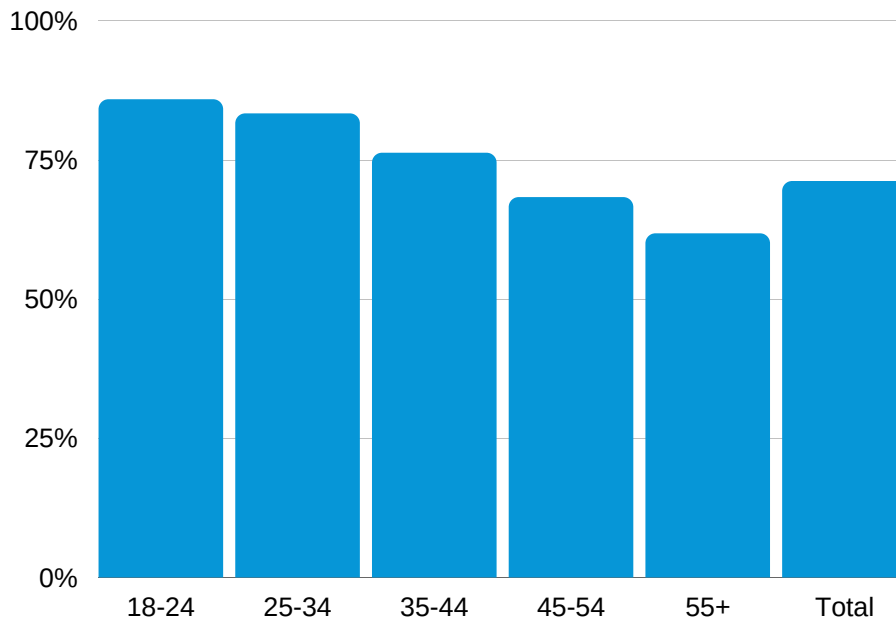
'Public space' was defined in UN Women UK's 2021 YouGov survey as any of the following: Public transport (e.g., buses, trains, etc.), hospitality venues (e.g. pubs, clubs, bars, etc.), public events (e.g. concerts, sports games, festivals, etc.), streets, parks, commons and other public recreational spaces and online spaces (e.g. social media). For the purposes of this study, 'public place' excludes place of work or study (e.g., school, college, university etc.) – although recent studies show that workplace harassment continues to be an issue for women working from home, and for some has even worsened (Rights of Women, 2021). The survey found that 71% of women of all ages have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space, revealing that other studies may have underestimated the prevalence of sexual harassment in public spaces. This highlights the scope of the issue that women face today. It must be noted that 8% of women said they "don't know", "prefer not to say" or "chose not to answer", suggesting the actual level could be slightly higher than 71%.

Prior to this, the End Violence Against Women Coalition outlined the results of a 2016 YouGov survey which showed that 64% of women of all ages across the UK have experienced sexual harassment in a public place – 7% less than the 2021 YouGov survey. A study by Plan International UK and Our Streets Now in 2020 illustrates how the problem is consistent and continuous, revealing that 19% of girls aged 14-21 had experienced public sexual harassment since lockdown began in the UK. The result is that 28% reported feeling less safe going out in public now than they did before the lockdown (Plan International UK and Our Streets Now, 2020).

The 2021 UN Women UK YouGov survey corroborates the notion that sexual harassment is experienced or reported most often by younger women, with more than 80% of women aged 18-34 having experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space (Figure 1). Full-time students are also disproportionately affected, with 93% being survivors of some form of sexual harassment.

### Women who have experienced sexual harassment in a public space, by age (January 2021)

Percentage of women (n = 1,089)



*Figure 1: Results from 2021 YouGov survey of 1,089 women in the UK who responded to the question “Which, if any, of the following have you EVER personally experienced in a public space?”*

Transport for London’s 2014 study indicated that there are differences in incidences of sexual harassment in public places based on ethnic / cultural backgrounds. It showed that 8% of white and 10% of BAME adults experienced unwelcome sexual behaviour (Transport for London, 2014). A cross-analysis of ethnic and cultural background with gender, age, and socio-economic background to demonstrate intersectional experiences could give more insights.

Overall, the seriousness of the issue was highlighted in a report about the sexual harassment of women and girls in public places, published by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee in 2019, which stated that “sexual harassment is the most common form of violence against women and girls” (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2018). However, the report also highlights the lack of robust data on sexual harassment in public places which is necessary for effective policy. This report will assist in adding data on this topic.

## Common spaces, locations, and types of sexual harassment

According to a YouGov survey in 2017, women experience sexual harassment most often in the street (56%) and in a pub, club, or bar (53%) (YouGov, Half of 18-24 year-old women say they've been sexually harassed in a public place in past 5 years, 2017).

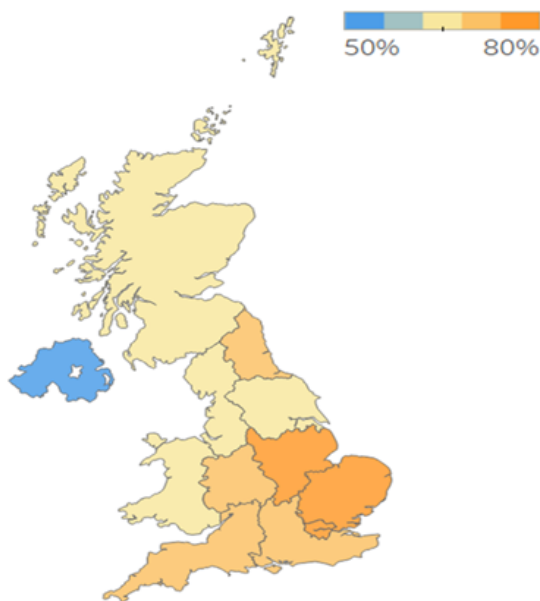
A 2020 YouGov survey of adults living in London explored the most common public transport locations. Of those who have experienced sexual harassment on public transport, the most common locations are the tube (64%), bus (38%) and train (31%), likely as they are the most used forms of public transport (YouGov, 2020).

