MATT STOREY
POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR CLEVELAND

HER SAFETY, OUR PRIORITY

2026 CONSULTATION FINDINGS

SAFE STRONG & CONFIDENT COMMUNITIES

MATT STOREY
POLICE AND CRIME
COMMISSIONER
FOR CLEVELAND

Contents

03. Contents
04. Foreword from the Police and Crime Commissioner
05. Background
06. Consultation methodology
07. Consultation demographics
08. How safe do women and girls feel?
09. In which locations do women and girls feel unsafe?
12. Priority locations
16. What makes women and girls feel unsafe?
22. What actions do women and girls take to make themselves feel safer?
28. What types of harassment have women and girls experienced in the past year?
32. Barriers to reporting: Why women and girls did not report to police?
33. Experiences of Reporting to Cleveland Police
34. What would help women and girls feel safer in Cleveland?
35. Appendix 1
38. Appendix 2

Police and Crime Commissioner Foreword and thank you

First and foremost, I would like to thank the 2,797 women and girls from all ages, backgrounds and communities who took part in this consultation. Without your contribution, we could not have produced such a comprehensive and powerful insight into the experiences, perceptions and concerns of women and girls across Cleveland.

Some of the experiences and feelings shared with us are difficult and deeply concerning. I am especially grateful to those who found the courage to speak openly about their experiences. Your honesty has helped to shine a light on issues that too often go unseen or unreported. The exceptional response to this consultation demonstrates just how important this issue is to women and girls throughout Cleveland.

Whether discussing safety in our town centres and public spaces, or sharing personal experiences of stalking, harassment and violence; participants told us not only what concerns them, but also what changes they want to see.

The strength and clarity of these responses further reinforces my commitment to the safety of women and girls as one of the six key priorities within my Police and Crime Plan.

Most importantly, this report will help shape our priorities and actions over the coming years. It provides a blueprint for future work and, ultimately, a foundation for creating safer communities for women and girls across Cleveland.

Thank you once again for sharing your experiences, your views and your voices. This work would not have been possible without you.

Matt Storey
Police and Crime Commissioner

Women and Girls - Feelings of Safety Survey 2026

Background

Improving the safety of women and girls in Cleveland remains a key priority for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), as part of his Police and Crime Plan. Understanding lived experiences is essential to ensuring that services, policies, and interventions are informed by the voices of those most affected.

This report presents the findings of the Women and Girls' Feelings of Safety Survey 2026, providing insight into how women and girls feel about their safety, the challenges they face, their experiences of reporting incidents, and the changes they want to see.

The findings provide a clear understanding of feelings and concerns to support future partnership activity and the continued development of a coordinated response to improve feelings of safety, confidence, and trust.

Violence against women and girls continues to be recognised nationally and locally as a significant public safety issue. National research consistently shows that many women alter their daily routines, avoid certain locations, modify travel arrangements, and change behaviours because of concerns about their personal safety.

This survey follows a similar survey conducted in 2021. The survey includes questions relating to:

- How safe women and girls feel in different environments.
- Factors contributing to feelings of safety and vulnerability.
- Experiences of harassment and intimidation.
- Barriers to reporting incidents.
- Experiences of reporting to Cleveland Police.
- What women and girls want to see change.

The survey forms part of wider work to improve responses to violence against women and girls across Cleveland.

Consultation methodology

The survey was conducted online only and promoted through:

- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) communication channels.
- OPCC social media channels including circulating the survey to closed Facebook groups.
- Local strategic groups, e.g. Safer Cleveland Board
- Voluntary and community organisations.
- Partner and stakeholder networks.
- Circulated grassroots community groups.

Survey questions can be found at appendix 1.

Consultation results

During the eight-week consultation period from May to June 2026, a total of 2,797 women and girls completed the survey.

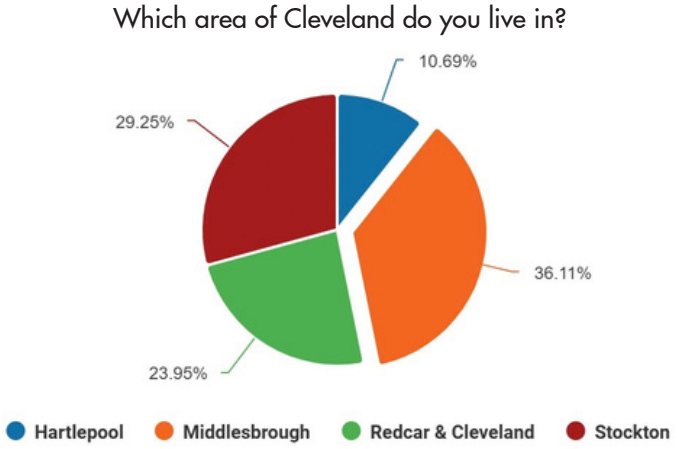
A similar survey was conducted in June 2021, to inform the development of the Home Office's Safer Streets 3 funding opportunity. This opportunity was specifically focused on improving safety for women and girls in Middlesbrough.

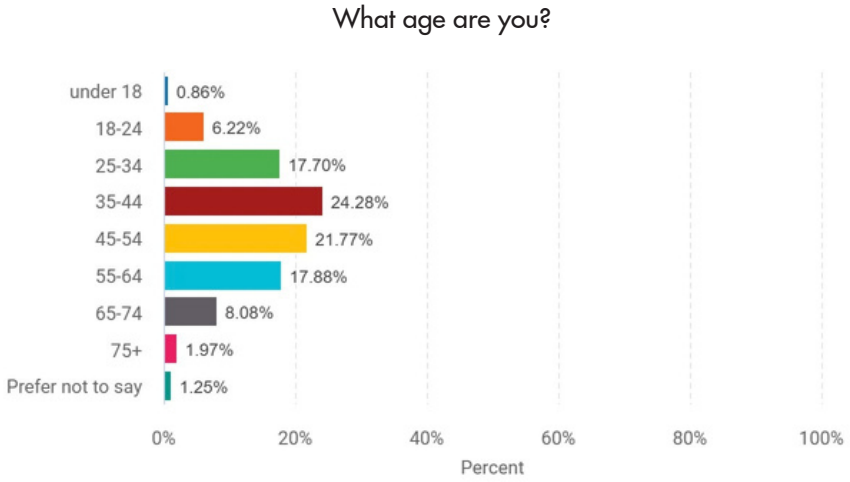
The 2026 survey was conducted using the same online promotion methods. Replicating the survey enabled comparisons to be made over time and helped identify any changes in perceptions, experiences, and priorities since the original survey. While the overall approach remained consistent, some questions were revised, added, or removed in 2026 to reflect emerging issues and evolving information needs. Comparative findings between the two surveys are presented at the end of this report at appendix 2.

A survey is planned for later in the year to further understand the experiences of men and boys.

Consultation demographics

The survey was completed by women and girls across the entirety of Cleveland as seen in the chart beow.





The largest proportion ot respondents in the chart below were aged between 35 and 54 years, accounting for 46.1% of all responses. This was followed by women aged 50 to 64 years (17.9%) and those aged 25 to 34 years (17.7%). Representation across most other age groups was broadly consistent, although participation from those aged under 18 was limited, accounting for 0.9% of responses.

The ethnicity of respondents was predominantly White British, White Irish or White Other, representing 96.3% of participants. A further 2.9% identified as Asian, Black, Mixed Heritage or another ethnic group, while 0.8% preferred not to disclose their ethnicity.

Most respondents (78.2%) reported that they did not have a disability. However, 18.1% identified as having a disability, and a further 3.8% preferred not to disclose this information. In relation to sex assigned at birth, 99.4% of respondents reported that they were assigned female at birth.

How safe do women and girls feel

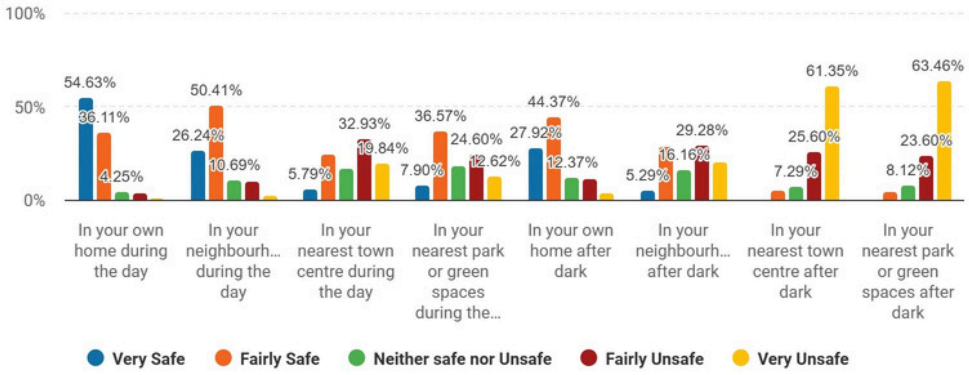
Women and girls were asked how safe they feel in certain situations as detailed below. Of the responses provided, 90.7% (n=2536) felt safe in their own home but this decreased slightly to 76.6% (n=2142) when considering the local neighbourhood.

