

Public Spaces and Gender:

***An everyday occurrence:
women and public sexual harassment***

***I want to be free to go where I want, when I
want, wearing what I want, with out fear of
male violence***

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

This study was sparked by a survey published by End Violence Against Women (EVAW 2012), which found that 43% of London women aged between 18-34 had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces in 2011/12.

As a consequence, Coventry Women's Voices¹ (CWV) and Coventry University² decided to carry out a similar study to mark International Women's Day 2013. The intention was also to provide baseline information to inform local and regional policies, particularly those being considered by Bob Jones, the newly appointed West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner.

CONTEXT

According to Holly Kearl, founder of *Stop Street Harassment* and *International Anti-Street Harassment Week*, studies across the world show that between 70% and 100% of women, when surveyed, reported incidents of public sexual harassment. Further, Kearl reports that this can typically act as a gateway crime:

... opening the door for perpetrators to move to more serious expressions of violence and aggression such as stalking, assault, and rape. (Kearl, 2010)

This continuum is echoed in a UK HMIC report (2012: 28) into rape investigation and prosecution, which found that perpetrators engage in:

...a long series of offences, which start with the inappropriate touching of women in the street [and] progressed, with ever increasing severity, towards attempted rape.

More locally, Coventry has a higher incidence of rape and sexual assault than anywhere else in the UK:

People living in Coventry are more likely to be the victims of rape and sexual assault than people living in the rest of the West Midlands and the UK as a whole. (DPH, 2011).

In addition, data provided by the Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (CRASAC) also shows that 93% of its clients are female, as are most victims of child sexual abuse. This gender balance is echoed by 2010 West Midlands Police data (GHK 2011) which states that females aged between 10-15 years old are most at risk, with the most common offence being sexual assault and rape.

This being the case, and building on the EVAW survey, the assumption was that many Coventry women would also have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public spaces.

Therefore, this study set out to examine what public sexual harassment looked like in Coventry and how it made women feel, both in terms of the immediate impact and longer term effects.

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, public sexual harassment is defined as:

- Unwanted sexual comments
- Wolf-whistling
- Groping

These particular forms of public sexual harassment were felt to be the most common types suffered by women, and have resonance with the wider definition of sexual harassment - 'unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature' - used by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC 2013).

The study - using a mixed methods approach - comprised two stages, both approved by the Coventry University ethics system. The first stage was an online survey, which aimed to explore women's experiences of public sexual harassment in the last 12 months³, and ran from October 2012 to January 2013. Links to the survey were promoted through a variety of online networks, including Coventry Women's Voices, the Coventry Feminist Group, Women's Views on News and Coventry University. Two hundred and seventy responses were received from women, and of these 193 completed surveys were included in the analysis (see Table 1).

¹ An independent group of women's organisations

² Coventry University Integrated Transport and Logistics Grand Challenge group.

³ Limited to the last 12 months to ensure the survey was manageable.

The second stage involved interviews with a selection of forty women who had agreed to a follow-up in the survey. Demographic data was analysed in terms of those who had experienced harassment in the last 12 months and those who had not (see Table 2). Fourteen interviews were carried out from within the 'had experienced' category, taking into account age range, disability, ethnicity and how many incidents each respondent had reported. Within the 'had not experienced' category, the focus was on all of the above, but with a larger emphasis on age-range, and two interviews were carried out.

All interviewees received a participation information sheet and gave written and/or verbal consent agreeing to take part and have their telephone interviews recorded. The interviews were carried out by the Coventry University researcher, plus two fully briefed members of CWV, during the first week of February 2013.

Table 1	No.
Number of surveys attempted	270
Number of surveys completed	193
Number of interviewees	16

Table 2	No.	%
Had experienced harassment	118	61
Had not experienced harassment	75	39

The interviews were semi-structured (CSE 2013) in that they were based around a pre-determined set of open questions to prompt discussion, with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore particular themes or responses further. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and comments used within this report have been edited where necessary in order to improve grammatical flow.

In recognition that some interviewees may well discuss distressing experiences, each interviewer was instructed to stop the interview if this occurred and offer a referral to CRASAC, before carrying on. In addition, each interviewer was offered the opportunity to debrief with a CRASAC representative post-interview.

As a complement to the study, data was also gathered during a workshop carried out as part of a launch of the initial findings on March 4th to mark International Women's Day 2013.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study are acknowledged, particularly in respect to the small number of respondents when compared to the total number of women who live in Coventry: 159,000 according to 2011 Census Data (Guardian Online 2012).

In addition, despite CWV being comprised of a diverse range of women's groups and all being informed of the survey, and the survey being promoted via a variety of online networks, the white British ethnicity, at 75%, was overwhelmingly represented in the survey responses, which does correspond to the ethnic make-up of women in Coventry (75%: ONS 2009). However, it would have been advantageous to have received a larger response rate from non-White British respondents in order to give a fuller picture of any differences/similarities of the types of public sexual harassment when compared by or within ethnicity.

Another limitation concerns some of the promotional methods used for the survey. For example, targeting women's groups via Facebook and Twitter makes it more likely that respondents would have a feminist/anti-sexist viewpoint and so would more clearly recognise public sexual harassment when it happened to them, and also be more willing to declare this.

In summary, the findings from this study can only be seen as a snapshot of a particular group of women in Coventry, albeit that their responses have resonance with the wider experience of women as detailed in other studies. However, it is hoped that the survey can be used to build and attract a more diverse respondent pool by specific community groups both in Coventry and the UK. To this end, the survey is freely available for use⁴, on the understanding that any reports generated can be subsequently uploaded to the Coventry Women's Voices website.

⁴ On request to Jane Osmond, arx162@coventry.ac.uk.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

This is a 2013 study of women's experiences of public sexual harassment in Coventry, which was sparked by a 2012 End Violence against Women survey which showed that 43% of young women in London (aged 18-34) had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces in the preceding year.

It is also placed in the context of a growing awareness of a global problem of public sexual harassment against women and the likelihood that it can act as a gateway to a continuum of sexual violence.

This, coupled with a 2011 report which found that Coventry has a higher incidence of rape and sexual assault than anywhere else in the UK, led Coventry Women's Voices and Coventry University to examine what public sexual harassment looked like in Coventry, and how it made women feel, both in terms of immediate and longer-term impacts.

Incidents

Nearly two hundred women completed an online survey, and of these, 61% reported experiencing one or more incidents of public sexual harassment in the last year. Both the survey and follow-up interview data⁵ showed that these incidents ranged across the continuum of sexual violence against women. While women aged between 17-29 were more likely to experience such incidents, all age groups reported harassment, and these included unwanted sexual comments, obscene gestures, wolf-whistles, being followed, kerb crawled, cornered, stared at, sexual assault and rape.

Where the harassment occurred

Women reported incidents of harassment occurring on the street, at bus stops, bus and train stations, on public transport, inside and outside pubs and clubs and at University, school and work.

Feeling unsafe

Unsurprisingly, only 7% of women felt 'very safe' in public spaces - whether they had experienced an incident within the last 12 months or not - with the majority feeling either 'fairly' or 'not very safe'. This feeling of being unsafe was echoed by the interviewees who used words like 'unwanted', 'violation', 'threatened', 'abusive', 'intimidated' and 'uncomfortable' to define what public sexual harassment meant to them.

Age at which harassment started

Worryingly, for the majority of women interviewed, the public sexual harassment started when they were relatively young, with nearly a third citing incidents when they were between 10-13 years old, and that - from this point on - it became continuous.

Reactions

Very few women reported incidents to the police and there was a general consensus that this was due to the perception that the police and judiciary simply did not take public sexual harassment against women seriously. Some women just did not feel safe enough to report because they were frightened of repercussions, and others didn't appear to realise that what was happening was sexual harassment.

If they did complain, women felt they suffered from a victim-blaming culture where they were routinely seen as 'at fault' for their own harassment, typically focused on what they were wearing and how much they had been drinking. Sadly, this attitude was sometimes shared by the female friends of those who had been harassed. At other times women were told by perpetrators that the harassment was just a joke, or 'banter' and they were accused of lacking a sense of humour.

Reasons for harassment

Various reasons were given as to why such public sexual harassment of women occurred. Some described it as a symptom of not being taken seriously within a patriarchal system, evidenced by the lack of societal equality that women face. Others felt that public sexual harassment had become so normalised that it was not recognised as such.

⁵ Sixteen women

For some this was linked to a widespread availability of pornography and also the lack of repercussions that perpetrators faced, which suggest an acceptance of men's entitlement to women's spaces and bodies. Drinking was also seen as a cause, particularly within groups of men who perhaps saw it as practicing masculinity and exercising power.

Impact

The culminative impact of such incidents was felt to be simply unjust. Firstly, women felt forced to change their behaviour in public places because of fear of harassment or violence, with women routinely employing a range of avoidance strategies. These included always being aware of surroundings, not going out after dark and avoiding isolated spaces, such as subways, car parks, bus stations, buses after 6pm and empty streets. Even those who did not specify an avoidance strategy mentioned a fear of being on their own in public after dark.

Secondly, was the emotional impact: most women reported feeling uncomfortable in public spaces and feared the consequences of challenging perpetrators. Others blamed themselves – and how they were dressed - for attracting such incidents. The women also reported feeling powerless, afraid, embarrassed, frustrated, angry, and bewildered by what the perpetrators hoped to gain. Bewilderment was also expressed at the lack of empathy the perpetrators displayed - typically that they did not appear to recognise the women they harassed as being in the same category as their mothers, sisters or daughters. In addition, frustration was expressed at the non-intervention from the general public, perhaps because harassment went unrecognised or there was a reluctance to become involved.

Solutions

On an individual basis, the women confirmed that they would endeavour to teach their existing/future children about what public sexual harassment looked like and why it is not acceptable, and on a practical level they wanted more police on the streets as well as more brightly lit areas.

But, overwhelmingly, they expressed a need for a cultural shift in relation to attitudes about public sexual harassment. Rather than the current focus on teaching women to keep themselves safe, they felt that the focus should be on teaching perpetrators not to harass. Beginning with issues of consent and relationships taught in schools, this attitude change should be promoted through an educational campaign explaining what public sexual harassment is and why it is unacceptable - backed up with real consequences for perpetrators, thus necessitating a concomitant attitude change in the police and judiciary systems.

This message, which should include encouragement for bystanders to intervene, ought to be wrapped within a zero tolerance campaign, with posters and information in every public space, including social media sites. To be successful, such an educational campaign was felt to need governmental backing, robust policies and strategic champions within all organisations responsible for safety in public spaces.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted that there is a very real problem with public harassment of women in Coventry, and has outlined some of the long-term effects, in particular the limitations to the freedom that women face in public spaces. It has also highlighted that such public sexual harassment can span the continuum of sexual violence, from wolf-whistling to rape. To combat this situation, there needs to be real and robust action from all those who have the power to initiate change and, on a local level, this includes the police, the local council, workplaces and universities.

