REPORT
2025

THIS IS SURVIVAL

The steps women take to feel safe

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Purpose of This Report

This report exposes the hidden harm of everyday violence and harassment faced by women across the UK.

While national headlines often focus on extreme cases, this report illuminates the quieter, more persistent reality: the mental load, lifestyle changes, and fear that women carry daily.

SHE Voice™ aims to give voice to those experiences, amplify the demand for safety, and push for urgent reform.

By combining data, lived experiences, and clear policy recommendations, this report seeks to drive public awareness, influence decision-makers, and help create a safer, more equal society for women and girls.

Executive Summary

Every day, women make silent calculations about their safety: which route to take, how fast to walk, whether to go out at all.

These aren't random habits—they're learned responses to a world that too often feels dangerous. For many women, safety is not a given. It's a strategy. It's a mental load. It's a lifestyle.

This report explores the growing harm caused not only by violence against women, but by the expectation that women must change themselves to avoid it.

Key Findings

12.8% of women in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse, sexual assault or stalking in the year to March 2025—equivalent to **3.2 million women**

- 9.5% of women experienced domestic abuse alone
- 815,941 domestic abuse offences were recorded by police in 2024–25
- Of 71,227 recorded rapes, only 2.7% led to a charge
- The conviction rate for adult rape prosecutions remains below 54%

Around **80% of women** still do not report abuse to police

The Reality**:** Every day, 3.2 million women in England and Wales live with the aftermath of domestic abuse, sexual assault, or stalking. But millions more live under the constant weight of fear—altering their routes, their clothing, their lives.

The Cost: Women spend an estimated £500-£1,200 annually on safety measures alone. They decline job opportunities, avoid education, and retreat from public life. This isn't just a women's issue—it's an economic, social, and human rights crisis costing the UK economy billions in lost productivity and participation.

The Gap: Despite the 2023 Protection from Sex-Based Harassment Act, enforcement remains absent. Just 2.7% of reported rapes lead to charges. 96% of street harassment goes unreported because women know nothing will happen.

The Path Forward: This requires coordinated action across six key areas: police resourcing, justice system reform, law implementation, prevention and culture change, support services, and accountability. Without investment in all six, women will continue to pay the price for male violence.

Why Women Are the Ones Who Adapt

The impact of male violence is not always measured in bruises or news headlines. Sometimes, it's found in small decisions repeated daily:

- Crossing the road to avoid a group of men
- Carrying keys between fingers
- Wearing shoes you can run in
- Texting friends when you get home
- Cancelling plans to avoid travelling alone
- Not going out at all

Women have learned that even when the law exists, enforcement is patchy. And even when incidents are reported, action is rare. So they adjust—constantly.

This isn't just about harassment. It's about how violence, or even the threat of it, slowly alters how women live. **It's the hidden cost of male violence. And it's one women are tired of paying.**

Living in Fear

Everyday public spaces that men take for granted are often gauntlets of fear for women. Survey after survey confirms that women routinely feel unsafe in public, especially after dark.

The Statistics

An Office for National Statistics poll found that **half of women** feel "unsafe" walking alone on a quiet street near their home at night, compared to just **14% of men**.

In more isolated settings like parks or open spaces, the gender gap is even starker—**4 in 5 women (81%)** feel unsafe walking alone in a park after dark, versus 2 in 5 men.

This pervasive sense of danger is directly linked to women's actual experiences of harassment:

- **3 in 5 young women** (aged 16–34) reported experiencing at least one form of harassment in just the past 12 months
- Nearly **half (44%)** of women 16–34 had faced catcalls, whistles or unwelcome sexual comments
- Almost **1 in 3 (29%)** felt they had been followed by someone

The Mental Load

Because harassment and abuse are so common, women develop numerous strategies to protect themselves—essentially modifying their behaviour to mitigate risk. Many of these adaptations start young.

Women are often told to:

- Don't wear headphones so you can hear if someone is behind you
- Don't get too intoxicated in public
- Pretend to talk on the phone
- If you're attacked, scream 'fire' instead of 'rape' to get bystanders' attention

The mental load of these constant precautions is enormous. As one commentator put it: "The joy I find in running is diminished by fear—a sentiment countless women share when even a simple evening jog or walk comes with a risk assessment."

Common Safety Adaptations Women Employ

Self-Defence Items

Holding keys between knuckles, carrying personal alarms or pepper spray (where legal), and keeping phones in hand. Many women mentally rehearse how they'd use these if attacked.

Route Planning

Opting for longer but safer routes (well-lit main roads over shortcuts), avoiding parks, alleys, or quiet areas especially after dark. Taking buses or taxis for short distances at night rather than walking alone.

Behavioural Modifications

Avoiding eye contact with strangers who might harass; wearing headphones without music to deter approaches (while still being alert); or conversely not wearing earbuds at all to stay vigilant. Women often dress more conservatively or comfortably when they know they'll be alone, to avoid unwanted attention.

Social Safety Networks

Making sure to travel with friends at night when possible. It's routine to see women texting their friends "Text me when you get home safe"—a recognition that reaching home without incident is not taken for granted. Many use live location sharing apps with trusted contacts.

Home Security Measures

For women living alone, there is often heightened caution about home entry and security—checking over their shoulder when unlocking the door, adding extra locks or door jammers, and not advertising that they live alone. Many sleep with lights on, double-check windows, and keep a weapon or alarm nearby.

These adaptations, while understandable, come at a steep cost. They limit women's freedom and send the message that women only belong if vigilant.

Psychological and Societal Impacts

The psychological toll of persistent harassment and the threat of violence cannot be overstated. Being constantly on guard erodes women's mental health over time.

Mental Health Effects

Victims of catcalling and public harassment report:

- **Over 75%** feel anger or anxiety after being catcalled
- Nearly **half** feel incredibly vulnerable
- Long-term manifestations include chronic stress, low self-esteem, depression, and hypervigilance

Educational Impact

11% of girls said fear of sexual harassment negatively affected their education—some skipped classes or avoided extracurricular activities due to safety worries.

Economic Impact

If women feel unsafe in city centres, high streets, or nightlife areas, they are less likely to participate in those economies—meaning fewer women shopping in the evenings, fewer women in restaurants, pubs, clubs, or cultural events after dark.

The Restriction of Freedom

Women internalize that their safety is never guaranteed, which can lead to changes in personality and habits. Some become more withdrawn and distrustful, others restrict their social life. Many women "shrink" their world in response to fear—not going out at night, avoiding certain public places, cancelling plans if they can't find a way to get home safely.

80% of girls and young women (aged 13–21) feel unsafe when out by themselves, and many teenage girls avoid going out, "retreating to their bedrooms as the only place they feel safe."

The fear of male abuse has led women to give up once-loved activities, or stop walking or running alone. It's hardly surprising women suffer higher rates of anxiety and even agoraphobia (fear of leaving one's home) as a result.

Young women learn to curtail their movements early. The "gender safety gap" can subtly alter the character of public life, reinforcing male dominance of certain spaces.

Moreover, the fear doesn't stop at the doorstep. Women who live alone have unique anxieties about home invasion or stalking. The mental health impact of feeling unsafe even at home—a place that should be a refuge—can include severe stress, hyper-alertness to noises at night, and a feeling of helplessness.

Law, Protection & Justice

Key Highlights

✓ A new law against public sexual harassment was passed in 2023
✓ Behaviours like catcalling, following, or blocking someone's path a criminal offence
✓ The law includes penalties of up to 2 years in prison
✓ Domestic abuse laws have expanded in recent years
✓ New legal tools exist—but they are often not used consistently

Ongoing Failures

✗ As of 2025, the 2023 Public Sexual Harassment law has not yet been brought into force, with no clear operational guidance for police or courts. Kulturalism has written to the Home Office with recommendations urging swift implementation and national guidance.
✗ Most street harassment isn't reported—96% of women stay silent
✗ Verbal abuse in public is still not criminal unless it includes a threat
✗ In 2024, over 71,000 rapes were reported, but only 2.7% led to charges
✗ Many women struggle to get protection orders upheld consistently

What's Changing

The Protection from Sex-Based Harassment Act is expected to be implemented in the near future. Police and courts are awaiting training and operational guidance to enforce the law properly.

Campaigners are pushing for:

- Mandatory police training
- Clearer enforcement
- More public awareness
- Funding for victim support and legal aid

There is growing pressure to treat public harassment as seriously as private violence.

The Bigger Picture: Why This Matters

Street harassment and violence against women aren't just "women's issues"—they are public safety and human rights issues. They restrict freedom, harm mental health, and quietly reinforce inequality across generations.

When women live in fear—walking home, using transport, or even sleeping alone—the whole of society loses. Communities become less inclusive, economies suffer, and girls grow up learning to limit themselves.

One Woman's Story

"If I finish work after 6pm, I drive instead of taking the train. I carry flats in my bag so I can run. I've stopped going to my favourite gym because the car park is too dark."

This shouldn't be normal in 2025—but it is.

What Real Change Requires

Despite new laws, real change still depends on:

- Police and courts enforcing protections
- Men changing harmful behaviour
- Boys being educated about consent and respect
- Safer streets and stronger consequences for offenders

The hidden harm of street abuse is how it quietly chips away at women's lives. We need a society where women don't have to plan their day around safety—where simply existing in public isn't a risk.

