

Statistical bulletin

# Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 16 February to 13 March 2022

Perceptions of safety and experiences of harassment, by personal characteristics, based on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

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## Correction

**13 July 2022 11:34**

An update has been made to the first paragraph in section 3 which explains the differences in experiences of harassment compared to June 2021.

No data tables have been updated.

# Notice

**28 August 2024**

An update has been made to the wording in the second paragraph in section 3. No data tables have been updated.

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# 1 . Main points

In February to March 2022, the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) asked people about their current perceptions of safety and their experiences of harassment in the last 12 months. The findings have been compared with those from June 2021, as detailed in [our previous release](#), the last time the questions were asked.

Consistent with our previous analysis, the latest data for February to March 2022 showed:

- people felt less safe walking alone in all settings after dark than during the day; with women feeling less safe than men in all settings after dark
- disabled people felt less safe in all settings than non-disabled people
- more women (27%) than men (16%) reported they had experienced at least one form of harassment in the previous 12 months

However, compared with June 2021, the latest data showed:

- more people felt unsafe “in a park or open space”; this increased from 7% to 11% during the day and from 60% to 63% after dark
- more people had stopped walking in quiet places such as “parks or open spaces” after dark in the last month because of feeling unsafe; an increase in both men (from 18% to 24%) and women (from 32% to 37%)
- a decrease in people reporting they had stopped going to “busy public spaces” during the day from 38% to 23%; this may be linked to changing attitudes to coronavirus (COVID-19) risks as well as feelings of personal safety

For the first time in February to March 2022, the OPN asked respondents how safe they felt using public transport. The data showed:

- people felt less safe using public transport after dark than during the day
- women aged 16 to 34 years felt the most unsafe of any age and sex group using public transport alone after dark

## 2 . Perceptions of personal safety

Questions asked on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) in June 2021 and February to March 2022 showed that perceptions of personal safety varied depending on setting and time of day (Figure 1). For the definition of “settings” used in this publication, see [Section 6](#).

### **Figure 1: During both time periods, adults felt less safe walking alone in all settings after dark than during the day**

**Proportion of adults who felt “very or fairly unsafe” walking alone by setting and using public transport, Great Britain, 2 to 27 June 2021 and 16 February to 13 March 2022**

## Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

In both time periods, adults felt less safe walking alone in all settings after dark than during the day. There was an increase in the proportion of adults reporting they felt unsafe in “parks or open space” both during the day and after dark, in February to March 2022 compared with June 2021.

As seen in June 2021, across all settings after dark, a higher proportion of women reported feeling very or fairly unsafe compared with men (Figure 2). The disparity was greatest “in a park or other open space”, where 82% of women reported feeling very or fairly unsafe, compared with 42% of men. In this setting, there was an increase in women reporting feeling unsafe in the day (from 11% to 16%) and for men after dark (from 39% to 42%), when compared with June 2021.

Compared with June 2021, the proportion of adults reporting feeling very or fairly safe increased for “busy public spaces” from 85% to 88% during the day.

## Figure 2: Women felt less safe than men in all settings after dark

Proportion of adults who felt “very or fairly unsafe” walking alone by setting and using public transport, by sex, Great Britain, 16 February to 13 March 2022

## Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Across all settings in the day and after dark, the latest data for February to March 2022 showed that disabled adults felt less safe than non-disabled adults (Figure 3). There was no change in disabled adults reporting feeling unsafe in any setting compared with the same data collected in June 2021. However, in “busy public spaces” there was an increase in the proportion of disabled adults reporting they felt very or fairly safe both during the day and after dark. For the definition of “disabled adults” used in this publication, see [Section 6](#).

## Figure 3: Disabled adults felt less safe in all settings than non-disabled adults

Proportion of adults who felt “very or fairly unsafe” walking alone by setting and using public transport, by disability status, Great Britain, 16 February to 13 March 2022

**Download the data**

[.xlsx](#)

Data relating to age, sex, ethnicity, disability, region, and deprivation can be found within [our related datasets](#).