Safety reduced considerably in public spaces during the day, with 52.8% (n=1476) of respondents stating they felt unsafe in town centres and 37.2% (n=1040) feeling unsafe in parks and green spaces.

Key Insight:

Even during daylight hours, significant numbers of women do not feel safe in public spaces.

How safe do you feel in the following situations?



Feelings of safety further reduced when respondents were asked to consider the same locations after dark. Feelings of safety at home remained the location women and girls felt was safest- though this decreased from 90.7% (n=2536) during the day to 72.3% (n=2022) at night. Likewise, when thinking about the local neighbourhood, this dropped by almost 30%. Overwhelmingly, women and girls felt unsafe in town centres after dark 87% (n=2433), and parks and green spaces 87.1% (n=2433).

Key Insight:

Darkness remains one of the strongest factors affecting women's feelings of safety.

In which locations did women and girls feel unsafe?

The open-text questions within the survey asked whether there were particular or specific locations where women and girls felt unsafe. From the 2,797 responses received, a number of locations across Cleveland were identified, with concerns often linked to environmental factors, anti-social behaviour, groups congregating, poor lighting, and experiences of harassment.

Town Centres: The primary unsafe environment

Town centres were the most frequently identified locations where women and girls reported feeling unsafe. Middlesbrough Town Centre was the most commonly referenced location across the dataset, followed by Stockton Town Centre and High Street, Redcar Town Centre, and Hartlepool Town Centre.

Respondents described town centres as environments characterised by visible drug and alcohol use, aggressive begging, anti-social behaviour, groups congregating in public spaces, and incidents of intimidation. Many women and girls reported concerns about being followed, verbally harassed, or becoming victims of theft or assault.

Particular concern was raised about specific areas within town centres, including bus and train stations, cashpoints, shopping centre entrances, fast food outlets, café seating areas and public gathering points. These locations were often described as places where groups congregate and where women feel particularly vulnerable, especially after dark.

Parks, green spaces and recreational areas

Parks, green spaces and recreational routes emerged as a significant area of concern, particularly when women were alone or travelling after dark.

Albert Park was the single most frequently cited location overall, with additional concerns raised about Stewart Park, Ropner Park, Burn Valley, John Whitehead Park, Linthorpe Cemetery, Tees Barrage, river paths, woodland areas and coastal routes.

Women described concerns relating to:

- Drug dealing and drug use
- Groups of men or youths gathering
- Sexual harassment and intimidation
- Off-road bikes and scooters
- Isolation and lack of visible support
- Limited escape routes in the event of an incident

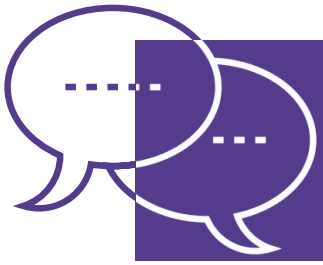
Environmental design, lighting and isolation

Across all location types, environmental factors emerged as a major contributor to feelings of unsafety.

Respondents frequently highlighted concerns about:

- Poorly lit streets and pathways
- Alleyways and cut-through routes
- Tunnels, underpasses and bridges
- Isolated footpaths and cycle routes
- Overgrown vegetation
- Areas lacking CCTV coverage
- Locations where help would not be readily available

These concerns often influenced everyday decision-making. Women reported avoiding shortcuts, choosing longer routes, restricting travel after dark, and relying on well-lit roads even when less convenient.



"Changes for better street lighting, CCTV (obvious and signposted as to help deter), higher police/warden presence, dispersal of groups of males, safe areas/projects for women in shopping or nightlife areas alike "Ask Angela" but within shops/businesses etc and it be available during the daytime."

Residential neighbourhoods and everyday spaces

A significant finding from the survey is that respondents also feel unsafe in everyday spaces such as their local neighbourhoods.

Many respondents reported concerns in their local/residential communities. Issues identified included:

- Drug dealing and associated activity
- Anti-social behaviour
- Vandalism and criminal damage
- Theft and attempted burglary
- Groups gathering near homes
- Intimidating behaviour from neighbours or local groups

Local shopping areas

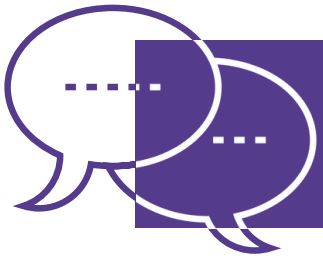
Local shopping parades were also identified as locations where women experience discomfort or feel vulnerable.

Examples included shopping areas in Linthorpe Village, Palladium shops, Acklam, Thorntree, Billingham and Norton.

Common concerns included:

- Groups gathering outside shops
- Aggressive begging
- Harassment and unwanted attention
- Shoplifting and disorder
- Intimidating behaviour from groups of young people or adults

While these locations may not generate the same level of concern as town centres, respondents reported that repeated exposure to these issues contributes to a wider sense of unease.



"Lots of men standing on shop fronts and groups of men on the streets. Often staring as I walk past. I sometimes have to walk on the road to get round them as they do not move to let me past."

Transport-related locations

Transport-related locations emerged as another area where women and girls experience heightened feelings of vulnerability.

Respondents highlighted concerns relating to:

- Bus stations
- Train stations
- Bus stops
- Car parks
- Taxi ranks
- Walking routes between transport hubs, workplaces and home

These locations were often associated with being alone, exposed, or waiting for transport with limited support available. Concerns about being followed, approached by strangers, or encountering anti-social behaviour were frequently reported.

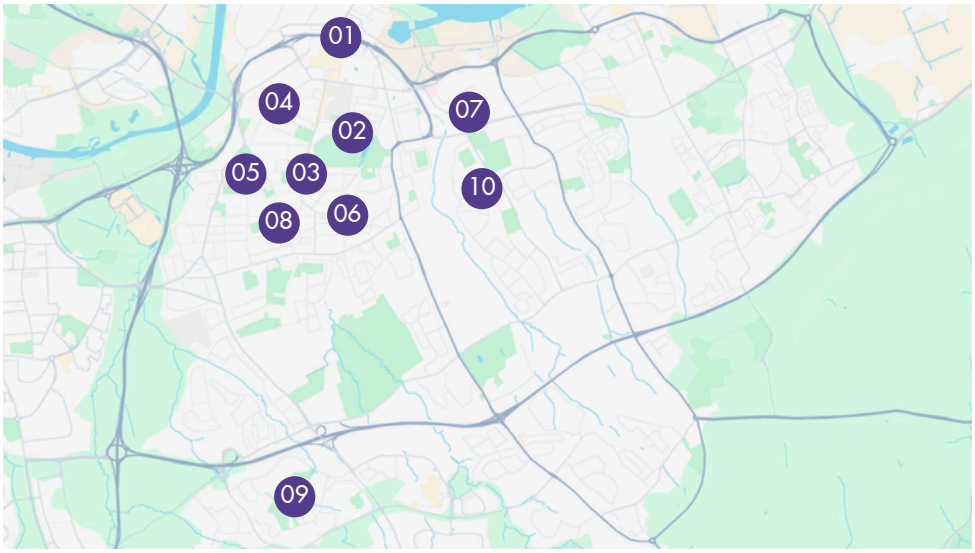
Many respondents stated that they avoid travelling alone after dark or make alternative arrangements to reduce the need to use public transport or associated routes.

Priority Locations

Priority locations were identified by respondents as part of the survey where they feel most unsafe. These have been broken down into top 10 priority locations per local authority area as below.

Middlesbrough – Top 10 priority locations

Women and girls focused on specific locations where they felt most unsafe.