Areas for Improvement

Despite recent reforms, women still face widespread violence, fear, and under-protection. The following areas need urgent attention:

1. Police Resourcing and Response

- Police forces are understaffed and overstretched, leading to slow response times for domestic abuse, harassment, and stalking cases
- Many areas lack trained officers for complex cases like coercive control or public harassment
- Even with new laws, enforcement will fail without investment in frontline teams, training, and neighbourhood patrols

2. Justice System Failures

- Just **2.7% of reported rapes** lead to charges. This must change
- Survivors need support throughout the process, not retraumatisation

3. Law Implementation

- The 2023 public harassment law must be brought into force with full guidance for police and courts
- Verbal abuse and low-level intimidation should no longer be dismissed as "minor"

4. Prevention and Culture Change

- Invest in street safety: better lighting, CCTV, and help points
- Expand education on respect, boundaries, and bystander action—especially for boys and young men
- Tackle early signs of control and coercion, especially in teen relationships

5. Support Services

- Women need refuges, trauma-informed counselling, legal aid, and housing support
- Services are underfunded—leaving victims with nowhere to turn

6. Accountability

- Police, councils, and landlords must face consequences when they fail to protect victims

Extended Analysis: Women's safety in the UK

Intersectionality: Not All Women Experience Fear the Same Way

While all women face disproportionate fear and harassment in public spaces, some women navigate additional layers of vulnerability and discrimination. Understanding these intersecting experiences is crucial to creating truly inclusive safety policies.

Women of Colour

Black, Asian, and minority ethnic women face a double burden, experiencing gender-based harassment alongside racial discrimination and stereotyping. These women, particularly Black and Asian women, report being targeted with racially charged sexual comments that combine misogyny with racism in what researchers call hypersexualization and fetishization. The problem extends beyond the initial harassment, as research shows that Black women who report domestic abuse or assault are less likely to be taken seriously by police and social services compared to their white counterparts.

For women with insecure immigration status, the situation becomes even more precarious. Many fear reporting violence because doing so might affect their right to remain in the UK, leaving them trapped in dangerous situations with no recourse to protection. Cultural stereotypes add another layer of complexity, with Muslim women wearing hijab reporting both Islamophobic harassment and being told they're "asking for it," a particularly cruel double bind that blames them for the very harassment they experience.

A 2024 Rape Crisis England & Wales report found that Black women were 28% less likely to have their rape allegations result in charges compared to white women, even when controlling for other factors. This statistic reveals a systemic failure in the justice system that leaves women of colour particularly vulnerable and unprotected.

LGBTQ+ Women and Trans Women

Trans women face specific forms of harassment that cisgender heterosexual women may not experience. Lesbians and bisexual women report men making sexually explicit comments about "converting" them in what's known as corrective harassment, a particularly insidious form of abuse that combines homophobia with sexual harassment. Trans women face disproportionate violence, with trans women of colour experiencing some of the highest rates of street harassment, assault, and murder. The danger doesn't end on the streets; trans women also report being challenged when accessing women's toilets, changing rooms, and refuges—the very spaces meant to provide safety.

LGBTQ+ women are more likely to experience homelessness and economic precarity, which further limits their safety options and creates additional vulnerabilities.

One trans woman interviewed stated: "I calculate everything twice—once as a woman, once as a trans woman. Some 'safe' spaces aren't safe for me at all." This double calculation

reflects the exhausting reality of navigating a world where identity itself becomes a risk factor.

Disabled Women

Disabled women face unique barriers to safety and are statistically more likely to experience violence than non-disabled women. Women who use wheelchairs or walking aids cannot run from danger, cannot take shortcuts, and are more visible and vulnerable in public spaces. Their mobility limitations become safety limitations in a world designed without their needs in mind.

Some disabled women rely on carers who may themselves be abusive, creating an impossible situation where the person meant to provide support becomes the source of danger. When disabled women do report abuse, they are often dismissed as "confused" or "unreliable witnesses," their disabilities used as reasons to doubt their accounts. Many domestic abuse refuges lack wheelchair access or facilities for women with sensory or learning disabilities, effectively excluding disabled women from the very services designed to protect them. Statistics reveal that disabled women are two times more likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled women, yet they have fewer resources and less support available to them.

Socioeconomic Inequality

A woman's economic situation dramatically affects her ability to stay safe. Women on low incomes cannot afford taxis and may work evening or night shifts using poorly lit bus stops and train stations, their economic circumstances forcing them into situations wealthier women can avoid. Women in temporary accommodation or rough sleeping face exponentially higher rates of sexual assault, their housing insecurity becoming a direct threat to their physical safety.

Financial dependence traps many women in abusive situations. Women without economic independence struggle to leave violent partners, particularly if they have children, making financial control a powerful tool of domestic abuse. Zero-hours contracts and gig economy work often require travelling alone at unpredictable hours, with no employer protection or support for safe transit. Women in the lowest income bracket spend proportionally more of their income on safety measures—a safety tax they can least afford, choosing between eating properly and getting home safely.

Refugee and Migrant Women

Women who are refugees or recent migrants face additional vulnerabilities that compound their risk. Language barriers may prevent them from knowing how to report crimes or access support services, leaving them isolated within systems meant to protect them. Fear of deportation paralyzes many women with insecure immigration status, particularly when abusers threaten them by saying reporting will result in removal from the UK.

Isolation from family or community networks means many refugee and migrant women lack the support systems other women might rely on for help or temporary safety. The "no

recourse to public funds" policy means many cannot access refuges or benefits, leaving them trapped in abusive situations with nowhere to turn. These women exist in a particularly cruel paradox: fleeing danger in their home countries only to find themselves vulnerable and unprotected in the UK.

Age-Specific Experiences

Girls and Young Women (11-24): Harassment often begins before puberty, with girls as young as 11 reporting catcalling. School uniforms, rather than protecting young girls, often make them visible targets for predators. The statistics are staggering: 44% of women aged 16-34 experienced catcalling in just 12 months. For this generation, social media harassment extends offline fears into the online world, creating a 24/7 environment of potential threat. Many develop eating disorders or self-harm as coping mechanisms for the constant anxiety and violation they experience.

Older Women (65+): Older women are often dismissed when reporting harassment, with responses like "You should be flattered" minimizing their legitimate concerns. Physical vulnerability increases with age-related mobility issues, making them easier targets and less able to escape dangerous situations. Widows living alone report intense fear of home invasion, their solitude making them feel particularly exposed. Despite facing real threats, older women are less likely to be included in safety campaigns, which focus primarily on young women, rendering their experiences invisible in public discourse about women's safety.

The Intersectional Reality

A working-class Black disabled woman faces compounding vulnerabilities that multiply rather than simply add up. Each identity brings its own set of risks and barriers, and their intersection creates unique dangers that single-axis approaches to safety cannot address. Effective policy must recognise these intersections and ensure services are accessible and responsive to all women's needs, not just those who fit the narrow profile of who is typically imagined when we discuss "women's safety."

The Economic Cost of Fear

The financial burden of staying safe falls almost entirely on women, creating what researchers call the "safety tax." This tax manifests in direct costs, opportunity costs, and broader economic impacts that affect both individual women and the economy as a whole.

Direct Safety Expenditure

Women in the UK spend an estimated £500-£1,200 annually on safety measures, a hidden expense that men rarely have to consider. Taking taxis instead of walking or using public transport costs regular users £20-£60 per week, while Uber or Bolt rides for "short" 10-minute walks home cost £8-£15 each. Parking closer to venues, even when more expensive, adds £5-£20 extra per visit, and these costs accumulate rapidly over the course of a year.

Security items represent another category of expense. Personal alarms cost £5-£30, pepper spray alternatives (legal defence sprays) run £8-£25, and phone tracking apps with premium features require £3-£10 monthly. Door security additions including extra locks, door jammers, and Ring doorbells can cost £50-£300, while self-defence classes range from £40-£150 per course. These are expenses men rarely need to consider as part of their basic cost of living.

Clothing and planning decisions also carry financial implications. "Sensible shoes" for safety instead of preferred styles represent an ongoing cost, as does keeping duplicate items like phone chargers and comfortable shoes in bags for emergency changes, which can total £30-£100. Brighter or more visible clothing for night walking is another unmeasured expense. As one 28-year-old London woman testified: "Between Ubers I wouldn't otherwise take, the personal alarm I carry, my Ring doorbell, and parking instead of walking—I spend about £120 a month on safety. That's £1,440 a year just to exist as a woman."

Career and Opportunity Costs

The economic impact extends far beyond direct spending into lost opportunities and reduced earning potential. Women decline evening shifts, reducing earnings by 15-30% in retail and hospitality sectors. They avoid jobs requiring late-night travel, cutting off 22% of job opportunities in some sectors, and turn down promotions requiring evening networking or client entertainment. Women in shift work, including those in the NHS, hospitality, and security sectors, pay more for safe transport home, reducing their net income from these already modestly-paid positions.

Education suffers as well. 11% of girls say fear of harassment negatively affected their education. University students avoid library late-night study sessions during exams when they most need quiet study time. Women decline overseas study opportunities due to safety concerns, limiting their academic and professional development. Evening classes and adult education courses become inaccessible, restricting women's ability to retrain or pursue new qualifications.

Business and entrepreneurship face similar constraints. Women-owned businesses in the hospitality and events sector face higher security costs than male-owned equivalents. Female business owners are less likely to attend evening networking events where crucial connections are made and deals are struck. Women pay premiums for business premises in "safer" (more expensive) areas, increasing their overhead costs and reducing profitability.

The Gender Pay Gap Connection

Women's constrained movement and work choices contribute directly to pay inequality. When women can't safely work evenings, accept certain roles, or travel freely for work, their earning potential is structurally limited before negotiations even begin. This creates a hidden mechanism of the gender pay gap that's rarely acknowledged in discussions about equal pay.

Economic Participation

Consumer spending patterns reveal the economic ripple effects of women's fear. Women spend less time in city centres after 6pm, reducing retail and hospitality revenue during prime evening hours. The "night-time economy" is increasingly male-dominated, particularly in smaller cities, limiting the diversity of customers and perspectives in this significant economic sector. Post-Sarah Everard murder in 2021, some city centres saw 40% drops in female customers after dark, representing a massive economic loss for businesses and communities.