However, although this study focused on Coventry, the issues uncovered are not unique to one city, and nationally a commitment is needed from the judiciary to take public sexual harassment seriously and prosecute accordingly. This should be backed up by a government campaign of educational awareness so society is clear about what public sexual harassment looks like and what the consequences are for transgression.

Finally, this study serves as a microcosm of the global situation of public sexual harassment, which affects 70 to 100% of women. That women, who comprise half of the world's population cannot safely negotiate public spaces without fear of sexual harassment is a travesty, and bearing in mind that it can act as a gateway to a continuum of sexual violence, it is unsurprising that 1 in 5 women (UN 2013) can expect to experience sexual assault and/or rape in their lifetimes. Action is needed and it is needed now.

KEY FACTS

- **61% had experienced sexual harassment in the last 12 months**
 - The majority of respondents were aged between 21-29 (36%), followed by 40-49 (21%)
 - 52% had experienced between two and four incidents
 - Incidents included unwanted sexual comments (37%), wolf-whistling (32%) and being groped (12%)
 - The majority of incidents occurred on the street (59%); other places included pubs, parks and public transport
 - 64% of women ignored incidents; those who challenged (19%) them were likely to be met with threats of physical violence
 - 46% did not feel safe in public spaces
 - A third would like to see an attitude change to sexual harassment; a third would like to see a larger police presence and a quarter more street lighting
- **Age when sexual harassment first started***
 - 17% 10 years old
 - 17% 11-12 years old
 - 25% 13-14 years old
 - 25% 15-16 years old
 - 17% 17-19 years old
- **Incidents**
 - Ranged from: wolf-whistles, unwanted sexual comments, being propositioned/followed, groped, sexual exposure and rape
- **Reporting**
 - Only three interviewees reported to police: the rest feared consequences of doing so or did not think they could report
- **Reasons for sexual harassment**
 - Societal inequalities
 - Refusal to take women's issues seriously
 - Normalisation of sexual harassment
 - Use of pornography
 - Insistence on sexual harassment as joke/banter
 - Drinking culture
 - Victim blaming
 - Non-intervention of the public

- **Impact**
 - Restriction of freedom
 - Avoidance of certain places
 - Exercising caution at all times
 - Fear
 - Embarrassment
 - Guilt/Self-blame
 - Frustration
 - **Strategies to combat public sexual harassment:**
 - Government campaign aimed at raising awareness with:
 - Men and boys
 - Police
 - Schools
 - Public
- 39% had not experienced public sexual harassment in the last 12 months**
- The majority of respondents were aged between 50-60 plus (34%) followed by 40-49 (25%)
 - Only 11% felt 'very safe' in public spaces
 - 30%
 - Were worried about being out after dark (36%)
 - Employed avoidance strategies (18%)
 - Worried about gangs of youths (10%)
 - 41% wanted better lighting
 - 28% wanted more police on the streets

Notes: 193 survey respondents; 16 interviewees
*interviewees

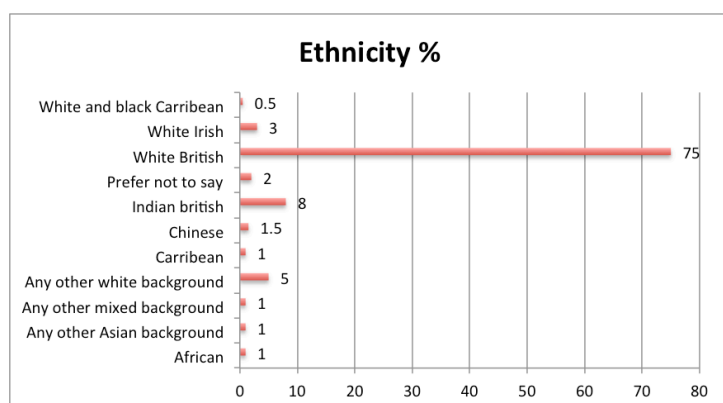
SURVEY FINDINGS

OVERALL FIGURES

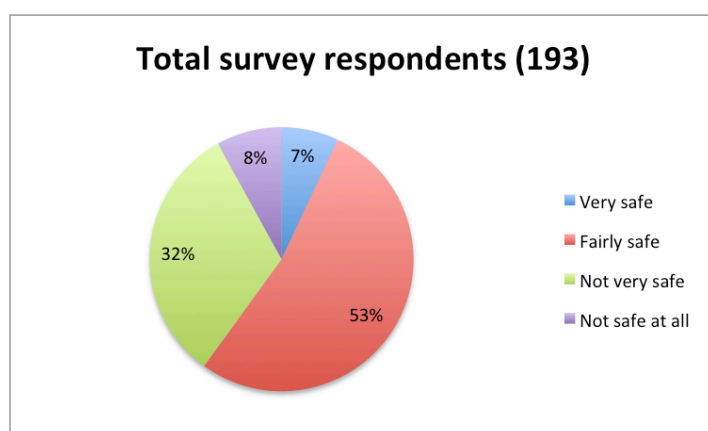
One hundred and ninety-three completed questionnaires were analysed, and 61% of respondents had experienced public sexual harassment in the last 12 months. Broken down by age, 82% of women aged 17-29 had experienced either groping, wolf-whistling or unwanted sexual comments. As the women grew older, the figures for these incidents began to diminish, with 51% of women aged 30-39 citing incidents, 43% of women aged 40-49 and 39% of those aged 50 plus. Overall, more women in each category, apart from those aged 50+ had experienced public sexual harassment than had not.

	17-29	%	30-39	%	40-49	%	50 plus	%	Totals	Total %
Had experienced	58	82	19	51	25	57	16	39	118	61
Had not experienced	13	18	18	49	19	43	25	61	75	39
Total number of respondents	71	100	37	100	44	100	41	100	193	100

Overall, the majority of respondents declared themselves to be White British, with the next largest category Indian British, followed by any other White background.



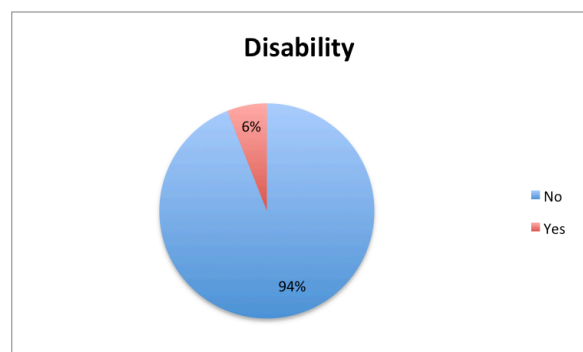
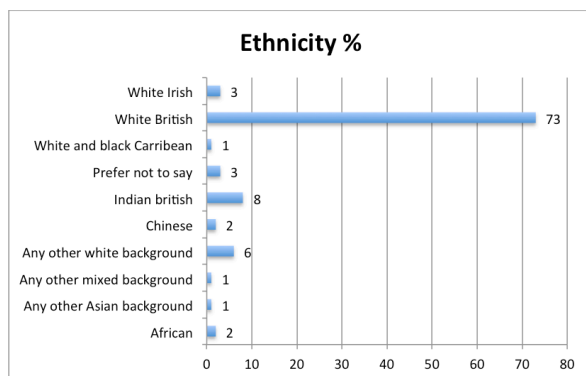
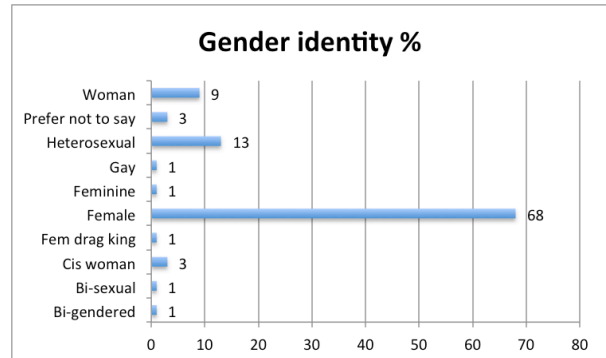
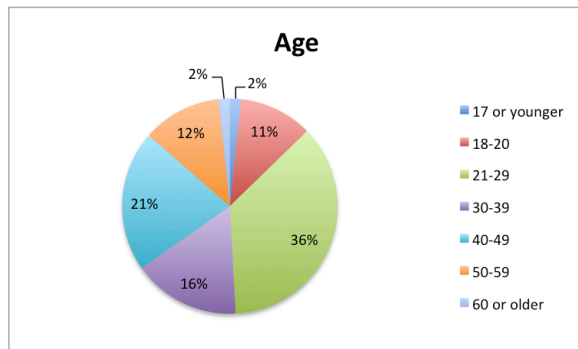
Just over half of the respondents reported feeling 'fairly safe' in Coventry, but only 7% felt 'very safe'. The rest (40%) reported feeling 'not very safe', or 'not safe' at all.



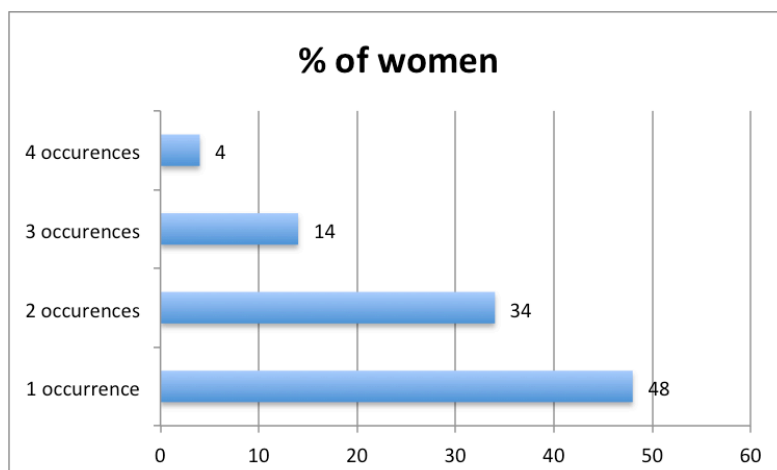
1 RESPONDENTS WHO HAD EXPERIENCED PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

A) DEMOGRAPHICS

The majority of the 118 respondents in this category were aged between 21-29 (36%), followed by 40-49 (21%). In terms of gender identity, 68% identified as female, 13% as heterosexual, 9% as women and 3% as a cis woman⁶. Ethnicity wise, the majority were white British, followed by Indian British. Only 6% declared a disability.



