WHAT MAKES A PARK FEEL SAFE OR UNSAFE?

The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire

A research project led by Dr Anna Barker and Professor George Holmes (University of Leeds) with Dr Rizwana Alam, Lauren Cape-Davenhill, Dr Sally Osei-Appiah and Dr Sibylla Warrington Brown, in collaboration with West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

Funded by the Home Office (Safer Streets Fund)
FOREWORD

The safety of women and girls in West Yorkshire is a top priority. Along with the Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, I have a strong sense of personal responsibility to ensure women and girls’ safety is at the heart of the policing and community safety agenda and this important research will continue to help create the conditions that enable women to feel safe in our county, and boost trust and confidence to report any form of abuse, wherever it occurs.

Funding for safer spaces is crucial to the development of our region. We know that the safety of public spaces, especially parks, is vital to ensure we eliminate barriers that disproportionately affect women and girls too often. Taking longer routes to travel home or denying ourselves opportunities to go outdoors should not be the choice we have to make. There should never be limitations to women and girls’ socialising, improving our wellbeing and fitness, or having equal opportunity to enjoy green spaces.

We know that there is not one solution. Whilst we must acknowledge the personal responsibility of all individuals to be part of the solution, we also need to consider the role education, prevention, behaviour change, and the wider sector play in influencing change. Applying a multi-dimensional approach, maximising the learning from this research, and working with partners, means we will achieve a greater understanding of how we can innovate, share great ideas, and address the safety of women and girls in public, including how we can take this learning into the private and digital spaces to ensure we accelerate societal change.

We all benefit from a cleaner, safer environment, and this is imperative to achieving a safe, just and inclusive West Yorkshire. Parks are the main place of leisure and physical activity for so many of West Yorkshire’s communities, whether they live, visit or work here. Utilising the findings of this University of Leeds report to improve the safety of these spaces will impact the positive perception of safety for all parks users and encourage us all to love our parks.

Alison Lowe OBE
Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, West Yorkshire

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When women and girls feel unsafe, they are less likely to use, enjoy and benefit from parks, particularly when alone and after dark. Parks and play spaces should be better designed and managed to be well-used, sociable places that offer activities and facilities that are welcoming to women and girls. Changes should support women and girls to feel safe throughout the day and all-year round. Changes to parks must be part of an holistic approach that tackles threats of violence against women and girls, to address root causes of women and girls’ unsafety.

The threat of harassment and violence restricts and inconveniences the everyday lives of women and girls, curtailing their freedom to use, enjoy and benefit from public spaces. This underscores the importance of listening to women and girls’ views and lived experiences in designing safer and more welcoming public spaces.

This research aimed to better understand what women and girls perceive makes parks feel safe and unsafe, and why. It sought professional views too, providing a comparison. The research was conducted across West Yorkshire, in 2022, with 67 women aged 18-84 years, 59 girls and young women aged 18-27 years and 27 professionals from parks and urban design services in local government and policy. Participants rated their agreement or disagreement with 49 statements relating to feelings of relevance and trust in parks. They ranked the statements on a grid from +5 (‘most like my view’) to -5 (‘most unlike my view’). The middle position (0) reflected ambivalence or neutrality towards a statement. Afterwards, participants reflected on reasons for their views in interviews and focus groups, adding a rich qualitative understanding. Factor analysis was used to identify participants who ranked statements in a statistically similar way, and who share a viewpoint.

The viewpoints, outlined below, capture the dominant perspectives that exist in relation to how women and girls perceive safety in parks, alongside areas of consensus in views.

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Women’s views on feeling safe in parks**

**Viewpoint 1: Design parks for women’s safety and independence**

According to this viewpoint, parks should feel safe for women by themselves, but they are not designed that way. For this reason, if women are alone they feel safer in familiar parks. Authorities must do more to support women’s independent use of parks – better lighting, visible security, help points, and more. Women only feel unsafe in the dark, however.拿出来

**Viewpoint 2: Lighting parks won’t deter predatory men, change society**

According to this viewpoint, women are not safe anywhere, and risks are amplified in parks, particularly when alone and after dark. This can be done to parks to make them feel safer enough to use at these times, with diverse views on lighting.

**Girls’ views on feeling safe in parks**

**Viewpoint 1: People in parks**

According to this viewpoint, it’s the people in parks that make girls feel unsafe, and hearing about other women suffering bad experiences. Groups of predatory boys make girls particularly anxious as they dominate park space and harass girls, although other users can be intimidating too. Harassment happens regularly and girls identify themselves as targets, yet authorities don’t take them seriously. Secured and visibly vegetated areas are hiding places for attackers, so openness is better for escape and visibility. Sexist attitudes and behaviour must change, and telling girls what not to do is victim blaming.

**Viewpoint 2: Familiarity and security**

According to this viewpoint, some parks are safe for girls, but it is still safer to avoid secluded areas and thick vegetation unless with others. There’s much that can be done to make parks feel safer, such as more security, lots of visible staffing and policing, better facilities and focusing on business. Parks feel safer with similar users, family and friends or in an organised group because there is safety in numbers and trusted people will intervene if something happens. Familiar parks also feel safer as their layout and exits are known. Other park users aren’t generally intimidating, although “unpredictable” drug users or drinkers do make girls feel unsafe.

**Viewpoint 3: Men and patriarchy**

According to this viewpoint, all public spaces are dangerous for girls because of harassment and the threat of predatory men. Hearing about other women suffering bad experiences makes girls fearful of going to parks. Help points and safety for girls in parks might help, but they won’t tackle harassment or stop sexual assault. Authority figures aren’t always trustworthy – police can be predatory too. Men must change their behaviour to feel safer and educate boys on acceptable behaviour. Until then, it is safer to take personal safety measures, ignore unwanted comments and avoid secluded areas or thick vegetation in parks.

**Areas of consensus among girls**

There were five areas of consensus across the three viewpoints. Girls agree:

1. Help points in parks would be reassuring if provided access to assistance quickly.
2. Being near the edges of parks feels safer because it is easier to escape and you can be seen by people in surrounding streets and buildings.
3. Like other public spaces, parks do not feel safe after dark. But fears are heightened by lack of lighting and limited sightlines in parks as well as secluded areas or dense vegetation.
4. Secured or hidden areas of parks feel unsafe because they can conceal threatening people, provide places to be trapped and jeered upon or seen by others.
5. Parks feel safer during daylight hours, but not always due to unsafe situations and knowledge of attacks or harassment in certain parks.

**Professionals’ views on women feeling safe in parks**

Professionals have similar views on how to support women and its feel safe in parks, and what parks must be made safe for women and girls. This is reflected in the research and a variety of different viewpoints are presented.

Professionals disagree with the idea that no parks are safe for women and girls, but think more can be done to make parks safer and feel safer. Recognising the importance of feelings of safety as well as crime reduction, changes can be made to make parks both safer and feel safer. Signs of disorder, people behaving inappropriately or unacceptably and drinking or drugs make women feel unsafe in parks. Buisers are safer and feel safer because there is more passive surveillance. Parks should be designed with facilities and amenities that appeal to women and girls, thereby signalling parks as safe places. Vitalising staff helping by providing opportunities for support, reporting and reassurance. Physical interventions, such as lighting, can be considered where there is a budget and opportunity. Security should be well-designed and sub-text to the purpose and atmosphere of parks and minimise fear. Vitality and openness can be maximised in certain areas of parks, including cutting down overgrown vegetation to reduce hidden areas, raising canopies and lowering shrubs. This can be accommodated in larger or wooded areas that provide diversity of experiences and importance for biodiversity.

**Viewpoint 1: Change society, do not blame victims**

According to this viewpoint, we need to target society as a whole, not just the park. Women feel unsafe because of harassment and violence against women, which is an issue across the park environment with isolated, slender thickly vegetated and dark spaces also heightens those fears. Personal safety measures are ineffective at keeping women safe, moreover, risks that blame women’s attitudes and behaviour must change, particularly amongst younger generations. Men need to be more aware of how their behaviour and presence in parks affects women.

**Viewpoint 2: Gender-sensitive design for maximum use**

According to this viewpoint, parks are safer when they are well-used, particularly with women and families. To get more women and girls into parks and feel safe, parks should look well-maintained with reassurance of presence of visible staff and improved park design, such as more family-friendly and mixed-use facilities, organised activities and greater openness and visibility. Safety is everyone’s responsibility so women should take sensible precautions and avoid obvious hazards, such as unfilled paths.

**Comparisons**

While 80% of professionals interviewed think parks in their area of West Yorkshire are very or fairly safe for women and girls, this compares with only 73% of women and 22% of girls interviewed. Yet, professional views on what makes parks safe and unsafe for women and girls were not outliers, compared to the views of women and girls.

**Recommendations**

The viewpoints outlined should be listened to and reflected upon, and can aid discussions about the design and management of parks to support women and girls to feel safe and welcome in them, with areas of consensus and starting points for policy and practice. A full list of recommendations can be found in chapter 8.
Feeling unsafe and fearful of crime in public spaces is a longstanding problem that disproportionately affects women and girls, particularly after dark.

While women are most at risk from violence in the home and by men they know (Stark, 1995), violence occurs outside women’s control (Kelly, 1988) and sexual harassment in public is routine and normalised. 71% of women of all ages in the UK have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public spaces and only 5% of 15-year-olds have not experienced harassment (UA Women, 2015). Moreover, other aspects of identity intersect with being a woman to shape the nature of harassment and violence women encounter (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1990). The pervasive threat of harassment and violence impacts women in personal and societally harmful ways, by restricting or inconveniencing their everyday lives at curtailing their freedom to ‘use, enjoy and benefit from public spaces’ (Allen et al., 2022). Finding the right amount of park (Vera-Gray, 2018) is a constant struggle, embodied in the routine precautions women and girls take to feel safe.

Creating safer public spaces

Following a series of high profile violent crimes against women in public, women and girls’ feelings of safety have become a central policy and public debate about creating safer public spaces. Yet, research shows that different approaches to creating safer public spaces may be driven by different assumptions and have as contradictory, contested and unintended consequences (Barker, 2017). Criticism has been directed at ‘scattering the world with visible reminders of the threat of crime’ (Zedner, 1996) or open spaces, compared with 2 out of 5 men (42%) (Office for National Statistics, 2022). In the UK, a higher proportion of women report feeling very or fairly unsafe walking alone after dark in parks or open spaces, compared with a 4% of men (g4%) (Office for National Statistics, 2021). While there are no comparable national statistics for teenagers and boys, research shows that half of (50%) of girls aged 12-19 no longer use public spaces because they fear safety or safety benefits from green space are ‘visible reminders of the threat of crime’ (Zedner, 1996). Women’s lack of confidence to use public spaces is driven by a fear of crime, and may be understood on a ‘spectrum’ of experiences ranging from broad societal phenomena to immediate, tangible features of parks themselves. Perceived safety is broader than tangible features of parks or open spaces, and perceived safety in public spaces. This literature tells us that there is a constant struggle, embodied in the routine precautions women and girls take to feel safe.