Of the regions in the UK, London appears to have the highest rates of sexual harassment. When asked if they had experienced sexual harassment in a public space in the last 5 years, 31% of women asserted that they had in the region of London, compared to 25% in the rest of the south, 23% in the Midlands, 22% in the North, and 17% in Scotland (YouGov, Half of 18-24 year-old women say they've been sexually harassed in a public place in past 5 years, 2017).

The new UN Women UK YouGov study finds the rates of sexual harassment to range from 50% in Northern Ireland to 80% in the East of England. (Figure 2) [1]

### Sexual harassment in the UK (January 2021)

Percentage of women (n = 1,089)



*Figure 2: Results from 2021 YouGov survey of 1,089 women in the UK who responded to the question "Which, if any, of the following have you EVER personally experienced in a public space?"*

[1] The 2017 and 2021 survey data are not directly comparable as the 2017 survey asks women if they have experienced sexual harassment in the last five years (i.e., based on the respondent's own definition of sexual harassment) whilst the 2021 survey asks women whether they have ever experienced selected examples of sexual harassment. However, both surveys indicate that London has one of the highest rates of sexual harassment, 77% in the 2021 survey.

The 2021 survey highlighted that the most common forms of sexual harassment of those listed are being cat-called or wolf-whistled (51%), being stared at (44%), and unwelcome touching, body rubbing or groping (37%). Moreover, the list was not exhaustive nor was there an “other” option so of the 20% who answered “none of these” there may be some who had experienced some other form of sexual harassment in a public space. (Figure 3)

### Women who have experienced sexual harassment in a public space, by type (January 2021)

Percentage of women (n = 1,089)

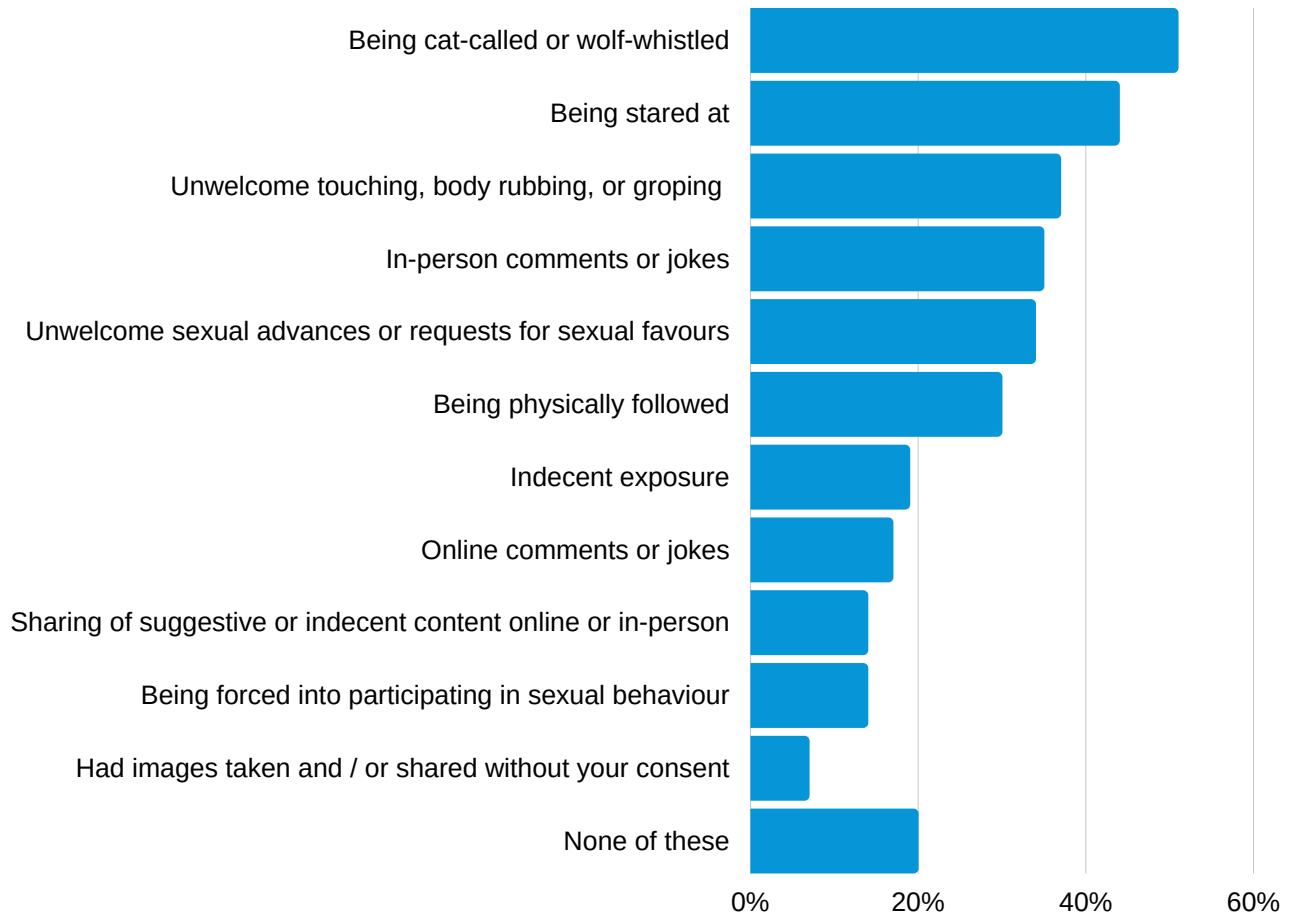


Figure 3: Results from 2021 YouGov survey of 1,089 women in the UK who responded to the question “Which, if any, of the following have you EVER personally experienced in a public space?”