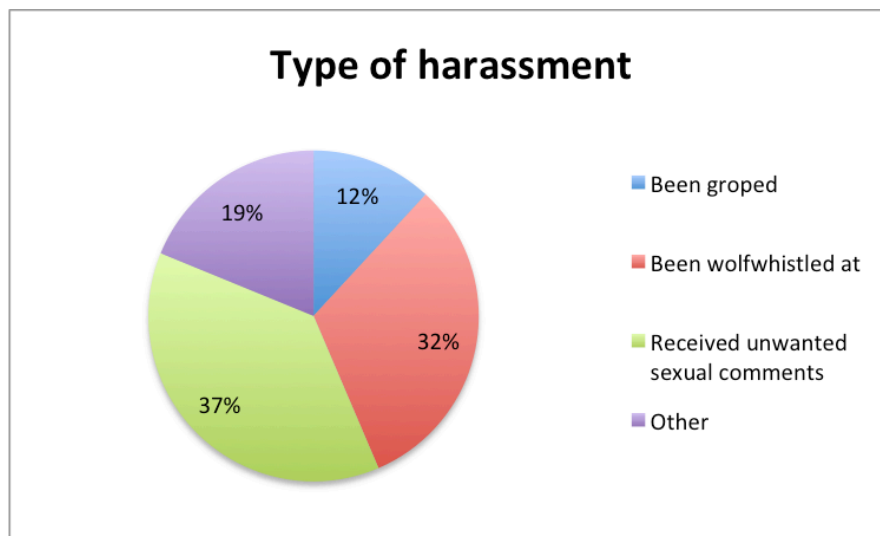
B) NO OF INCIDENTS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS



Nearly half of the respondents had experienced one incident in the last 12 months, and just over a third experienced two incidents. Eighteen percent experienced 3 to 4 incidents.

⁶ Definition of cis woman: <http://bit.ly/15i0GCo>

C) TYPE OF HARASSMENT



The most common incident was unwanted sexual comments (37%), followed by wolf-whistling (32%). Twelve percent had been groped and 19% cited 'other'. Some of the comments (where stated) under this latter category are outlined below.

Other responses

The majority (58%) expanded on how they had received unwanted sexual comments, with 13% of these received from passing cars. Seventeen percent had been groped/physically assaulted and 13% had been followed (2% by kerb crawlers). Typical comments included:

Unwanted sexual comments

I was told I had "great tits" whilst walking my seven year old son home from school, and was told to "take off your knickers" whilst walking to a local restaurant early one evening to meet friends.

I was part of an aggressive argument with a man at a bus stop when I intervened following his constant sexual comments to another woman in the queue.

It's a common experience - I often receive unwanted sexual attention from males, ranging from whistles, to comments such as 'smile darling', to having my hair stroked as I queue for a cash point, to having a male walk next to me and try to speak to me. All of these experiences are unwanted and are NOT 'just a male being friendly'.

As an older woman, it was suggested that I should be grateful for his advances.

Kerb Crawling

On one occasion a group of men followed me in a car for quite a long period of time, trying to get me to get in with them.

Walking along a road, asked if I needed a lift, was followed by another car on the same night, who kerb-crawled until the lack of response I gave made them give up.

Been asked if I needed a lift home at 4am, by myself, dark street, no-one around, the car is following me kerb crawling.

Followed

Been followed, and had a male speak in an intimidating way, ie loudly, but incoherently.

Followed by strange man.

Last year I was followed home from [a local nightclub], by a man who tried talking to me. If it weren't for a couple outside halls who knows what could have happened.

Assault

Guy showed me his penis at a bus stop.

A man tried to stroke my daughter's face while he walked past.

I was walking home and a bloke just slapped my bum as he walked past me. No comment or anything else.

Received unwanted sexual attention at a house party - a man grabbed my bottom.

When on nights out with friends I have been 'groped' on several occasions. Once at [a local nightclub] squeezing my bum when walking past me while waiting in the coat queue.

Had a man come onto me in a bar, touch my thighs without permission and refuse to let me leave until I kissed him.

Had my breasts grabbed from behind in a bar.

Another time somebody actually tried to put [his] fingers down the front of my dress when walking through a doorway in a bar towards the garden.

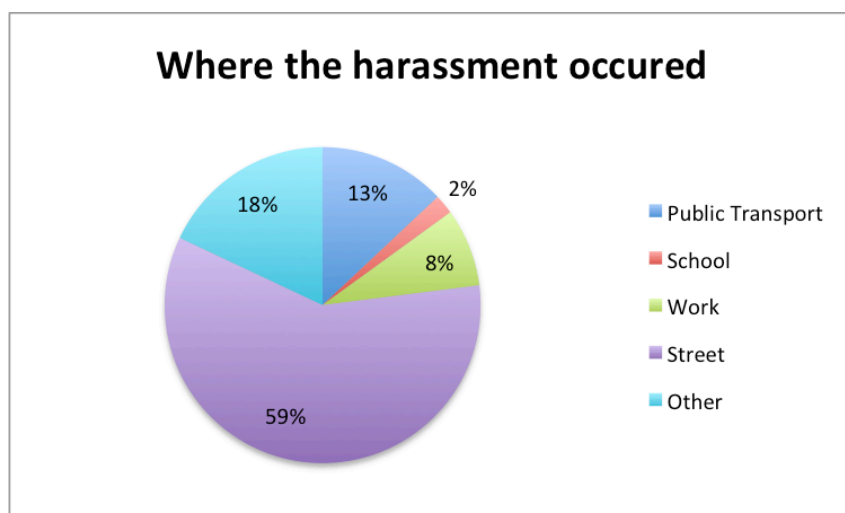
I have lost count of the number of times someone has inappropriately touched me in the city centre and how many times they have looked perplexed when I have not reacted gratefully.

When separated out by age⁷, it was more likely that younger women (aged 17-19) would suffer being groped, wolf whistled at and unwanted sexual comments. The groping incidents lessened for women between 30-39, but this age group suffered a similar amount of harassment in terms of wolf whistling and unwanted sexual comments. For those aged between 40-49, the groping and wolf whistling incidents were much less likely when compared to younger

women, but unwanted sexual comments were still high. For those aged 50 or over, they were more likely to be groped than those aged 40-49, much less likely to be wolf whistled at, but over half had received unwanted sexual comments.

Age	Groped	Wolf Whistle	Unwanted sexual comments
	%		
17-29	29	71	69
30-39	16	63	68
40-49	8	36	64
50 or older	12.5	19	50

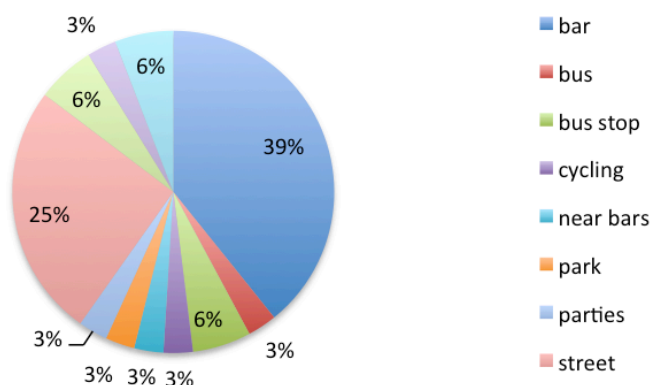
D) WHERE THE INCIDENTS HAPPENED



The majority of incidents happened on the street (59%). Nearly a fifth happened on public transport, followed by work (8%) and school (2%).

⁷ More than one option to answer

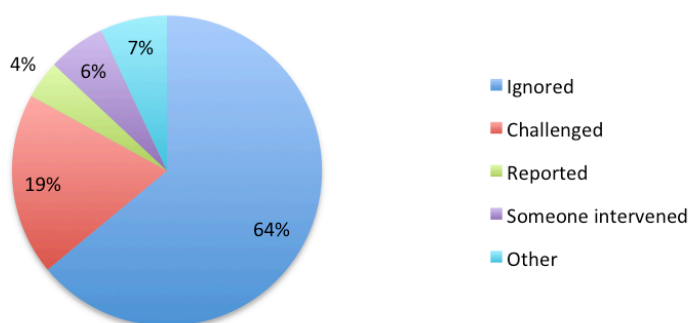
Where (other responses)



Of those that cited 'other' to where the incidents happened, the majority specified bars (39%) and on the street (25%).

E) REACTION

Reaction to harassment



Most (64%) ignored any incidents, and only 4% reported. Nineteen percent did challenge incidents but to little avail – in doing so they faced more harassment or threats of physical violence.

Of those who did challenge incidents, comments included:

I have over the years tried all sorts of methods. Challenging it creates an aggressive stand off where I'm told I'm over-reacting or I become the aggressor. The sad truth is that your only option is to ignore it, put up with it and internalise the self-loathing that doing this brings with it.

Once I stuck my finger up to the perpetrator when he insulted me and that was when I was punched, which I reported to the police. Despite witnesses - who didn't see the incident but did see the perpetrator leaving the scene - no further action was taken because I was unable to remember what he looked like clearly enough to get the correct answer at the ID parade.

I usually challenge it. This has led to threats of violence, including rape, to anger, scorn, increased harassment.

When you challenge it, you're accused of being too pretty and kind of asking for it.

Of those who did not challenge, responses included worries about safety, a refusal to react, a lack of consistent intervention by the public, and the futility of trying to report:

I ignore it because I worry that if I challenge it the situation may escalate, especially if I have my children with me and fear for their safety. It also depends if there are other people around, as I don't want to draw attention to it. If it is at night or in a subway, then I do feel too afraid to challenge.

I just tried not to react in any way to avoid further engagement, in hope they would stop.

I reported the incident with [a] glass bottle but no further action was taken.

No one else intervened.

When I have had issues in the past no one does much despite there being council policies. I have no faith in being supported.

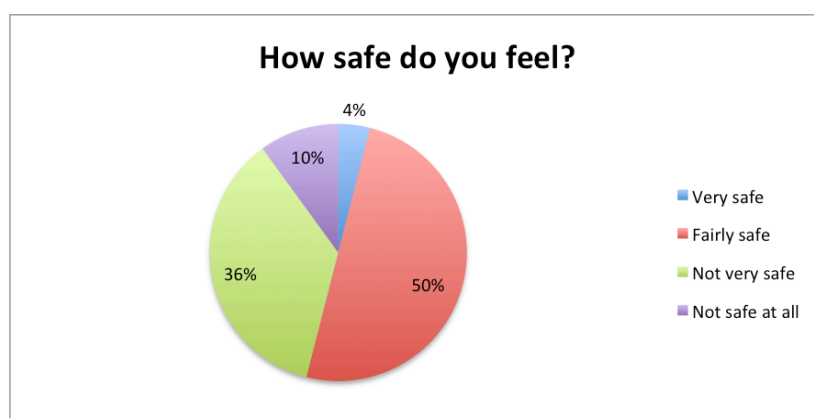
One time after being harassed I sat down at a bus stop to cry and another man came along, asked if I was ok and then stole my phone. It's hell, when are we going to do something about it?

People have stepped in when it has become violent, some of the time.