The research outlined in this report was conducted in 2022 by a team of researchers at the University of Leeds, with funding and support from West Yorkshire combined Authority as part of its award from the Home Office. Safer Streets Fund round three to support women and girls’ safety in West Yorkshire’s parks. A priority of The Mayor of West Yorkshire’s Safety of Women and Girls Strategy is to promote the use of parks by women and girls, with understanding and responding to the barriers to feeling safe.

Take the learning from the Safer Streets Fund safety in parks research and the understanding of barriers to feeling safe, and implement in wider public spaces and shared areas.

"Take the learning from the Safer Streets Fund safety in parks research and the understanding of barriers to feeling safe, and implement in wider public spaces and shared areas." (Delivery action from The Mayor of West Yorkshire’s Safety of Women and Girls Strategy, 2022–2023)

As outlined in figure 2.2, the research brings the views and experiences of women and girls to the fore, aiming to better understand their perceptions of what makes parks feel safe and unsafe, and why. Within this primary aim, we sought to identify areas where there is similarity or difference in views, recognising that women and girls are not a homogenous group and may perceive safety in parks in different ways. A secondary aim of the research was to understand the views of professionals who work in design, operation and policing.

Figure 2.3 Proportion of women and girls who felt ‘very or fairly unsafe’ walking alone by public setting

Figure 2.3 Determinants of fear and perceived safety

Research aims

The determinants of perceived safety in the built environment

This research builds on an already large evidence base on women’s fear and perceived safety in public spaces. This literature tells us that there is no simple relationship between feeling unsafe or fearful of crime and risk of victimisation in public spaces (War, 1984). Yet, women have particular fears in contrast to men, notably a fear of rape and sexual harassment, and live with a ‘shadow of sexual assault’ (Ferraro, 1996). Women’s greater fears in contrast to men need to be situated within gender relations and the sexual violence women experience in private as well as public spaces (Valentine, 1990; Stanoev, 2015; Vera-Gray, 2018).

A starting point for this research is that feelings of safety are influenced by a more complex set of drivers than crime and risk of victimisation, and by factors ranging in scope from broad societal phenomena to immediate, tangible features of parks themselves. Perceived safety is broader than the fear of crime, and may be understood on a ‘spectrum’ of experiences ranging from being ‘inconvenienced’ to feeling ill at ease to feeling encountered (WorldBank, 2020). Safety may therefore be understood as freedom from intolerable danger or risk, but also feeling comfortable in space. Systematic reviews of existing research illustrate that wide range of social and physical environmental factors, personal or intersectional characteristics and experiences, and broader social context shapes feelings of fear and perceived safety in the built environment and urban green spaces (Croci et al., 2017; Maru&VanVeenlanden and van den Bosch, 2014, Pain, 2003), as summarised in figure 2.1.
3. METHODOLOGY

We used Q methodology to identify the main perspectives held by women, girls and professionals on women’s and girls’ safety in parks. Q methodology is an approach to studying people’s subjective viewpoints, opinions or beliefs, and involves sorting or ranking statements about a topic on a grid (Watts and Stenner, 2012). There may be lots of views or opinions about a topic, but people’s views tend to cluster to create shared viewpoints. The process for a Q-study is shown in Figure 3.1.

The purpose of Q methodology is to identify the range of shared viewpoints that exist on a topic and provide rich descriptions of them. Descriptions include issues arising from the viewpoint, such as a viewpoint on “parks”. The collated sources were reviewed by the research team for relevance, and (i) women, girls and professionals (n=50); (ii) women and girls (n=2); (iii) women, girls and professionals (n=4); (iv) women and girls (n=4); (v) women and girls (n=3); (vi) women’s organisations (n= 17); (vii) experts in the field of women’s and girls’ safety (n=2); and (viii) market research firms and consultancies (n=3). To develop the set of statements for this study, we searched for and collated a wide range of sources on women and girls’ safety in parks and public spaces. These included sources on academic literature (n=10), (ii) government, parliamentary and official sources (n=13), (iii) newspaper, online articles and press releases (n=30), (iv) mapping tools and safety apps (n=3), and (v) research papers, conferences and discussions (n=3). This resulted in a collection of over 300 sources available in English, spanning various issues from parks design to sexual harassment to patriarchal social structures. The majority of sources had European, UK or other Anglophone geographical focus, with a few of sources in English, Spanish and German. The collated sources were reviewed by the research team for relevance, and (i) white and girls’ statements were extracted from sources with the direct voices of women and girls extracted from a wide range of views. All statements were then coded, resulting in 28 themes covering women and girls’ safety in parks and public spaces.

The Q methodologists were reduced to a final set of 49 statements about the topic of concern, according to their own subjective viewpoints. To develop the set of statements for this study, we searched for and collated a wide range of sources on women and girls’ safety in parks and public spaces. These included sources on academic literature (n=10), (ii) government, parliamentary and official sources (n=13), (iii) newspaper, online articles and press releases (n=30), (iv) mapping tools and safety apps (n=3), and (v) research papers, conferences and discussions (n=3). This resulted in a collection of over 300 sources available in English, spanning various issues from parks design to sexual harassment to patriarchal social structures. The majority of sources had European, UK or other Anglophone geographical focus, with a few of sources in English, Spanish and German. The collated sources were reviewed by the research team for relevance, and (i) white and girls’ statements were extracted from sources with the direct voices of women and girls extracted from a wide range of views. All statements were then coded, resulting in 28 themes covering women and girls’ safety in parks and public spaces.

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4. FINDINGS - WOMEN’S VIEWS ON FEELING SAFE IN PARKS

During one-to-one interviews, 67 women aged 19-84 years from West Yorkshire ranked 49 statements on a grid relating to feelings of safety in parks, from ‘most like’ to ‘most unlike’ their views. Afterwards, women reflected on the reasons for their views and what makes parks feel safer and more welcoming.

We found that women do not have a singular view of what makes parks feel safe, although there are some areas of general agreement. Using factor analysis, we extracted three clusters of 21, 16 and 18 women with statistically similar response patterns who share a viewpoint on feeling safe in parks.

Eight statements were rated in statistically similar ways across women from across the three viewpoints, identifying areas of consensus.

In what follows, we summarise each viewpoint, the differences between them and areas of consensus. In brackets, we provide the statement number (51 to 55) and standardised z-score, from 4 (most like my view) to -5 (most unlike my view), which correspond to the grid in Figure 3.2, where 0 represents a middle position. Statements marked with an asterisk indicate that statements distinguish one viewpoint from another at 95% significance or higher.

Women’s viewpoints can be summarised as:

Viewpoint 1: Design parks for women’s safety and independence

Table 4.1 shows the highest ranked statements by women aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates a future-oriented outlook that something can and should be done to support women to feel safer using parks independently.

The idea that nothing can be done to make parks safe for women’s use after dark was deemed to be unacceptable by policy (52, -7), yet authorities were perceived not to be doing enough about the harassment of women in parks (51, +7).

“There has to be things that you can do because it’s not just a given that public places are going to be safe for women, and there is nothing you can do about it.” (P21)

“If they [parks] were designed with women you would see better lighting, you would see signs, you would see more patrolling.” (P40)

Women’s independence and autonomy was a key concern in this viewpoint. Inadequate design and management of parks were seen as barriers to feeling safe alone, particularly after dark, and without relying on friends or family to access parks (51, +7). On the other hand, women used their knowledge of familiar parks to help manage safety concerns and facilitate independent use (54, +5).

“I don’t feel safe in any park after dark... there is just not enough lighting, ever... There are no safety points, All the amenities close, so even the toilets close at four o’clock, so if you are in the park after dark, there is nothing there that could support you as a single person.” (P9)

“I don’t want to necessarily go to the park with a friend every night because I am a single person, and I am independent, and I would like to feel that.” (P9)

This viewpoint was distinguished by the strongest support for a wide range of physical design interventions in parks with lighting being seen as a priority (51, +5), but also CCTVs, cameras (53, +4) and help points (53, +4) to support and extend women’s use of park space, especially during seasons with shorter daylight hours. Indeed, this viewpoint most strongly disagreed with the idea that having lots of visible security measures in a park makes it seem like an unsafe place (51, -4).

“I think if the authorities are going to make any changes to the parks I think cameras, lighting, physical presence would be key, that’s where the majority of the funding needs to go.” (P48)

“I think automatically makes it feel safer because you can see what’s going on around you and you can pre-prepare for things.” (P9)

The presence of visible authority figures, including ‘caring’ park staff, were perceived as reassuring given their formal capacity to intervene in potentially harmful situations and by being a contact point for women to report concerns or ask for help. Women in this viewpoint desired a formal visible presence in parks, which could be provided by security patrols (51, +5), more park staff (51, +4) or police officers (51, +3). Park staff were also asked to impart a feeling of safety by providing ‘eyes’ on the park and forming a partnership, as well as being friendly and comforting verbal and non-verbal interactions, which communicated to women that they have been noticed and are on other’s radar.

“It was just a really quick interaction and off the [groundsman] went, but it would make me feel safe to do that [run around the park] again... those kind of things are really important, because you’ve been seen.” (P41)

Women often advocated for park staff to work extended hours or for shift patterns to be arranged to provide visible presence throughout the day, including on late afternoons and early evenings when it is dark in winter, to support feeling safe.

Well-used parks (52, +3) and parks with presence of other women (53, +3), felt safer. Lone men (56, +5), groups of men and boys (55, +5), groups of teenagers (54, +3) and men with their families (53, +2) were typically considered as non-threatening in parks unless their behaviour signalled otherwise. However, the presence of drinkers and drug users in parks (54, +5) alongside physical disorder such as rubbish, needles and graffiti (52, -2) felt intimidating.

Park features that limit visibility such as thick vegetation (53, -5), secluded areas (54, -3) and fences or walls (55, -2) contributed to feeling unsafe.