The survey showed that 18-24-year-old women experience the highest proportion of sexual harassment. The most common forms for this group are being cat-called or wolf-whistled (72%), being stared at in a way that made them feel unsafe or uncomfortable (68%), and in-person comments or jokes that made them feel unsafe or uncomfortable (59%). (Figure 4)

## Women who have experienced sexual harassment in a public space, by type (January 2021)

Percentage of women (n = 1,089)

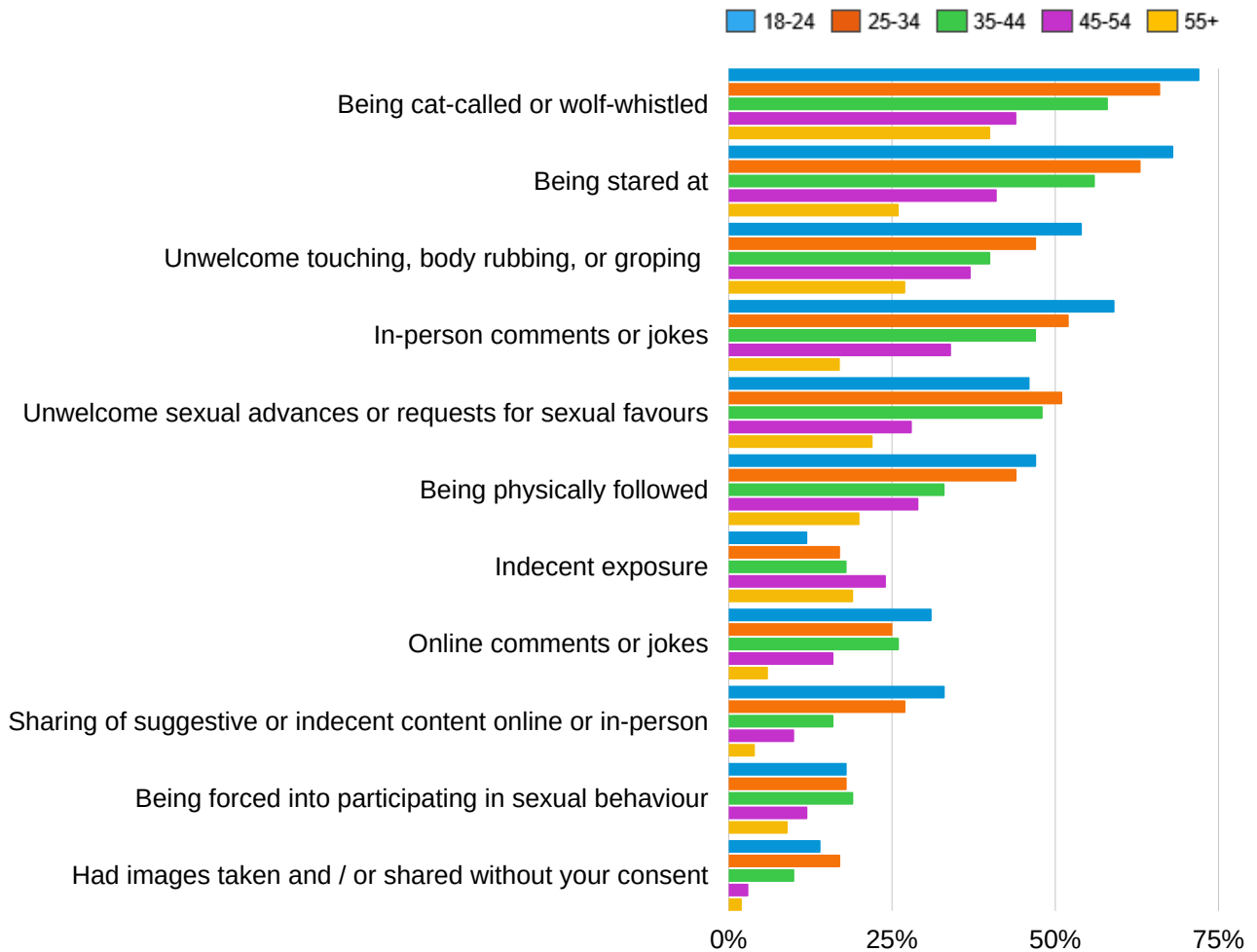


Figure 4: Results from 2021 YouGov survey of 1,089 women in the UK who responded to the question “Which, if any, of the following have you EVER personally experienced in a public space?”

The data suggest that the rates of incidence generally decrease with age except when it comes to indecent exposure and unwelcome sexual suggestions or advances. 45-54-year-old women were the most common survivors of indecent exposure (24%) and around 50% of 25-44-year-olds have been subjected to unwelcome sexual suggestions or advances or requests for sexual favours. (Figure 4) Differences in rates of incidence of the various forms of sexual harassment may be due to generational differences in perceptions, awareness, and definitions of sexual harassment. For example, women over 55 are more likely to remember an incidence of indecent exposure rather than an incidence of catcalling that may have taken place in their 20s.

In a 2017 survey by YouGov, 64% of women aged 18-24 said that a man wolf whistling at a woman is usually or always considered sexual harassment compared to just 15% of women aged 55+. In comparison, the age groups had a similar perception of flashing where with 95% of women aged 18-24 and 90% of women aged 55+ agreed that flashing is usually or always considered sexual harassment.

## Sexual harassment online

As the prevalence of social media and the use of online platforms grows, so too does sexual harassment online.