01 Middlesbrough Town Centre
(incl. Captain Cook Square, McDonald's area, bus/train stations)

02 Albert Park

03 Linthorpe Road
(Full stretch)

04 Parliament Road/Union Street/Borough Road

05 Linthorpe Cemetery

06 Palladium Shops
(Grove Hill)

07 North Ormesby
(Especially Beaumont Road)

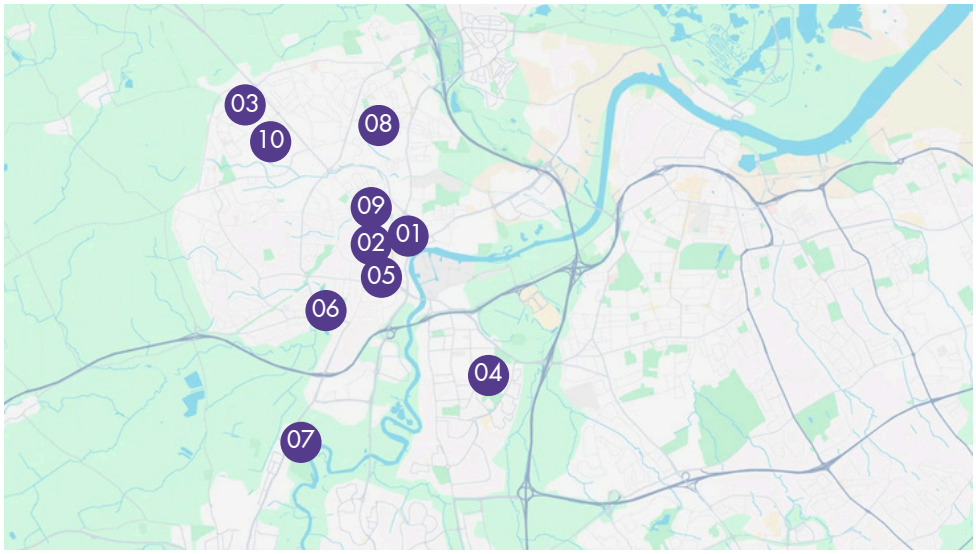
08 TS1 Residential Streets
(Gresham, Ayresome and surrounding areas)

09 Hemlington
(Lake, shops and estates)

10 Berwick Hills/Thorntree/Park End
(Including local shopping parades)

Stockton-on-Tees – Top 10 priority locations

Women and girls focused on specific locations where they felt most unsafe.



01 Stockton Town Centre
(High street)

02 Fountain area
(Town centre/high street)

03 Hardwick
(Estate, shops and green spaces)

04 Thornaby
(Town centre, estates e.g Thorntree Road, Yarm Lane)

05 Yarm Road/Yarm Lane/Hartington Road

06 Ropner Park

07 Preston Park/Tees barrage/ River Tees routes

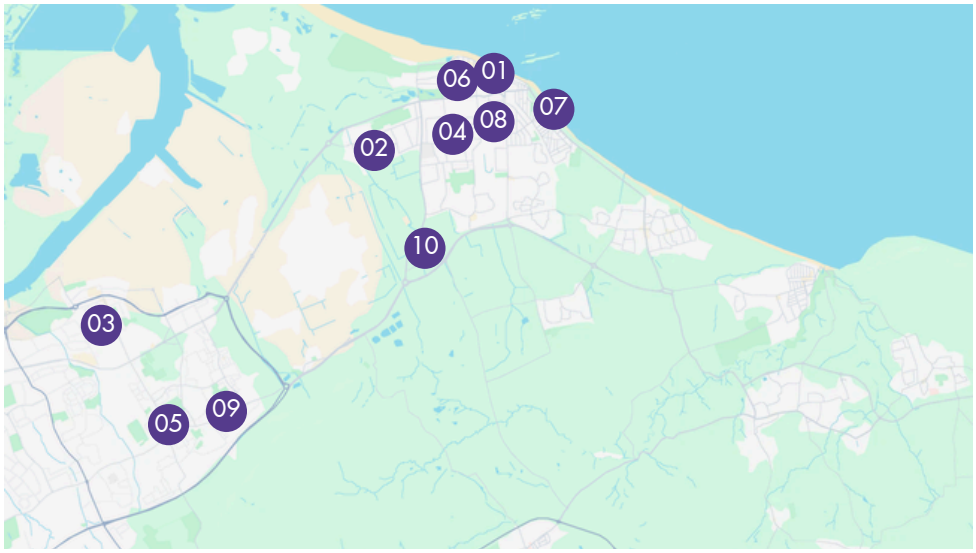
08 Ragworth

09 Oxbridge/Parkfield/ Newtown

10 North Tees Hospital
(Walkways and surrounding areas)

Redcar and Cleveland – Top 10 priority locations

Women and girls focused on specific locations where they felt most unsafe.



01 Redcar Town Centre
(High street)

02 Dormanstown

03 Grangetown/South Bank/ Eston cluster

04 Lakes Estate

05 Normanby/Bankfields

06 Queen Street / Station Road areas

07 Seafront / promenade / coastal routes

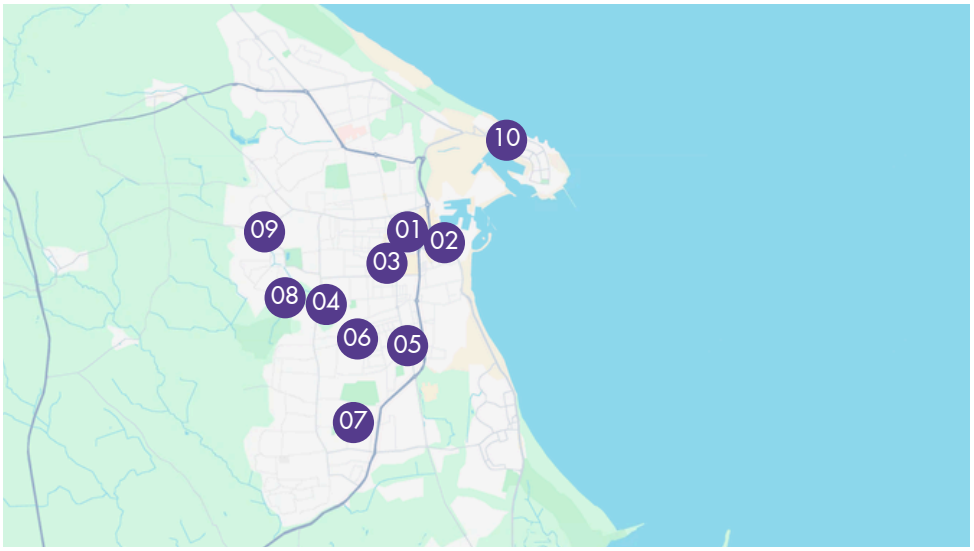
08 Underpasses
(e.g Racecourse tunnels)

09 Eston Square
(Surrounding areas)

10 Local parks
(Kirkleatham, Borough Park)

Hartlepool – Top 10 priority locations

Women and girls focused on specific locations where they felt most unsafe.



01 Hartlepool Town Centre

02 Church Street

03 York Road/'Ramp'/Middleton Grange

04 Burn Valley Park

05 Belle Vue/Owton Manor/ Dyke House

06 Murray Street/Oxford Road

07 Rossmere Park

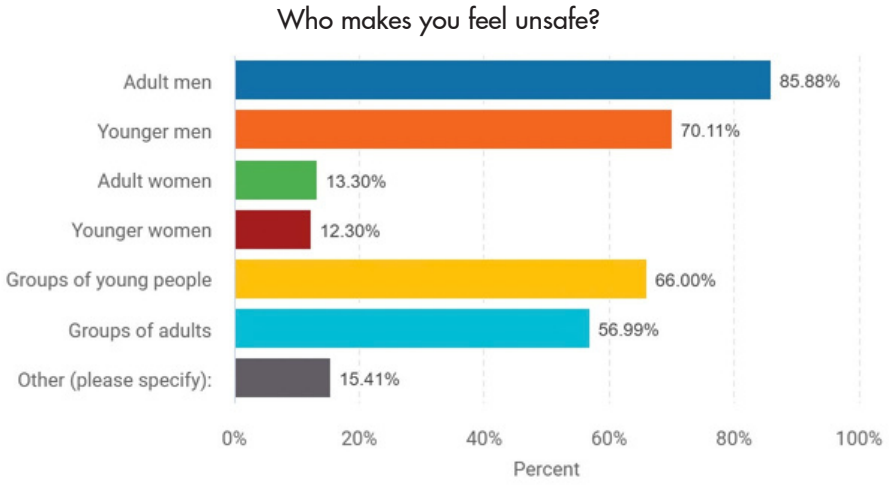
08 Summerhill Park

09 Naisberry Park
(Lighting issues)

10 Seafront/Headland/ Coastal Routes

What makes women and girls feel unsafe?

Women and girls were invited to answer this question using an open text box, allowing them to describe in their own words the factors that contribute to feeling unsafe. The responses provided valuable insight into lived experiences and perceptions of safety, highlighting a range of behavioural, environmental and societal issues.