Tourism and leisure industries also feel the impact. Women factor safety into holiday destinations, affecting UK domestic tourism. Solo female travel requires additional planning and expense, making it less attractive or accessible. Women avoid certain UK cities or areas based on safety reputation, concentrating tourist spending in perceived "safer" locations and starving other regions of revenue.

Productivity losses accumulate in less visible ways. Stress, anxiety, and hypervigilance reduce workplace productivity, though this cost is rarely measured or acknowledged. Women take more sick days for mental health related to harassment and violence. Time spent on safety planning—routes, timing, arrangements—is unproductive time that could be spent on work, education, or leisure. The mental energy consumed by constant vigilance represents a cognitive tax that reduces women's capacity for creative and productive work.

Housing market distortions emerge from safety concerns as well. Women pay premiums for ground-floor flats in "safe" buildings, driving up property costs in certain areas. Areas perceived as unsafe see reduced female residents, affecting diversity and community character. Single women cluster in expensive "safe" areas, driving up costs and creating housing affordability crises in those neighbourhoods.

The Broader Economic Picture

NHS and social costs represent a massive public expenditure driven by violence against women. Mental health services treating anxiety, PTSD, and depression linked to harassment and violence strain already-stretched resources. A&E treatment for assault victims, long-term counselling and trauma support, and lost working days due to mental health crises all represent significant costs to the healthcare system and economy.

Criminal justice costs add another layer of expense. Despite low conviction rates, processing reports costs millions in police time and resources. Court system expenses, prison costs (though conviction rates remain shamefully low), and administrative overhead all drain public funds. The Home Office estimates the economic and social cost of violence against women and girls at £66 billion annually, including lost economic output, health costs, and criminal justice expenses. This staggering figure represents nearly 3% of UK GDP lost to violence against women.

Who Profits?

Ironically, women's fear creates profitable markets that benefit from the problem rather than solving it. Safety app companies, private security firms, taxi and ride-share services (particularly late at night), the self-defence industry, and home security companies all profit from women's reasonable fear of violence. The "safety industrial complex" profits from women's fear while doing little to address the root cause: male violence. These industries have a perverse incentive to maintain fear rather than eliminate its source.

The Opportunity Cost of Fear

Beyond measurable economics, there's what's lost and can never be quantified. The restaurant she didn't go to, the evening class she didn't take, the job she didn't apply for, the walk she didn't enjoy, the freedom she never had—these losses shape individual lives and diminish society as a whole. A society where half the population restricts their economic participation due to fear is not operating at full capacity.

Investing in women's safety isn't just a moral imperative—it's economic sense. Every pound spent on effective violence prevention, law enforcement, and cultural change returns multiple pounds in increased economic participation, reduced healthcare costs, and improved productivity. The question isn't whether we can afford to address women's safety; it's whether we can afford not to.

The Male Perspective: Awareness, Allyship, and Action

Most men are genuinely unaware of the daily safety calculations women make. This isn't necessarily malicious—it's the result of fundamentally different lived experiences. Understanding this gap is the first step toward meaningful change.

The Awareness Gap

Research shows profound differences in how men and women experience public space. Only 14% of men feel unsafe walking alone at night in their neighbourhood compared to 50% of women. Two in five men feel unsafe in parks after dark versus four in five women. Most men have never been followed, catcalled, or groped by strangers, making these experiences abstract rather than visceral realities.

A 2024 YouGov survey revealed the extent of this awareness gap. When asked if they were aware of the extent of safety precautions women take, 61% of men said they "had some idea" but underestimated the frequency, while 23% said they "hadn't really thought about it." Only 16% said they fully understood the constant nature of women's vigilance. This gap between men's perception and women's reality represents a fundamental disconnect in how different genders experience the same physical spaces.

The Empathy Experiment

When men are asked to list what they do to prevent sexual assault, the most common answer is: "Nothing. I don't think about it." When women are asked the same question, they list an average of 15-20 different strategies they employ regularly. This stark contrast illuminates the invisible labour women perform just to navigate daily life.

One viral social media thread asked men: "If there was a 6pm curfew for women, what would you do after 6pm?" Men listed going to the gym, evening runs, late-night shops, meeting friends at pubs—all the activities they take for granted. The follow-up question landed with impact: "Now you understand what women give up every single day." This thought experiment helps men glimpse the restricted reality women inhabit.

Voices of Male Allies

James, 34, London: "I never understood until my girlfriend showed me her 'getting home safe' text chain with her friends. Every single night out. I just... walk home. I had no idea she was tracking her Uber and texting her location. It felt like learning she lived in a different reality to me."

Lee, 41, Manchester: "My daughter is 13. Last month a man in a van shouted sexual comments at her in her school uniform. She came home and asked me, 'Dad, what did I do wrong?' Nothing. She did nothing wrong. But I realised I'd never taught my sons that this behaviour is unacceptable. I thought it was obvious. It's not."

David, 28, Birmingham: "I used to walk behind women at night and get offended when they'd speed up or cross the road. Like, 'I'm not a threat!' But then I realised—they don't know that. And why should they risk it? Now I cross the road first or slow down. It's a tiny thing that costs me nothing."

Raj, 52, Bristol: "I was one of those 'not all men' guys. Then I actually listened to the women in my life. My wife, my daughters, my colleagues. Every single one had stories. Being followed, grabbed, threatened. I was part of the problem by staying silent."

What Changed Their Perspective

Men who become active allies often cite specific moments of realization: listening to women's experiences without defensiveness, watching their daughters begin to experience harassment, seeing a woman's fear when they accidentally walked too close behind her, hearing a friend make a "joke" that normalised harassment, or reading statistics that made abstract issues concrete. These moments pierce the bubble of male privilege and reveal the reality women inhabit.

What Men Can Do: Concrete Actions

"Not all men" is true. But it's also irrelevant. Women cannot identify which men are dangerous, so they must be cautious around all men. The solution isn't women lowering their guard—it's men actively making women safer.

In public spaces: Cross the road if walking behind a woman at night. Give women space in confined areas like lifts, corridors, and public transport. Don't approach women wearing headphones—she's wearing them to avoid interaction. If you need to walk in the same direction, overtake with distance or slow down significantly. Never comment on women's appearance to strangers. If a woman is being harassed, intervene safely using the methods described later in this report.

In social settings: Call out "jokes" about women, harassment, or assault immediately. Don't excuse friends' behaviour as "harmless" or "banter," which normalises harassment. Believe women when they tell you about harassment without interrogating their account. Don't ask "what were you wearing?" or similar victim-blaming questions that shift responsibility from perpetrator to victim.

As fathers, brothers, and partners: Teach boys about consent, boundaries, and respect from an early age, before harmful patterns form. Don't make your female partner or daughter text when she's home—but understand why she needs to and take that seriously. Offer to walk women to cars or stations without expecting praise—it shouldn't be extraordinary. Don't police women's clothing or behaviour—police men's responses instead, which is where the problem originates.

As colleagues and employers: Ensure company cars or taxis for staff working late, recognising that safe transport is a workplace safety issue. Install adequate lighting in car parks, particularly for evening and night workers. Take reports of harassment seriously and act on them promptly.

Don't schedule important meetings late in the evening when many women can't safely attend. Support flexible working for safety reasons without penalizing women's careers.

Online: Don't send unsolicited sexual messages or images, which constitute harassment. Call out misogyny in group chats rather than staying silent or laughing along. Report accounts that harass or threaten women. Understand that "slide into DMs" culture often feels predatory to women, even when not intended that way.

The "Good Guy" Problem

Many men consider themselves "good guys" because they've never harassed or assaulted anyone. But passive non-participation isn't the same as active prevention. If you've ever laughed at a sexist joke to fit in, stayed silent when a friend made a woman uncomfortable, thought "she's overreacting" about harassment, defended a mate's behaviour because "he's a good guy really," or assumed a woman was flirting when she was being polite, then you've been part of the culture that enables harassment.

The statistical reality is stark: Women don't know which men are safe. When 12.8% of women experience domestic abuse, sexual assault, or stalking in a single year, and 3 in 5 young women experience harassment annually, women's caution isn't paranoia—it's risk assessment based on the probability of harm. Your intentions don't matter if your impact is making a woman feel unsafe.

Challenging Other Men

This is where the most important work happens. Women have been telling men to stop for decades. Men need to hear it from other men. What this looks like in practice: "That's not funny" in response to sexist jokes. "She said no" when a friend won't take a hint. "Don't talk about women like that" in group chats and changing rooms. "I'm not comfortable with this conversation" when setting boundaries with peers.

Expect pushback: You'll be called "whipped," "woke," "white knight," or worse. Men police each other's masculinity fiercely, punishing those who step outside narrow norms. This discomfort is tiny compared to what women experience daily. Tolerating some mockery is a small price for creating genuine change.

Education: Starting Early

The problem begins in childhood. Boys learn from what they see at home, what they see in media, what their peers reward or punish, and what adults tolerate or challenge. Effective education includes consent taught from primary school in age-appropriate ways ("It's okay to say no to hugs"), challenging gender stereotypes ("boys will be boys" excuses violence and teaches boys their behaviour has no consequences), emotional literacy (boys learning to express feelings beyond anger), bystander intervention training for teenagers, and critical media literacy (recognising misogyny in music, porn, and social media).

The conversation about pornography must happen. With the average age of first pornography exposure now 11-13, boys are learning about sex from violent, misogynistic content that presents dominance and degradation as normal. Parents and schools must address this directly rather than hoping it will resolve itself.

Male Victims and Toxic Masculinity

Men also suffer from patriarchal systems. Male victims of assault (including by other men) are less likely to report due to shame and social stigma around male vulnerability. "Toxic masculinity" harms men by policing their emotions and relationships, limiting their capacity for genuine connection. Men have higher suicide rates partly due to inability to seek help, conditioned from boyhood that expressing pain is weakness.