The UN Women UK 2021 YouGov survey found that 17% of UK women online experienced online comments or jokes that made them feel unsafe or uncomfortable and 14% experienced sharing of suggestive, indecent, or unsolicited content online or in-person. These incidences of sexual harassment are more prevalent in younger age groups. (Figure 5)

### Women who have experienced sexual harassment in a public space, by type (January 2021)

Percentage of women (n = 1,089)

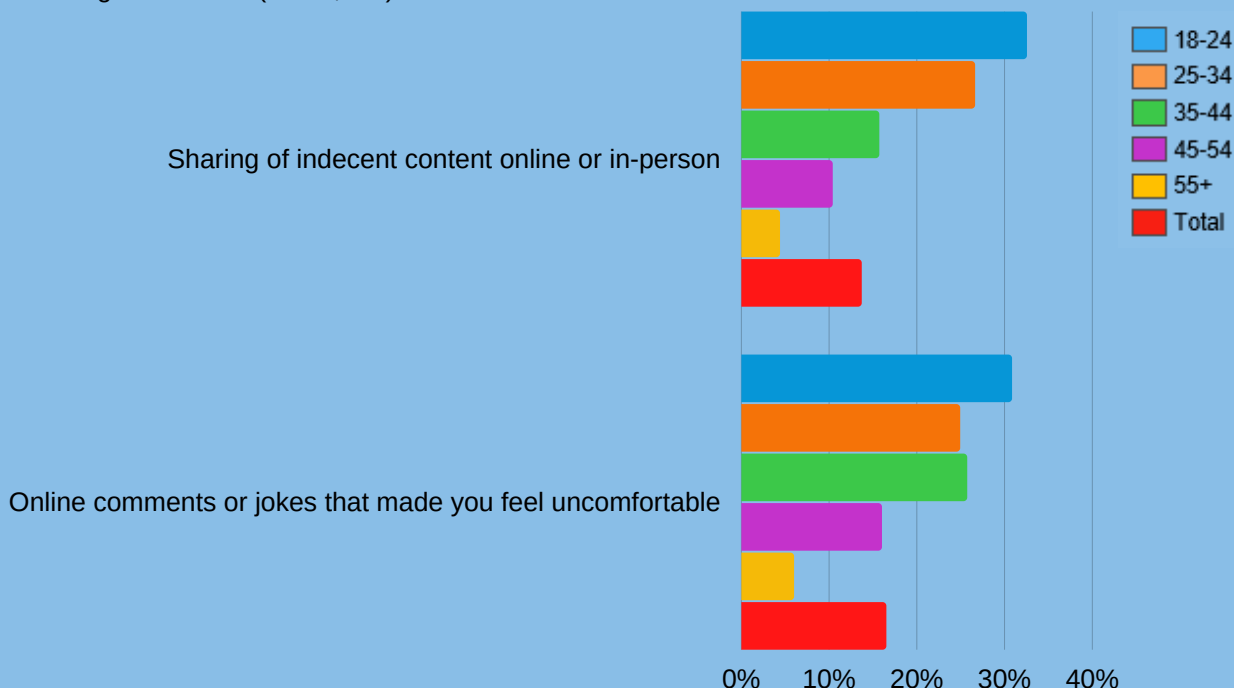


Figure 5: Results from 2021 YouGov survey of 1,089 women in the UK who responded to the question “Which, if any, of the following have you EVER personally experienced in a public space?”

These figures serve to corroborate other studies into sexual harassment online. In a 2017 study by Cybersmile, 30% of women stated they had seen bullying or harassment online. Facebook and Twitter are the two platforms where the female respondents saw the most bullying and harassment (Cybersmile, 2017). An Amnesty International survey in 2017 found that 21% of women had experienced online abuse, of which 27% received threats of physical or sexual violence, 47% received sexist or misogynistic comments, and 69% received generally abusive language or comments. More than half of the women who had experienced abuse or harassment experienced stress, anxiety, or panic attacks as a direct result (Amnesty International UK, 2017).

“Cyber flashing” is another common form of sexual harassment online. A YouGov survey in 2018 found that 19% of all women and 40% of women aged 18 to 34 have received an unsolicited sexual photo from someone who is not a romantic partner (YouGov, 2018).

These incidents are likely to be rising as women and girls spend more time online during the pandemic. The UK’s Revenge Porn Helpline found calls about explicit imagery being shared without consent rose by 87% between April and August 2020 versus the previous year (Revenge Porn Helpline, 2020).

Sexual harassment online is also a significant issue for girls. Research by UK Safer Internet Centre in 2019 found that almost a third of girls aged 13-17 years have received unwanted sexual messages online from their peers (compared to 11% of boys) in the last year (UK Safer Internet Centre, 2019).

Activists and civil society organisations are beginning to work with social media platforms to encourage more robust responses to growing rates of harassment online.