Respondents were asked to identify who makes them feel unsafe. The findings as seen in the above chart provides a clear and consistent picture of the individuals and behaviours most strongly associated with fear and vulnerability.

Key Insight:

Concerns are overwhelmingly linked to men, particularly adult men, with fear increasing significantly when individuals are encountered in groups. By contrast, women and girls were rarely identified as a source of fear.

While respondents frequently emphasised that behaviour is ultimately the key factor influencing perceptions of safety, the findings highlight a strong association between experiences of intimidation, harassment and concerns relating to male behaviour.

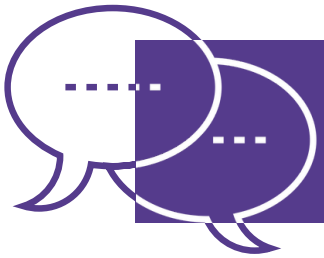
The chart above shows that adult men were overwhelmingly identified as the group most likely to make women and girls feel unsafe, with 85.9% (n=2402) of respondents selecting this option. Younger men were the second most frequently identified group at 70.1% (n=1960), followed by groups of young people at 66.0% (n=1846) and groups of adults at 57.0% (n=1594). In contrast, relatively few respondents identified women as a source of concern, with only 13.3% (n=372) selecting adult women and 12.3% (n=344) selecting younger women.

Male behaviour and gender-based fear

The most significant factor influencing feelings of safety was the behaviour of men. References to men, lone males, and groups of men appeared consistently throughout the survey responses.

Women described experiences including:

- Unwanted staring and attention
- Following behaviour
- Catcalling and sexual comments
- Harassment and intimidation
- Feeling observed or targeted in public spaces



"It's not just where you are—it's who is around you, what they're doing, and knowing nothing will happen to them."

Groups, gangs and youth Behaviour

Groups of people, particularly groups of young people or men congregating in public spaces, were frequently identified as a source of concern.

Respondents described feeling intimidated by:

- Large groups gathering in public places
- Shouting and swearing
- Aggressive or confrontational behaviour
- Blocking pathways and entrances
- Harassment directed at passers-by

The presence of groups was often viewed as more intimidating than the behaviour of an individual. Women reported feeling particularly vulnerable when required to walk past groups, especially when alone.

Off-road bikes, e-bikes and masked riders

One of the strongest emerging themes within the survey relates to off-road bikes, electric bikes, quad bikes and scooters, often being ridden by individuals wearing face coverings or balaclavas. This further reinforces feedback received through other engagements conducted by the PCC.

Respondents associated these individuals with:

- Reckless and dangerous driving
- Intimidation of pedestrians
- Anti-social behaviour
- Drug-related activity
- Theft and criminality

Many women reported feeling anxious when encountering groups of riders, particularly in parks, neighbourhoods and public spaces.

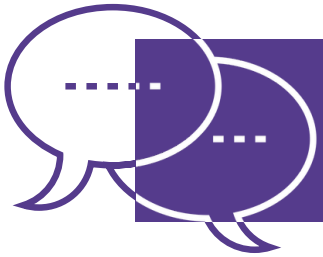
Drugs, alcohol and visible addiction

The presence of drug and alcohol use featured prominently throughout the consultation.

Respondents frequently referenced:

- Public drug use
- Drug dealing
- Street drinking
- Intoxicated individuals in public spaces
- Aggressive begging

Women often linked these concerns to unpredictability. The uncertainty surrounding how an intoxicated individual might behave contributed significantly to feelings of unease and vulnerability.



"Mainly men. People who walk around clearly under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Gangs of boys/men. Areas that aren't well lit."

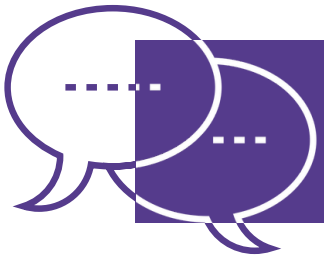
Harassment and unwanted attention

Many respondents described experiencing routine forms of harassment and unwanted attention.

Examples included:

- Catcalling
- Wolf-whistling
- Sexual comments
- Unwanted conversations
- Requests for money
- Persistent attempts to engage
- Intimidating or inappropriate staring

While some incidents may appear minor in isolation, respondents highlighted the cumulative impact of these experiences and their contribution to a wider sense of vulnerability.



"Persistent harassment by local beggars and drug users all over town, either asking for money or trying to sell obviously stolen goods."

Darkness, isolation and poor lighting

Environmental factors were identified as a significant contributor to feelings of unsafety.

Respondents frequently referred to:

- Poorly lit streets and pathways
- Isolated routes
- Parks after dark
- Underpasses and alleyways
- Areas with limited visibility

Women reported feeling particularly vulnerable in locations where there were few people present, limited escape routes, or little opportunity to seek assistance if needed.

Lack of visible enforcement and accountability

A strong theme throughout the consultation was the perception that inappropriate behaviour often goes unchallenged.

Respondents described concerns relating to:

- Limited visible policing
- Lack of consequences for offenders
- Repeat anti-social behaviour
- Perceived lack of enforcement
- Low confidence in the criminal justice system

Many women expressed frustration that individuals engaging in intimidation, harassment or anti-social behaviour appeared to do so without consequence.

Fear of serious crime

While many respondents described concerns relating to low-level harassment and anti-social behaviour, these experiences were often linked to wider fears of more serious offences.

Women reported concerns about:

- Sexual violence
- Assault
- Robbery
- Stalking
- Knife crime

These fears were shaped not only by personal experiences but also by incidents affecting friends, family members, local communities, and stories reported through traditional and social media.

Behaviour

Many women stated that concerns were not simply based on age, gender or appearance, but on behaviours such as:

- Aggression
- Intimidation
- Harassment
- Shouting and swearing
- Threatening conduct

Respondents repeatedly emphasised that it is behaviour that creates fear, regardless of who is displaying it.

Drugs, alcohol and visible intoxication

As previously mentioned, a recurring theme throughout the consultation was concern about individuals under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Drug and alcohol use were frequently linked to wider concerns about anti-social behaviour and public safety.

Balaclavas, face coverings and off-road vehicles

A notable emerging theme was concern about individuals wearing face coverings or balaclavas, often associated with off-road bikes, e-bikes, quad bikes and scooters. The anonymity provided by face coverings was repeatedly cited as a factor increasing feelings of fear.

"There are also people of all ages flying around on electric scooters at all times, both on the pavements and roads, with total disregard for anyone's safety or wellbeing."

Groups (especially men and youths)

Groups, particularly groups of men and young people, were frequently identified as making women and girls feel unsafe. Respondents described groups as intimidating and often associated with louder, more disruptive or confrontational behaviour.

Unpredictability and Fear of the Unknown

Another important theme was uncertainty. Many respondents explained that they often feel unsafe not because an offence has occurred, but because they cannot predict the intentions of those around them. This uncertainty was frequently linked to anxiety and heightened vigilance, particularly when women were alone.

Cultural differences and perceptions: A small number of respondents referenced concerns, particularly groups of men relating to ethnicity, nationality, cultural differences or language barriers.

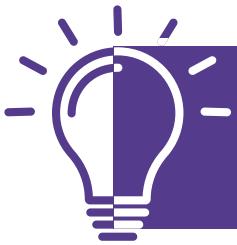
These comments generally focused on:

- Perceived differences in attitudes towards women
- Feeling intimidated or uncomfortable
- Reluctance to report concerns due to fear of being labelled racist

However, these comments represented a minority of responses and were often linked to wider concerns about harassment, anti-social behaviour or safety.

What actions do women and girls take to make themselves feel safer?

Respondents were asked in an open-text box what actions they take to make themselves feel safer. Analysis of all responses identified nine clear themes, demonstrating the significant adjustments women and girls make to manage concerns about their personal safety.



Key Insight:

The findings highlight that many of these behaviours have become routine and are viewed as necessary precautions rather than choices.

Avoidance of places, times and activities

The most dominant theme was avoidance. Large numbers of women reported actively avoiding locations, activities and times of day that they perceived as unsafe. This included not going out after dark, avoiding town centres, parks, green spaces, public transport, certain neighbourhoods and isolated routes.

Many respondents also described avoiding pubs, bars and nightlife, choosing to shop online or travel elsewhere rather than visit local centres.

Several locations, including Middlesbrough Town Centre, Stockton High Street, Albert Park and local parks and cemeteries, were frequently described as places women now avoid altogether. For many respondents, avoiding these areas was seen as the most effective way of managing risk.

"I avoid places where I know I might encounter groups of youths."