“So parks with thick vegetation, hedges, trees, so I don’t feel safer... they have thinned things quite a lot so there is more visibility and that feels really good.” (P41)

Yet, while park design was seen as important in empowering women to use and feel safer in park space, this viewpoint also perceived the need for societal change in attitudes towards women such as sexism and prejudice (52, -3) to address the causes of women’s insecurities.

“The root of why parks feel less safe for women and girls is because of violence against women and girls in society and that comes down to sexism, oppression of women, and men’s behaviour and attitudes towards women...” (P21)

The viewpoint advocated for men to take more responsibility to change their behaviour in parks to improve women’s sense of safety (54, +5). Even small changes in public etiquette, such as men not walking or turning a corner, were thought to make a difference. Men were seen as part of the solution as ‘allies and bystanders’ that could help women feel safer, particularly if they stood up to harassment or gave women space of (55).

Table 4.1 Highest ranked statements (Viewpoint 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Most disagree (-5/-4)</th>
<th>Most agree (+5/+4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel safe in parks after dark</td>
<td>Having lighting in parks would make women feel safer to me when after dark*</td>
<td>I would feel safer in parks if CCTVs, cameras do not make me feel safer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing could be done to parks to make me feel safe enough to use them after dark*</td>
<td>Women in this viewpoint desired a formal visible presence in parks, which could be provided by security patrols</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCTV cameras do not make me feel safer</td>
<td>Parks would make me feel safer if there were more parks staff present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is safer to challenge unwanted comments or attention from men and boys in parks than to ignore them</td>
<td>I would feel safer in parks if there was a panic button/emergency help point*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having lots of visible security measures in a park makes it seem like an unsafe place</td>
<td>I feel safer in parks that I am familiar with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Viewpoint 2: Lighting parks won’t deter predatory men, change society

Table 4.2 shows the highest ranked statements by women aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that women’s fears in parks cannot be designed out as they stem from the threat of violent men. Moreover, the risk from predatory men is potentially amplified in ‘secluded’ park environments and after dark. It sees the solution in dealing with the foundations of women’s fear – challenging the societal norms and attitudes towards women that sustain violence and changing male behaviour.

Women aligning with this viewpoint were most equivalent as to whether any parks are safe for women (52, +5), at any time of day (53, +5), reflective of a wider sense of vulnerability in society and perception that potentially nowhere is safe.

“I don’t think any parks are safe... and I don’t think women and girls in today’s society are safe at all.” (P55)

Past experience of crime and violence (54, +7) hearing about other women suffering bad experiences in parks (54, +3) and harassment (54, -2), shaped women’s feelings of unsafety, particularly in ‘quieter’ and ‘secluded’ public spaces, such as parks.

“A lot of women have experienced being wolf whistled, shouted at or sexuallly assaulted on nights out... experiences of that type does make you feel unsafe in parks because by their nature they are quite secluded.” (P62)

“I had to change cutting through the park to go... the long way round because I had heard about that... you don’t want to put yourself in them positions.” (P32)

“I was reading that article about the woman that got killed in the park... you think, “Oh I walk in parks by myself, that could have happened to me.”” (P62)
Most agree (+5/+4)

Of safety and reporting campaigns related to parks, and bad experiences by Yet, this viewpoint was most critical about authorities taking action on especially if it was like female officers. (P62)

Moreover, the idea that women should take personal safety measures to stay safe and avoid violence must change (S14, +4). Worrying boldly was seen as a ‘myth’: it doesn’t stop unwanted attention! (P15, +4). In contrast, men should take responsibility for changing their behaviour in parks to make women safer (S24, +4).

It’s not the women’s responsibility to take safety measures, it’s the men’s responsibility not to do it… also, society’s responsibility to educate men so that they don’t make women feel unsafe. (P11)

Until men’s behaviour changes, it is perceived so safer going parks with friends and family (S15, +5), part of organised groups (S18, +2), and when the park is busier with people (S15, +3), including other women (S15, +3) and users of a similar identity (S15, +3).

Table 4. Highest ranked statements (Viewpoint 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most disagree (-5/-4)</th>
<th>Most agree (+5/+4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feel safer in areas of parks with thick vegetation (for example hedges, trees and bushes</td>
<td>feel safer using parks with friends and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a feel safer in parks after dark</td>
<td>Experiences of crime or violence in the past made women and girls feel unsafe in parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is safer to challenge unwanted comments or attention from men and boys in parks than to ignore them</td>
<td>Men and boys should take responsibility for changing their behaviour to make women and girls feel safer in parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel safer in more secluded areas of parks that are hidden from view</td>
<td>Social attitudes towards women and girls, for example sexism and prejudice, needs to change for me to feel safer in parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As long as women and girls take personal safety measures in parks, they can be safe</td>
<td>The presence of lone men in parks makes me feel unsafe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Viewpoint 3: Safety in familiarity, danger spotters

Table 4, shows the highest ranked statements by women aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that not all parks feel safe, but some parks are brightened by anti-social behaviour and these reputations for being unsafe. The solution is to create well-used parks designed to attract ‘legitimate’ use(s) with good visibility to enable women to spot danger and take action. This viewpoint most strongly disagreed that ‘no parks are safe for women and girls’ (S24, +4). Women differentiated between safe and unsafe parks, as well as times of day. While this viewpoint did not agree that parks are unsafe during daylight hours (S3, -2), there was a strong fear of using parks after dark (S3, -5).

‘I think some parks are safe. I think it depends when you go, which parks you go to, what areas they’re in, who frequents them.’ (P16)

Unlike Viewpoints 1 and 2, this viewpoint placed less emphasis on the idea that societality attitudes towards women have to change for women to feel safer in parks (S40, +4), and felt much can be done to park themselves to make them feel safer to use. Moreover, hearing about other women suffering bad experiences in parks (S42, +8), harassment (S27, +6), and past experiences of harassment (S27, +5) were ranked lower, along with the effects of intersectionality reflecting the demographic profile of the women aligning to this viewpoint, see Appendix C (S11, +5). Despite some support for male behaviour change in parks (S4, +1*), the safety of the local area and improving park design and management mattered most to this viewpoint. Women felt safer in some parks while avoiding others with reputations for risky users. This viewpoint was distinguished by a much greater concern with the presence of drinkers and drug users (S4, +5), groups of teenagers (S41, +4*), and groups of men and boys (S42, +4*). Lone men without a ‘legitimate’ purpose were also considered a threat (S6, +3*). While lone women were associated with risk of sexual violence, groups of men and (male) teenagers were linked to drinking and drug use, domination of park space and sexual harassment.

‘I can think of parks… that I wouldn’t go to because they’ve got reputations for predatory males, taking drugs, taking, drink and then there are parks where I wouldn’t be an evil at walking through all at.’ (P16)

‘I’ve spent a lot of time juging in the park, so I got a lot rubbish from groups of young lads and men.’ (P14)

‘If there’s a man just walking round the park and he’s got no children or no dog… no purpose… that would make me feel very insecure.’ (P25)

This viewpoint put greater importance on physical size of disorder (S30, +3*), which acts as ‘warning signals’ (Innes, 2004) for social dangers. On the other hand, the idea that disorder was symbolic of gender inequality (S26, +3) was less important to the immediacies of feeling safe in parks.

‘I feel the needles speak for themselves obviously, you know there could be drugs users there… it would just be off-putting.’ (P30)

In contrast, women viewed larger, well-maintained parks with a range of facilities and mixed uses (S9, +3) and provision of amenities such as cafes (S23, +3) as safer (more so because they create spaces with lots of passive surveillance throughout the day.)

‘In the bigger parks… definitely you feel much more comfortable being around those facilities because there is people there and there is stuff going on and there is a sense of it being official… And it attracts people throughout the day.’ (P19)

They also felt more secure in parks that they knew from experience attracted ‘legitimate’ activities and users, including other women (S20, +2) or men with their families (S7, +2). Well used parks (S22, +2) were felt to provide information in names and mitigate unsafe situations with potentially risky users.

‘There will be people using them, women using them, families, a lack of anti-social behaviour, you would probably have a nice feeling, playgrounds and just feeling comfortable and safe.’ (P38)

‘If they [groups of men and boys] were there playing football… rugby training or some fitness training, or running as a group, I wouldn’t find that intimidating.’ (P16)

‘With facilities, there’s generally a lot more people… So if there’s [a] lone man maybe in those types of parks, then I wouldn’t feel as bad.’ (P88)

This viewpoint was ambivalent as to whether anything could be done to improve women’s feelings of safety after dark (S20, +3) as design does not stop ‘risky’ users. Moreover, parks are designed for daytime use, which suit park-users and people interventions after dark would need to foster goodness, to create park spaces that feel safe enough to use.

‘They can be made safe, they can’t really prevent who’s in them, but there’s things that can be done to make them seen safer, yes.’ (P98)

‘I wouldn’t run round the park in the dark but that’s because there is no lighting… I don’t think they are designed with women and girls’ safety in mind it is a popular main route during the day, and it is not used by anybody after dark.’ (P19)

The presence of visible authority figures in parks, including park staff (S13, +2*), security patrols (S16, +2) and police officers (S15, +2) were deemed to tackle anti-social behaviour, and were seen as more important than physical design interventions, such as help points (S33, +3) and clearer signage (S35, +1). However there was some support for CCTV cameras (S10, -2) and lighting (S10, +1), particularly during winter when it becomes dark quite quickly in the afternoon. (P33). Lighting was seen as an effective intervention along with the presence of vegetation and absence of people using parks after dark.

‘I wouldn’t feel safe in a park after dark usually because they are lonely and quiet, I am not going to walk through a park with a great lighting because it’s empty I wouldn’t feel safe because there are too many tools and criminals that I would feel intimidated around.’ (P19)

Secluded areas (S40, +3) and thick vegetation (S37, +3) were important as interpreted as being well-lit, yet also potentially unsafe. Indeed, dense vegetation and thick vegetation made parks much more important in this viewpoint (S30, +5). Relatedly, more exits to parks could also ease escape (S41, +1).’