# Reporting sexual harassment

## Frequency of sexual harassment in the UK

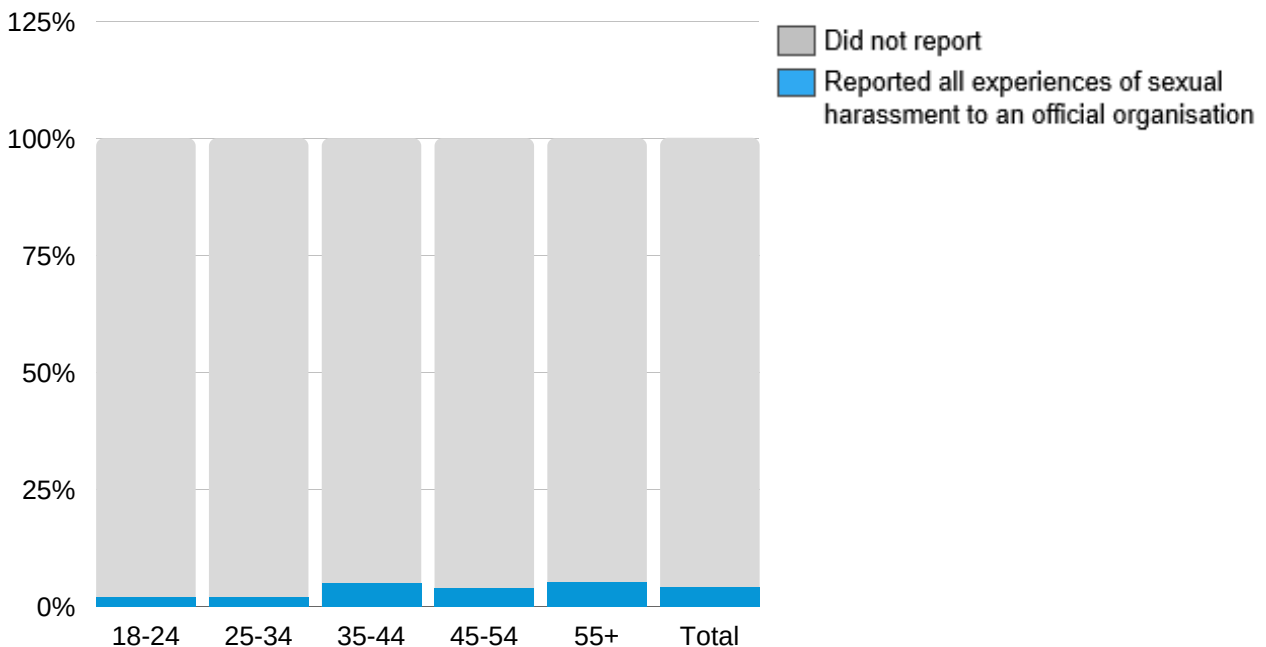
Sexual harassment is widely under-reported, which is partly why reports, studies, and surveys such as these are necessary to understand the scale of the problem.

The 2021 YouGov survey shows extremely low levels of reporting. Over 95% of all women did not report their experiences of sexual harassment, with 98% for women aged 18-34 not reporting incidences of sexual harassment. (Figure 6)

### Rates of reporting

(January 2021)

Percentage of women (n = 1,089)



*Figure 6: Results from 2021 YouGov survey of 1,089 women in the UK who responded to the question “Thinking about the experiences you mentioned in the previous question... If you did not report all of these to an official organisation, what were your reasons for this?” with “Not applicable – I did report all of these experiences to an organisation.”*

These 2021 YouGov figures demonstrate the lowest levels of reporting that have been recorded. A 2017 YouGov survey found that 80% of survivors never reported the incident to the police or authority figures, showing 16% higher reporting rates than the 2021 figure. It does, however, corroborate the finding that younger people are less likely to report sexual harassment than other age groups, with more than 90% of women aged 18-24 never reporting sexual harassment (YouGov, Half of 18-24 year-old women say they've been sexually harassed in a public place in past 5 years, 2017).

This trend of under-reporting is also seen on public transport. 2019 YouGov figures suggest that despite TfL's campaign to increase reporting of sexual harassment, actual reporting to the British Transport Police or transport staff is only 2% in both cases (YouGov, 2020).

## Barriers to reporting

A multitude of factors contribute to the low reporting rate, from the different levels of perceived severity of sexual harassment, to the availability and effectiveness of the reporting mechanism and attitudes or emotional responses to the incidents.

### Barriers to reporting

(January 2021)

Percentage of women (n = 1,089)