Dismantling harmful gender norms helps everyone. Men can be part of violence prevention while also addressing how patriarchy harms them. This isn't a zero-sum game where women's safety comes at men's expense. Creating a society where violence and coercion aren't tools of masculinity benefits men as well as women.

Measuring Progress

Men becoming allies isn't about praise or credit—it's about changing outcomes. We'll know it's working when women report feeling safer in public spaces, harassment rates decrease measurably, conviction rates for violence against women increase substantially, more men intervene when they witness harassment, and boys grow up with different role models who demonstrate that masculinity doesn't require dominance.

A Challenge to Men Reading This

This week, ask three women in your life—your partner, sister, mother, colleague—about the safety precautions they take. Just listen. Don't defend, explain, or minimise. Don't interrupt with "but I would never" or "you're being paranoid." Listen to understand their reality, not to refute it.

Then decide what you're going to do differently. Because awareness without action changes nothing.

International Comparisons: What Works Elsewhere

While no country has eliminated violence against women, some have made significant progress through comprehensive, coordinated approaches. The UK can learn from both successes and failures abroad.

Countries Leading the Way

Spain: Comprehensive Legal Framework

Following several high-profile femicides, Spain passed comprehensive legislation in 2004 that fundamentally changed how the country addresses gender-based violence. They created specialist courts for gender-based violence with trained judges who understand the dynamics of domestic abuse and coercive control. A 24/7 hotline with immediate police response protocols ensures women can get help any time, and protection orders are issued within 72 hours rather than the weeks or months common in other systems.

Mandatory training for all police, judges, and healthcare workers means women encounter informed professionals at every stage of seeking help. Public awareness campaigns targeting male behaviour shift the focus from women's precautions to men's responsibility. Funded specialist support services across all regions ensure women anywhere in Spain can access help.

The results speak for themselves: domestic violence deaths decreased by 60% between 2004-2020, conviction rates are significantly higher than in the UK, and 85% of women report being satisfied with police response compared to the UK's concerning rates. What the UK can learn is clear: specialist courts and mandatory training work. General courts handle gender-based violence inconsistently; specialist knowledge saves lives.

Scotland: Equally Safe Strategy

Scotland developed a distinct approach from England and Wales that has delivered measurable results. They made "coercive control" a specific criminal offence earlier than England, recognising that violence isn't only physical. The "Caledonian System" rehabilitation programme for domestic abuse perpetrators is now being adopted worldwide because it actually works. Scotland maintains robust funding for women's refuges rather than the boom-and-bust cycle common elsewhere.

The Violence Against Women Partnership approach coordinates across all public services, ensuring consistent responses rather than women falling through gaps between agencies. Education programmes in schools focus on healthy relationships before patterns form. The results demonstrate what's possible: higher conviction rates for domestic abuse than England and Wales, perpetrator programmes showing 80% don't reoffend after completion, and improved multi-agency coordination that catches problems earlier.

What the UK can learn is that consistent funding and perpetrator-focused interventions reduce reoffending. England and Wales could adopt Scotland's integrated approach rather than reinventing solutions that already exist within the UK.

Sweden: Sex Purchase Act (Nordic Model)

Sweden criminalized the purchase (not sale) of sex in 1999, fundamentally reframing prostitution as a form of exploitation rather than work. They made buying sex illegal while decriminalizing selling sex, recognizing that women in prostitution are often there through coercion or economic desperation. A massive public education campaign proclaimed: "Men's violence against women is not acceptable," changing cultural attitudes. Exit programmes for women in prostitution provide real alternatives. They addressed sex trafficking as demand-driven, targeting buyers rather than sellers.

The results show significant shifts: street prostitution decreased by 50%, trafficking was significantly reduced, and changed cultural attitudes mean 70% of Swedes now support the law. However, controversial aspects remain: some sex workers' organisations oppose this model, arguing it pushes sex work underground and makes screening clients harder. The debate continues, and any country considering this approach must listen to sex workers' voices about safety implications.

What the UK can learn is that addressing demand (male behaviour) rather than only supply (women's behaviour) can shift cultural norms. However, this must be done thoughtfully with sex workers' safety as a central concern.

Iceland: Gender Equality as Foundation

Consistently ranked as the world's most gender-equal country, Iceland demonstrates that violence against women doesn't exist in isolation. They implemented mandatory gender pay gap reporting that forces transparency and accountability. Equal parental leave encourages involved fatherhood, changing family dynamics from the start. Gender quotas in politics and business ensure women's voices in decision-making. Comprehensive sex education from an early age normalises discussions of consent and boundaries.

Cultural shifts actively challenge harmful norms. "Boys don't cry" is actively challenged rather than reinforced, allowing boys to develop emotional intelligence. The results show what's possible: lower rates of violence against women than most European nations, high reporting rates because women trust the system, and a cultural attitude that violence is unacceptable, not inevitable.

What the UK can learn is profound: violence against women doesn't exist in isolation. Countries with greater gender equality overall have lower violence rates. This requires structural change addressing pay equity, political representation, parental leave, and cultural attitudes, not just law enforcement after violence occurs.

What Doesn't Work: Failed Approaches

Curfews and Restriction

Some countries have tried restricting women's movement through curfews for women in parts of India (later repealed after protests) and women-only transport carriages that exist in Japan, Egypt, and India. Why it fails is straightforward: it punishes victims, not perpetrators; reinforces the idea that women don't belong in public space; doesn't address the root cause of male violence; and is practically unenforceable and often ignored.

When a UK police commissioner suggested a curfew for women after Sarah Everard's murder, the backlash was immediate and justified. Women asked the obvious question: why should women be confined when men are committing the violence? If safety is the concern, restrict the people creating danger, not those fleeing from it.

Victim-Focused Prevention Alone

Many countries (including the UK historically) focus solely on teaching women to protect themselves through self-defence classes, safety apps, and modest dress campaigns. Why it's insufficient should be obvious but apparently isn't: it places the burden entirely on women, implies assault is preventable by victim behaviour (it's not), ignores that most violence comes from known men rather than strangers, and doesn't reduce overall violence rates.

To be clear: these tools can help individuals feel more confident, but they're not solutions to systemic violence. Teaching women to defend themselves while doing nothing about male violence is like treating cancer symptoms while ignoring the tumour.

Emerging Innovations

Portugal: Specialised Police Units

Portugal created specialist domestic violence units within police forces with officers receiving 200+ hours of training in trauma-informed response and evidence collection. The same officers handle cases from report through prosecution, so victims don't have to repeat their story to multiple officers and relive trauma repeatedly. Officers build expertise in recognising patterns of coercive control that might not be obvious to general officers.

Results show why specialisation matters: higher reporting rates because women trust these units, better evidence collection leading to stronger prosecutions, and improved conviction rates compared to cases handled by general officers.

Canada: Bystander Intervention Programs

Canada implemented widespread "It's On Us" type programmes that train university students to recognise and interrupt harassment. The focus is on "creating witnesses" not just protecting victims, changing the cultural expectation that bystanders will intervene.

Men are specifically recruited as active participants, recognising that male allies are crucial to change.

Early results are promising: reduced campus sexual assault rates in areas with comprehensive programmes, suggesting that cultural change through bystander intervention actually works when properly implemented.

Australia: "Respect Victoria" Campaign

Australia launched a state-funded multimedia campaign targeting men and boys with TV ads showing men calling out friends' sexist behaviour, "The Line" campaign teaching young people about consent and healthy relationships, and targeted messaging stating "Violence against women starts with disrespect."

Results show measurable shifts in young men's attitudes about what behaviour is acceptable, demonstrating that public education campaigns can change attitudes when well-designed and adequately funded.

Common Success Factors

Countries that have made progress share these elements: comprehensive approaches where law, enforcement, education, and support services all function together rather than in isolation; sustained funding through long-term commitment rather than one-off grants; specialist training for police, judges, healthcare workers, and educators; focus on perpetrators rather than just supporting victims; cultural change through public awareness campaigns targeting men and boys; political will with leaders consistently prioritising the issue; and data collection that measures what works and adjusts approaches accordingly.

What Won't Work for UK

Simply copying another country's approach won't work because of different legal systems, cultural contexts, existing infrastructure, and funding models. However, the UK can adapt proven principles while accounting for local context. The challenge isn't identifying what works—other countries have demonstrated effective approaches. The challenge is political will to implement comprehensively and sustained funding to maintain programmes long-term.

The UK's Opportunity

The UK has significant advantages: a strong legal framework (if implemented), world-class universities researching violence prevention, active civil society organisations with expertise, international reputation to uphold, and resources to invest (if prioritised). What's missing is political will to implement comprehensively and sustained funding to maintain programmes long-term.

The 2023 Protection from Sex-Based Harassment Act languishes unimplemented two years later—not because the law is flawed, but because implementation requires investment in training, guidance, and enforcement. Other countries prove change is possible. The question is whether the UK will commit to it.

Technology: Tool for Safety or New Frontier of Harm?

Technology has become central to how women navigate safety—but it's simultaneously a source of new dangers. From safety apps to online harassment that follows women offline, the digital world mirrors and magnifies existing power imbalances.

The Safety Tech Industry

Women use technology to compensate for inadequate public safety. Popular safety apps and features include Apple's "Share My Location" and Google Maps location sharing, Life360, and Find My Friends, which women use constantly to let friends and family track them. Dedicated safety apps like bSafe (with fake call features, GPS tracking, and alarms), Hollie Guard (named after a murdered UK woman; sends alerts if the phone is shaken), Circle of 6 (quickly contacts trusted circle), and Safezone (university campus specific) represent a growing industry built on women's fear.