‘…you’re better in an open space, that people can see you, or you can see other people. If you’re more in a secluded area then you might be potentially more vulnerable in a park situation.’ (P25)

As with the other viewpoints, the solution does not lie in women taking personal safety measures (S6, +3), as they are viewed as less important compared to parks which women aligning to this viewpoint, see Appendix C (S19, -2). Despite some concerns over past bad experiences (S48, 1*), harassment (S27, 0*), and past experiences of harassment (S27, +1*), these women were heterogeneous in this regard, these aspects of identity shaped differences in experiences, affecting women’s feelings of safety: This wider sense of vulnerability and unease in public spaces was related to intersections of being a woman with other aspects of identity, including ethnicity, age, religion and disability and CQG factors. (S3, -4). Although these women were heterogeneous in this regard, these aspects of identity shaped differences in experiences, affecting women’s feelings of safety:

‘It’s not just about me being a woman that stops me from going to the park, it’s me being an Asian woman… being a Muslim woman.’ (P12)

‘If you’re LGBTQI+, you’re younger, you wear a hijab or you have some kind of mark of religion, that makes you more likely to be attacked.’ (P88)

Lone men in parks were particularly feared as the perceived profile of a sexual predator (S6, +4), with groups of men and boys so, albeit still intimidating (S5, +1*). On the other hand, men with families were seen as legitimate park users (S9, +2).

‘The presence of lone men in parks makes me feel una… you hear of those assaults and you just have a fear that something is going to happen.’ (P12)

After dark, fear in parks is most palpable (S1, -1*). In direct contrast to Viewpoint 1, there was strong agreement that nothing can be done to parks to make them safer enough for women to use after dark (S2, +3*), when the risk of sexual violence is perceived to its highest.

‘Nothing makes me feel safe in the dark all ever.’ (P91)

Physical design interventions such as lighting (S5, +2*), CCTV cameras (S10, -1) and help points (S13, +3*), were not felt to be enough to mitigate risks to women’s safety when alone in parks, particularly after dark. Relatively, reactions and evin (S14, +1) and the idea of parks being ‘a myth’ as ‘it doesn’t stop unwanted attention!’ (P15, +4). In contrast, men should take responsibility for changing their behaviour in parks to make women safer (S24, +4).

‘It’s not the women’s responsibility to take safety measures, it’s the men’s responsibility not to do it… also, society’s responsibility to educate men so that they don’t make women feel unsafe.’ (P11)

Until men’s behaviour changes, it is perceived so safer going parks with friends and family (S15, +5), part of organised groups (S18, +2), and when the park is busier with people (S15, +3), including other women (S15, +3) and users of a similar identity (S15, +3).
Divergence across viewpoints

As shown in the descriptions above, there are key areas where women’s viewpoints diverge. Appendix D outlines the 49 statements used in the study from ‘conversus’, where there is most statistical agreement across the viewpoints, to ‘divergence’, where there is least. As the table in Appendix D shows, divergence between viewpoints is not usually complete disagreement. Rather, it shows divergence in the degree of strength, certainty or importance placed on that statement within different viewpoints.

While there was strong agreement across viewpoints that parks feel unsafe after dark, there was disagreement as to what something could be done to parks by authorities to make them feel safer for women to use after dark. Whilst Viewpoint 1 strongly disagreed that nothing could be done and viewed this as an unacceptable policy position (S2, +5*), Viewpoints 3 was more equivocal (S2, ±5*) whereas Viewpoint 2 had a greater degree of agreement (S2, ±3*). While Viewpoints 1 and 2 viewed some parks as safe according to various contextual factors, women in Viewpoint 2 were more equivocal as to whether any park is safe at any time. This reflected women’s wider sense of vulnerability and unease in public spaces, partly related to intersectionality with various aspects of women’s identities shaping experiences and feelings of safety (see chapter 7 for a discussion about intersectionality and feelings of safety in parks).

This divergence paralleled views towards lighting. Viewpoint 1 strongly agreed that lighting would make parks feel safer to use after dark (S2, +5*) as part of a greater emphasis on visible security measures to improve women’s safety and independence using parks. On the other hand, Viewpoint 2 placed the statement on lighting towards the middle (S1, +3*), and Viewpoint 2 was in relative disagreement (S1, -3*). Viewpoint 3 was more concerned with designing open-air visibility into park landscapes (S1, +3*) than Viewpoints 1 and 2 (S1, 0*).

The viewpoints also diverged in their perceptions of ‘high’ parks users. Notably, lone men in parks were interpreted as a potential threat in Viewpoints 2 and 3 (S6, ±4/5), but not in Viewpoint 1 (S6, 0*). While Viewpoints 2 and 3 widely perceived lone men as potential ‘predators’, Viewpoint 3 generally disregarded this between presence and behaviour, with men engaged in activities such as walking a dog seen less as threatening in context, the presence of groups of men and boys was interpreted as strongly threatening in Viewpoint 2 (S5, ±5*), whereas group movements were interpreted as ‘brave’ and wanted comments, in comparison with potentially threatening in Viewpoint 1 (S5, ±4*), depending on size of group, but not threatening in Viewpoint 3 (S5, ±4*), unless the group movement signalled otherwise.

On the other hand, the presence of drinkers and drug users and groups of teenagers were interpreted as intimidating in Viewpoint 3 (S4, ±5/6, S5, ±4/5), but not so in Viewpoints 1 (S4, +3/4) and 2 (S4, 0*). Moreover, particularly in Viewpoint 1, there was a social justice belief in the right of teenagers to use parks. Yet for Viewpoint 3, this was a diverse range of potential threats, these types of park users were seen as ‘unpredictable’ and associated with experiences of abuse of behaviour, not unwanted comments.

The focus on types of ‘highly’ people in parks in Viewpoint 2 referred to the perceived importance of local context in shaping safety. In contrast, Viewpoint 1 was reassurance and solution-focused, prioritising the need for visible security to deal with potential threats, whereas Viewpoint 2 focused on the threat of men, and the wider social context of male behaviour driving women’s fear.

The emphasis placed on the need to address broader social, cultural and structural factors underpinning women’s fears in parks and public spaces more broadly distinguished Viewpoints 1 and 3 from Viewpoint 3. Hence, Viewpoints 1 and 3 prioritised changing societal attitudes towards women (S34, ±3/4) and male behaviour (S34, ±3/4) as key parts of the solution, yet these were much less of a priority for Viewpoint 3 (S34, 0*). By contrast, Viewpoint 3 was primarily concerned with the local social order of their park created by users, as well as the openness and visibility of the park environment.

Consensus across viewpoints

Eight statements were ranked in statistically similar ways by women across the three viewpoints, identifying areas of consensus. The first three areas relate to aspects of park design and management that women felt improve safety and feelings of safety (business, the presence of other women and organised group activities), the second three relate to aspects that women felt impeded safety (challenging unwanted comments and perimeter fences or walls). The final three aspects refer to statements placed in a middle position, reflecting an ambivalence and less strong feeling.

In addition to these eight areas of consensus, there were further areas where the viewpoints were similar, but which did not reach the statistical threshold for consensus. This included the use of male groups in parks after dark, feeling safer nearer to the edges of parks, feeling safer with the presence of police officers, feeling unsafe in secluded areas, and feeling safer using familiar parks.

1. Busier parks safer for women

Well-used parks feel safer (S52, ±3) because there is increased passive surveillance, which is perceived to deter offending and provide opportunities for support and help from other users through ‘more eyes’ (P11) on the park.

“...obviously the more people that are there the more safe it is. As a woman, it’s when you're actually on your own, isolated, that I feel more unsafe.” (P11)

When parks are busier with people, women feel that they are ‘not on their own in the park’ (P15), even when visiting the park alone, with women planning their visit during busy times.

“I will walk the dog while parkrun’s going on because... there’s an organised thing going on, there’s lots of volunteers around, there’s lots of people I could ask for help if I needed.” (P43)

Facilities, experiences, visible staff and organised activities were viewed as central to fostering a sense of security during the daytime, and improved safety perceptions as a result. Well-used parks after dark may also encourage greater park use:

“We did go running in a park that was still lit in a busy place. If there was loads of people using it, I would use it... I want to see where I am running.” (P19)

Well-used parks with steady footfall may mitigate some of the effects of darkness on fear:

“I go over to Holland Bridge... everyone walks through the park after dark, and women, it’s a lot safer for women over there... there’s a lot more women out and about... I mean in the park it’s pitch black, but it’s the route from the train station... So, a lot of people use it.” (P38)

Threats from lone men, groups or other park users seen to be ‘tricky’ were also perceived as less intimidating in well-used parks. By contrast, many women associated isolated, unpopulated parks with additional personal safety risks:

“I think bad things are more likely to happen when nobody else can see these things happening.” (P41)

2. Women in parks signal a safer place

There was a consensus that the presence of other women in parks is a sign of safety (S30, ±3/4), because women wouldn’t use them if they were not safe” (P38). Seeing other women in parks also empowered more women to use parks, creating potential for positive feedback loops: “you get a lot of Asian women walking around this particular park... probably because there are other women doing the same” (P7).

“Having other women and girls there, especially... on its own, it makes you feel a lot better.” (P9)

3. Organised group activities extend women’s use of parks

Organised group activities were perceived to support women to feel safer and extend women’s use of parks (S18, ±2), including in quieter or secluded areas of parks, and after dark. They were felt to create a sense of inclusion and belonging, as well as ‘safety in numbers’ (P19), and because there is a trusted ‘organiser’ with oversight. Many women commented that these activities enabled them to participate in exercise and social opportunities they would not do alone because of safety concerns, both during the day and after dark:

“...[running group] is a really good way for me still to get out, to exercise, to be social... they’re organised and there’s lots of... so they feel really really, really safe.” (P3)

“I do love the more secluded areas... because it’s a bit quieter... you can be a part of a group and get a bit more out of it, but it’s just I would never do that on my own.” (P19)

“I would feel safe using parks as part of an organised group... It makes you feel like you belong, the park belongs to you as well.” (P36)

There was a desire for a wider choice of organised activities beyond exercise classes to appeal to a broader demographic of women. By contrast, some women were neutral towards group activities, as they preferred ‘solo’ nature:

“You always use fitness groups, but it would be nice to have a broader range of opportunities, like photography or art classes or even a picnic club or a book group in the summer. Parks could be used for so many different things.” (P16)

Organised group activities also made parks busier, and therefore feel safer and less likely to be territorialised by particular groups or become male-dominated. Men and boys participating in organised sports and activities in parks were not perceived as threatening, and added to passive surveillance:

“...someone has a purpose to be there, like organised sport, gardening or volunteering... Anyone in those categories ticks the box of making me feel safer.” (P36)

4. Fences or walls around the edge of parks limit escape and visibility

There was a consensus that fences and walls around the edge of parks (S9) felt less safe because they may limit escape and visibility - “I think if there was fences everywhere and we had to go through that, that wouldn’t make me feel safer” (P16). Additionally, in making the park more secluded or hidden, women felt fences or walls impeded attracting help from bystanders.