For the first time in February to March 2022, the OPN asked respondents how safe they felt using public transport. During the day, 9% of adults felt unsafe, compared with 34% of adults after dark.

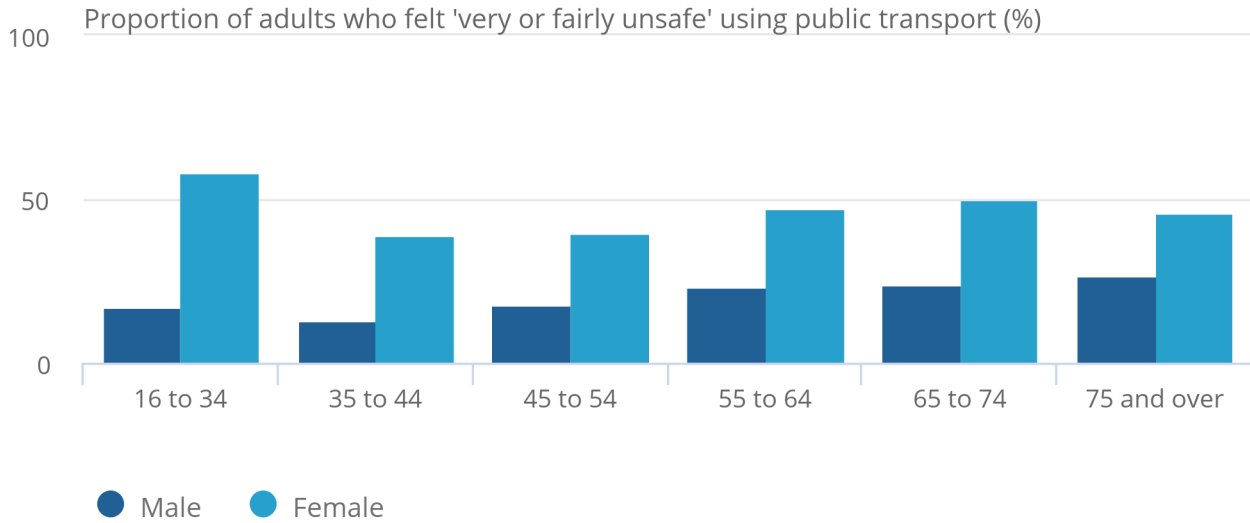
When looking at sex and age together, 58% of women aged 16 to 34 years reported feeling very or fairly unsafe using public transport alone after dark. This was the highest proportion of any age and sex group (Figure 4). A higher proportion of adults in London felt very or fairly safe alone on public transport after dark, compared with all other regions except Scotland and the South West.

**Figure 4: Women aged 16 to 34 years felt less safe using public transport after dark than any other sex and age group**

Proportion of adults who felt "very or fairly unsafe" using public transport on their own, by sex and age group, Great Britain, 16 February to 13 March 2022

Figure 4: Women aged 16 to 34 years felt less safe using public transport after dark than any other sex and age group

Proportion of adults who felt "very or fairly unsafe" using public transport on their own, by sex and age group, Great Britain, 16 February to 13 March 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

### 3 . Experiences of harassment

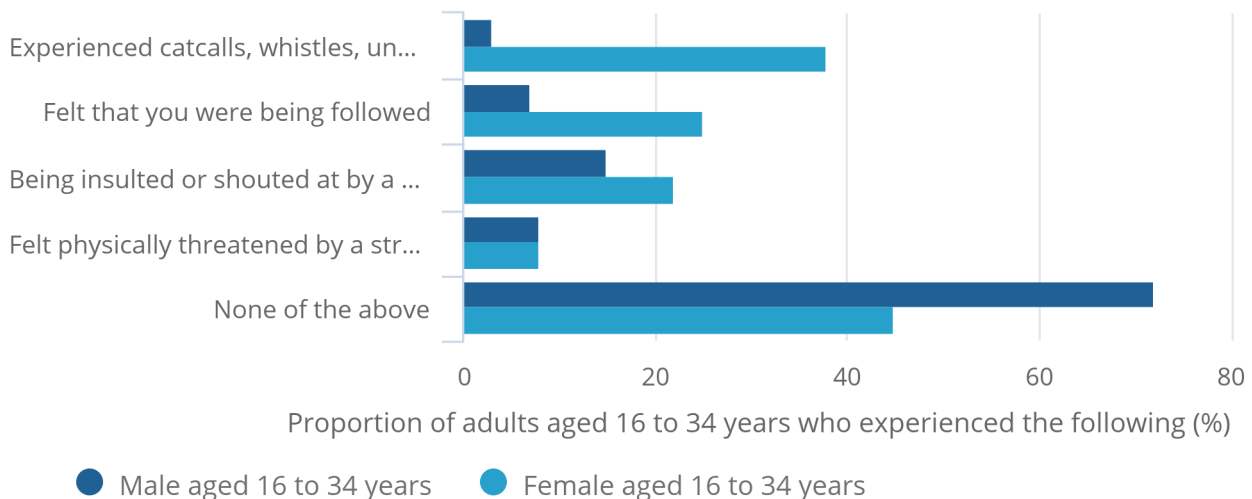
The latest Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) data showed that in the previous 12 months, 27% of women and 16% of men had experienced at least one form of harassment. One in two (50%) women aged 16 to 34 years had experienced at least one form of harassment; a decrease from 58% in June 2021. For the definition of "harassment" used in this publication, see Section 6. Between June 2021 and February to March 2022 there were no differences in experiences of the individual types of harassment asked about.

**Figure 5: Experiences of catcalls, unwanted sexual comments, and whistles were the most common form of harassment for women aged 16 to 34 years**

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 34 years who experienced types of harassment in the last 12 months, by sex, Great Britain, 16 February to 13 March 2022

Figure 5: Experiences of catcalls, unwanted sexual comments, and whistles were the most common form of harassment for women aged 16 to 34 years

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 34 years who experienced types of harassment in the last 12 months, by sex, Great Britain, 16 February to 13 March 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

There were differences between women and men in experiences of catcalling and feeling that you were being followed. More than one third of women (38%) aged 16 to 34 years had experienced catcalling in the last 12 months, the highest of all age and sex groups (Figure 5).

The experience of being insulted or shouted at by a stranger in public was more likely to have been experienced by disabled adults than non-disabled adults.

Adults who experienced harassment in the previous 12 months were more likely to report feeling very or fairly unsafe in all settings compared with adults who had not (Figure 6). Differences observed were significant in all settings except for during the day in a "park or other open space" for both men and women, and during the day in a "quiet street near home" for men.

## Figure 6: Adults who had experienced harassment in the previous 12 months were more likely to feel unsafe when walking alone and using public transport

Proportion of males and females who felt “very or fairly unsafe” by setting and experience of harassment, Great Britain, 16 February to 13 March 2022

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

## 4 . Effects of perceived safety on behaviour

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) asked people who said they felt very or fairly unsafe in any setting, if they had stopped doing certain activities in the last month. For the definition of “activities” used in this publication, see [Section 6](#).

Compared with June 2021, the latest data for February to March 2022 showed an increase in both men (from 18% to 24%) and women (from 32% to 37%) reporting they had stopped walking in quiet places, such as parks or open spaces, after dark in the last month.

There was a decrease in the number of adults reporting they had stopped going to busy public spaces during the day. This fell from 38% to 23%, a decrease from 43% to 24% for men and 36% to 22% for women. Alongside people’s feelings of personal safety, attitudes to coronavirus (COVID-19) risks may also have influenced some of these changes.

## 5 . Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment data

[Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Released 25 May 2022

Data from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) on perceptions of personal safety in different settings, by personal characteristics, collected between 16 February and 13 March 2022. Also contains data on experiences of harassment in the previous 12 months.

## 6 . Glossary

### Activities

People who reported feeling very or fairly unsafe in any setting were asked in the last month if had they stopped doing one of the following activities:

- leaving home alone
- going to streets or areas that they think are unsafe
- walking in quiet places such as parks or open spaces
- walking in a quiet street close to where they live
- going to busy public spaces on their own such as a high street or train station

## Disabled adults

Those with a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted, or is expected to last, 12 months or more that reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

## Harassment

In this publication, the term "harassment" refers to four types of harassment that were asked about in the survey. These were:

- being insulted or shouted at by a stranger in public
- experienced catcalls, whistles, unwanted sexual comments or jokes from a stranger in public
- felt that you were being followed
- felt physically threatened by a stranger in a public space

## Settings

Respondents were asked how safe they felt when walking alone or using transport, both in the day and after dark, in the following locations:

- in a quiet street close to your home
- in a busy public space such as a high street or train station
- in a park or other open space
- using public transport on your own in or around your local area

In this publication, the term "settings" refers to the four locations, both in the day and after dark.

# 7 . Measuring the data

Differences between groups presented in this bulletin are significant at a 95% confidence level.

## Opinion and Lifestyle Survey

This release contains data from a module undertaken through the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

Between 16 February 2022 and 13 March 2022, respondents of the OPN Survey were asked how safe they feel when walking alone both during the day and after dark in:

- a quiet street close to home
- a busy public space
- a park or open space
- using public transport on their own, in their local area

Those who reported feeling very or fairly unsafe in any setting were asked whether this had affected their behaviour. Respondents were asked about experiences of harassment in the previous 12 months.

Data collection is conducted by an online self-completion questionnaire. Telephone interviews are available if requested by a respondent, however the predominant mode of collection is online. At the time that these data were collected, around 4,500 adults were contacted in every period. The achieved sample for the OPN was approximately 3,000 to 3,500 individuals per fortnight, and, an average response rate of 69%, based on data collected since 25 August 2021. From March 2020, the OPN was adapted to become a weekly survey used to collect data on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on day-to-day life in Great Britain. As we have moved to a period where restrictions have been lifted across Great Britain, the OPN moved to a fortnightly data collection from 25 August 2021 onwards.

## Sampling and weighting

This analysis is based on pooled data, which comprise two waves of data collection, covering the periods 16 to 27 February 2022 and 3 to 13 March 2022.

The waves included 6,213 adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain. Pooling two waves of data together increases sample sizes, allowing us to analyse perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment for different groups of the population. Survey weights were applied to make estimates representative of the population (based on June 2021 population estimates).

Further information on the survey design and quality can be found in [our Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#).

## 8 . Strengths and limitations

The main strengths of the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) include:

- it allows for a very quick turnaround of data: the OPN currently collects data fortnightly, over a twelve-day period
- it meets data needs: the questionnaire is developed with customer consultation and design expertise is applied in the development stages
- it is flexible and responsive, allowing new questions to be included at a fast pace
- it meets users' sampling needs: questions can be run for multiple weeks, with the data combined to increase the sample size for examining small sub-groups of the population
- its questions are straightforward and directed at the majority of the population, however it is also possible to include questions only relevant for sub-samples
- robust methods are adopted for the survey's sampling and weighting strategies to limit the impact of bias
- it is accurate and reliable; the questionnaire is rigorously tested and the data are quality assured

The main limitation of the OPN is that in-depth probing of topic modules is not possible because of the length of the questionnaire.

## 9 . Related links

### [Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment. Great Britain: 2 to 27 June 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 24 August 2021

Data from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) on perceptions of personal safety in different settings by personal characteristics, collected between 2 to 27 June 2021. Also contains data on experiences of harassment in the previous 12 months.

### [Social capital in the UK: April 2020 to March 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 24 May 2022

How the UK is faring in the four domains of social capital: personal relationships, social network support, civic engagement, and trust and cooperative norms. The analysis covers April 2020 to March 2021 and includes historical comparisons with pre-April 2020 data where available. The bulletin includes data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales on how safe adults aged 18 years and over felt walking alone in their local area after dark in May 2020 to March 2021. Includes historical comparisons since 2015 to 2016.

### [Crime in England and Wales: year ending December 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 28 April 2022

Crime against households and adults using data from police recorded crime and the new Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales. Includes the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on crime and people's perceptions of crime during the January to December 2021 interview periods.