"Don't go out at night to places that make me feel unsafe"

"Make sure I stay away from town centres."

Restricting independence and freedom

Many women and girls described limiting their independence as a direct result of safety concerns. This included not leaving the house alone, avoiding walking independently, restricting travel after certain times, no longer exercising outdoors and reducing social activities.

Some respondents stated that they rarely leave home unless necessary, while others described feeling confined to their homes.

"I just don't go out"

"My world has become smaller"

"I feel like a prisoner in my own home"

Reliance on others for safety

A significant number of respondents reported relying on partners, family members, friends or colleagues to help them feel safe. Common behaviours included walking with someone, arranging lifts, travelling in groups, staying on the phone while walking and ensuring someone always knows their location.

Several women stated that they would not visit certain places alone and felt safer when accompanied by a man.

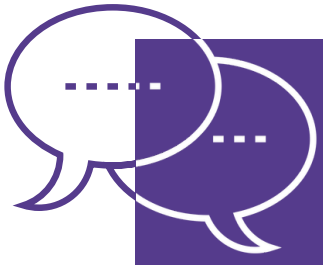
"I do not go anywhere alone, my partner accompanies me, especially when out walking our dog"

"I rarely go into Middlesbrough on my own anymore without my husband or family members".

Hypervigilance and situational awareness

Women and girls frequently described being constantly alert to their surroundings. Many reported regularly checking who is nearby, looking over their shoulder, identifying escape routes, crossing roads to avoid people or groups, avoiding eye contact and remaining aware of potential threats.

Responses suggest that this level of vigilance has become an automatic part of daily life, particularly when travelling alone or after dark.



"Keep a constant vigilance of my surroundings"

"Just keep alert"

Personal safety measures and self-protection

Many respondents reported carrying personal safety items or adopting self-protection strategies. Common examples included personal alarms, rape alarms, whistles, safety apps, torches, sprays and other items intended to provide reassurance. A particularly common theme was carrying keys in their hand or between fingers while walking alone.

Many respondents expressed frustration that they felt unable to legally carry more effective forms of protection and questioned why responsibility for personal safety appeared to rest largely with women themselves.

"I carry a can of deodorant spray"

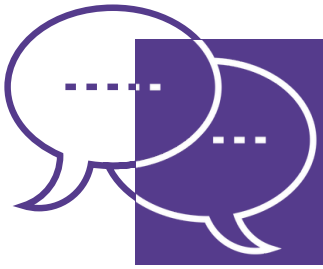
"I carry a personal alarm and mobile phone."

"I carry my keys between my fingers if I feel particularly unsafe"

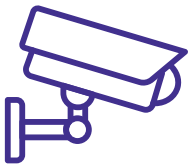
Technology and location sharing

Technology is increasingly being used as a safety tool. Many respondents reported sharing their live location through applications such as Life360, Hollie Guard, Find My Friends and built-in smartphone tracking features.

Others described using emergency SOS functions, staying on phone calls while walking, or ensuring family members always know where they are. These measures were often described as routine rather than exceptional.



"Only travel by car. Plan routes and parking and getting to and from venues in advance. Tell people where I am going. Use tracker app if I need to. Am aware of my surroundings. Don't leave food or drinks unattended. Make sure phone is fully charged."



Home security and target hardening

A substantial number of women and girls reported investing in security measures at home. These included CCTV systems, Ring doorbells, alarms, security lighting, additional locks, window locks, reinforced fencing and letterbox guards.

Some respondents described extensive security arrangements following previous incidents, while others stated that securing their homes had become a normal part of managing feelings of safety.

"Yes. Have my phone with me, bundle of keys, self-defence red paint spray. We have panic button at home. We will have additional cameras installed in our garden and house as we received threats from neighbours."

Dogs as protection and reassurance

The use of dogs emerged as a notable theme throughout the responses. Many women and girls reported feeling safer when walking with a dog and some specifically referenced large breeds such as German Shepherds, Dobermans and Rottweilers as providing reassurance and acting as a deterrent.

Several respondents stated that they avoid walking alone without their dog or had acquired a dog partly because of safety concerns.

"Pretend to be on my phone. Take my large dog out!"

"I carry a torch and have lights on the dogs collars so I am more visible. I avoid taking shortcuts or walking in the park or on the beach when it is dark. I try to stick to the main road near me."

Protecting children and family members

Safety concerns were not limited to respondents themselves. Many women and girls described taking actions to protect their children and wider family members, including restricting children's movements, avoiding parks and town centres, supervising activities more closely and driving children rather than allowing them to walk independently.

Several respondents expressed concern that their children are growing up with the same fears and restrictions that they experience themselves.

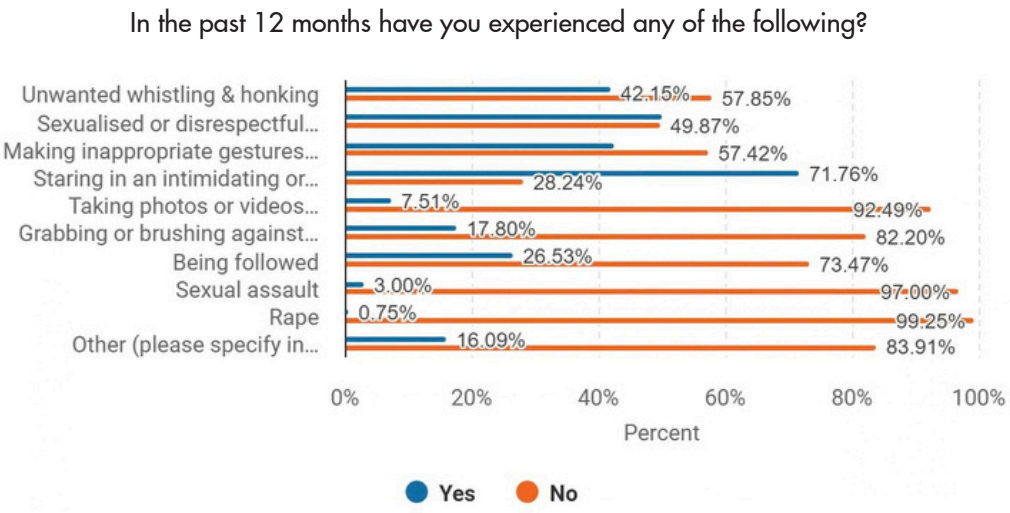
"I don't walk alone on an evening and neither do my teenage children, have find my iPhone on all family phones."

"Avoid the areas when I can. Don't like to take my young children because of the risk of people being inappropriate."

"I do not go to these places on my own and I will not take my children without a male presence with me."

What types of harassment have women and girls experienced in the past year?

Respondents were asked whether they had ever experienced any of the following types of harassment in Cleveland during the past 12 months.



Key Insight:

While the most serious forms of violence against women and girls were reported by a smaller proportion of respondents, everyday harassment and intimidation is widespread and forms a significant part of many women's daily experiences.

Key Insight:

Low-level but persistent behaviours, such as staring, unwanted comments, gestures and harassment, far more common than serious criminal offences. These experiences shape how safe women and girls feel, influence their behaviour, and contribute to wider concerns about personal safety.

Everyday harassment

The most commonly reported experiences were behaviours that many respondents described as routine and normalised.

The survey found that:

- 71.8% (n=2008) had experienced staring in an intimidating way.
- 50.1% (n=1401) had experienced sexualised or disrespectful comments.
- 42.6% (n=1191) had experienced inappropriate gestures.
- 42.2% (n=1180) had experienced unwanted whistling or vehicle horn honking.

Key Insight:

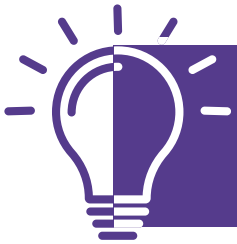
Harassment is a common feature of many women's daily lives and is experienced across a range of public settings, including town centres, shops, public transport, workplaces and neighbourhoods.

Escalation beyond verbal harassment

The survey identified experiences that move beyond verbal harassment and intimidation to behaviours that involve physical proximity, pursuit or unwanted contact.

Notable findings include:

- 26.5% (n=741) reported being followed.
- 17.8% (n=497) unwanted physical contact, including grabbing, brushing against them or other forms of unwanted touching.
- 7.5% (n=209) reported being photographed or recorded without consent.



Key Insight:

Many women encounter behaviour that escalates beyond verbal harassment and can create genuine fear for personal safety.