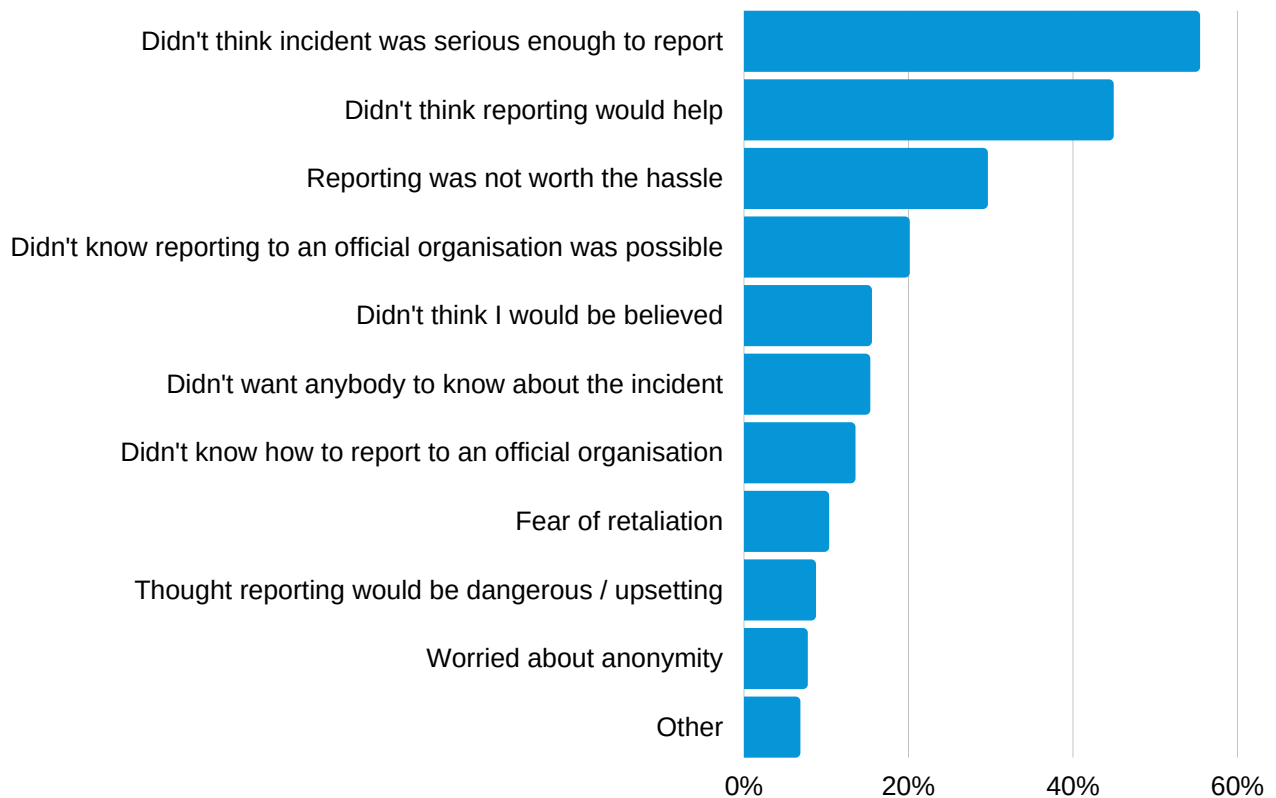


Figure 7: Results from 2021 YouGov survey of 1,089 women in the UK who responded to the question "Thinking about the experiences you mentioned in the previous question... If you did not report all of these to an official organisation, what were your reasons for this? (Please select all that apply.)"

## Subjective definitions of sexual harassment

The 2021 YouGov survey found that over 50% of women experiencing any of the categories of sexual harassment did not report the incident because they did not believe it was serious enough to report. This is likely due to multiple definitions of sexual harassment and lack of awareness. In a similar way, according to a 2017 YouGov survey, 73% of women would report “flashing” whereas only 8% of women would report someone “pinching or grabbing their bum”. Perception of severity also correlates with age as older age groups may consider an incident less severe than younger groups (YouGov, Sexual harassment: how the genders and generations see the issue differently, 2017).

The unconscious attitude that a certain level of sexual harassment should be tolerated by women is prevalent in our society. Some acts of sexual behaviour are defined as “unacceptable” whilst others are “tolerable” or even “acceptable”, resulting in a culture of conditioning for women to accept certain sexual behaviour, particularly in busy cities, where some women feel a certain level of sexual harassment is almost inevitable.

## Lack of confidence in current reporting system

The 2021 YouGov survey found that 45% of women did not report the incident because they did not think it would help. Further to this, due to the lack of parity in management and leadership roles across the UK (McKinsey 2016), workplace superiors to whom misconduct would be reported are more likely to be men. In the new data, 24% of women said having more female officers to report the incident to would improve the current reporting systems.

There is a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms currently in place, as well as in the effectiveness of privacy protection, which results in fear of retaliation. Survivors may believe that their report will not be taken seriously and that it is unlikely that the offender will be found or charged.

## Classification of acts of sexual harassment as crimes

Whilst sexual assault and physical threats are criminal offences, the criminality of other forms of sexual harassment is not always clearly defined (e.g., catcalling, where the content of the “call” is relevant in defining its criminality). In addition, the anonymous nature of some acts of sexual harassment, such as catcalling, can make identification of the perpetrator and reporting of the incident challenging. Although the barriers will vary between incidents, they have all proven to be relevant for harassment in both physical public spaces and online.

Police forces across the UK are starting to record incidents of sexual harassment or other misogynistic behaviour as specific incidents that can then be tracked and addressed, including in cases of domestic abuse.

## **Internalisation of blame**

In the 2021 UN Women UK YouGov survey, 16% of women did not report an incident of sexual harassment because they thought they would not be believed. Historic “victim-blaming” can increase shame around the issue, further discouraging reporting across types of gender-based violence. This is despite the fact that only 3% of reported sexual crimes in the UK have been shown to be false (UN Women, 2019). Women have reported modifying behaviour to avoid encouraging sexual harassment, for example, not smiling, wearing modest clothing, not drinking, not walking alone (UN Women, 2019). A 2020 survey conducted by Visible found that 41% of women changed their clothing, their commutes or the times they travelled due to harassment on the London underground (Peake, 2020).

## How to incentivise reporting

In addition to investigating current barriers to reporting, the 2021 UN Women UK/YouGov survey looked into suggestions from respondents on what would incentivise them to be more likely to report their experiences to help change the reality.

### Suggested improvements to current reporting systems to increase reporting rates (January 2021)

Percentage of women (n = 1,089)