It was more likely that women aged between 17-49, would ignore any incidents, but nearly half of those 50 and over did so too, although they were more likely than younger women to challenge the incident. No matter what the age of the woman, less than 10% reported it and very rarely did a bystander step in.

Age	Ignored it	Challenged it	Reported it	Someone intervened
%				
17-29	88	23	5	7
30-39	79	16	5	0
40-49	72	20	8	4
50 plus	44	31	6	0

F) HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL?



Half of the respondents felt 'fairly safe' in public spaces, but nearly half felt 'not very safe' or 'not safe at all'. Only 4% felt 'very safe'.

Forty respondents also expanded on this question, and 42.5% employed a variety of coping strategies to minimise their exposure to harassment. The main coping strategy was to avoid being out after dark, particularly in isolated places, and these included subways, car parks, bus stations, on buses after 6pm and in empty streets. Comments included:

Dark places such as subways and parks when it's quiet at night and near pubs where there are drunk people on the streets at night.

Car parks are particularly scary...public spaces after dark or at dusk on your own are not pleasant and I would avoid them.

I do not feel as safe in the evenings, particularly in [the bus station], car parks and streets in the City Centre.

I do not feel safe walking back to my car after work now that it is dark at 5pm.

I feel safe on buses except when groups of drunk people get on the bus, such as university sports teams or groups of people returning home on the late night buses from [nearby town].

It is now commonplace for me to bolster my safety by not going to "lonely" places... where possible, not going out alone at night.

After dark I am reluctant to walk or cycle on streets other than those with a number of others who are doing so.

Even those who did not specify a coping strategy, mentioned fear of being on their own in public after dark:

Depends on the place and time of day. Safer during daylight than in the evening. Safer in a busy place than in a quiet one.

During the day I tend to feel fairly safe in the city centre and on my route home, but after dark not at all. I've felt unsafe on quiet buses and car parks before.

Safe when with people but not safe on my own or when getting dark outside. Not safe at all when walking around in backstreets.

Frequently received [harassment] on the street when walking home not only when it is dark but day time - such as cars with men [who] slow down right next to you or beep.

For the most part I feel safe on the streets but I feel unsafe around the [red-light area in Coventry] because I fear - because of previous bad experience - the men's responses to the fact that I am a transgender woman and the increased culture of objectification of women in that area.

In places with plenty of people around I feel safe. Walking to the chip shop from my house in the dark not so much.

For one woman, issues of safety were bound up in the normalisation of public sexual harassment:

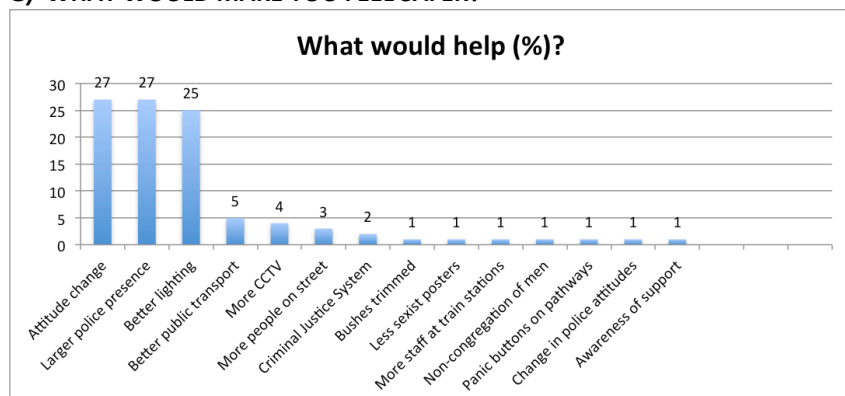
Between the [fairly safe and not very safe] as I do not feel sexual violence/harassment/abuse against women by men is taken seriously by our society nor police or media. It has almost become a part of life that us as women have to accept and put up with, as it is not tackled.

Age	Very safe	Fairly safe	Not very safe	Not safe at all	Not answered
	%				
17-29	5	50	34	10	
30-39	5	53	32	5	5
40-49	4	60	24	12	
50 plus	0	37	56	6	

When separated out by age, 5% or less of all age groups felt 'very safe', and less than 13% of all age groups felt 'not very safe at all'. Therefore the main concentration of replies

were in the 'fairly safe' or 'not very safe' categories. For the former, 50-60% of the 17-49 age group felt fairly safe, but only 37% of women 50 plus did so. For the latter, the 50 plus age group felt a lot less safe than the other age groups at 56%, with approximately a third of all other age groups feeling the same.

G) WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL SAFER?



The majority of answers concentrated on three areas: the need to change attitudes towards public sexual harassment; the need for more police and better lighting on the streets.

In terms of the attitude change, this generally focused on clarifying to the general public - in particular men - that public sexual harassment is not acceptable and that bystanders should be encouraged to intervene when they see it happening. This is

linked to suggestions of an education campaign that would span from early teenage years upward, backed by zero tolerance posters/materials in every public space:

A change in attitude in the public - also in the criminal justice system.

Give men and boys information about how to behave towards women in public spaces and teach society to challenge bad behaviour so it becomes a socially unacceptable practice.

For men to take responsibility for their behaviour and recognise their power in these situations and the impact they have on women and girls.

I think to raise awareness and a big campaign to say this is not to be tolerated so it becomes embedded in our society in the same way drinking and driving behaviour is not tolerated.

Men need to be told not to do this. They need to be told that it's not ok. Police need to be prepared to act when complaints are made.

In terms of better lighting, most respondents felt that this would improve the current situation for women, in particular along the route to and from the train station:

Areas at my university are very poorly lit, there could be better lighting along pathways.

Better-lit public walk ways especially the ones going to the train station (under the bridge).

In terms of public transport, the bus system came under criticism, in particular in relation to buses not turning up on time, leaving women standing alone at bus stops. In addition, the poorly staffed (at night) bus and train stations were mentioned:

More regular bus services, i.e at night, so there is less time spent waiting for buses in the dark, meaning there will be more of an option to get a bus instead of having to walk.

Public transport that turns up on time so as to avoid the need to wait around for extended periods, particularly when dark.

More staffing of places like stations.

Better security at [local bus station].

H) FINAL COMMENTS

Final comments from the respondents included the above topics, but also there were indications that Coventry felt less safe than other cities:

Coming from a smaller town, there was a visible police presence, community wardens who were known to the majority of residents which served to build the relationships and inspire confidence in the authority figures. I miss the friendly inclusion. Coventry feels isolated and unfriendly when out and about.

Another respondent felt that there should be a safe place in the city centre for women if they felt unsafe:

A central spot where women can go if they feel unsafe, which could be manned by the Police, [maybe in] the [town centre] Plaza.

And, yet again the bus service was mentioned, this time in terms of where bus stops were cited:

Not to locate bus stops on one of the worst sections of the city centre. When I have to catch a bus from there, there are gangs, fights, intimidating behaviour, and pubs and gambling clubs located opposite which draws more unwelcome behaviour. Buses are just as bad too as it is not challenged and you are unable to get away unless you choose to get off the bus, pay for a new fare and wait even longer.

Another issue mentioned was the problem of a 'no-go' area around the local lapdancing club:

Get rid of [local lapdancing club]... research has shown time and time again where these clubs are situated the areas become no go areas for women and sexual assaults increase 25%.

A further comment - which reflects previous comments about the problems faced in bars – focused on a Facebook page featuring 'embarrassing nightclub photos':

I guess this isn't specific to Coventry, but I think it'd be good to keep our eye on feeling safe with regards to what is allowed online. For example, the Facebook page 'Embarrassing nightclub photos', something which I've noticed a lot of people I know from Coventry have 'liked', displays degrading pictures of women and men - but more so women - on which people leave aggressive, sexist, disgusting 'comments. This page, along with the uni lad bible or whatever it's called, seem to demonstrate how people are using online devices to vent all of their misogyny - but not just as a venting field, also a place where misogynists can threaten, exploit and re-affirm their own beliefs. It's not like a fair debate can take place on these pages because you have to be misogynistic to 'like' the page in the first place.

However, the comments mainly focused on the respondents' need to negotiate public spaces without fear, and also without the expectation that their behaviour, rather than the men harassing them, needed to change:

I want to be free to go where I want when I want, wearing what I want, with out fear of male violence.

I feel at the moment like the onus is on me to duck my head and walk on by when there are groups of men who decide they want to whistle or say something to me. It shouldn't be that way. They should feel ashamed and embarrassed for acting that way. It's so disrespectful and it makes me so angry.

I try to remain aware when out and about but also don't wish to restrict my movements or feel that there are no go areas for women.

Finally, the harassment was exacerbated by the refusal of the police, bar staff and the public to intervene:

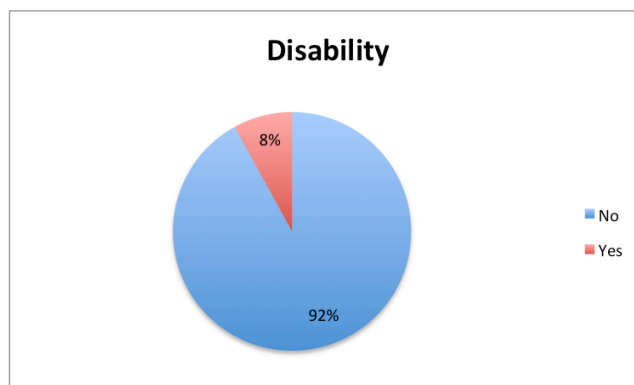
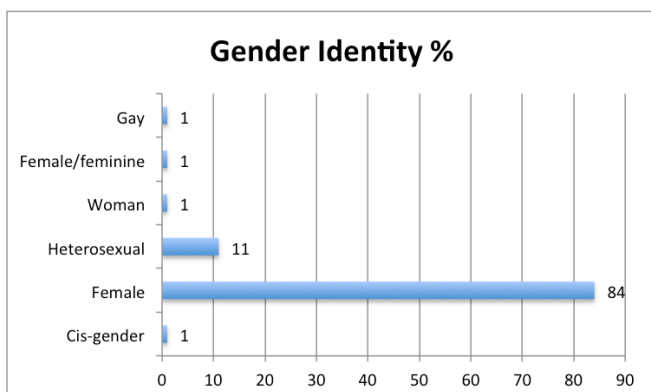
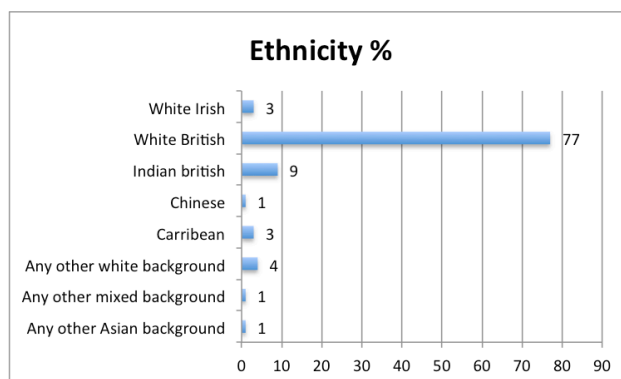
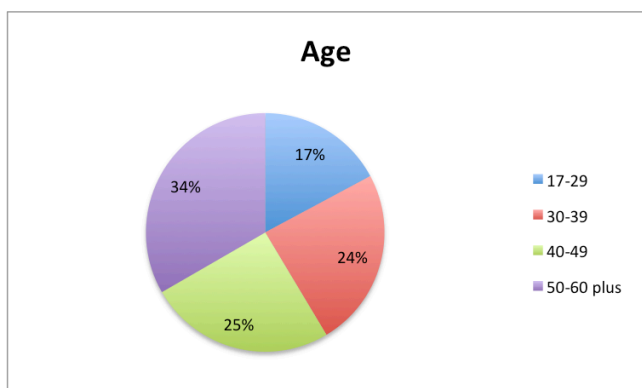
If police are in the area and sexual comments are being made to someone loudly then they should intervene and not take it as people "having a good time" when it is usually unwelcome. Just because someone is not directly challenging it doesn't mean they are comfortable with it. Bar staff should be taught how to deal with sexual harassment between customers without putting themselves in danger.