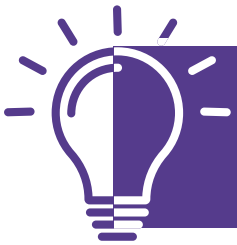
Respondents frequently described incidents involving:

- Men following them on foot.
- Vehicles repeatedly circling or following them.
- Individuals deliberately invading personal space.
- Unwanted physical contact in public places.
- Individuals taking photographs or videos without permission.

Reports of the most serious offences, including sexual assault (3.0%) and rape (0.75%), were less common within the survey responses than other forms of harassment.

16.% of respondents reinforced findings in the wider survey, with male harassment and intimidation emerging as the dominant theme. Respondents described experiences including being followed, stared at, approached inappropriately, subjected to sexual comments, or made to feel uncomfortable in public spaces. Verbal abuse, aggression and intimidation from both adults and young people were also commonly reported, including swearing, threats, misogynistic remarks and racial abuse.

Many women and girls highlighted concerns about behaviour associated with drug and alcohol use, particularly aggressive begging, unpredictable behaviour and feeling threatened when refusing requests for money. Off-road bikes, e-bikes, scooters and vehicles were also frequently mentioned, with women describing reckless driving, being followed, shouted at from vehicles, or intimidated by masked riders.



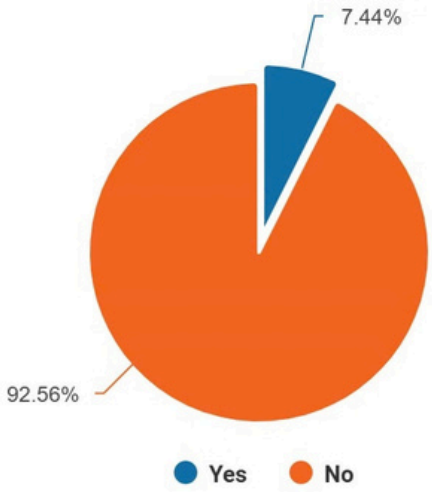
Key Insight:
Many women encounter behaviour that escalates beyond verbal harassment and can create genuine fear for personal safety.

The following issues were highlighted as specific contributory factors to women feeling unsafe:

- Domestic abuse.
- Stalking.
- Workplace harassment.
- Online harassment and abuse.
- Incidents involving children and young people.
- Low confidence in reporting and perceptions of police inaction.

All respondents were asked about reporting to police, only 7.4% (n=206) said they had reported.

Did you report it to the police?



Key Insight:
Experiences of harassment occur across multiple settings and are not limited to public spaces alone.

Barriers to reporting: Why women and girls did not report to police?

The 2,594 open-text responses to this question identified several consistent barriers to reporting incidents.

01

Lack of confidence in outcomes

Many women and girls did not report incidents because they believed no action would be taken or that reporting would not lead to any meaningful outcome.

02

Incidents not seen as serious or criminal

Respondents often felt that behaviours such as staring, comments, whistling or intimidation were not serious enough to report or would not be considered a police matter.

03

Normalisation of behaviour

Many women and girls viewed harassment and unwanted behaviour as a normal part of everyday life and therefore did not consider reporting it.

04

Lack of evidence or identification

Some respondents felt unable to report incidents because they could not identify the offender, gather evidence or prove what had happened.

05

Perceived police limitations

A common view was that police are under-resourced, too busy, or unlikely to be able to respond effectively to reports.

06

Previous negative experiences

Past experiences of poor communication, lack of follow-up or cases being closed without action reduced confidence in reporting future incidents.

07

Fear, trust and emotional barriers

Women reported concerns about not being believed, being judged, dismissed or facing negative consequences as a result of reporting.

08

Behaviour change instead of reporting

Many respondents chose to avoid certain places, alter routines or stay at home rather than report incidents they experienced.

09

Systemic and cultural barriers

Some women and girls felt that harassment and anti-social behaviour are so widespread that individual reports would not lead to meaningful change, viewing the issue as a broader societal problem rather than a policing matter.

Experiences of Reporting to Cleveland Police

Respondents were asked if they had reported incidents to police, 209 women shared their experiences. While some described positive interactions with individual officers, the overall picture was one of inconsistency. Experiences ranged from reports of professional, compassionate and timely responses to feelings of being ignored, dismissed or receiving no meaningful outcome. A recurring theme was that positive initial responses were often undermined by poor communication, limited follow-up and a lack of visible action.

Many respondents praised frontline officers for being supportive, empathetic and responsive, particularly in emergency situations. However, concerns were frequently raised about cases being closed without explanation, a lack of updates following reports, and incidents resulting in no further action due to evidential thresholds or difficulties identifying offenders.

Several women described feeling dismissed, not believed or unsupported during the process, with some reporting that the experience of reporting was itself stressful and emotionally challenging.

Respondents also recognised the pressures facing policing, including resource constraints and competing priorities. However, this understanding did not reduce concerns about delays, limited visible policing and the perception that issues persist despite being reported. Of particular concern were accounts relating to domestic abuse, stalking, assault and safeguarding issues, where some victims felt insufficient action had been taken to protect them.

Key Insight:

While individual officers are often highly regarded, confidence in the wider reporting and criminal justice process remains low. Poor communication, limited outcomes and perceptions that reports do not lead to meaningful action continue to undermine trust and reduce willingness to report future incidents.

"Good initial responses are undermined by lack of action, communication and outcomes."

What would help women and girls feel safer in Cleveland?

Respondents identified five common key priorities that would help improve their feelings of safety. Responses focused on both immediate action and longer-term cultural change.

01

Visible policing and enforcement

Women and girls want to see more visible police presence in communities, particularly in town centres, parks and known hotspots, with proactive action taken to tackle issues before they escalate.

02

Education and behaviour change

Respondents highlighted the need to educate boys and men about respect, consent and appropriate behaviour, with a focus on challenging misogyny and harmful attitudes from an early age.

03

Stronger consequences and accountability

Many women and girls called for stronger action against offenders, greater accountability and increased confidence that reports will lead to meaningful outcomes and consequences.

04

Safer environments

Improved street lighting, CCTV coverage and the design and maintenance of public spaces were consistently identified as important factors in helping women and girls feel safer.

05

Tackling Antisocial Behaviour

Women and girls want stronger action to address anti-social behaviour, including groups congregating in public spaces, drug and alcohol misuse, off-road bikes and other intimidating behaviours.

Confidence in reporting and response

Across all themes, respondents stressed the importance of being listened to, believed and supported when reporting incidents, alongside clearer communication and visible outcomes.

Key Insight:

Women and girls do not want to change their own behaviour—they want men, systems and environments around them to change so they don't have to. The findings highlight a need for visible action now, alongside long-term efforts to address the root causes of violence, harassment and intimidation.

Appendix 1

Q1
How safe do you feel in the following situations?

- In your own home during the day
- In your neighbourhood during the day
- In your nearest town centre during the day
- In your nearest park or green spaces during the day
- In your own home after dark
- In your neighbourhood after dark
- In your nearest town centre after dark
- In your nearest park or green spaces after dark

Very Safe -Fairly Safe -Neither Safe or Unsafe -Fairly Unsafe -Very Unsafe

Q2
Are there any particular locations where you feel unsafe?

Q3
What makes you feel unsafe?

Q4
Who makes you feel unsafe? Please select all that apply

- Adult men
- Younger men
- Adult women
- Younger women
- Groups of young people
- Groups of adults
- Other (please specify):

Q5
Do you take any actions to make yourself feel safer?

Q6
In the past 12 months have you ever experienced any of the following types of harassment in Cleveland?

- Unwanted whistling & honking
- Sexualised or disrespectful comments
- *M*aking inappropriate gestures or suggestive
- *St*aring in an intimidating or inappropriate way
- *T*aking photos or videos without permission, including upskirting or upblousing
- *G*rabbing or brushing against someone intentionally
- Being followed
- Sexual assault
- Rape
- Other (please specify in comments section)

Yes No

Q7
Did you report to the police?

- Yes
- No

Q8
Please tell us about your experience of reporting to Cleveland Police

Q9
Please tell us why you didn't report the incident to Cleveland Police?

Q10
What do you think could be done to make women and girls feel safer?