5. It is safer to ignore than challenge unwanted comments in parks

Women disagreed that it was safer to challenge than ignore unwanted comments in parks so as not to escalate a situation (S35, ±3/4). “You’d make things worse... they won’t like you because you’ve challenged them!” (P59). In parks, it was often safer to ignore the comments and carry on walking, get out of the situation (P59), however, there was an awareness that leaving male behaviour unchallenged would not change the status quo, or safety trumped a desire to challenge. Women’s decisions on how to respond to incidents also depended on situational factors, wider context, disposition and personality.

6. Seeing park users of a similar identity feels safer

Women agreed that seeing other park users of a similar identity feels safer but qualified this (S2, ±4/5). Parks that comprise a mix of people felt safer as they convey an atmosphere of inclusivity, but it is important to see similar users within the diversity.

“I just feel that if there is somebody that looks like you and you just automatically feel that you are not on your own for some reason.” (P58)

7. Women can’t rely on other nearby park users to intervene in harassment

Women generally agreed that you can’t rely on other nearby park users to intervene in harassment situations (S19, ±3/4). As one woman commented: “I’ve seen somebody being attacked in the park and people just walking by” (P46). However, the degree of agreement and reasons varied. While some felt that ‘community spirit seems to be broken down’ (P90), others perceived that people ‘turn the other way... in case they get hurt’ (P90). Views on this statement complement the general idea that well-used parks are safer in increasing the probability of bystander intervention.

8. Mobile phone safety apps may be useful but trade freedom for safety

Recent years have seen a growth in mobile phone safety apps promoted at women which allow women to choose trusted contacts to track their journeys. Some women saw these types of tracking apps as potentially useful. Yet, many expressed that they should not have to rely on them, which trade aspects of freedom and independence for safety as a ‘double edged sword’ (S31). As one woman put it: “I don’t want to be tracked and followed in order to feel safe, so no for me!” (P49). Instead, some women suggested an app that sees where pre-determined men are (P49).
5. FINDINGS - GIRLS’ VIEWS ON FEELING SAFE IN PARK

During focus groups, 50 girls aged 13-18 years from West Yorkshire individually ranked ordered 49 statements on a grid relating to feelings of safety in parks, from ‘most like’ to ‘most unlike’ their views. Afterwards, girls reflected in group discussions on the reasons for their views and what might make parks feel safer and more welcoming.

Girls are more diverse in their views than women, and do not have a single view of what makes parks feel safe, although there are some areas of general agreement. Using factor analysis, we extracted three clusters of girls with statistically similar response patterns who share a viewpoint on feeling safe in parks. Five statements were ranked in statistically similar ways by girls across the three viewpoints, identifying areas of consensus.

In what follows, we summarise each viewpoint, the differences between them and areas of consensus. In brackets, we provide the statement number (S1 to S49) and standardised z-score, from -5 (most like my view) to 5 (least like my view), which corresponds with the girls in Figure 3.2, where 0 represents a middle position indicating less strong feeling. Statements marked with an asterisk indicate statements that distinguish one viewpoint from another at p<0.05 significance or higher.

Girls’ viewpoints can be summarised as:

**Viewpoint 1: People in parks**

Table 5 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that the presence of groups of (male) teenagers in parks is intimidating and that authorities are not doing enough about harassment and violence against women and girls, which hearing about and experiencing makes parks feel unsafe to go to. The solution should involve changing existing attitudes, rather than telling girls what not to wear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of parks</th>
<th>once per week +62%</th>
<th>once every 2 weeks +14%</th>
<th>once per month/seldom +10%</th>
<th>No reply 6%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Group</td>
<td>17-18 (18%)</td>
<td>15-16 (42%)</td>
<td>13-14 (30%)</td>
<td>UK 84% Elsewhere 0% No reply 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth</td>
<td>11 (60%)</td>
<td>12 (55%)</td>
<td>13 (52%)</td>
<td>13 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Group</td>
<td>White (5%)</td>
<td>Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (22%)</td>
<td>Asian/Asian British (60%)</td>
<td>UK 14% Other ethnic groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14% of girls interviewed had a disability.

Girls felt that parks are not designed with their safety in mind (S2, +1*), and relevant authorities should do more. Whilst this viewpoint was somewhat optimistic that something can be done to improve feelings of safety in parks after dark, this viewpoint was ambivalent (S42, 0*). Indeed, in contrast to other viewpoints, girls felt that physical design interventions, such as lighting (S1, +1*) and CCTV cameras (S3, +2) would not necessarily make parks feel safer, with some girls noting that they could not stop an incident happening. There were also some concerns about CCTV in parks being potentially ‘intrusive’, a counterpoint to the recreational and leisure purposes of parks.

**Viewpoint 2: People reduce girls’ feelings of safety**

This viewpoint is concerned that girls are more diverse in their views than women, and do not have a singular view of what makes parks feel safe. This viewpoint focuses on the physical and social environment. The most common fears of girls were harassment in public in the past year (S27, +5), higher than in Viewpoints 2 and 3.

In this viewpoint, harassment in parks is an important dimension of feeling unsafe in parks, yet girls felt that authorities did not take it seriously enough (S17, +4). Indeed, of the 16 girls aligned with this viewpoint, 11 had experienced harassment in public in the past year higher than in Viewpoints 2 and 3 (Appendix C). Girls explained that unwanted comments and attention happen regularly and make them feel uncomfortable and unsafe, yet they do not feel it was safe to challenge these behaviours themselves (S36, +3*), and they do not feel authorities are dealing with their experiences in parks in appropriate ways.

I got sexually assaulted in a park. And he got excused because he had ADHD. (Group 5)

Furthermore, girls in this viewpoint agreed that other aspects of their identity shaped their feelings of safety in parks (S19, +4).

A lot of times your religion or what you are wearing [points at headscarf] that makes me feel vulnerable. It makes people think they can do something. (Group 5)

This viewpoint is concerned that girls are more diverse in their views than women, and do not have a singular view of what makes parks feel safe. This viewpoint focuses on the physical and social environment. The most common fears of girls were harassment in public in the past year (S27, +5), higher than in Viewpoints 2 and 3.

In this viewpoint, girls felt that parks are not designed with their safety in mind (S2, +1*), yet highlighted the importance of design for facilitating escape from risky people and situations. Being trapped by others in enclosed park areas is a prominent fear, such as in sports and play spaces (see discussion below on play space designs), with perimeter fences and walls (S4, +4) and thick vegetation (S19, -7) considered to be particularly unsafe, and relatively more so than in the two other viewpoints. However, in consensus with the other viewpoints, girls felt less safe in the middle compared to the edges of parks (S4, +3) and in more secluded or hidden areas of parks (S14, -3) as inhibiting escape. Conversely, lots of exits could make parks and play spaces feel safer (S4, +2*).

No hidden areas, everything to be seen. It’s not comfortable. (Group 5)

However, while physical disorder such as rubbish, needles and graffiti (S20, +2) contributed to girls in this viewpoint feeling unsafe in parks, in contrast, signs of order and inclusion, such as tidy grass and flower beds (S1, -2) and symbols of gender equality, such as inspirational statues and murals of women (S14, -3), did not provide counterpoint signals of safety.

There was a reason I wouldn’t leave and go to the park. The state of it. You’d have a swing set without the swings. They would have been taken away having been vandalised. We’d spent so much money on transport to get to another park that was better maintained. (Group 2)

While the other two viewpoints were somewhat optimistic that something can be done to improve feelings of safety in parks after dark, this viewpoint was ambivalent (S42, 0*). Indeed, in contrast to other viewpoints, girls felt that physical design interventions, such as lighting (S1, +1*) and CCTV cameras (S3, +2) would not necessarily make parks feel safer, with some girls noting that they could not stop an incident happening. There were also some concerns about CCTV in parks being potentially ‘intrusive’, a counterpoint to the recreational and leisure purposes of parks.

**Viewpoint 3: Girls are more diverse in their views than women, and do not have a singular view of what makes parks feel safe**

This viewpoint is concerned that girls are more diverse in their views than women, and do not have a singular view of what makes parks feel safe. This viewpoint focuses on the physical and social environment. The most common fears of girls were harassment in public in the past year (S27, +5), higher than in Viewpoints 2 and 3.

In this viewpoint, girls felt that parks are not designed with their safety in mind (S2, +1*), yet highlighted the importance of design for facilitating escape from risky people and situations. Being trapped by others in enclosed park areas is a prominent fear, such as in sports and play spaces (see discussion below on play space designs), with perimeter fences and walls (S4, +4) and thick vegetation (S19, -7) considered to be particularly unsafe, and relatively more so than in the two other viewpoints. However, in consensus with the other viewpoints, girls felt less safe in the middle compared to the edges of parks (S4, +3) and in more secluded or hidden areas of parks (S14, -3) as inhibiting escape. Conversely, lots of exits could make parks and play spaces feel safer (S4, +2*).

No hidden areas, everything to be seen. It’s not comfortable. (Group 8)

50 girls interviewed across West Yorkshire.
Most agree (+5/+4) Most disagree (-5/-4)

Familiarity and areas of parks with thick vegetation, for example hedges, trees and bushes
Every day harassment of women and girls in public places, for example unwanted comments and attentions, makes me feel unsafe in parks

Table 5.1 Highest ranked statements (Viewpoint 1)

Table 5.2 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that going to familiar parks with familiar people is important to feel safe, and that this can be done by design parks to make them busier and safer for girls throughout the day, including improving visible security and exits and reducing secluded areas.

In this viewpoint, and in contrast to Viewpoint 1, going to familiar parks with familiar people is relatively more important to perceptions of safety. In this way, visiting parks with friends or family (75, +5) or as part of organised activity supports feeling safe (68, +5). Visiting with others was perceived to offer some protection from harassment or crime due to safety in numbers, as well as the strong belief that friends and family will interfere, if necessary.

“I normally go… with my family and friends. It’s about being in a group.”

Table 5.3 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.4 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.5 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.6 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.7 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.8 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.9 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.10 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.11 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.12 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.13 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.14 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.15 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.16 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.17 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more. Girls perceived a safer environment to ignore rather than challenge unwanted comments and attention (75, +5), and walking bolder and confidently (68, +5) as less effective at reducing fear.