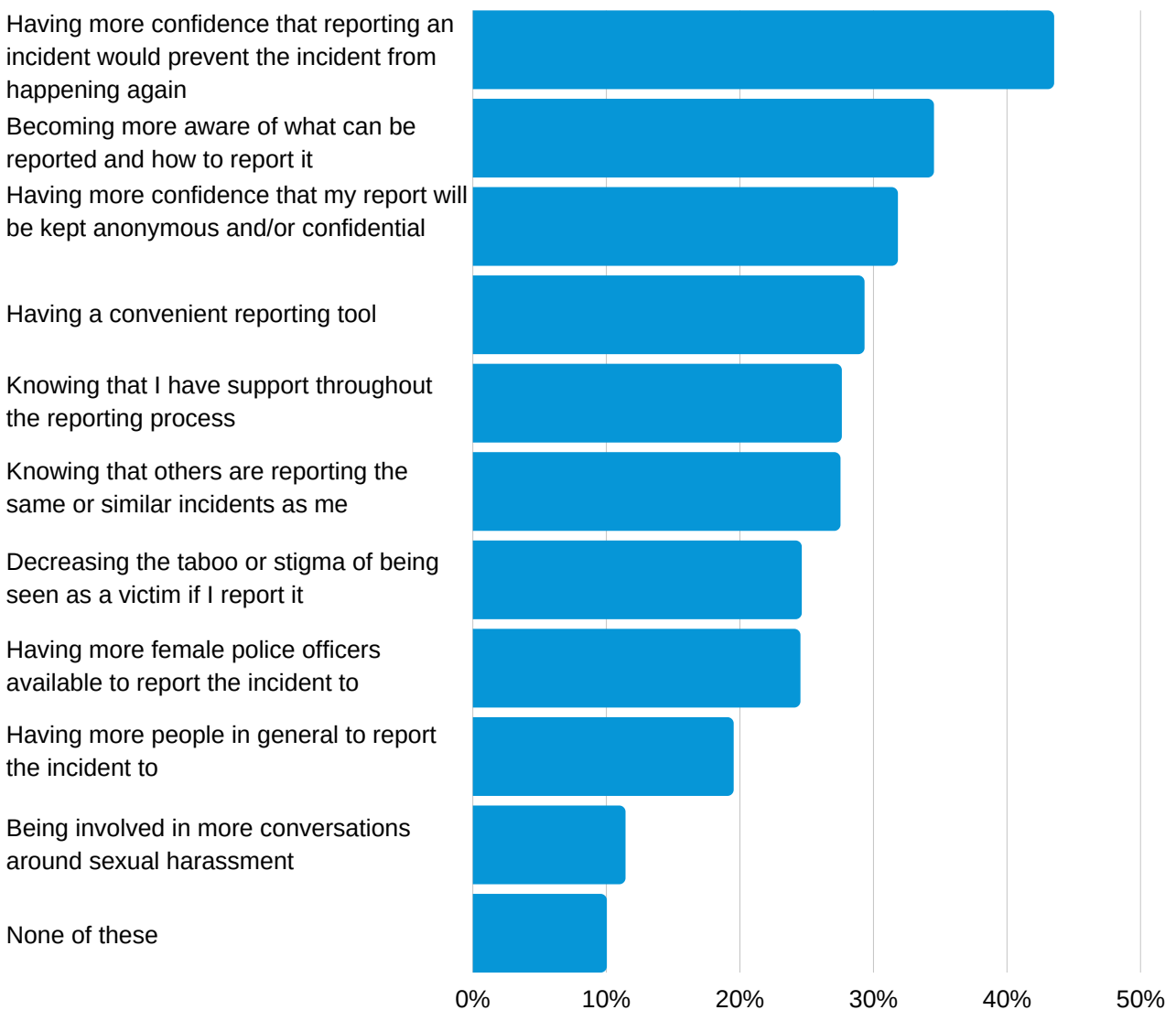


Figure 8: Results from 2021 YouGov survey of 1,089 in the UK who responded to the question “If you were to personally experience any form of harassment or behaviour mentioned in the previous questions... In general, which, if any, of the following would make you more likely to report it to an official organisation? (Please select all that apply.)”

The responses again highlighted low levels of trust amongst UK women in the current reporting system. 44% of women agreed that having more confidence in the consequences of reporting would encourage them to report whilst 32% said that having more confidence in the anonymity of the reporting system would make them more likely to report. Of those who did not report because they thought doing so would be too dangerous or emotionally upsetting, 76% said they would be more likely to report if they had confidence that doing so would prevent the incident from happening again. This highlights the importance of having faith in the system.

Informing women of the resources available is also important since 35% of the respondents think that increased awareness of how the current reporting systems work and how they can be accessed could help increase reporting rates.

Finally, it is clear that wider attitudes to sexual harassment need to change. Of those women who reported being threatened, coerced or forced into participating in sexual behaviour, or being touched sexually without consent (i.e., survivors of sexual assault), 47% also said they would be more likely to report if there was less taboo or stigma of being seen as a victim. (Figure 8)

As discussed in the executive summary, these responses highlight three important ways to incentivise women to report: 1) Increase public trust in the system so women believe reporting will lead to change; 2) Strengthen the reporting processes so it is clear what can be reported and how; and 3) Change wider attitudes towards sexual harassment, moving away from viewing people who report as victims.

# Rising public awareness

## The #MeToo campaign

Awareness and intolerance of all forms of sexual harassment has been growing, which is a key step in women understanding what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and can be reported.

The 2017 #MeToo campaign sparked a swift rise in public awareness and scrutiny of sexual harassment through its demands for change, mirrored around the world in #MeToo India, #NiUnaMenos and #BalanceTonPorc.

A study conducted among women of all ages in response to the #MeToo movement showed that women under the age of 35 years were the most likely to think that the #MeToo movement had a positive and progressive impact on society's thinking around sexual harassment (UN Women, 2018). This result highlights the important role different age groups play in driving the global movement to reshape and progress social norms. There remains work to be done to encourage inter-generational discussions, such as those being carried out by UN Women UK.

## Local authorities moving to create change

Localised programmes of change are beginning to create case studies for national action.

Nottinghamshire introduced a policy to record misogyny as a hate crime in 2016, and since then the overwhelming majority of locals surveyed have reported that they believe this was a positive change. (Nottingham Women's Centre, 2018). Constabularies, including Durham, have followed this lead and made commitments including from the Greater Manchester Authority. However, overall the numbers of recorded incidents of misogyny remain low.

The Greater London Authority has developed a coordinated plan for tackling violence against women and girls that includes safety in public spaces, after committing to join UN Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces initiative. Using data collected by TfL through its SMS reporting system, which the public can use to report anything of a sexual nature without consent, and together with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, the city launched a Women's Night Safety Charter, which organisations are encouraged to sign up to. The GLA has since created a checklist for safety in nightlife venues alongside the Good Night Out Campaign, providing ideas and inspiration for nightclubs, pubs and clubs (Greater London Authority, 2019).

Similarly, the Scottish Government's 'Equally Safe' strategy and the Welsh Government's 'This is Sexual Abuse' campaign shine light on the importance of addressing sexual harassment. There is work to be done on a united approach that includes all regions of the UK in a concerted action plan, including devolved administrations.