Q11
Which area of Cleveland do you live in? *
- Hartlepool
- Middlesbrough
- Redcar & Cleveland
- Stockton

Q12
Is your gender the gender you were assigned at birth? *
- Yes
- No

Q13
What is your ethnicity? *
- White
- British
- Irish
- Other
- Asian or Asian British
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Any other Asian background
- Mixed
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and black African
- White and Asian
- Any other mixed background
- Black or Black British
- Caribbean
- African
- Any other black background
- Other Ethnic Group
- Chinese
- Any other Ethnic Group
- I do not wish to disclose my ethnic origin

Q14
What is your age? *

- under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75+
- Prefer not to say

Q15
Do you consider yourself to have a disability? *

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Appendix 2

Key comparisons between the 2021 and 2026 women and girls' safety surveys

2021 Women and Girls' Feelings of Safety Survey: Background

In response to the death of Sarah Everard, the Government's Safer Streets 3 funding programme, which focused on reducing violence against women and girls (VAWG) and improving safety in public spaces, Cleveland partners conducted an online survey for three weeks between 20 May and 11 June 2021. Developed with support from domestic and sexual abuse organisations, the survey gathered views on experiences, perceptions of safety, and priorities for change.

The survey was open to people who identified as female and received 1,206 responses from women and girls across Cleveland, with the highest proportion from Stockton (38%), followed by Hartlepool (24%), Redcar and Cleveland (21%), and Middlesbrough (17%). Most respondents identified as White British (96.5%), around 10% reported having a disability, and nearly two-thirds (62.6%) were aged between 25 and 54 years.

Factors relevant to the design of the 2026 survey

To enable comparisons to be made between the 2021 survey and the planned 2026 survey, and in recognition of the increasing public focus on VAWG, changes and emerging issues in society, several changes were made to the 2026 survey:

- "What makes you feel unsafe?" was changed from a list of predefined options such as hearing experiences from others or national news etc. to an open-text response.
- A new question was added asking respondents whether they take any actions to help themselves feel safer.
- "Did you tell anyone about your experiences?" was revised to focus specifically on whether incidents were reported to the police rather than expanding a multiple choice such as telling a family or friends or other services.
- Day and night experiences was reviewed to include an additional option - nearest park and green spaces.
- The list of harassment and offending behaviours was expanded to include:
    - Sexualised or disrespectful comments
    - Inappropriate gestures or suggestive behaviour
    - Intimidating or inappropriate staring
    - Taking photographs or videos without permission, including upskirting and downblousing
    - Intentionally grabbing or brushing against someone
    - Being followed
    - Other serious sexual offences
- These changes were made to better reflect our understanding of prevalence and, lived experience of harassment and violence against women and girls, much of which had gained increasing publicity and awareness since the murder of Sarah Everard and response of agencies post 2021.

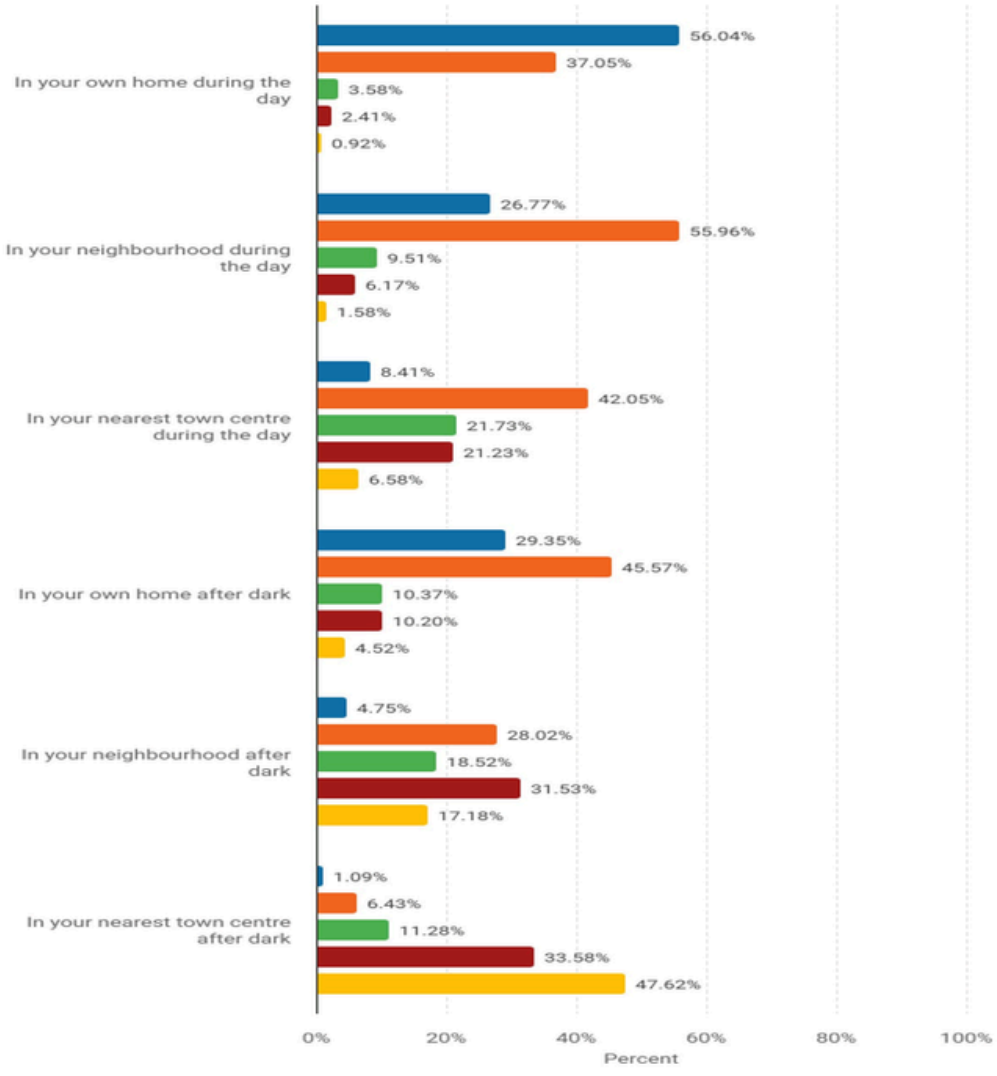
Survey feedback and comparisons between the 2021 and 2026 surveys

It is important to recognise that the below information cannot be compared as like-for-like responses due to key differences including:

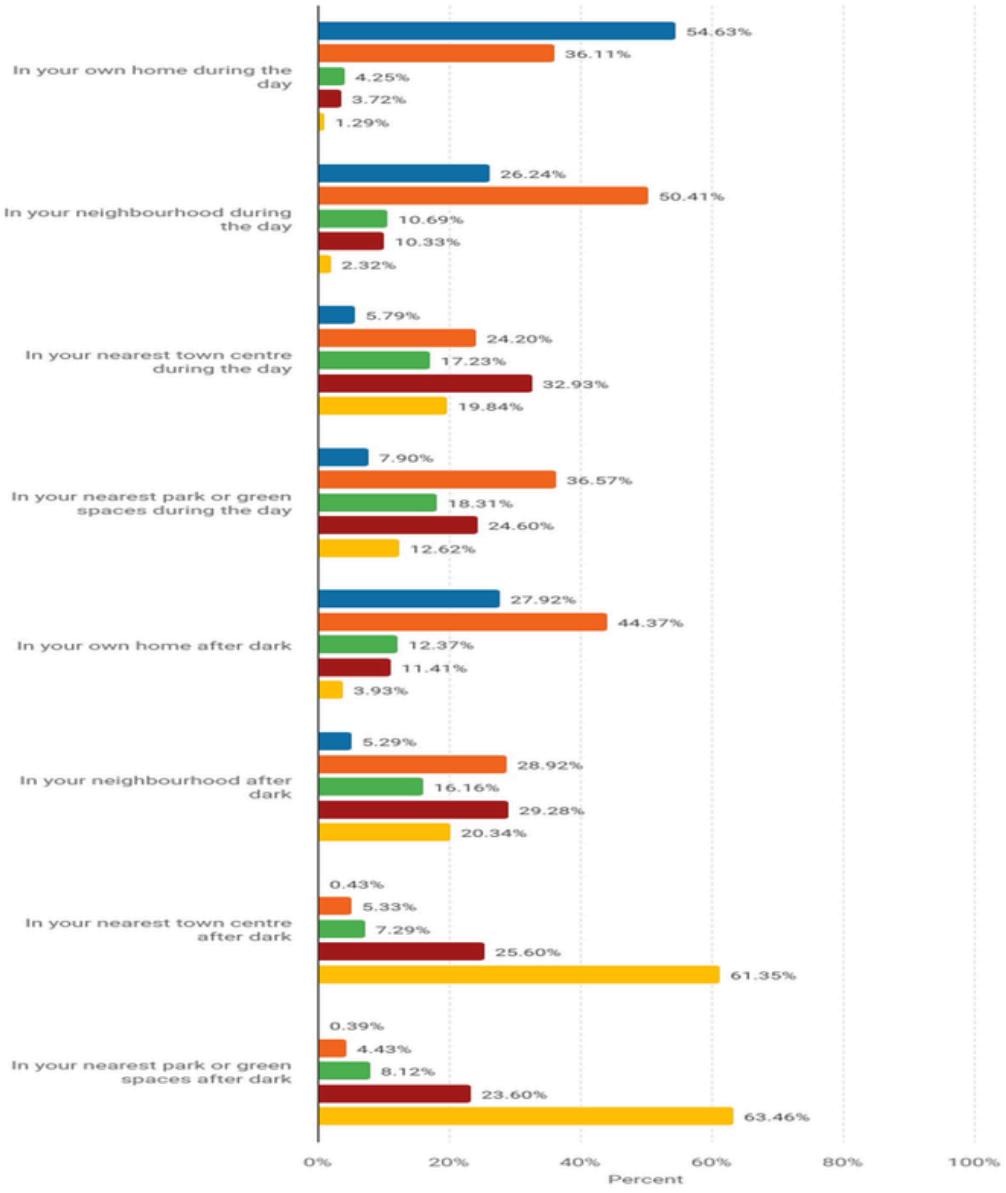
- Duration of survey (3 weeks in 2021 and 8 weeks in 2026)
- Potential for impacts of Covid lockdown to have influenced 2021 responses
- Number of respondents (1206 in 2021 and 2797 in 2026)
- Additional questions added to 2026 survey