“Lighting [can also] help you spot other people. There could easily be a view that concerns or reports of harassment towards girls may not be taken seriously.

Table 5.18 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more. Girls perceived a safer environment to ignore rather than challenge unwanted comments and attention (75, +5), and walking bolder and confidently (68, +5) as less effective at reducing fear.

In this viewpoint, and in contrast to Viewpoint 1, going to familiar parks with familiar people is relatively more important to perceptions of safety. In this way, visiting parks with friends or family (75, +5) or as part of an organised activity supports feeling safe (68, +5). Visiting with others was perceived to offer some protection from harassment or crime due to safety in numbers, as well as the strong belief that friends and family will interfere, if necessary.

“I normally go… with my family and friends. It’s about being in a group.”

Table 5.19 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.20 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.21 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.22 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.23 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.24 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.

Table 5.25 shows the highest ranked statements by girls aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the view that harassment and threats of violence towards women and girls are key drivers of feeling unsafe in parks; hence, societal changes to the norms and attitudes that underpin this and greater gender equality are needed for girls to feel safer in public spaces, with authorities doing more.
Female staff present, not male… because if a male is harassing me, I don’t then want to go in another male, who might do the same.” (Group 5)

Furthermore, interactions with police officers and park staff perceived to be ‘divergent’, where there is least. As the table in Appendix D shows, divergence between viewpoints is not usually complete disagreement. Rather, it shows divergence in the degree of strength, certainty or importance placed on that statement within different viewpoints.

Sometimes they just kick you out of places for no reason. Or they feel the need to tell you to do something.” (Group 4)

Most times I just don’t like them [police]. I know that they’re trying to like look after us, but it’s like they just can be nice about it.” (Group 4)

“If people see the police, they might get a bit anxious about it. But I feel park staff might feel a bit friendly, and a better presence around the park.” (Group 9)

Overall, this viewpoint expressed concern that physical interventions in parks do not address the root cause of girls’ anxiety—threats of violence against women and girls, thereby undermining the need for societal change alongside design change to improve feelings of safety in parks and other public spaces.

‘Whether there’s good lighting or horrible lighting, there’s still weird men who might do summat to you.’ (Group 9)

As shown in the descriptions above, there are key areas where girls’ viewpoints diverge. Appendix D lists the 40 statements used in the study from ‘consensus’, where there is most statistical agreement across the viewpoints, to ‘divergence’, where there is least. As the table in Appendix D shows, divergence between viewpoints is not usually complete disagreement. Rather, it shows divergence in the degree of strength, certainty or importance placed on that statement within different viewpoints. Statistically, Viewpoints 1 and 3 were closest, with the greatest difference between Viewpoints 1 and 3. In Viewpoints 1 and 3, and similarly, statements about sexism and patriarchy were least issues for girls’ feelings of unsafety, whereas the presence of women in parks increased a sense of safety. Furthermore, both Viewpoints 1 and 3 saw men, particularly lone men, as a threat. On the other hand, Viewpoint 2 was more equivocal as to these aspects.

In this sense, Viewpoints 2 and 3 display societal change in attitudes and violence against women and girls as necessary to make parks and other public spaces safer and feel safer to girls. Indeed, girls connected their feelings of unsafety in parks with a wider sense of vulnerability in society that affected not only their sense of insecurity in parks but also on the streets, in public transport and at school.

However, Viewpoints 2 and 3 display an optimism that something could be done to improve girls’ sense of safety in parks, particularly after dark. This includes girls taking personal safety measures, but without strong alignment to this idea.

Furthermore, for Viewpoint 2, feelings of safety stemmed from being in familiar parks with familiar people. This was shared to some degree by Viewpoints 3, but less so by Viewpoint 1. Viewpoint 2 was also strongly enthusiastic about physical design interventions and visible staff presence in parks, such as CCTV cameras, police and security patrols. This enthusiasm was weaker in Viewpoint 3 and slightly weaker still in Viewpoint 1.

The strongest area of divergence related to groups of teenagers. While the first two viewpoints perceived such groups as threatening and dominating, Viewpoints 2 and 3 perceived them as more benign or variable.

Consensus across viewpoints

Five statements were ranked in statistically similar ways by girls across the three viewpoints, identifying areas of consensus. While the first two areas relate to aspects of park design and management that girls felt improved or facilitated safety (emergency help points and being near to the edge of parks), the second two relate to aspects that girls felt improved safety (darkness and secluded areas). The final aspect (times of unsafety during daylight hours) was placed in a middle position, reflecting some ambivalence.

1. Help points in parks would be reassuring

Girls were generally in favour of emergency panic buttons or help points in parks (S33, +3/+2) to quickly access help, if required. They felt this to be important given limited mobile phone reception in some parks. Additionally, some girls may lack mobile phones or have insufficient credit or data to make an emergency call. However, there was also some scepticism as authorities may be slow to respond. Girls also felt that help points could be misused or vandalised.

“I think if anything were happening in a park and they were close to a safety button, they could just press that and get some help.” (Group 2)

“If you were on the edge, you could get away.” (Group 7)

“It’s really scary, the fact that even in the daytime, a man can approach you, intimidate. Furthermore, girls felt that there were more undesirable park users at night, which they associated with unpredictable behaviour or intimidation.

“It’s really the fact that even in the daytime, a man can approach me, and try to do something with me while there are other people around.” (Group 10)

2. The edges of parks feel safer

The edges or perimeter of parks were generally considered safer than the middle (S42, -2/-3). Girls felt that, at the edges of parks, it was easier to escape from danger and risky people towards nearby streets, shops or houses.

“If you were on the edge, you could get away.” (Group 7)

“If you were on the edge, you could get away.” (Group 7)

“I don’t feel as safe in the middle of parks.” (Group 7)

“It’s safer being near the edge – there’s never a minute you can breathe until you’ve stepped on the safety button, they could just press that and get some help.” (Group 2)

“I think that if anything were happening in a park and they were close to a safety button, they could just press that and get some help.” (Group 2)

3. Parks do not feel safe after dark

Girls strongly disagreed that parks feel safe after dark (S1, -4/-5), with 86% of girls across viewpoints indicating they felt very unfairly unsafe walking alone in a local park after dark (see Appendix C).

Some girls expressed their fear of dark spaces in vivid terms, where unsafe is felt in their ‘gut’ or ‘stomach’, with the constant need to be aware of what’s around them (Group 7). They explained how moving through darkness produces unpleasant sensory experiences like butterflies’ feeling sick (Group 7).

‘...you walk in to a park on a night and like you’re just constantly looking over... it scares you.” (Group 10)

While girls’ fear in darkness extended beyond parks to other public spaces, a lack of lighting and limited sightings in parks, as well as secluded areas or dense vegetation intensified feelings of insecurity. At night, you’re always on edge – there’s never a minute you can breathe until you’ve stepped through the door” (Group 5)

In addition, girls felt they were at greater risk of victimisation, particularly physical and emotional violence, after dark. ‘It feels like you’re more comin’ to you’ (Group 3).

Notably, girls felt they were at greater risk of victimisation, particularly physical and emotional violence, after dark. ‘It feels like you’re more comin’ to you’ (Group 3).

Not only did girls highlight that there were fewer people around at night, they felt that darkness provided cover to potential attackers. Furthermore, girls felt that there were more undesirable park users at night, which they associated with unpredictable behaviour or intimidation.

4. Secluded areas in parks feel unsafe

There was consensus that secluded or hidden areas in parks do not feel safe (S43, -3/-4). Secluded areas, like dark areas, could conceal potential threatening people, provide places to be trapped, and impair being seen (and heard) as well as seeing others: ‘There nobody around, nobody can see you, you could probably hear you’ (Group 5). As such, many girls preferred open spaces in park design; being in parts of parks where there are other people around and avoiding secluded areas, woods, thick vegetation or thick bushes.

‘Secluded parks or any area it makes me feel so unsafe… there’d be no way someone could get away.’ (Group 2)

‘Whenever I walk through park and see trees, I feel uncomfortable because it’s more covered so you can’t see. There are people hiding and people can’t see you.” (Group 2)

5. Parks feel safer during daylight hours, but not always

During discussions, girls expressed feeling safer using parks during daylight hours, with 62% of girls indicating that they felt fairly safe and a further 20% very safe walking alone in a local park during the day (see Appendix C). However, they also indicated that parks could sometimes feel unsafe during the day (S1, 0/-1). In particular, knowledge of sexual assaults can transform specific types into threatening spaces even in the daytime:

‘Last month a girl got raped in the park. And the weird thing is... she was just taking her kids to school and it was 8 in the morning, so it wasn’t even night... it’s just freaked her and raped her in the park... And the thing is, it’s not the first time I’ve heard of it, so I kind of feel weird going there.” (Group 6)

Photo elicitation activity: Park play spaces and MUGAs

We used a photo elicitation activity to understand girls’ views on standard and gender-sensitive (i.e., designed with girls) play spaces. Focus groups were shown 24 images of park play spaces, including existing play spaces in the UK, Europe and the US as well as ‘Better design’ suggestions for parks by MakeSpace For Girls (MSGF)1. The images were circulated (i.e., no particular order) amongst the girls, who were given the opportunity to say what they liked and disliked about them with a focus on feelings of safety. There were four key findings. Firstly, girls strongly preferred open play spaces with good outdoor visibility and visibility in contrast to enclosed spaces, as typified by fenced courts or MUGAs, where they could be trapped. Secondly, girls were enthusiastic about ‘socially active and active play equipment such as swings’, which allow them to hang out with friends in a fun way. Thirdly, girls were generally positive about mixed-use spaces and landscapes, showing the need for gender-sensitive (mixed-use) design across parks, not only in designated play spaces. Finally, girls generally perceived images of MUGAs and skate parks as male-dominated and exclusionary (see also Walker and Clark, 2020, Clark, 2020). Although there was some divergence in views, particularly around skate parks, as they could be spaces for girls. Yet, supposedly gender-sensitive designs could also be perceived as exclusionary to teenage girls, particularly at the intersection of gender and age. Girls’ comments highlight that gender-sensitive designs may not always translate across contexts, undermining the importance of local consultation and co-design with teenage girls.