I would like more people to challenge sexually explicit language and behaviour in public places as I don't want to tolerate people destroying public property and intimidating others.

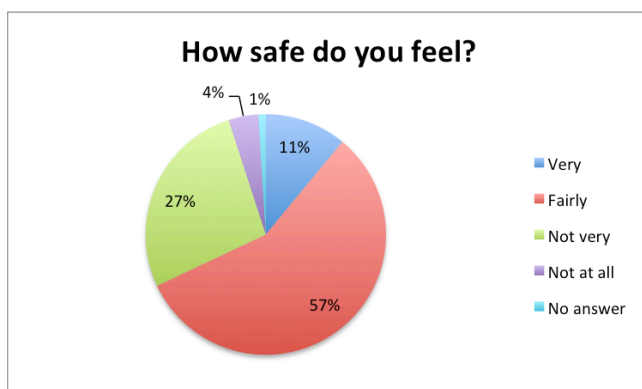
2 RESPONDENTS WHO HAD NOT EXPERIENCED PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

A) DEMOGRAPHICS

In contrast to the respondents who had experienced public sexual harassment in the last 12 months, the age range was older with this group of 75 respondents. The majority were aged between 40-60 plus (59%), followed by 30-39 (24%). In terms of gender identity, 84% identified as female and 11% as heterosexual. Ethnicity wise, the majority were white British, followed by Indian British. Only 8% declared a disability.



B) HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL?



The majority felt fairly safe (57%), and 11% felt 'very safe'. Surprisingly, given that this group had specified they had not experienced harassment in the last 12 months, just over 30% felt 'not very safe' or 'not safe at all'.

Of the twenty-one expanded responses to this question, most concerned safety in public spaces in Coventry. Comments included worries about going out after dark and coping strategies to minimise danger.

Comment type	Total	%
After dark worries	8	36
Employ coping strategies	4	18
Worried about gangs of youths	2	10
Not enough police on the streets	2	9
Fear of crime	2	9
More CCTV needed	1	5
Mobility worries	1	5
Fear of going out	1	5
Grand Total	21	

The largest proportion (36%) found being out in public spaces after dark problematic:

Usually fairly safe but if on foot would avoid run down areas at night. Felt unsafe driving through city centre late at night.

Especially when leaving work and it's dark, very conscious of people around me. Wouldn't ever come into Coventry on my own at night.

Some areas are poorly lit and feel enclosed e.g. by the council building and gallery [city centre] and the underpass to the London Road.

Eighteen percent also employed coping strategies to minimise their sense of danger:

I am always aware of my surroundings, I ensure I walk in a confident manner and have my keys ready to open my door.

If a man walks behind me I try and let him past so he is in front of me.

I would always be aware of my surroundings and try not to put myself into a vulnerable situation.

I am always on guard whenever I am out and about on my own, not so much on the bus, but everywhere else. However, I do not get buses very often because I do not like hanging round waiting at bus stops especially as the dark nights are drawing in.

Some also specified that they felt nervous when confronted by gangs of men:

Seems to be lots of youths hanging around, can be intimidating.

Seems to be lots of large groups of men hanging around town in the coffee shops etc., which are quite intimidating.

In addition, two had been harassed but not in the last 12 months:

I have previously been followed after an evening meeting right up to the door of my car. He even stroked my cheek!

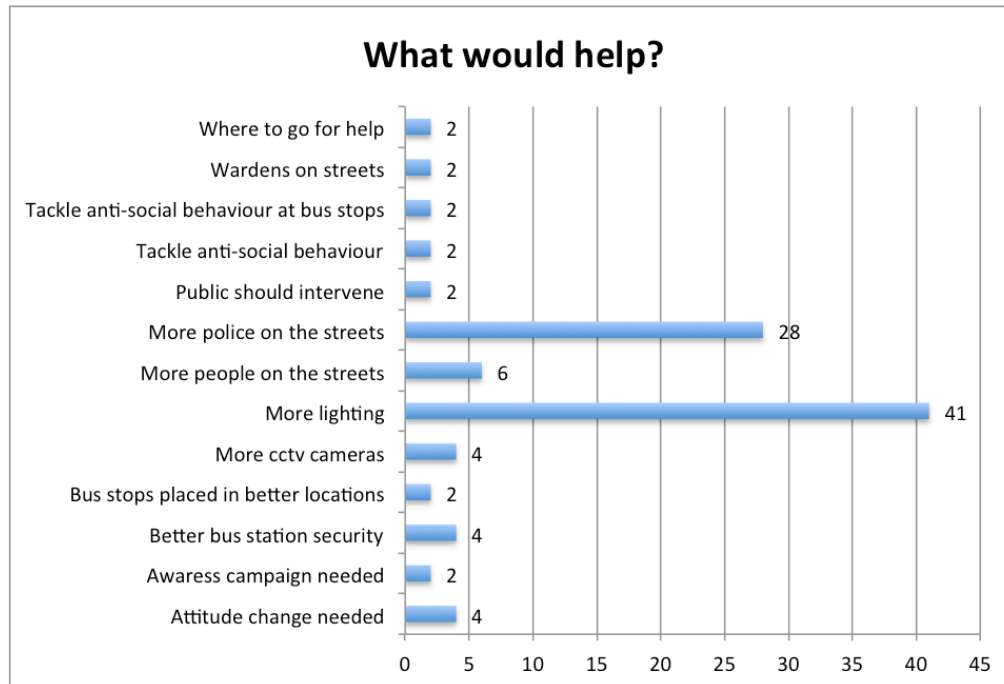
On another occasion, and in broad daylight, challenged to give a man money who said he had a knife and was just out of prison. I was walking very quickly and side stepped him and just carried on. He was surprised at my response and didn't follow me. I am always careful and look around me. But still find entering [local] car park after 6pm very frightening as there are so few people about. I also find working late a bit unnerving.

Age	Very safe	Fairly safe	Not very safe	Not safe at all	No answer
	%				
17-29	15	46	38	0	0
30-39	11	67	22	0	0
40-49	5	63	26	5	0
50 plus	12	52	24	8	4

In terms of age, less than 15% of all age groups felt 'very safe' and less than 10% felt 'not safe at all'. A larger majority of those aged 30-49 felt fairly safe when compared to the other age groups, but the largest

majority that felt 'not very safe' was concentrated in the 17-29 age range.

C) WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL SAFER?



Fifty-three (71%) of respondents answered this question and 41% would like to see more lighting on the streets, including in car parks, subways, around the Cathedral and parks.

Better lighting in some places. Mostly it's good but there are dark areas, especially near parks etc.

Better lighting in car parks, alternatives to subways.

The next priority was more police on the streets:

More police or security presence in the City centre and community.

Maybe more police patrols around the city centre or a more visible security presence - you don't see many police patrolling anymore so you feel you have no support if needed.

Others wanted a change of attitude to harassment in terms of an educational campaign, and for people to intervene if they saw any incidents:

A concentrated campaign educating men not to harass women in public and the public to intervene if they see it happening.

Better education in schools for boys to teach them that rape and sexual attacks on women are wrong.

I think the main thing that would make both men and women feel safer is if they felt other members of the public would help if they needed it. Sadly you hear of far too many occasions when everyone just stood back.

D) FINAL COMMENTS

Twenty-five respondents gave final comments, and while a quarter stated that they felt safe in Coventry, the rest were concerned with issues such as the number of homeless people in the city begging, groups of men congregating, the need for an education campaign and for people to intervene when incidents happened. Also, one respondent mentioned that she would like to see 'fewer examples of overtly sexual advertising in the city' and another spoke about being in her 40s and how this had lessened harassment incidents:

I am now 45 years old; as such, I do not expect to be a ready target for the same type of harassment that younger women might suffer more from. Which is not to say that I don't recognise that street harassment and gender violence can happen to people of any age; just that I recognise that I am no longer young and normatively 'beautiful', and perhaps less eye-catching to would-be harassers.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Sixteen telephone interviews were carried out, 14 with those who had experienced public sexual harassment and two with those who had not⁸. As the two who had not experienced harassment in the last 12 months – one because ‘on the electric wheelchair I go pretty fast!’ and the other ‘Certainly not in Coventry’ – had commented that they used coping strategies to avoid harassment, their comments⁹ have been amalgamated into the themes below.

The interviewees ages ranged from 18-59, with the largest concentration (50%) being 21-29 and 50-59 (25%). Most were White British (75%), followed by Indian British (12.5%), Chinese (6.25%) and any other white background (6.25%). Only two identified a disability, one with bi-polar disorder and one a wheelchair user.

A) DEFINITION OF HARASSMENT

All the interviewees were asked what they considered to be public sexual harassment and the resulting definitions have been grouped into the following broad categories:

Unwanted attention/comments

To me it can be any unwanted attention, it doesn't have to be physical, it can be verbally, which is just as distressing and it seems that you know men will really take advantage.

For me is just when someone interrupts what you are doing like in a negative way. If you are just walking down the street and then there's somebody bothering you and I think it's harassment.

Any sort of behaviour- verbal or physical - which makes you feel uncomfortable or makes you feel like you can't exercise your own rights.

Intimidating actions

Any unwanted contact or intimidating actions on the behalf of one person against someone else.

So it's where I think you feel threatened, where you feel that somebody is being abusive to you or drawing attention to you, somebody that you don't know.

You know anything that kind of makes you feel less of a safe person when you're just going about your business.

Violation of personal space

I think it's anything really is said to you or done to you that makes you, that violates your freedom, your public space.