Day & night: How Safe Do Women and Girls Feel in the Following Situations? 2021

Blue- Very Safe Orange- Fairly Safe Green- Neither Safe Nor Unsafe Red- Fairly Unsafe Yellow- Very Unsafe



2026
Blue- Very SafeOrange- Fairly Safe Green- Neither Safe Nor Unsafe Red- Fairly Unsafe Yellow- Very Unsafe



Across both the 2021 and 2026 surveys, the same overall pattern emerged. Respondents felt safest in their own home, particularly during the day, and feelings of safety consistently decreased after dark. In both years, town centres after dark were identified as the location where women and girls felt least safe, while neighbourhoods were generally perceived as safe during the day but significantly less safe at night. During the day, most respondents felt safe in their neighbourhood in both 2021 and 2026, although this decreased from 82.7% in 2021 to 76.7% in 2026. After dark in neighbourhoods, feelings of safety (very/fairly safe) were slightly lower, with only 32.8% feeling safe in 2021 and 34.2% in 2026. This indicates that concerns about local neighbourhood safety after dark remained a key issue across both surveys.

The most notable concerns related to town centres. During the day, feelings of safety in town centres declined between 2021 and 2026, with those feeling safe falling from 50.5% to 30.0%. At the same time, the proportion feeling unsafe increased from 27.8% in 2021 to 52.8% in 2026. After dark, town centres were the location where respondents felt least safe in both surveys. In 2021, 81.2% felt fairly or very unsafe in their nearest town centre after dark, rising to 87.0% in 2026. Overall, the findings suggest that while perceptions of safety at home remained relatively stable, concerns about safety in public spaces have increased since 2021.

Locations

The findings from both the 2021 and 2026 surveys were largely consistent, identifying town centres as the locations where women and girls most frequently felt unsafe. Stockton and Middlesbrough town centres were the most commonly mentioned locations in both surveys, followed by Redcar and Hartlepool town centres, indicating that concerns about safety in key central areas have remained persistent over time.

There were few notable changes between the surveys. Ingleby Barwick, Bishop Cuthbert Park (Stockton Teesside University (Middlesbrough) and Victoria Road, Rift House (Hartlepool), emerged as locations of concern in the 2021 survey but were not prominently referenced in 2026. In addition, the 2026 survey highlighted new locations, such as areas of Middlesbrough, Linthorpe Village, Palladium shops Acklam shops, Linthorpe Cemetery, Laycock Park. For areas for Stockton Town Centre specifically the fountain area and North tees Hospital walkways/surrounding routes. For areas of Hartlepool Town centre (specifically ramp area), Naisbury Park, Rossmere Park. For areas of Redcar, Normanby/Banksfield and Kirkleatham Park. These locations were not identified in the 2026 findings but this may reflect particularly following the inclusion of parks and green spaces as a specific focus within the 2026 survey.

Key factors why women and girls feel unsafe

Women and girl's responses to both surveys described similar factors that contribute to feelings of unsafety. The responses provided valuable insight into lived experiences and perceptions of safety, highlighting a range of behavioural, environmental and societal issues.

In the 2021 survey, references gangs of young people hanging around shops. Many women stated that they felt unsafe whilst exercising particularly in parks. Lighting was a key factor in why women felt unsafe in locations – many respondents mentioned alleys, subways and back paths as areas they would actively avoid if possible. Transport hubs were also mentioned as areas where women felt unsafe, specifically train stations and bus stops. Again, similar to those referenced within the 2026 findings.

A notable difference, and one of the strongest emerging themes within the 2026 survey was concerns raised about off-road bikes, electric bikes, quad bikes and scooters, often being ridden by individuals wearing face coverings or balaclavas. This was not referenced within the 2021 findings.

Who makes women and girls feel unsafe?

There is a comparable difference between the two survey to who is most likely to make women and girls feel unsafe:

Group of people	2021	2026	Change
Adult men	81%	86%	+5 percentage points
Younger men	64%	70%	+6 percentage points
Groups of young people	75%	66%	-9 percentage points
Groups of adults	48%	57%	+9 percentage points

Across both surveys, adult men remained the group most likely to make women and girls feel unsafe, increasing from 81% in 2021 to 86% in 2026. Concerns about older boys also increased, rising from 64% to 70%.

The most notable change was a decrease in concerns about groups of young people, which fell from 75% in 2021 to 66% in 2026. In contrast, concern about groups of adults increased from 48% to 57%. Despite these changes, the overall pattern remained consistent, with adult men and older boys identified as the groups most likely to make women and girls feel unsafe.

Experiences of harassment

The findings on types of harassment cannot be directly compared between the 2021 and 2026 surveys due to significant changes in the question format. In 2021, respondents were asked a single question about whether they had experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault or rape, with 35.5% reporting that they had. In contrast, the 2026 survey asked respondents to select from a detailed list of specific harassment behaviours and offences. As a result, the 2026 findings provide greater insight into the types of harassment experienced but are not directly comparable with the broader measure used in 2021. Reports of the most serious offences specified individually in 2026, including sexual assault (3.0%) and rape (0.75%), were less common than other forms of harassment.

Reporting to the police

Direct comparison between the 2021 and 2026 findings is not possible due to changes in the survey questions. In 2021, respondents were asked whether they had experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault or rape, with 12% reporting the incident to the police. In 2026, respondents were asked about a broader range of harassment and offending behaviours, and 92.6% of those who experienced an incident stated they did not report it to the police. As the scope and format of the questions differed, the results are not directly comparable.

The findings were consistent across both the 2021 and 2026 surveys. Women and girls commonly cited a lack of confidence that the police would take their report seriously or respond effectively as a key reason for not reporting incidents. This lack of trust remained a significant barrier to reporting across both surveys.

Findings were broadly similar across both surveys. Positive experiences included timely responses, supportive officers, and feeling listened to and taken seriously. Negative experiences included lack of updates, poor communications with investigations, and criminal justice process remains low.

Actions needed

Women and girls shared similar views to what changes they want to see, these were consistent in both the 2021 and 2026 surveys.

- Visible policing and enforcement
- Education and behaviour change
- Stronger consequences and accountability
- Safer environments
- Tackling antisocial behaviour

A key difference in the 2021 findings was the emphasis on measures to improve safety within the night-time economy. Respondents highlighted the need for more proactive door staff, support from Street Angels, and designated safe places in town centres where women and girls could seek assistance. These specific suggestions were not prominent in the 2026 findings as referenced by many respondents described avoiding pubs, bars and nightlife, choosing to shop online or travel elsewhere rather than visit local town centres.

However, the 2026 survey included new questions about the actions women and girls take to improve their own safety and used more open-text responses, providing richer insight into personal experiences and coping strategies. It is also important to note that the 2021 survey was conducted as communities emerged from COVID-19 restrictions, meaning perceptions of safety and experiences of town centres after dark may have been influenced by different social and environmental circumstances.

MATT STOREY
POLICE AND CRIME
COMMISSIONER
FOR CLEVELAND

Office of the Police and
Crime Commissioner for Cleveland
St Marks House
St Marks Court
Thornaby
Stockton-On-Tees
TS17 6QW

T. 01642 301861
E. pcc.office@cleveland.police.uk

@ClevelandPCC
@clevelandopcc
@clevelandopcc

www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk