

Statistical bulletin

Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain: 2 to 27 June 2021

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

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Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Perceptions of personal safety](#)
3. [Experiences of harassment](#)
4. [Effects of perceived safety on behaviour](#)
5. [Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment data](#)
6. [Glossary](#)
7. [Measuring the data](#)
8. [Strengths and limitations](#)
9. [Related links](#)

1 . Main points

- People felt less safe when walking alone after dark than during the day in a quiet street close to home; a busy public space; and a park or open space.
- One in two women and one in seven men felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a quiet street near their home.
- One in two women and one in five men felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a busy public place.
- Four out of five women and two out of five men felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a park or other open space.
- Disabled people felt less safe walking alone in all settings than non-disabled people.
- Adults who experienced at least one form of harassment in the previous 12 months were more likely to feel unsafe when walking alone compared with those who had not.
- Two out of three women aged 16 to 34 years experienced one form of harassment in the previous 12 months; with 44% of women aged 16 to 34 years having experienced catcalls, whistles, unwanted sexual comments or jokes, and 29% having felt like they were being followed.
- Some 6 out of 10 people who reported feeling unsafe during the day, and 4 out of 10 who reported feeling unsafe after dark, had altered their behaviour, as a result, in the previous month.

Statistician's comment

"This is the first time the ONS has asked people about feelings of personal safety when walking alone in different public settings. We explored how those feelings are influenced by personal experience of harassment and if they affected behaviours. There are some clear findings: men and women both feel less safe after dark, but the extent to which women feel unsafe is significantly greater. Disabled people, too, are more likely to feel unsafe, even in the daytime in busy public places."

Nick Stripe, Head of Crime Statistics Branch, Office for National Statistics

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2 . Perceptions of personal safety

In June, the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) showed that perceptions of personal safety when walking alone varied depending on [setting](#) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: 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, Great Britain, 2 to 27 June 2021

[Download the data](#)

Across all settings, a higher proportion of women reported feeling very or fairly unsafe when walking alone, compared with men (Figure 2). The disparities were greatest for walking alone after dark than during the day, most notably “in a park or other open space” where 81% of women reported feeling very or fairly unsafe after dark, compared with 39% of men.

Figure 2: Women felt less safe than men walking alone, in all settings

Proportion of adults who felt “very or fairly unsafe” walking alone, by setting, and sex, Great Britain, 2 to 27 June 2021

[Download the data](#)

When looking at sex and age together, women aged 16 to 34 years and 75 years and over felt less safe, in most settings than females in other age groups. Differences were significant, both during the day and after dark, “in a quiet street close to home” and “in a busy public place” (see [accompanying datasets](#)).

Across all settings, 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) felt significantly less safe than non-disabled adults (Figure 3).

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

Proportion of adults who felt “very or fairly unsafe” walking alone, by disability status, Great Britain, 2 to 27 June 2021

[Download the data](#)

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

3 . Experiences of harassment

In June 2021, the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) showed that 32% of women and 19% of men had experienced at least one form of [harassment](#) in the previous 12 months. Of adults aged 16 to 34 years, 65% of women had experienced harassment, compared with 29% of men (Figure 4).

Figure 4: More women aged 16 to 34 years experienced catcalls, unwanted sexual comments, and whistles than men of the same age

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 34 years who experienced types of harassment, by sex, Great Britain, 2 to 27 June 2021

[Download the data](#)

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 5). 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 5: Adults who had experienced harassment in the previous 12 months were more likely to feel unsafe when walking alone

Proportion of females and males who felt “very or fairly unsafe” walking alone, by setting and harassment, Great Britain, 2 to 27 June 2021

[Download the data](#)

4 . Effects of perceived safety on behaviour

In June 2021, the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) showed that 42% of adults who reported feeling very or fairly unsafe after dark, and 63% of adults who reported feeling very or fairly unsafe during the day indicated that, as a result, they had stopped doing at least one of the following activities in the previous month:

- 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

Coronavirus (COVID-19) risks and restrictions are also likely to have reduced the number of times people left their home in the previous month.

5 . Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment data

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

Dataset | 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 and 27 June 2021. Also contains data on experiences of harassment in the previous 12 months.

6 . Glossary

Settings

Respondents were asked how safe they felt when walking alone, 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

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

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

7 . Measuring the data

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

Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

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

Between 2 and 27 June 2021 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

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

Data collection for the OPN is primarily collected through a self-completion online questionnaire. Telephone interviews are available if requested by a respondent. Around 6,000 adults aged 16 years and older in Great Britain are contacted every week, with the achieved sample for the OPN currently approximately 4,000 to 4,500 individuals per week.

Sampling and weighting

This analysis is based on pooled data, which comprise four waves of data collection covering the following periods:

- 2 to 6 June 2021
- 9 to 13 June 2021
- 16 to 20 June 2021
- 23 to 27 June 2021

The waves included 16,112 adults aged 16 years and over in Great Britain. Pooling four 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.

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

8 . Strengths and limitations

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

- allowing for a very quick turnaround of data: the OPN currently collects data weekly, over a five-day period, with estimates and reference tables published on the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) website within five days of survey completion
- meeting data needs: the questionnaire is developed with customer consultation and design expertise is applied in the development stages
- being flexible and responsive, allowing new questions to be included at a fast pace
- meeting 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
- questions being straightforward and directed at the majority of the population, however it is also possible to include questions only relevant for sub-samples
- robust methods being adopted for the survey's sampling and weighting strategies to limit the impact of bias
- being accurate and reliable; the questionnaire is rigorously tested, and the data are quality-assured

The main limitations of the OPN include:

- in-depth probing of topic modules is not possible because of the length of the questionnaire
- data for Scotland and Wales cannot currently be analysed with the same level of granularity as data for English regions (from 21 October 2020 the size of the sample frame was boosted for England); we are currently investigating options to increase the sample size for Wales and Scotland.

9 . Related links

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

Bulletin | Released 22 July 2021

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 May 2020 to March 2021 interview periods.

[Sexual offences in England and Wales overview: year ending March 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 18 March 2021

Figures on sexual offences from the year ending March 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales and crimes recorded by police.