Discrimination

It's very broad. It's not overtly sexual it's more the discrimination between male and female and being treated slightly differently because I am female.

However, as one interviewee pointed out, trying to define harassment is difficult as the word is in such common usage:

The word harassment has been ferried around too much and that is another reason why people aren't taking it seriously. Because that word also has connotations of a couple in EastEnders having an argument and they are like 'oh stop harassing me' and 'leave me alone'.

B) AGE AT WHICH HARASSMENT FIRST STARTED

Twelve of the interviewees talked about when public sexual harassment first started for them – and for two it began when they were 10 years old:

I think my first recollection of, whether you call it sexual harassment; I was about 10 and we were moving and there were 3 guys in the house, removal men, and I was looking for a particular soft toy that was very precious to me, and one of the guys said to me, "Well, I'm sure I saw it upstairs." So I went upstairs to look for it, thinking, "Well, I don't know how it's got there." And he followed me up and as I'm standing there looking into

⁸ 24 of those who had experienced harassment and eight of those who had not were invited to interview: of these 16 eventually took place.

⁹ Quoted comments have been altered where necessary to improve grammatical flow

the cupboard, he came up behind me, and don't forget I'm only 10, I didn't have breasts, but he stood behind me and was fondling my breasts.

Probably about ten years old maybe. I remember an incident...well the first time that I felt unsafe with a man...I just had a really bad feeling about it.

Another interviewee remembered an incident happening when she was 11:

I think one of my earliest memories is when I was around 11. I was a young-looking kid as well, I mean I didn't hit puberty until I was a good 14 years old.

For three interviewees, the incidents happened at school – one when she was 12:

When I was in school there was a boy that used to sit next to me in maths and he used to try and constantly feel my leg and put his hand up - like places.

I am a bit wary of men in public spaces because going back to school age I was walking home with my sister and we were followed in a white van so we had to run off.

When I was about twelve years old I was walking home with my mum through town, we were just going to go and get the bus because we'd just come back from London, and it was dark, and a guy came past on his bike and grabbed my bum.

For the rest, the incidents began in their early teenage years, probably because 'you started going places by yourself a bit more':

From about 13 or 14. I do remember one [man] that always managed to quiz me at the bus stop in town and came and stood next to me - he kind of kept smiling and talking at me. And I was a child, I think I was about 14 at that point.

Others remembered incidents from when they were a bit older, between 15-19, and it then became 'continuous':

I think basically it started from when I was 16 - this was the first time when I got wolf-whistled on the street by someone who was in a car and from then on I cannot actually say it ever stopped.

Maybe around 17 I would say and continuous.

C) INCIDENTS OF HARASSMENT

The range of incidents that the interviewees had suffered during their lives to date crossed the spectrum of public sexual harassment, from wolf whistles to rape.

For two of the interviewees who had been subjected to wolf whistling, it was clear that this had made them feel very uncomfortable:

When you are walking around and you are wolf whistled at it just makes you feel really uncomfortable and vulnerable. You don't really know what to do.

This young lad walked up behind me and goes, "Oh you're a bit cute aren't you?" - whistling at me like I'm a dog.

Another had experienced unwanted sexual comments and questioned herself as to whether it was her fault:

If somebody makes a comment like that, a sexual comment like... you know, makes a point of directing it at you... it's this notion... and I think it's this thing with women - it is about whether or not you have drawn attention to yourself by perhaps getting dressed up, you know!

One interviewee talked about being propositioned by a man outside a local bar:

I was stood outside and I felt threatened by the man because he asked me to go around the corner with him. I felt I would almost be safer walking away as opposed to going inside because I just thought if I go inside he might follow me to a table where I sit. I just didn't feel like if I told the bar staff that they would be able to deal with it, I didn't trust them. All I wanted was my mum to come, and I got in the car and went.

Others had been followed by men in the street and one talked about how physically frightening this experience had been:

I just thought that man's crossed the street twice the same time I have, and you think 'oh, I'm probably imagining it' and carry on. And I thought I'm going to speed up a bit, so I sped up a bit and I thought he's

speeding up again. I was almost to the point of breaking in to a run when I saw a couple on the other side of the street so I ran across the road. I said I've seen this man behind me, so would you just talk to me for a minute and make sure that he's going to go away. They looked to where he was, I looked behind and he ran off.

Two of the interviewees reported that they had been physically groped, and how powerless this made them feel:

A guy touched my bum while I was in work, that was probably the most awful one - he actually like came up behind me and touched my bum. I turned around, I was in that much disbelief, you know did that really just happen?

So there was the bar on one side, the wall on the other, he was in the middle, he put his arms on each side so I couldn't leave and the staff didn't do anything, the general public didn't do anything; it got quite worrying. He started groping me. Eventually I sort of turned to someone and just said, "Could you help me out here?" and then they intervened, but I had to actually speak to someone for anything to be done. I mean this guy was quite a lot bigger than me.

One interviewee reported how she was subjected to a man sexually exposing himself at a bus stop at around 10pm at night:

There was a teenager sitting in the bus stop and said, "You're beautiful," something like that and I said, "Thank you," and then kind of ignored him. But then he went on and asked me questions - whether I have a boyfriend, if I am good at giving blow jobs. I definitely felt uncomfortable with the questions and I was irritated because he was clearly younger than me. Then he stood up and I kept my distance and I looked away, because there was nobody else at the bus stop. And then he asked me if I wanted to have a look at his dick and he already had his hands in his jogging pants and he just took the pants down and said I should have a look, which I did not.

Not satisfied with the interviewee turning away, he kept on pestering her:

He demanded that I should look and "Look and is it small? It's really cold." [And] he stood there and laughed all the time and he made the impression he really had fun. I don't know if he was intoxicated actually - if he was he wasn't that much. It was more like a teenager who felt really cool and really powerful at that moment. Shortly after that his bus arrived and I was lucky that he took another bus than me.

For two of the interviewees, the public sexual harassment that they suffered turned into rape¹⁰. One interviewee was cleaning a hotel bedroom for a friend:

There was an incident when I was about 19, I had worked for a family from leaving school, then they opened a hotel and asked me if I would go round on a Friday morning, change the sheets, clean the bedrooms and stuff. The guy, I had known him for several years at this point and I always felt comfortable with the family, but he started to follow me round the bedrooms and grab me and I suppose I didn't know how to handle it. One week doing my job the same thing happened, he's following me round. The next minute I'm on the floor and [he raped me].

The other interviewee suffered a rape at a work-related event, and recounted how she 'was carried up the stairs' to a hotel room and 'woke up to it happening':

I was scared, you know - I woke up to it happening, I couldn't say anything, I froze. Afterwards I did challenge it and said, "Do you know I just woke up with you doing that" well he just started talking to me as if putting it all on me and he said "I'm sorry I couldn't keep myself away from you". And then put all the guilt on me.

D) REPORTING

Only three interviewees reported incidents to the police – two involving incidents that happened to them as children. For one, she 'thought' the result was that the perpetrator was made to sign the sex offenders register, but for the other, although her parents did ring the police, they 'didn't hear anything else from that'.

The third interviewee recounted how, when she reported being raped, she had been dismissed by the police as a liar and thus felt 'violated':

I was subjected to a horrific interrogation from two police officers which I'm now dealing with as a complaint a year afterwards: I was disbelieved. I went through hell basically. I felt like I didn't want to go ahead with it, I felt so horrified. And that's what's happening to a lot of women. Because it's this whole mentality, 'oh you know they're lying, let's try and get the truth out of them with this'. I don't know whether that was their tactic but it's

¹⁰ Both interviewees were offered referrals to Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre – one declined and one was already with the service.

horrific. And this is the main problem women aren't allowed to withdraw complaints without saying it didn't happen.

More typically, the interviewees did not feel safe enough to report, either because they were frightened of repercussions, or because they didn't appear to realise that what was happening was reportable:

I was scared to tell anybody to be honest. It was the whole worry that 'God, he might be waiting for me outside school'. You know as a child your mind works overtime and yes, I was just very scared.

I was trying [to get him to stop] without making a fuss, like while the teachers were talking I couldn't just shout out or anything, I was constantly having to grab his hand and getting it off my leg.

I did at one time suffer a sort of sexual assault I would say, but I didn't report it, I managed to run off.

As with the rape survivor above who did report but did not get justice, not reporting seemed to be due to a lack of confidence that such reports would be taken seriously. As one interviewee stated:

I wouldn't go to the police in reality - it's quite scary because if we think about it any male that we come into contact with could potentially rape us, and more likely, like nine times out of ten will get away with it, and that's the knowledge that I go round with, wherever I go. I just think well actually if somebody did do this to me they could get away with it because that's what our justice system allows.

E) WHY DO SUCH INCIDENTS HAPPEN?

The interviewees gave various reasons for why they thought public sexual harassment of women occurs, which included not being taken seriously within a patriarchal society, evidenced by the lack of equality that women face:

Because I believe that you know, no matter how much we say in this country women have equal rights, they do not. [Like the] fact that it's taken them so many years to change the laws regarding domestic violence. I believe that we live in a very patriarchal society where men have the upper hand: they will use their power to manipulate, and this is the minority, obviously. But there are those out there that will use their power to manipulate and I do believe that for decades women have felt they would never be believed, especially when it's someone you know.

Also, some felt that public sexual harassment had become so normalised that it was not recognised as such, and for one interviewee, pornography added to this normalisation:

I think it is just the society that we live in. People don't see it as harassment probably, that is the biggest thing. It is normalised behaviour and it is more... it is sometimes more of a joke so that women don't feel like they can take it seriously.

I think if something is very deeply entrenched within them that this is a way to look at women, if all they see of sexual activities is pornography, then I think, if there's no other influences, it is bound in some ways to impact upon their behaviour and how they view women.

The interviewees also mentioned how public sexual harassment is often seen as a 'joke':

They're not really thinking they're harassing someone but for them it's like, yes, funny or something like that I guess.

I think it's not challenged because it's just accepted and it's something that people can get away with and they see it as being cheeky or funny when actually it's not, it makes people very uncomfortable. I mean you look at the things that get tweeted on 'Everyday Sexism'¹¹ and you think, 'Well yes that happens all the time but no-one ever thinks anything of it'. People pull up in cars and things like that when you're walking down the street.

This was underlined when some interviewees reacted to the public sexual harassment and were told that they 'can't take a joke':

Can't take a joke. Banter ... do you know what? I'd love to slap anybody that says to me, "Oh it's just playful banter", well I'm sorry it's not playful banter, because you're just allowing the next generation to be fucking harassed and raped: it's not painful banter when it's going to be your children, you need to be thinking about that.

Drinking was also seen as a cause, particularly within groups of men who perhaps saw it as practicing masculinity and exercising power:

¹¹ Twitter feed: @EverydaySexism

All the times it's happened to me I just assume they're drunk because it's on a night out in the evening so that's what I assume it is but I wouldn't know really.

If there are a few of them, kind of peer pressure, group thing: if there is a group of men, it's very much more likely to happen.

To feel powerful. To kind of see how far they can go, yes like basically to feel good I guess. I mean it's like to see how far I can go; feel good; how much can I achieve without any consequences? Maybe because seeing this as normal.

This normalisation of public sexual harassment was felt to encourage a victim-blaming culture where women are routinely seen as 'at fault':

I mean especially there's a really big rape culture at the moment, people don't have a lot of sympathy for the victims, they ask questions like, "What were you wearing? Were you drinking?" things like that. There's a lot of emphasis on how girls should behave rather than boys.

This focus on dress and behaviour was reflected by friends and the general public:

When my friend said what were you wearing, that was the point when... when she said that and it made me think this is probably why I feel like I wouldn't have support because people do ask questions like that.

If I'm going out I will dress a little less conservatively than I will day-to-day, but I am a fem, I do dress unorthodoxly anyway, which has unfortunately gathered me attention before but it's especially so on a night out. I do feel like I'm judged by staff because of that, and also because I'm a young woman; I dress how I feel and I'm not afraid to have a drink.

Also frustrating was the non-intervention from the general public, with specific mentions of bar staff:

I don't think people step in. I mean I experience it quite a lot in clubs or something like where your back gets touched and you turn around but no-one has seen it and yes, nobody's interested in whether it's happened or not.

It's never certain that members of the public will step in. I mean after that thing at [local bar] it was never certain that staff would step in, because they must have seen that happening; I was right at the bar literally and nothing happened. I don't know if it was just because it was busy or if they thought we were actually together...

I don't think anybody would think or say anything. No one wants to get involved.

F) IMPACTS

The effect of the public sexual harassment had long-term impacts on the interviewees, with the overwhelming impact being a curtailing of freedom:

It can kind of limit your freedom to go out and how you feel about yourself if you're objectified in that way: you start looking at yourself in a different way or changing the way you behave.

Your freedom is limited in a public space due to a little bit of actual harassment, so you just adapt your life and you almost just accept [it].

This limitation of freedom was evidenced by the caution that they exercised in certain public spaces, particularly after dark. Unsafe spaces included parks, bus stops, subways, quiet places, the city centre, the streets and pubs/bars:

It is not really like an isolated incident, it is more in the evening or at night if you are walking through quieter places.

If you're stood waiting for a bus in [local bus stop area] you're going to get a comment or somebody come up to you and give you unwanted attention.

Probably like subways or where it's really dark. I know sometimes I cycle home through [...] Park and it's so dark there.

Anywhere where there's a collection of bars is quite bad. I mean any of the pubs.

Anywhere around [local group of bars]: generally the city centre is pretty bad from my experience.

The cautiousness that the interviewees practiced involved thinking about the safest way to travel home, sticking to places where there were other people, being aware of what was going on around them and driving wherever possible:

Well I guess I think about which way I am travelling home at all times, avoiding certain areas and stuff like that.

I've become very much more cautious. If I'm in a situation where somebody says something that makes me feel uncomfortable, then yes, I do change my behaviour. I'll try and stick where people are and take all those reasonable, commonsense precautions, like I wouldn't take a shortcut up an alley or through the precinct if there was nobody around.

[The incident] made me aware at quite an early age that you have to be sensible and be aware of what's going on around you, so I never forgot that, that was a big lesson.

I never walk anywhere on my own in the dark unless it's absolutely necessary. I wouldn't do journeys that I think weren't safe or comfortable, I would either get my partner to drop me off if I'm just going to somebody's house or I will drive myself.

The feelings that the interviewees expressed about the public sexual harassment they had suffered included fear, guilt, embarrassment, and self-blame. As well as the fear of being a woman in public spaces, there was fear of the consequences of challenging the perpetrator(s):

Who knows what could have happened, with that sort of man anything could have happened, you know I could have been punched, I could have been assaulted, anything to be perfectly honest that's how I felt.

I mean if I'm walking down the street on my own and someone shouts something at me I would ignore it because I would feel I could get jumped and beaten up.

I think it's because it's intimidating so people don't challenge it because you never know who that person is.

However, one interviewee did challenge a perpetrator, but was worried that she would be blamed for starting a fight:

There were some middle-aged guys who were giving me and my friends a lot of gyp [in the pub] ... security wasn't doing anything; their friends weren't doing anything - I kept pushing them away like physically. One of them grabbed my friend, I pulled him off her. I mean I didn't want to get into a full blown fight because I knew I would be thrown out if I threw the first punch, but I'm happy to take people on and I have just enough strength to do that, especially when I'm angry.

This theme of fighting back was problematic for another interviewee, who was left with long-standing guilt after being raped:

To be perfectly honest, I felt I should have fought back, I should have done this, I should have done that, but I went into a state of fear where you become helpless and you just freeze, and that's what happened.

There was also a feeling of embarrassment expressed by some interviewees – as if they were creating a needless drama:

You are almost embarrassed and trying to hush the situation, which is crazy because you are doing nothing wrong.

It is that feeling of not wanting to create a drama - which is ridiculous because they are doing something wrong - and it is not about creating a drama, it is about being recognised and being able to stand up for something which is wrong.

Self-blame was also evident, with some interviewees questioning their behaviour to see if they had 'asked for it' in any way:

It just makes you think have I done anything to encourage that, or is there something wrong with the way I look. And I think it does stay with you because it does make you feel vulnerable.

Several of the interviewees expressed frustration and a sense of injustice about the impact of public sexual harassment on their daily lives:

It is only after doing this survey that I really thought about how much it encroaches on your freedom and your autonomy. You feel this kind of sense of anger and frustration and you just don't really know where to put that and what to do with it.

I don't feel like I can have a normal conversation - let's just say I was at a bus stop and a guy strikes up a normal conversation with me - I would feel instantly threatened, like instantly and I just wouldn't respond. And I hate that because men can have normal conversations and you know it would not be seen as anything

We had this conversation, me and my husband: that it's okay for him to go out in the dark or to walk somewhere but it's not okay for me to do that. And it's just what's normal at the moment, isn't it? And it's not fair, it shouldn't be like that. Why can I go outside and not feel safe?

I'm quite an independent person and, I don't like to rely on other people. I've been quite clear that I will walk places and do things because I believe I've got a right to the streets and won't be driven off the streets.

G) STRATEGIES TO COMBAT PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In order to get a feeling for how the interviewees would like to see public sexual harassment dealt with, they were asked what advice they would give to a (future) son or daughter. For daughters the advice was centred on making sure that they knew what public sexual harassment was and not to see it as a compliment:

I would ... this is difficult, I guess I would try to explain what is going on because I felt I was kind of confused - I couldn't really say it was harassment, it was kind of normal and I felt that I had to do this because of the way things work, and people were only making fun and I should feel complimented or something like that. I think trying to say that it's not okay and you have the right to feel uncomfortable and you have the right to go away or step back, or give arguments back.

There were also a lot of comments about how daughters could keep themselves safe from attack. These included ignoring incidents, practicing avoidance strategies, being aware of surroundings, staying in groups, disclosing incidents to family/friends, dressing 'safely' and carrying rape alarms/mobile phones. Some also advocated a policy of believing their daughters unconditionally if they did report, and strengthening their sense of self in terms of being a woman.

I would always say to my children, you know whatever happens come home, find me and we will believe - as adults we should believe them whatever they are saying, that's my message every day I pass onto my children. I said 'You will get threatened from people outside - oh, don't tell your mum; we will kill you'. Even then you have to tell me and I will believe you." This is the message you know, we should believe whatever children are telling us, even small things.

It's about making her strong enough to be able to defend herself - actually strong enough to believe the truth of the good things in her.

Another comment addressed the current focus on 'stranger danger', instead of the likelihood that harassment would be carried out by a known person:

I mean it was always you heard about the stranger on the street or someone creeping into your room, [for me] it was someone I had just met.

However, the struggle to give advice to daughters is encapsulated in these comments:

If it's making you feel uncomfortable then you should ... you can't say challenge it though, because it's too dangerous. You know you can challenge it if you're somewhere where you're surrounded by people and you feel safe but there isn't really any advice you can give; it's too grey, it's too big, you know the majority of times you could say you could challenge it and you'd be perfectly fine but you never know.

I think I always will be quite ambivalent about whether you should say anything back or how you should react towards the harasser, so I'm not really sure in that respect what kind of advice you can give.

The advice for sons centred on teaching them to respect women and not divide them into 'nice and nasty' stereotypes. Also, the interviewees commented that they would explain to their sons what public sexual harassment is and encourage them to speak up if they saw their 'mates' carrying it out. For one interviewee, it was important to provide good male role models for boys so they had an example of how to become a man who respects women:

A future son of mine I would teach him how to respect women. I would teach him if any of your friends are talking about women in a disrespectful way you would speak up.

This is not okay, this shouldn't be how you're acting towards women, women are not there for you to look at or to act towards and if friends and peer groups are acting this way, to tell them that that's not okay. How would you feel if that was your sister or your mother or your own daughter? I think really it's kind of personalising the issue.

I was away last weekend and [my son] was very clear [he wanted] some man time so I gave him a man's breakfast and he stayed over with some male friends as well. So that was kind of important that he did that.

Overall though, the interviewees all felt that an education/awareness raising exercise needed to take place in order to educate society that the culture of public sexual harassment of women was simply not acceptable. They also felt that the only realistic method of success was for the government to instigate a series of campaigns, aimed at men and boys. This was in response to comments about recent campaigns that were aimed at women:

*How ridiculous, you know all the blame was completely on the women [in that campaign], and it even said to men if you do commit a rape you could lose your job or you could go to prison - no you should be saying that you **will** fucking lose your job and you **will** go to prison.*

I think campaigns [that] are actually targeting men instead of women, instead of saying don't let your hair down too much or keep your skirt below your knee.

I think just awareness that it is a problem; it's actually assault if you're going up and touching somebody and they don't want you to touch them and not to be seen as this kind of jokey, "Oh, well you've just got no sense of humour," type of thing.

One interviewee, currently working in Spain, talked about a campaign that she had seen:

In my school in Spain there are now posters on the wall and they are really good because they are aimed at girls - if you feel unhappy [in a relationship] you are not happy and things like that. It is really common to have serviettes on your table and on the serviettes it says 'no means no' in purple, so they have got a campaign going there - you would never see that in England - picking up a serviette and it says 'no means no'.

The interviewees also wanted the issue of consent to be taught in schools from an early age:

I think as part of general sex education in schools consent should be talked about. It should be something that girls and boys learn from a young age - to always ask. Even if it's just little kids - if a little boy kisses a little girl and she doesn't want to be kissed you say 'Well, you always have to ask'.