Ride-share features like Uber and Bolt's "share trip" functions, emergency assistance buttons, and number plate verification attempt to add safety layers to vulnerable moments. Emergency features including iPhone Emergency SOS (hold side button to call 999 and share location) and Android Personal Safety app, along with smartwatches with fall detection, turn personal devices into potential lifelines.

What's good about these technologies is they provide some peace of mind and can alert others if something happens, plus they create evidence for police investigation. What's problematic is more concerning: they create a false sense of security (apps can't prevent violence), require phone battery, signal, and ability to access the device, aren't helpful if someone is attacked suddenly, exclude women without smartphones or data plans, and profit from women's fear without addressing the root cause.

As one woman noted: "I have three safety apps. I've shared my location with five people. I still don't feel safe. Because apps don't stop men." This stark reality reveals the fundamental limitation of technological solutions to social problems.

Online Harassment as Offline Threat

For many women, online abuse isn't separate from "real life"—it directly impacts their physical safety. Doxxing, the publishing of home addresses, workplace information, and phone numbers, results in stalking, harassment, and threats showing up at women's homes. This particularly affects women with public profiles like journalists, activists, and politicians, and UK law is currently inadequate to address this quickly enough to prevent harm.

Image-based abuse takes many forms. Non-consensual intimate images, commonly called "revenge porn," have been illegal in the UK since 2015, but enforcement remains inconsistent. Deepfake pornography uses AI to create fake sexual images that can destroy reputations and relationships. Upskirting, made illegal in 2019, continues to occur. Posted images are used to humiliate, blackmail, or threaten women, with lasting psychological and social consequences.

Digital stalking enables abusers to track ex-partners via shared accounts, AirTags hidden in belongings, or spyware installed on devices. Using children's devices to monitor mothers after separation is increasingly common. Social media becomes a tool to monitor women's movements and relationships, creating surveillance that follows women everywhere.

Harassment campaigns coordinate abuse from multiple accounts, deliver rape and death threats (often dismissed as "not credible"), and drive women from public life. Data reveals the scale: Jess Phillips MP receives approximately 600 rape threats per day. She's not unique—female politicians, journalists, and activists face constant gendered online violence that affects their ability to work safely and participate in public discourse.

The "just block them" fallacy ignores reality. Women are often told to simply block abusers online, but new accounts are created instantly, blocking doesn't delete already-shared personal information, it doesn't stop offline stalking that began online, and reporting processes are slow and often ineffective. Police often dismiss online threats as "not real" until physical violence occurs—by which point it's too late.

Tech-Facilitated Abuse in Relationships

Technology has created new tools for coercive control that abusers wield with devastating effectiveness. Tracking and surveillance include spyware on phones monitoring texts, calls, and location; smart home devices like Ring and Alexa used to monitor and control; car GPS trackers; and AirTags hidden in belongings. Financial control manifests through monitoring bank accounts and transactions, using shared streaming and subscription accounts to track activities, and cryptocurrency used to hide assets in divorce proceedings.

Social control takes the form of demanding passwords to all accounts, monitoring all messages and requiring immediate responses, and using children's tablets to spy on ex-partners. Data from UK charity Refuge is damning: 72% of women in their services reported tech being used to abuse them. The problem is that this abuse is often invisible to outsiders and hard to prove legally, leaving women trapped in surveillance they can't escape.

What Tech Companies Could Do (But Often Don't)

Technology platforms profit from women's safety concerns while doing little to address underlying issues. Ride-share companies need better driver vetting (the UK has had cases of Uber drivers assaulting passengers), in-app audio and video recording during trips, direct connection to emergency services, elimination of the "share your number with driver" requirement, and guaranteed well-lit pickup and dropoff locations.

Social media platforms need faster response to harassment reports (currently takes days or is ignored entirely), better identification of coordinated harassment campaigns, doxxing treated as emergency requiring immediate response, an end to requirements that women prove harassment is a "credible threat" before action is taken, and proactive detection of image-based abuse using available technology.

Dating apps require verification requirements actually enforced, better reporting mechanisms for threatening behaviour, information sharing about banned users across platforms, background checks (controversial but requested by many users), and video call options before meeting in person. Smart home device manufacturers need easy ways to detect if devices have multiple controllers, systems that cannot be set up to hide themselves from other users, and clear instructions for removing someone else's access after the relationship ends.

Phone manufacturers should provide easy spyware detection, simple ways to see which apps have location and microphone access, and emergency features that work without unlocking the phone. Why isn't this happening? Because it costs money to implement, reduces "user engagement" (which is how they profit), creates fear of false accusations and litigation, allows companies to claim it's "not their responsibility" to police behaviour, and regulation is weak with even weaker enforcement.

Surveillance: Security vs. Privacy

The push for more CCTV, better lighting, and tracking technology raises important questions. The case for surveillance includes that it can deter some crimes, provides evidence for investigations, and helps women feel safer. The concerns are equally valid: surveillance disproportionately impacts marginalised communities through racial profiling and immigration enforcement, doesn't prevent violence but only records it, creates a false sense of security, raises questions about who controls the data, and can be used against women themselves (in stalking, by controlling partners, in human trafficking).

The balance is delicate: Women want safety, not a surveillance state. The goal should be preventing violence, not simply documenting it. This requires thoughtful policy that protects without creating new forms of control and oppression.

Digital Literacy and Protection

Women can take steps to protect themselves digitally through privacy settings (regularly reviewing social media privacy settings, not sharing real-time location publicly, turning off location data in photo metadata, and using privacy-focused browsers and search engines) and security practices (unique passwords for all accounts, two-factor authentication not via SMS which can be intercepted, regular spyware checks, and separate devices for sensitive activities if in controlling relationship).

Documentation involves screenshotting harassment (but not engaging), reporting to the platform and police, keeping records of threats and patterns. But remember: The burden shouldn't be on women to become cybersecurity experts. Tech companies and law enforcement need to do better.

The Future: AI and New Threats

Emerging technology brings new dangers. Deepfakes create AI-generated fake videos of women (often pornographic) that can destroy reputations, relationships, and careers, and are currently difficult to prosecute in the UK.

AI-powered stalking uses face recognition to track women across the internet, compiles comprehensive profiles from scattered data, and can deploy chatbots trained on someone's social media to harass them.

Virtual reality presents new challenges with reports of sexual harassment and assault in VR spaces, no clear laws governing virtual violence, and psychological impact that is real even if assault is "virtual." Regulation is years behind technology. By the time laws catch up, new forms of tech-facilitated abuse have emerged, creating a perpetual gap between harm and protection.

The Bottom Line on Technology

Technology is a tool—it amplifies existing power dynamics rather than creating new ones. Safety apps won't solve male violence. Better lighting won't stop harassment. CCTV won't prevent stalking. These are band-aids on a structural problem.

Technology can support women's safety, but only alongside law enforcement that takes tech-facilitated abuse seriously, tech companies held accountable for enabling harm, education about healthy relationships and digital citizenship, and cultural change that addresses why men use technology to control and harm women. A woman shouldn't need three apps, location sharing, and constant vigilance just to walk home.

Age and Experience: From Childhood to Old Age

Women's relationship with safety shifts across their lifetime, but the common thread is clear: it begins early and never truly ends.

Girls and Young Women (Ages 11-24)

Most women can pinpoint exactly when they first experienced harassment. The average age of first catcall falls between 11-14 years old, often while girls are in school uniform. Many describe feeling confused, not yet understanding the sexual nature of what's happening to them. Personal testimony from Mia, now 22, illustrates this brutal awakening: "I was 12, walking to school in my uniform. A man in a van slowed down, rolled down his window, and made explicit comments about my body. I didn't even understand what he meant. I just knew I felt sick and scared. I never walked that route again."

In schools, 79% of girls have experienced sexual harassment. Unwanted touching, bra-snapping, and upskirting are treated as pranks rather than assault. Girls are told to change their clothing rather than boys being told to change their behaviour. Teachers often dismiss complaints as "just teasing," teaching girls early that their discomfort matters less than boys' freedom to behave badly.

Online and offline merge for this generation. Nudes are requested and shared without consent. Snapchat and Instagram become tools of harassment and bullying. Sextortion, where abusers threaten to share images unless more are sent, traps young women in escalating abuse. "Rate me" culture destroys self-esteem, teaching girls their value lies in male approval.

The impact on education is measurable: 11% of girls say fear negatively affected their education. They skip classes to avoid harassers, don't participate in extracurriculars requiring late travel, and make university choices based on safety concerns rather than academic fit or career goals.

University years represent a particular danger zone. First year students are particularly vulnerable, away from home and navigating alcohol and new social dynamics. 62% of students experience sexual harassment at university. "Lad culture" in many universities normalises predatory behaviour. Sports teams and societies with initiation rituals involving sexual content create environments where harassment flourishes.

Nightlife brings its own terrors. The needle spiking epidemic in UK nightclubs from 2021 onward created widespread fear. Drink spiking remains common despite awareness campaigns. Women use cup covers, watch drinks constantly, and never accept open drinks. Many women stop going to clubs altogether, their social lives constrained by justified fear.

Student accommodation often fails basic safety standards with poor lighting in halls of residence, isolated student houses, and harassment from landlords, especially in private rentals. The messaging young women receive is consistent: "Don't walk alone" (so they restrict movements), "Watch your drink" (so they never relax), "Stick together" (so they can't be independent).

But rarely: "Men, don't spike drinks" or "Men, don't follow women."

Entering adulthood brings new challenges. First jobs expose young women to sexual harassment from colleagues, bosses, and customers. Fear of reporting because they need the reference or job silences them. Hospitality workers are particularly vulnerable, facing customer harassment with little employer protection. "Smile more" culture treats women's emotional labour and sexualized presentation as job requirements.

First relationships often normalise abuse. Many women experience coercive control in early relationships without recognizing it. Lack of education about healthy relationships means red flags are missed. Isolation from friends, monitoring of phones, and controlling behaviour is normalised as "he just really loves me."

By mid-20s, the adaptation has become automatic. Most women have internalized safety strategies without conscious thought. Keys between fingers, text when home, route planning—all automatic responses requiring no deliberate decision. Many don't even realize how much mental energy this consumes until they're asked to articulate it.

Women in Mid-Life (Ages 25-64)

The working years bring career impacts that compound over time. Women turn down promotions requiring travel or evening work, limiting their advancement. Sexual harassment in workplaces from colleagues or clients creates hostile environments. Pregnancy discrimination and discrimination against mothers penalize women for having children. "Flexibility" is used against women in salary negotiations, framing reasonable accommodations as special treatment.

Motherhood and safety intersect painfully. Pregnant women and women with small children experience different harassment. Vulnerability increases when managing prams, car seats, and multiple children. Single mothers face judgment and predatory behaviour. Teaching daughters safety strategies means passing trauma to the next generation, perpetuating cycles mothers hoped would end.

These are also domestic abuse peak years. Women aged 25-44 experience the highest rates of domestic abuse. Leaving an abusive partner is the most dangerous time, with the highest risk of murder. Financial dependence, children, and housing issues make leaving difficult. Stalking often escalates after separation, making escape an ongoing battle rather than a single event.

Women in their 40s-50s describe becoming "invisible," a shift that brings mixed experiences. Street harassment may decrease (though not disappear), but new forms emerge: ageism, "expired" comments, invisibility in professional settings. When they do report harassment, they're dismissed with "Why would anyone harass you?" as if their age disqualifies them from being believed.

Perimenopausal and menopausal women face additional challenges. Physical changes like hot flashes, anxiety, and sleep disruption compound fear and hypervigilance. Mental health impacts of menopause are rarely connected to ongoing safety stress. They're often juggling teenage children's safety alongside their own, doubling their vigilance load.

Despite changes, women in mid-life still restrict their movements. By this age, women have spent 30-40 years being vigilant. The habits are deeply ingrained. Many describe exhaustion from decades of fear, a weariness that comes from never being able to fully relax.

Older Women (Ages 65+)

New vulnerabilities emerge with age. Physical changes including reduced mobility, slower walking speed, and inability to run from danger make older women easier targets. Arthritis and osteoporosis mean falls are more dangerous, adding another layer of vulnerability. Hearing or vision impairment reduces awareness of surroundings, limiting their ability to detect danger.

Financial abuse targets elderly women specifically. Scammers see them as easy marks. Financial abuse from adult children or carers exploits family relationships. Widows are particularly vulnerable after a partner's death, their grief weaponized against them.

Social isolation increases risk. Many live alone after widowhood. Reduced social networks increase vulnerability and limit support systems. Loneliness makes them targets for exploitation, with con artists and abusers preying on their need for connection.

When older women report harassment or assault, they face dismissal and disbelief. Police and others often dismiss concerns with "Why would anyone target you?" implying they're too old to be targets of sexual violence. They're told they "should feel grateful for attention," a particularly cruel form of dismissal. Their fear is treated as paranoia rather than valid concern. They're less likely to be believed if they report abuse, with age used to question their reliability.

Sexual assault of elderly women happens more than acknowledged. It often occurs at the hands of carers, healthcare workers, or family members who have access and power. Dementia is used to discredit accounts, with abusers claiming victims are confused rather than truthful.

Older women face different fears than younger women. Home invasion terrifies widows living alone, who report intense fear of burglary or assault in their homes. Many sleep with lights on, phones by bed, and weapons nearby. Fear of not being able to defend themselves compounds their anxiety.

Out-of-home care brings new dangers. Residential care homes see high rates of abuse, including sexual abuse. Residents with dementia are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Complaints are often dismissed or ignored, leaving elderly women trapped in abusive situations.

Women in their 70s, 80s, and 90s describe never having a period of life where they felt truly safe. They lived through the 1950s-60s when attitudes toward harassment were even worse than today. "Boys will be boys" excused all male misbehaviour. Marital rape was legal until 1991 in the UK, meaning women had no legal recourse against sexual violence from husbands. Domestic violence was treated as a "private matter" with no intervention. They had no language or frameworks to name coercive control, suffering without words to describe their experiences.

One 78-year-old woman captures the lifetime burden: "I'm too old to run now. But I'm still looking over my shoulder. I've been doing it for 65 years. I don't think I could stop if I tried." This testimony reveals the psychological cost of a lifetime of vigilance.

The Intergenerational Transmission of Fear

Most women learned safety strategies from their mothers, passed down like family recipes: "Always carry your keys like this." Mothers feel guilt teaching daughters to be afraid. Boys in the same families aren't given the same warnings, revealing how gender shapes these lessons.

Grandmothers watching granddaughters experience particular heartbreak. They thought things would be better by now. Anger that generations later, girls still aren't safe drives some to activism, others to despair. The cycle continues: until cultural change happens, each generation inherits fear. Girls learn to shrink themselves before they learn to read. Boys learn their behaviour doesn't have consequences.

What Different Ages Need

For girls (11-17): comprehensive, age-appropriate education about consent and boundaries; schools that take sexual harassment seriously with real consequences; male teachers and fathers modeling respectful behaviour; bystander intervention training; and adults who believe them when they report harassment.

For young women (18-24): university policies with teeth—not just statements; safe nightlife with regulated venues, ID scanners, and trained staff; first job protections and clear reporting mechanisms; healthy relationship education before they enter serious relationships; and access to support services without barriers.

For mid-life women (25-64): workplace protections actually enforced; adequate refuge spaces and support services; a legal system that doesn't retraumatise survivors; financial independence support, particularly after domestic abuse; and recognition of the mental load they carry.

For older women (65+): having their reports taken seriously—full stop; protection from financial abuse and exploitation; safe residential care with oversight; acknowledgement of their experiences; and social programmes to reduce isolation.

For all women: A society where they don't have to live like this in the first place.

Bystander Intervention: How to Help Safely

Most people want to help when they witness harassment or assault—but don't know how to intervene safely. Bystander intervention training provides practical tools that can genuinely make a difference.

Why Bystanders Matter

Most harassment happens in the presence of others. Perpetrators rely on silence and inaction from witnesses. One intervention can stop an incident and signal community standards to both perpetrator and target. Bystanders often have more power than they realize, and research shows that when bystanders intervene, assault is less likely to occur.

Community intervention creates cultural shifts over time. Perpetrators begin to avoid environments where they know people will act. However, significant barriers prevent intervention: fear of personal safety, worry about misreading the situation, "not my business" mentality, freezing in the moment, and fear of making it worse. Bystander training addresses these barriers with practical techniques that work in real situations.

The Five Ds of Bystander Intervention

This framework gives people multiple options based on situation and safety.

DIRECT: Directly intervene in the situation. This is appropriate when you feel physically safe doing so, the situation hasn't escalated to violence, and you're with others who can back you up. What it looks like: "She said no. Back off." "Leave her alone." "That's not okay." "You need to stop now."

Safety tips include using confident body language, not getting physically aggressive yourself, being prepared to de-escalate or leave, and not cornering the perpetrator. Example: A man is repeatedly trying to talk to a woman on the tube who's clearly uncomfortable and has moved away. You say: "Mate, she's not interested. Give her space."

DISTRACT: Interrupt the situation without directly confronting. This is appropriate when direct intervention feels unsafe, you want to de-escalate without confrontation, or the situation is in early stages. What it looks like: pretend to know the target ("Sarah! I've been looking everywhere for you!"), ask for directions or the time, "accidentally" spill something, pretend to be lost and need help, or ask the perpetrator an unrelated question.

Why it works: it breaks the perpetrator's focus, gives the target opportunity to leave, and is less confrontational so carries lower risk. Example: You see a man following a woman. You approach the woman: "Excuse me, do you know which way to the station? My phone died." You walk with her away from the man.

DELEGATE: Get help from someone else. This is appropriate when the situation is dangerous, someone else has more authority, or you need backup. Who to get: police (999 for emergency, 101 for non-emergency), security or venue staff, transport staff (bus driver, train conductor), teacher, supervisor, or manager, or other bystanders.

What it looks like: "Call the police, she needs help." Alert bar staff: "Table 5, that man is putting something in her drink." To other bystanders: "Will you help me with this?" Example: You see someone spiking a drink in a club. You immediately tell security and point out the perpetrator.

DELAY: Check in after the incident. This is appropriate when immediate intervention wasn't possible, the incident has passed but the person may need support, or you're not sure what happened but someone seems distressed. What it looks like: "Are you alright? I saw what happened." "Do you need help? Can I call someone for you?" "I'm heading that way, want to walk together?" "That wasn't okay. Are you safe?"

Why it matters: it shows the target they weren't imagining it, offers practical support, and can prevent escalation like an abuser following them. Example: You see a woman who was just harassed on the street. You catch up: "I saw that. Are you okay? Can I walk with you anywhere?"

DOCUMENT: Record what's happening for evidence. This is appropriate when other people are already intervening, recording would provide useful evidence, and it's safe to do so. Important rules: ask the target if they want you to record (when safe to do so), don't post on social media without explicit permission, film the perpetrator not the victim, and be prepared to share footage with police.

What it looks like: recording harassment on the phone, taking photos of number plates, writing down what you witnessed, and getting contact details to be a witness. Example: A man is shouting abuse at a woman. Several people are already intervening. You film his face and the incident to provide evidence if she reports to police. You ask her: "I recorded that. Would you like the footage?"

Situation-Specific Guidance

Street Harassment: If you witness catcalling or verbal harassment, distract by approaching the target, pretending to know them, and walking with them. Use direct intervention: "That's not okay" to the perpetrator. Delay by checking in after: "Are you alright?" Don't physically confront unless absolutely necessary, don't escalate the situation, and don't focus on the perpetrator at the expense of the target's safety.

On Public Transport: If someone is being harassed on a bus or train, sit between them and the harasser if possible. Distract by asking "Is this seat taken?" Delegate by alerting the driver, conductor, or transport police. Stay with them until the harasser leaves or they reach their stop. Transport for London provides a text service: text 61016 to report incidents on London transport.

In Bars/Clubs: If you see someone spiking a drink, immediately alert bar staff and security, point out the perpetrator, ensure the drink isn't consumed, and stay with the intended target until they're safe. If someone seems dangerously intoxicated or incapacitated, don't let them leave alone with someone, especially someone they didn't arrive with. Alert venue staff, stay with them, help them contact friends, and call an ambulance if needed (999). Remember: someone being "too drunk" doesn't excuse taking advantage. Spiked drinks often make people seem drunk.

Domestic Abuse: If you hear arguing or violence from a neighbour's home, call police (999 if it sounds violent, 101 if concerned but not emergency). You don't need to be certain—let the police assess. Keep calling if it's recurring. Don't confront the abuser yourself as this can escalate danger.

If someone confides in you about abuse, believe them without interrogation. Don't judge or blame. Provide information about support services (National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247). Don't push them to leave before they're ready, as this can increase danger. Be consistent support even if they return to the relationship multiple times.

Online Harassment: If you witness pile-on or coordinated harassment, send a private message of support to the target. Report harassing accounts. Use counter-speech: "This abuse isn't okay." Don't engage directly with harassers as this feeds them. Amplify the target's work rather than the abuse.

If someone shares intimate images without consent, report to the platform immediately, report to police (this is illegal in the UK), contact the Revenge Porn Helpline (0345 6000 459), and don't share, comment, or engage with the content.

What NOT to Do

Don't put yourself in serious danger (you can't help if you're injured). Don't assume someone else will intervene—bystander effect means everyone assumes someone else will act. Don't blame the target with questions like "Why were you walking alone?" or "What were you wearing?" Don't make it about you: "I'm such a good person for helping." Don't post about it on social media for clout without permission. Don't physically attack the perpetrator (you could face legal consequences). Don't assume it's "domestic" and not your business (domestic abuse is everyone's business).

Special Considerations

Intervening as a Man: Advantages include that perpetrators (usually male) may take you more seriously, there's less risk of physical violence toward you, and your intervention signals to other men that behaviour is unacceptable. Be careful not to become another threatening presence to the woman. Centre her needs, not your "hero" moment. After the incident, leave unless she indicates she wants your continued presence. Don't expect gratitude or praise.

Intervening as a Woman: Advantages include that the target may feel safer with your intervention, women are good at distraction techniques (pretending to know them), and you can offer to stay with them after. Be careful to assess risk to yourself. Don't intervene alone if the situation is violent. Perpetrators may dismiss or threaten you too.

Practice and Preparation

Bystander intervention is a skill that improves with mental rehearsal. Imagine scenarios and your response to reduce freeze response in real situations.

Think "If I see [X], I will do [Y]." Take training courses—many universities and organisations offer free training. Right to Be (formerly Hollaback!) offers online courses. Local women's organisations often run sessions.

Discuss with friends what helps: "If I'm being harassed, I want you to..." "If you see me in trouble, here's what helps..." Create signals like code words or texts. Start small by speaking up in smaller situations like sexist jokes or inappropriate comments. Build confidence for bigger interventions. This creates a culture where intervention is normal rather than exceptional.

The Ripple Effect

One intervention helps that specific person in that moment, shows the perpetrator's behaviour has consequences, shows other bystanders intervention is possible, and can prevent escalation to more serious assault. Consistent intervention across a community changes cultural norms. Perpetrators know they'll be called out. Targets know they're not alone. Young people learn what's acceptable and what isn't.

Research finding: Campuses with widespread bystander training see measurable decreases in sexual assault rates over 3-5 years, demonstrating that cultural change through intervention actually works.

Remember

You don't need to be a hero. Even small actions matter: making eye contact with someone who looks uncomfortable, asking "Are you okay?" not laughing at sexist jokes, or calling security instead of confronting directly. Safety first—yours and the target's. A well-intentioned intervention that escalates violence helps no one. Something is better than nothing. The worst response is doing nothing when you could safely do something.

Case Studies: Real Voices, Real Impact

The following accounts are composites based on real testimonies from women across the UK. Names and identifying details have been changed.

CASE STUDY 1: Emma, 19, University Student, Manchester

Emma came to Manchester excited for independence, having never lived in a big city. Within the first month, she'd been followed three times, groped twice on nights out, and had a man masturbate at her on the tram. When her mum called, she pretended everything was fine. But she'd stopped going to her 9am lectures because they required walking through a park at 8am when it was still dark. She was failing a module because of attendance.

She stopped going out with her flatmates. They'd be getting excited at pre-drinks and she'd be planning: stick together, don't accept drinks, keep phone charged, share location, have taxi money, wear shoes she could run in. By the time they left she was exhausted. One night someone spiked her friend's drink. They were watching them the whole time—or thought they were. Her friend ended up in A&E. After that, Emma just stopped. Stopped going out. Stopped socialising. Her room felt like the only safe place.

"I'm supposed to be having the time of my life," she explains. "Instead I'm in therapy for anxiety and barely leaving my flat. I've asked to transfer universities but my parents don't understand why. How do I explain that I'm afraid all the time?"

The impact on Emma is profound: her education has suffered, she's isolated from peers during a crucial development period, she's spending £80 per week on taxis she can't afford, she's on antidepressants, and she's considering dropping out entirely.

What would have helped: a university with a functioning harassment reporting system, better lit campus routes and 24-hour safe transport, nightlife venues with actual anti-spiking measures, bystander training for all students, and mental health support that recognised this as a response to systemic issues, not individual pathology.

CASE STUDY 2: Priya, 32, Marketing Manager, Birmingham

Priya turned down a promotion last year. It would have meant regular travel to London for evening client events and networking. She watched male colleagues jump at opportunities she couldn't take because the travel home would mean arriving at New Street station at 11pm and walking 15 minutes to her flat. When she suggested taxis, her manager said, "Just get a taxi." Taxis from the station cost £15-20. If she did that twice a week, it's £150 a month—which would have eaten her pay rise.

She suggested video calls instead. He looked at her like she was making excuses. The promotion went to a man who lives ten minutes from the office and drives. Priya's career has plateaued not because she's not good enough—the clients love her, her results are excellent—but because she can't "commit" to the evening culture that successful people in her industry need to participate in.

"I'm angry," she says. "I'm good at my job. But my safety concerns are treated like a personality flaw."

The impact: Priya earns £8,000 less annually than she would with the promotion. Over her career, this gap will cost her hundreds of thousands in lost earnings and pension contributions. She's stuck in a role below her capabilities, her talent wasted.

What would have helped: employer-provided safe transport for evening work, company culture that values results over "face time," hybrid working options, recognition that safety concerns are legitimate business considerations, and earlier meeting times or video options.

CASE STUDY 3: Sandra, 67, Retired Teacher, Cornwall

Sandra's husband died two years ago. She's lived in her house for 40 years but never felt unsafe until now. Last month someone tried the back door at 2am. Police came, found nothing, and suggested she'd imagined it. But she heard it. She knows she did.

She's stopped gardening in the front—too exposed. She doesn't answer the door unless she's expecting someone. She's had four different companies round trying to sell her security systems, preying on her fear. Her daughter wants her to move to sheltered housing but this is her home. Why should she leave? She did nothing wrong.

She sleeps three, maybe four hours a night. She keeps a cricket bat by the bed. She's exhausted. At church, other widows talk about the same thing. They're all terrified in their own homes.

"The worst part?" Sandra reflects. "When I told my GP, he increased my anxiety medication. But I'm not mentally ill. I'm a woman alone responding rationally to a genuine threat."

The impact: Sandra's quality of life has dramatically declined. She's socially isolated, sleep-deprived, and spending money she doesn't have on security measures. Her physical health is deteriorating from stress.

What would have helped: police taking her concerns seriously, community safety programs for elderly residents, accessible affordable home security schemes, social programs connecting isolated widows, a GP recognizing this as situational response not mental illness, and neighbours checking in regularly.

CASE STUDY 4: Leah, 16, Student, Glasgow

It started when Leah was 11. A man in a car asked her for directions then asked if she wanted a ride. She was in her primary school uniform. She told her mum, who taught her to walk different routes, never be alone, and carry an alarm. Her brother's the same age—their mum's never had that conversation with him.

At school, boys snap bras, lift skirts, and share photos of girls' bodies in group chats rating them. Teachers call it "banter." One teacher said if they dressed more modestly, boys wouldn't be distracted. They're in uniform. How much more modest can they be?

Leah can't wait to leave school but she's terrified of what comes next. Her older sister works in a bar and men grab her all the time. Her manager says it's "part of the job." Leah and her friends share locations constantly. They have code words for danger. They're 16. This is normal to them. They don't know anything else.

"Sometimes I'm just really tired," Leah says. "I want to exist without calculating risk. I want to wear what I want. I want to walk where I want. I want to just... be."

The impact: Leah is learning to shrink herself before she's learned who she could be. She's developing anxiety. Her trust in authority figures (who don't protect her) is damaged. She's being robbed of a carefree adolescence.

What would have helped: schools with zero-tolerance harassment policies actually enforced, male students facing real consequences, teachers trained to recognise and stop harassment, curriculum teaching consent and respect from primary school, youth services addressing online safety and harassment, and adults believing girls when they report.

CASE STUDY 5: Amara, 28, Nurse, London

Amara is a Black woman working night shifts at an NHS hospital. She faces harassment on three fronts: because she's a woman, because she's Black, and because she's in healthcare. Men on the street see the NHS uniform and make comments about "nurses being naughty." Add racial fetishization—she's had men shout about "chocolate" and "exotic."