Differences across viewpoints

As shown in the descriptions above, there are key areas where girls’ viewpoints diverge. Appendix D lists the 40 statements used in the study from ‘consensus’, where there is most statistical agreement across the viewpoints, to ‘divergence’, where there is least. As the table in Appendix D shows, divergence between viewpoints is not usually complete disagreement. Rather, it shows divergence in the degree of strength, certainty or importance placed on that statement within different viewpoints. Statistically, Viewpoints 1 and 3 were closest, with the greatest difference...
1. Preference for openness and outlook vs enclosed and trapped

Across the focus groups, girls liked open spaces with good outlook as typified by some of the MSFG better design suggestions and park landscape designs.

“Swings… seating area… nowhere really to like hide and them come out and try scare you or anything.” (Group 6, Image 1)

In contrast, they disliked enclosed spaces with fewer or less visible exits, or spaces with obstructed escape routes where they could be ‘trapped’, such as fenced courts/MUGAs. Even the ‘gender sensitive’ MUGA with multiple exits was perceived as enclosed:

“I don’t really like that one because there’s only one entrance to get out… you’d feel trapped.” (Group 4, Image 2)

“… all the trees surrounding it – it’s closed in.” (Group 9, Image 2)

Girls’ sense of unsafety in enclosed play spaces may go part way to explaining why 1 out of 5 girls (20%) indicated they would feel fairly or very unsafe using the sports/play areas of a park.

Yet, girls’ dislike of enclosed spaces went beyond fenced courts, with dense vegetation surrounding other play spaces and a lack of lighting also of concern. Girls similarly expressed a strong dislike for play and seating equipment with supposedly ‘gender sensitive’ designs if they felt the spaces could trap them or provide hiding places for potential attackers.

“We hated the circle table. Coz you’re just trapped, and you can’t see behind you or anything.” (Group 5, Image 3)

“There’s so many trees round it, and anyone could be there. It looks like in the daytime already, so in night time it would be worse.” (Group 7, Image 4)

However, passive surveillance from surrounding streets and buildings mitigated some concerns around enclosure in fenced MUGAs/courts.
2. Positive about sociable aspects of play spaces and equipment

Girls generally liked the sociable aspects of some play spaces and equipment, with girls often commenting favourably on features of sociable seats, shelters, swings and exercise bikes, which enabled them to sit or chat with their friends.

“You can exercise whilst talking to your friends; the best thing ever!” (Group 2, Image 5)

“This is good to have a chat with friends with shelter.” (Group 1, Image 6)

Indeed, girls were particularly enthusiastic about MSFG design suggestions for swings (and swing-like hammocks), which may provide teenage girls with the opportunity to ‘hang out’ in an fun and active way. Several groups also commented positively on accessible swings, viewing them as inclusive.

“I love swings and it’s great that there is one for disabled people too, to feel included.” (Group 1, Image 1)

“Being a teenager, I like to just hang out on the swings.” (Group 2, Image 1)

However, despite the importance of sociability in play space design, some girls also emphasised their need for personal space in relation to other park users, indicating fears of overcrowding or other people sitting too close.

3. Positive about mixed-use play spaces and park landscape design

Girls largely commented positively on MSFG better design suggestions for mixed-use play spaces and park landscape designs. Girls liked that they provided different activities and areas, for example singing on a stage in addition to sports, as well as spaces to hang out with friends or picnics with family.

“There’s a lot of different spaces for different things” “Like the tables to hang out with friends.” (Group 2, Image 7)

“There’s like… somewhere to play sports and then there’s like swings and stuff and then places like where you can sit on the grass with your family and have like a picnic.” (Group 6, Image 8)

While some girls felt that this represented a more equitable use of park space, one alluded to the safety benefits of mixed-use space “for everyone”: “I quite liked this one because it was so-open… and there was a bit for everyone so like if a man was running he can run on the outside bit of it, and the kids are more in the central bit.” (Group 7, Image 8)

Some girls also noted the possibility for vandalism of play spaces/equipment or anti-social behaviour, including by boys and other teenagers, highlighting issues of male intimidation across different spaces.

Girl 1: “I don’t look bad but it seems like it would be really busy…

Girl 2: “Like boys would just turn it into a crack den.” (Group 3, Image 13)

4. MUGAs/skate parks vs gender-sensitive designs: the need for spaces for teenage girls

In addition to concerns about enclosure and entrapment, MUGAs and skate parks were generally perceived as male-dominated and exclusionary for girls.

“It would be mainly boys… it might make you feel more uncomfortable. It’s just not like a very good place.” (Group 6, Images 2 and 9)

“...if a girl goes there, like a group of girls, they (boys)’ll just kick you out.” (Group 8, Image 2)
6. PROFESSIONALS’ VIEWS ON WOMEN AND GIRLS FEELING SAFE IN PARKS

During one-to-one interviews, 27 professionals working in various local government services and the police from across West Yorkshire rank ordered 49 statements on a grid relating to women and girls’ feelings of safety in parks, from ‘most like’ to ‘most unlike’ their views. Afterwards, professionals reflected on the reasons for their views and what might make parks safer and more welcoming.

Professionals have similar views on women’s safety in parks, characterised by 56% of professionals who provided similarly structured responses. Using factor analysis, we identified two clusters of 16 and 10 professionals with statistically similar response patterns who share a viewpoint on women’s safety in parks.16

Given the high level of similarity in professionals’ views, we first summarise areas of consensus then outline the two diverging viewpoints. In brackets, we provide the statement number (0 to 49) and standardised Z score, from -5 (most like view) to 5 (most unlike view), which corresponds with the grid in Figure 3.3 where 0 represents a middle position. Statements marked with an asterisk indicate statements that distinguish one viewpoint from another at p<0.05 significance or higher.

Consensus across viewpoints

Appendix D lists the 49 statements used in the study from ‘consensus’, where there is most statistical agreement across the viewpoints, to ‘divergence’, where there is most statistical disagreement. As the table shows, there were 25 areas of consensus among professionals (including six areas with some ambivalence and less statistical similarity) corresponding with the grid in Figure 3.3, where ‘0’ represents a middle position. Statements marked with an asterisk indicate statements that correspond with the grid in Figure 3.3, where ‘0’ represents a middle position. Statements marked with an asterisk indicate statements that correspond with the grid in Figure 3.3, where ‘0’ represents a middle position.

There was a level of optimism among professionals about parks being safe for women and girls (S1, +1), and about being able to make parks safer and feel safer to use, including after dark (S2, +3). Professionals had wide experience of diverse parks, and perceived some parks to be ‘safest’. Furthermore, they believed that parks should be safe ‘everybody should feel able to walk around and not feel targets. Their expectation was, otherwise, it was extremely sad, as it could mean overlooking a professional failure or defeat. Moreover, the danger was not the park itself, but the behaviour of its users: ‘the park is not an evil thing, it is just a facility. It’s the people who use it’. (P10, policing/community safety).

Moreover, professionals felt that a range of practical environmental remedies could improve women’s sense of safety in parks. ‘We can do things to the environment - we can cut back trees, bushes, branches; open pathways; increase CCTV, lighting… It’s pretty simple stuff, but it is decisive.’ (P25, policing/community safety).

For example, there was consensus that artificial lighting (S11, +1) and CCTV cameras (S10, -1) could partially improve women’s sense of insecurity after dark (S1, +1), subject to sufficient budget and opportunity. Indeed, some professionals were disillusioned with an absence of light and signs to facilitate safer park use. However, using lighting was also seen as a balancing act (P13, design/community safety) with regard to costs, biodiversity and aesthetics, but also its complex relationship with safety, thereby explaining some ambivalence. Lighting could create additional dangers by casting shadows, as well as attract potentially threatening people.

In addition, professionals perceived openness and visibility to be important for women and girls’ sense of safety in parks, and in contrast with secluded (S40, +4), or thickly vegetated (S3, -3/-2) areas, which limit passive surveillance and increase women’s sense of vulnerability to unseen dangers. Hence, ‘visible’ landscape design was important for safety (P23, design/planning), with vegetation management (cutting back) perceived as a ‘cheap solution’ (P10, parks services), alongside improving mobility via pathways through the parks (P25, Other). Yet parks could accommodate both visibility and biodiversity net-gain, ‘so more natural areas… [but] in a way that keeps open vistas’. (P10, parks services).

There was also a preference for park designs that favour easy exits, with perimeter fencing seen to impede women and girls’ sense of safety by blocking entry (S43, -1/-2). Professionals also disagreed that women and girls feel safer nearer the middle of parks (S42, -1/-2) given lesser escape possibilities.

However, professionals were generally ambivalent as to whether parks look or feel like they are designed with women and girls’ safety in mind (S12, 0), although some participants noted the legacy of Victorian planning, which may not have considered women’s safety in parks. Others noted that safety in parks is not to be taken into account in gender specific ways (P21, design/planning), with the lack of female representation in park management and the council perceived as a barrier to understanding women’s views and lived experience.

I think a lot of our councillors are older men… they probably don’t see it from the perspective of a young female. And all of the management teams… are middle aged and men… so I think the hardest part of redesigning a park will be getting the hearts and minds changed, to understand that this is even needed.” (P25, Other).

In designing parks, professionals felt a balance was needed between safety and the other benefits or services that parks provide (e.g. environment and biodiversity), as well as women’s experience of safety (such as active experience and play) so as not to ‘miss out on other things which can be important as well’.

I don’t think they necessarily need to make everywhere completely safe. If you look at thick, dark woodland with dense undergrowth. It’s a brilliant, great place... Some elements of that you crawl inside... the kids, climbing inside rhododendron bushes.” (P13, design/planning).

There was consensus that well-used parks are safer and feel safer (S12, +3) given the presence of passive surveillance and potential for bystanders, including towards women. This was also broad agreement that visible park security staff could provide a reassuring signal, particularly if well-designed and subtle: ‘People with signs, genuine people with signs, it’s all positive’. (P25, Other).

However, professionals were generally ambivalent as to whether parks are seen as potentially escalating risk. There was similar scepticism that walking in pairs (S34, 0) was an effective strategy for women and girls. ‘Are they safer in pairs? There’s no evidence of this. A pair of women walking in a park, one is a target and the other is not; if they are not targets then there is no sense in walking together.’ (P10, Other).

There was consensus that police officers make women and girls feel safe (S15, +2), yet also a recognition that media coverage of high-profile incidents involving police officers may lower women’s trust and confidence in the police. Although not meeting the statistical threshold for consensus, there was also broad agreement that visible park security staff could provide some sense of safety (S16, +1).