## Growing grassroots campaigning

The number of grassroots campaigns and community groups collecting data on sexual harassment is growing, demonstrating increasing public interest. In addition to the Everyday Sexism Project, which has been running for some years, sites including London Anti-Street Harassment, Hollaback!, Sisters of Frida and Glitch are bringing users of different public spaces together to redefine norms and construct a series of demands. Campaigns including OurStreetsNow and CuteCatCalls are demonstrating the potential of social media to create a platform for support.

## The role of UN Women and Safe Spaces Now

Over the past ten years, UN Women has seen widespread change in cities around the world through its global framework initiative Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces. This is the first ever global programme that develops, implements, and evaluates tools, policies and comprehensive approaches on the prevention of and response to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women across all public spaces. To accelerate action on the ground in the UK, UN Women UK has created the Safe Spaces Now project to drive rapid action on prevention of violence.

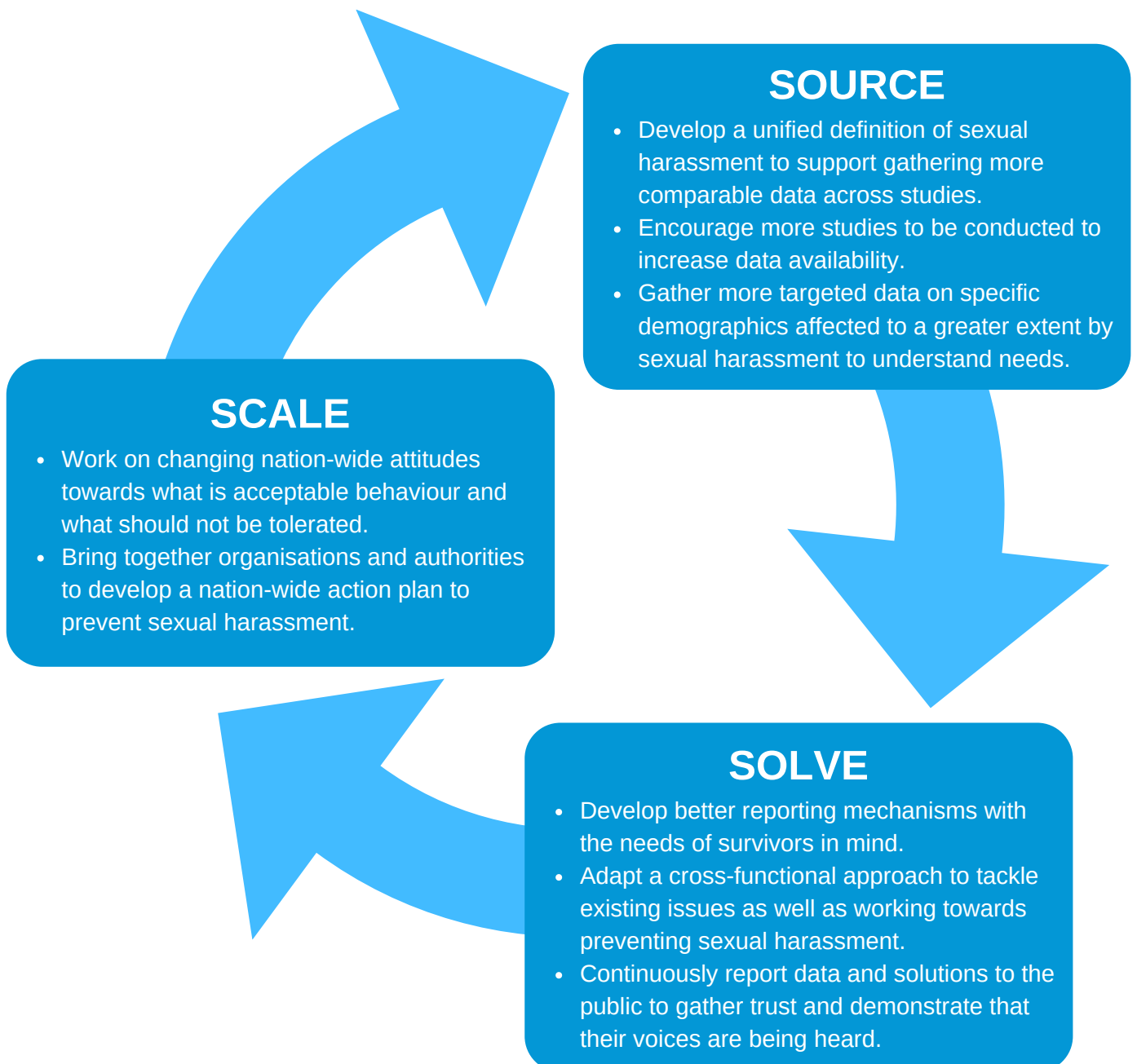
The project has three phases. The first and current is to **source** the data and bring to light the reality of violence and harassment in public spaces that women and girls are experiencing. Next is to **solve** the problem, bringing together our steering group of local authorities, emergency services, private taxi and nightlife venues, and online players, to co-design solutions that focus on prevention of harassment besides just addressing existing violence. The final phase is to **scale** these solutions using legislation and technology to create lasting global change.

UN Women UK has launched a coalition of organisations and individuals working to create solutions based on these findings, and to involve decision-makers in committing to their delivery. Coordinating a single united campaign with many organisations working together for change will be important in the coming years to generate visible and rapid results.



## Concluding remarks

Sexual harassment in public spaces is rife and must be addressed with urgency as we 'build back better' as a society. The findings of this report highlight a serious lack of trust in the reporting mechanisms and systems that are in place to protect women, and limited improvement in rates of reporting sexual harassment over time. There is an opportunity to use these findings to take concerted action, and further incentivise women and marginalised groups to come forward with their experiences. The solutions to this problem must involve national and local government, owners and administrators of public spaces, as well as individual members of society, which UN Women UK is actively engaging. The return to public spaces from the COVID-19 pandemic is a unique moment for concerted cross-stakeholder action to eliminate sexual harassment in the long term, and it must be seized.



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