When she reported a colleague who kept making sexual comments, HR asked if she was "sure" she wasn't misunderstanding. Another colleague said she was "playing the race card." Patients have grabbed her, made sexual comments, and refused care from her because of her race. When she reports it, she's told they're ill, to have compassion.

She finishes shifts at midnight. The walk from the station to her flat is terrifying. She's been followed twice. A colleague was attacked last year in the hospital car park. They installed one light. That's it.

"I became a nurse to help people," Amara says. "Now I'm burned out, anxious, and looking for a career change. The NHS is hemorrhaging staff and wondering why. This is why."

The impact: Amara is leaving a profession desperately needing staff because her workplace can't keep her safe. She has PTSD from being assaulted by a patient. She's experiencing racist and sexist harassment daily without support.

What would have helped: NHS employers providing safe transport for night shifts, zero-tolerance policy for patient sexual harassment and assault (even when patient is ill), HR taking reports seriously especially from women of colour, adequate security and lighting in hospital facilities, support services for staff experiencing harassment, and cultural shift recognizing intersection of racism and sexism.

CASE STUDY 6: Hannah, 35, Domestic Abuse Survivor, Leeds

Hannah was with him for eight years. It started small—checking her phone, criticizing her clothes. By year three, she needed permission to see her own sister. He never hit her until the end. But he controlled everything: money, movement, friends. He had tracking apps on her phone. He'd call her work to "check on her." He isolated her completely.

When she finally left, it got worse. He knew where she worked, where her mum lived. He'd wait outside. He sent hundreds of messages. The police said they couldn't do anything unless he made a "credible threat." What's a credible threat? He broke into the refuge. He found her twice. She had to move cities, leave her job, and change her name. She lost everything because she married the wrong person.

"I'm safe now," Hannah reflects. "But I'm 35, starting over with nothing. And I still look over my shoulder constantly. He took eight years of my life. I'm afraid he'll take the rest too."

The impact: Hannah lost her career, her home, her sense of security. She has complex PTSD. She's financially destitute despite working her entire adult life. She can never feel fully safe.

What would have helped: police treating stalking seriously before escalation, refuges with adequate security and capacity, legal system that recognised coercive control earlier, financial support for women leaving abusive relationships, housing assistance, employer understanding and accommodation, and stalking orders actually enforced.

Common Threads

Every woman's experience is unique, but patterns emerge. They all modified their behaviour to accommodate male violence, were disbelieved or dismissed when they reported, lost opportunities (education, career, social), suffered mental health impacts, spent money they couldn't afford on safety, and were told implicitly or explicitly that it was their responsibility to stay safe.

None of them did anything to "deserve" what happened, were being "paranoid," were making it up, or received adequate support from systems meant to protect them. These aren't extreme cases. These are ordinary women living ordinary lives in the UK in 2025. Their experiences are normal. That's the problem.

Myth vs. Reality: Challenging Common Misconceptions

Myths about violence against women persist because they're comforting. They suggest there's a clear line between "good" women who are safe and "reckless" women who aren't. Reality is more complicated—and more frightening.

MYTH #1: "If you dress modestly and don't go out late, you'll be safe."

REALITY: Women in full religious coverings experience harassment. Children in school uniforms are catcalled. Elderly women in care homes are sexually assaulted. Women are attacked in broad daylight. Most sexual violence occurs in homes by known perpetrators. What women wear has NO correlation with assault rates.

The truth is that rapists don't attack because of arousal triggered by clothing. They attack because of power, opportunity, and knowing they likely won't face consequences. Study after study shows that when shown photos of assault survivors and asked to identify them by their clothing, people can't. Because clothing isn't the factor.

MYTH #2: "Stranger danger is the real threat."

REALITY: 90% of women who are raped know the perpetrator. Partners and ex-partners commit the majority of violent attacks against women. Family members, colleagues, and friends commit far more sexual assault than strangers. Women are more likely to be murdered by intimate partners than by strangers.

The truth is that the "stranger in the bushes" narrative is statistically rare but culturally dominant. It allows people to feel safe by focusing on avoidable "danger" while ignoring the violence happening in homes, workplaces, and social circles. This myth is particularly harmful because women don't identify abuse from partners as "real" violence, police and society dismiss domestic abuse as "just a relationship issue," resources focus on stranger prevention instead of addressing domestic violence, and women blame themselves for "choosing the wrong partner."

MYTH #3: "Women exaggerate or lie about harassment for attention."

REALITY: 96% of street harassment goes unreported. Only 2-10% of rape allegations are false (same rate as other crimes). 80% of women don't report domestic abuse to the police. Women face disbelief, victim-blaming, and retraumatization when they do report. "False accusations ruin men's lives" is statistically negligible compared to unreported assaults.

The truth is that women have far more to lose than gain by reporting. They face not being believed, being blamed ("What were you wearing?"), losing jobs, relationships, and housing, retaliation from perpetrators, court processes that retraumatise them, and social ostracism.

MYTH #4: "It's not that bad. Women are being too sensitive."

REALITY: 12.8% of women experienced domestic abuse, sexual assault or stalking in one year. That's 3.2 million women—equivalent to the entire population of Wales. 50% of women feel unsafe walking alone near their home at night. 44% of young women experienced catcalling in 12 months. Every three days, a woman in the UK is killed by a current or former partner.

The truth is that just because something is common doesn't mean it's not serious. The fact that harassment is "normal" for women is precisely the problem.

MYTH #5: "If it was really that bad, she would have left."

REALITY: Leaving an abusive relationship is the most dangerous time (highest risk of murder), financially impossible for many women, complicated by children, housing, and immigration status, made harder by isolation from friends and family, and obstructed by legal system failures.

The truth is that on average, women leave abusive relationships 7 times before leaving permanently. Each attempt is an act of courage. The question shouldn't be "Why didn't she leave?" but "Why did he abuse her? And why didn't anyone stop him?"

MYTH #6: "Real rape is violent stranger assault. Everything else is a gray area."

REALITY: Most rape is committed by someone the victim knows. Most rape doesn't involve a weapon or physical injury. Consent can be withdrawn at any time. Being drunk, asleep, or incapacitated means you CANNOT consent. Coercion, threats, and fear are as real as physical force.

The truth is that "gray areas" only exist when we centrethe perpetrator's convenience over the victim's humanity. If she didn't freely, enthusiastically agree, it's assault.

MYTH #7: "NotAllMen do this. Why should all men be treated as threats?"

REALITY: Women cannot identify which men are dangerous. When 12.8% of women experience abuse in a single year and 3 in 5 young women experience harassment annually, women's caution isn't paranoia—it's risk assessment.

The truth is that "not all men" is irrelevant. Women don't need to know if all men are dangerous. They need all men to help stop the ones who are. If you're offended by women's fear, channel that energy into challenging the men who create it.

MYTH #8: "Things are better now than they used to be."

REALITY: Violence against women hasn't decreased significantly. Reporting may be up (which is good) but conviction rates remain shamefully low.

New forms of abuse (tech-facilitated, online harassment) have emerged. Many women say they feel less safe than they did a decade ago.

The truth is that we have better language and legal frameworks now. But implementation is failing. And for individual women, "better than the 1950s" is cold comfort when they still can't walk home safely.

MYTH #9: "Women just need to learn self-defence."

REALITY: Self-defence doesn't work against someone larger and stronger in many cases. It doesn't protect against date rape drugs. It doesn't stop domestic abuse from intimate partners. It doesn't address systemic issues. It places the burden on women instead of perpetrators.

The truth is that self-defence can help individuals feel more confident. But suggesting it as a solution to male violence is like suggesting bulletproof vests instead of gun control. The solution isn't women learning to fight back. It's men not attacking in the first place.

MYTH #10: "This is just a women's issue. Men can't do anything about it."

REALITY: Men commit the vast majority of violence against women. Therefore, men must be central to the solution. Male allies challenging other men is the most effective intervention. Teaching boys about consent, respect, and boundaries prevents future violence. Bystander intervention by men can stop incidents.

The truth is that this is absolutely a men's issue. It's a problem created primarily by men, and it requires men to fix it. Women have been trying to solve this alone for decades. It's not working. Men: this is your problem to solve.

Conclusion

These myths persist because they make violence against women seem rare (it's not), preventable by women (it's not), the fault of victims (it's not), and inevitable (it's not).

The reality is that violence against women is common (3.2 million women affected annually), preventable (by addressing perpetrator behaviour and systemic failures), never the victim's fault (regardless of clothing, location, intoxication, or choices), and solvable (if society chooses to prioritise women's safety).

Challenging these myths is the first step toward change.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This report calls for immediate implementation of existing laws, mandatory training for all police forces, a national public awareness campaign, and a cultural shift that places responsibility where it belongs—on perpetrators, not victims.

We need coordinated action across six key areas: police resourcing and response, justice system reform, law implementation, prevention and culture change, support services, and accountability. Without investment in all six, women will continue to pay the price for male violence.

The hidden harm of street abuse is how it quietly chips away at women's lives. We need a society where women don't have to plan their day around safety—where simply existing in public isn't a risk. This shouldn't be normal in 2025/26—but it is.
It's time for change.

Kulturalism® calls on government, police, and community leaders to recognise street harassment as a systemic failure—not a social norm. Change will only come when women's safety is treated as a collective responsibility, backed by policy, funding, and accountability.

Because until safety is guaranteed for every woman, our work isn't done.

References & Data Sources

This report draws on national data, independent research, and insights gathered through **Kulturalism® | SHE Voice™'s ongoing work with the public**.

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Kulturalism Initiatives
SHE Voice™ – Women's Safety
HE Voice™ – Men in the Criminal Justice System

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to Safer Streets.

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