Another campaign target was felt to be the police and judicial system, which was criticised for not taking public sexual harassment seriously enough, and therefore there needed to be a change in the way it was prosecuted:

When you look at the whole legal system, you know when a man will go out and do a burglary, he will get a custodial sentence of 3 years and yet someone that has committed a sex offence will get far less - what is this saying to society as a whole - but more on a personal level - to us women?

The way that the police have handled it in the past, why would women go to a governmental kind of body that has been put in place to keep law and order and yet they fall short all the time when it comes to women?

A campaign aimed at the general public was also advocated:

I think raising awareness that it's actually not something that's acceptable and if there was more support, if people did want to challenge... like in a bar if someone mentioned it to a bouncer for something actually to be done about it, or if you mentioned it to bar staff.

If it was blatantly obvious that people were getting harassed for somebody to actually intervene.

Social media also came in for criticism, in particular Facebook:

An everyday occurrence for me - if I'm on Facebook or places like that, I frequently witness rape jokes. If you go on the Embarrassing Nights Out [Facebook page] you see only photos of women and they're collapsed and passed out: they could have been spiked, they probably have drunk too much, they could have had their drinks ...whatever you don't know the story. But there'll like hundreds of comments on it and every five or six there'll be a comment saying, 'Oh just how I like them'. I believe Facebook are responsible and should take action on it.

WORKSHOP FINDINGS

The initial findings from the study were launched on March 4th at the Coventry Herbert Art Gallery and Museum to celebrate International Women's Day.

After a presentation of the initial findings to an audience of forty women, a workshop took place and they were put into groups to explore the following themes:

- Their personal experiences of public sexual harassment
- How it made them feel
- What strategies can be used to combat it

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

As with the main study, the women reported that they had experienced harassment at school, work, University, bus stops and bus stations, pubs and clubs.

A male or a group of males would [often] join me at bus stops and try to engage me in conversation, sitting next to me in the shelter and touching my leg, or hair, or shoulder. [This would] continue onto the bus when it arrived. The touching would be accompanied by exhortations to join them on their night out, or try to find out where I was going, or invitations to sit on one of their faces or some equally crass and revolting sexual overture.

Types of harassment included inappropriate comments, groping, obscene gestures and being cornered, assaulted in a crowd, followed and stared at.

A question from the audience concerning how some women welcomed the milder forms of public sexual harassment, such as wolf whistling, led to one woman commenting:

Some of the sexual comments I have received have been delivered so aggressively that they completely nullify any notion of a compliment and, as I have said, it all feels so done by rote that I'd struggle to take the compliment, were it ever truly intended.

However, several women cautioned against censure for women who equate public sexual harassment with receiving compliments, as this can veer dangerously close to victim blaming:

It's important that we don't give credence to the idea that some women's 'acceptance' of street harassment (in the sense that they take it as a compliment, or say it doesn't bother them and we are overreacting or don't want to challenge it or talk about it) perpetuates the problem because then we are running dangerously close to victim blaming. We need to blame a patriarchal culture that fosters an acceptance of gender discrimination and produces a society that says it is OK. This is why I think awareness campaigns would be really, really helpful. Rather than shouting at women - and men - 'YOU'RE WRONG', try the 'have you considered it this way?' approach.

Another issue was the lack of repercussions for perpetrators when they engage in public sexual harassment:

At school harassed by a boy - inappropriate comments/groping, took a while to report. No repercussions.

At work male colleague grabbed my shoulders and made gesture of oral sex - reported it and was told just to talk to him. It was not taken seriously.

And, linked to the lack of repercussions was the issue of how normalised men's entitlement to women's spaces and bodies has become:

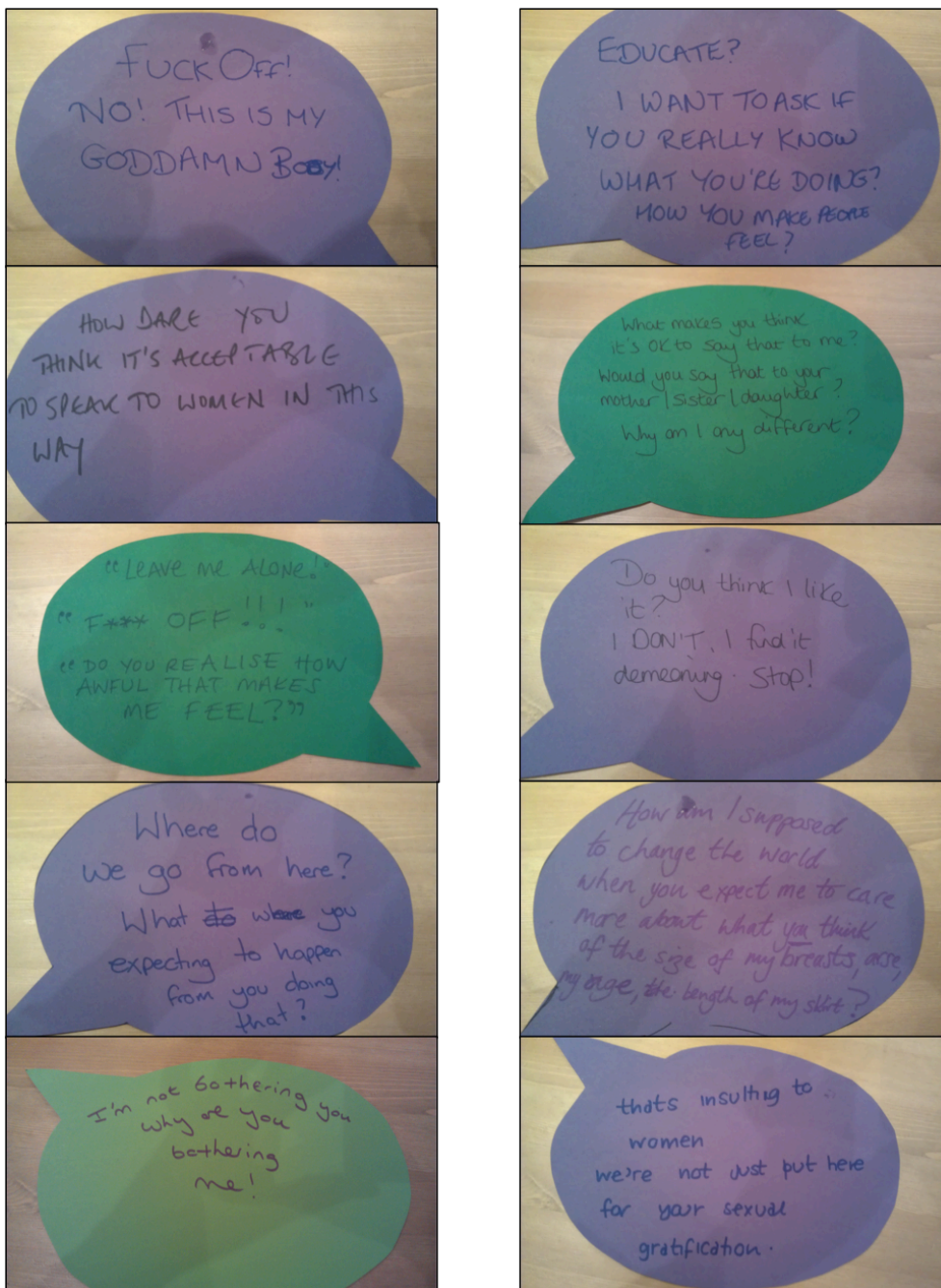
I firmly believe that a lot of sexual harassment perpetrated by men against women (wherever the location - work, home, school, street, nightclub, bus) stems from a sense of entitlement, and is a form and expression of domination and control. I also view it as a form of gender discrimination and do not think it hyperbole to place it on the spectrum of violence against women: it can be used as a way to intimidate women - a way for men to own and dominate public or private space.

I think a lot of, particularly, street harassment is so pervasive, normalised and routine that it has become almost devoid of the very thing it is ostensibly about. To me, it isn't - or rarely is - about sex or sexiness. It's done by rote, it is so culturally intrinsic: this is what men do and this is what women receive.

IMPACT

The second stage of the workshop explored how public sexual harassment made the women feel, and they were encouraged to write down a response on a cardboard speech bubble. The responses displayed a great deal of anger,

frustration, powerlessness and bewilderment. Particularly striking was the bewilderment expressed in that the women simply didn't understand what the perpetrators expected to gain from their actions. They also talked about the absence of empathy displayed in terms of the lack of recognition by the perpetrators that the women in the street were no different to the women in their lives.



COMBATTING PUBLIC SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The main theme that emerged from the discussions about how to combat public sexual harassment of women focused on clarity in relation to policies, both within institutions and externally - for example, the need for a policy implemented by Coventry City Council on what is, and what is not, acceptable behaviour in public spaces.

However, whilst the participants recognised that there may be policies and procedures already in place in various institutions, they felt that without strategic champions and leaders to promote and ensure compliance – and this to include penalties for non-compliance - such policies had little chance of being anything more than lip service. In this respect, University policies were specifically mentioned, and the need for such policies is reflected by a recent report about lad culture on campus – *That's What She Said* - carried out by the University of Sussex Students' Union (2013).

In addition, in keeping with the findings from the main report, the women said they would welcome an awareness raising campaign – perhaps in a similar vein as to that which was carried out by the construction industry (CCS 2013). As one participant pointed out, and the rest agreed, none could remember the last time that a group of builders cat-called and wolf whistled at them as they were walking along the street. This awareness raising campaign should also include a broader definition of public harassment to include the experiences of men, the gay and ethnic communities.

Finally, the participants called for a educational initiative in schools to be focused, from an early age, around issues of consent, as it was felt that the current ‘don’t get pregnant’ theme does not address the broader issues of gender inequalities. In other words, there needs to be a much greater concentration of effort which prioritises awareness and consent for both young women and men. Further it was felt that tailored confidence building/assertiveness courses for women and girls could help them to recognise harassment and respond to it appropriately.

In summary, discussions at this event focused heavily on girl’s and women’s experiences of unwanted sexual attention, abuses of power within sexual negotiations and sexual assault – all of which are potentially underpinned by different understandings of ‘consent’.

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- Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre: <http://www.crasac.org.uk>
- Coventry Women's Voices: <http://coventrywomensvoices.wordpress.com>
- Coventry University Integrated Transport and Logistics Group: <http://bit.ly/S7aXLs>
- Coventry University: <http://www.coventry.ac.uk>
- Everyday Sexism Project: <http://www.everydaysexism.com>
- Herbert Art Gallery and Museum: <http://www.theherbert.org>
- International Women's Day: <http://www.internationalwomensday.com>
- Meet us on the Street: <http://www.meetusonthestreet.org>
- Stop Street Harassment: <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org>
- Women's Views on News: <http://www.womensviewsonnews.org>