There was less enthusiasm for technology and information type solutions. Mobile phone safety apps (S37, 0) were potentially useful but limited. Help points (S33, -1) were considered less useful as they may be situated far from the site of an emergency. Furthermore, both safety apps and help points may not elicit timely responses (including from authorities), particularly when threats emerge quickly. Clever signage (S30, 0) was thought to make only a small difference to feelings of safety in parks.

There was consensus that it is safer for women and girls to ignore rather than challenge unwanted comments in parks (S35, -3), with any reaction seen as potentially escalating risk. There was similar perception that walking boldly and confidently would make women and girls feel safer (S11, +2). Furthermore, there was a representation an unrealistic expectation of women and girls’ lived experience of fear in parks. Moreover, this perception was based on the fear of ‘victim-blaming’ narratives (P23, design/planning), policing/community safety. Additionally, there was some sense that authorities should not communicate to women and girls ‘if you should do this to park at this time or do that, people are going to say “that’s n+3 days, or you should do this or do that because parks are open 24/7”. Women should be able to come at any point of the day’ (P18, design/planning). Rather, the emphasis should be on perpetrators.

Furthermore, professionals agreed that social attitudes towards women, for example sexism and prejudice, need to change for women and girls to feel safer in parks (S14, +3). It was a striking feeling that fear in parks is part of a wider societal problem affecting women and girls across all public and private spaces, which remained a notable barrier.

I really do feel strongly about trying to change cultural generalisations of how women and girls should be treated.” (P18, policing/community safety).
**Viewpoint 1: Changing society, do not blame victims**

Table 6 shows the highest ranked statements by professionals aligned with this viewpoint. It illustrates the views of harassment and violence against women and girls—what women hear about and experience—affect perceptions of safety, and that women taking personal safety measures is not the solution.

The first viewpoint advocates for changes to societal and cultural factors that underpin violence against women and girls and the gendered effects of fear in public spaces. As one professional noted, “It’s not just targeting the park itself; it’s society as a whole.” (P5, design/planning)

This viewpoint is of the strong belief that past experiences of crime or violence (direct or indirect) make women and girls feel unsafe in parks (+4), irrespective of whether they occurred. Yet, this inequality may be heightened by temporal and environmental conditions in parks, notably darkness, seclusion and isolation.

“If women and girls have past experiences of domestic violence... or boys outside, then, or in school... then it’s definitely going to inform... how they feel safe within the community. And then if you move that into an outside, or in school... then it's definitely going to inform... how they feel safe within the community.” (P8, park services)

Further, this viewpoint believed that men need to be more aware of the pernicious impact of everyday public harassment on women’s sense of safety and wellbeing (P9, design/planning).

“Cat-calling, for example, wolf-whistling... it’s perceived... as a bit of fun. But it’s far more serious than that. It could have a real massive effect on their wellbeing and their mental health and their security.” (P6, parks/community safety)

Hearing about other women suffering bad experiences in parks also makes women and girls fearful of going to parks themselves (P9, +4). Moreover, having or hearing about bad experiences was seen to affect women’s sense of security for a long time afterwards.

“It’s that expectation... “I’ve been there before, this has happened before, this is going to happen again” and so women and girls might hide themselves out of that situation.” (P11, parks/community safety)

Given that wider societal attitudes and gender relations were the problem, changing men’s attitudes and behaviour (+4, +3) was perceived as the solution to improve women’s sense of safety in parks and public spaces. “So there’s still a lot of sexism... and that needs tackling.” (P9, park services).

**Viewpoint 2: Gender-sensitive design for maximum use**

Table 6A shows the highest ranked statements by professionals aligned with this viewpoint. It highlights that professionals felt that women and girls would feel safer in parks with a range of facilities and mixed uses (+5), as these would attract a more varied set of park users. In particular, toilet facilities were needed to bring families to parks, and for organised group activities. Relatedly, this viewpoint felt that women and girls would feel safer in parks with tidy grass and flowerbeds (S8, +1) as they attract a more varied and wider range of park users,”. (P8, park services)

Women and girls feel safer in more secluded areas of parks that are hidden from view (S6, -1) as this was seen as a way to make women and girls feel safer by going to parks themselves (P9, +4).

**Table 6. Highest ranked statements (Viewpoint 1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Most disagree (35/-4)</th>
<th>Most agree (55/+4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No parks are safe for women and girls*</td>
<td>The presence of some park users, for example drinkers and drug users, makes women and girls feel less safe*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls feel safe in parks after dark*</td>
<td>Experiences of crime or violence in the past make women and girls feel unsafe in parks*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls feel safer in areas of parks with thick vegetation, for example hedges, trees and bushes*</td>
<td>Everyday harassment of women and girls in public places, for example unwanted comments or attention, makes them feel unsafe in parks*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As long as women and girls take personal safety measures in parks, they can feel safe*</td>
<td>Women and girls feel safer using parks with friends and family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls feel safer in more secluded areas of parks that are hidden from view</td>
<td>Hearing about other women’s bad experiences in parks makes women and girls feel safer of going to parks themselves*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6A. Highest ranked statements (Viewpoint 2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Most disagree (35/-4)</th>
<th>Most agree (55/+4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls feel safer in areas of parks with thick vegetation, for example hedges, trees and bushes*</td>
<td>Women and girls feel safer in parks that provide a range of facilities and mixed uses, for example sports grounds, playgrounds or seating areas*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No parks are safe for women and girls*</td>
<td>The presence of some park users, for example drinkers and drug users, makes women and girls feel less safe*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls feel safer in parks after dark*</td>
<td>Women and girls feel safer in areas of parks where they can see signs of disorder make women and girls feel unsafe in parks, for example rubbish, needles and graffiti*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls feel safer in more secluded areas of parks that are hidden from view</td>
<td>Women and girls would feel safer using parks as part of organised group activities, for example sports, exercise, social activities, or volunteering*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6B. Highest ranked statements by professionals aligned with this viewpoint (all professionals >0.6, all women and girls >0.6)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Most disagree (35/-4)</th>
<th>Most agree (55/+4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very/ fairly safe</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very/ fairly unsafe</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know / prefer not to say</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comparisons between the views of professionals and women and girls**

There was a marked difference between participant groups in how safe parks are perceived to be for women and girls. As shown in Figure 6, while majority of professionals think parks in their area of West Yorkshire are very or fairly safe for women and girls, this compares with 5% of women and 2% of girls.

In your area of West Yorkshire, how safe or unsafe do you think parks are for women and girls?

There are various factors that may explain this difference. For instance, professionals displayed a sense of optimism in line with their professional responsibilities to make parks safe. They may also have a different understanding of the risk of crime in parks based on aarker with crime statistics, whereas girls and women may draw more on fear and perceptions of crime, which tend to over-estimate crime. Moreover, professionals may have wider experience of local parks and are therefore more likely to know ‘safer’ ones. However, this difference may also indicate that professionals have a divergent viewpoint from women and girls. This is an important consideration because if people designing and managing parks have different viewpoints from (potential) users, this might be a barrier to improving park safety.

We therefore explored whether the viewpoints of professionals who design, manage, police and work in parks vary from those of the women and girls we interviewed by comparing relative scores for each statement for each of the viewpoints. This is the statistical measurement relating to where a statement is placed on the most extreme point, for that viewpoint. For any particular statement, we can explore whether a professional’s viewpoint is a relative outlier by considering whether any particular statement has a higher or lower z-score than all the women and girl’s viewpoints. If it does not, the professional’s viewpoint can be considered to sit between the women and girl’s viewpoints. Given that there are eight viewpoints in total, with random placement we can expect that for 25% of the statements, the first professional’s viewpoint will be the outlier at the highest or lowest score, the same for the second. Hence, we see that the first professional’s viewpoint is the outlier for one statement and the second viewpoint for 10 statements. Thus, we cannot say that professionals’ viewpoints are outliers, and indeed they tend to sit within the range of women and girls’ views. Therefore, it does not appear that professional’s viewpoints on the causes of feelings of safety and unsafety for women and girls is markedly different from the women and girls themselves.
Looking at which statements are outliers for the second viewpoint, we see a pattern. Consistent with its favourable view of interventions that create neat, well-used parks, we see it is relatively most in favour of organised group activities (S8), tidy grass and flowerbeds (S12), and the absence of signs of disorder (S20). This viewpoint has the highest z-score for the idea that women and girls feel safer in the presence of other women and girls in the park (S30), and with other users of a similar identity to them (S32). Of all the eight viewpoints, this professional viewpoint has the highest score for the idea that as long as women and girls take safety measures, they can be safe (S36).

Overall, we see little difference between the two professionals’ viewpoints, with a Pearson correlation coefficient (henceforth Pearson’s r) of 0.822, indicating a very high level of correlation, and thereby a very high level of agreement amongst professionals. Pearson’s r is a statistical measure of the similarity between two sets of values, on a scale of 1, indicating perfect overlap between the sets of values, to -1. By contrast, the three women’s viewpoints had Pearson’s r of 0.643, 0.642, and 0.647, indicating that they were all moderately correlated with one another, and thereby a moderate level of agreement amongst women. The three girls’ viewpoints showed lower levels of overall correlation. Viewpoints 1 and 3 were moderately correlated (Pearson’s r of 0.680), viewpoints 2 and 3 were also moderately correlated (Pearson’s r of 0.566), but viewpoints 1 and 2 were furthest apart with a low level of correlation (Pearson’s r of 0.469). Thus, we can say that there was more variation in the views of girls, particularly between viewpoints 1 and 2, than for women, and that professionals show a very high level of similarity in view.
7. INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEELINGS OF SAFETY IN PARKS

Existing literature highlights that women and girls’ differential experiences and fear of violence and crime are produced through intersecting power relations and systems of oppression (e.g. Pain, 2001; Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1998).

Ethnicity, religion and gender

As discussed briefly in chapters 4 and 5, some women and girls from minority ethnic backgrounds felt unsafe in parks due to their distressing and frightening experiences of verbal racist abuse in parks and other public spaces. Their experiences underscore how public racist rhetoric continues to exclude some women and girls from full and equal access to public space, including the use and enjoyment of parks.

‘I was walking through the park near school and this man called me the N word. I don’t know him. It was after the Euros, like how they were racist to the footballers. I was scared to walk to the park because of my race if they did something to me, because of how I look.’ (Group 1)

‘I don’t think racism and any other incidents should be happening... but sadly they do happen. So that [S18] kind of stuck out for me because I have in the past, not in a park but in a public setting, when I have been walking on a road, because I enjoy walking. I have had people driving in their cars shout out and say the word “Pak,” it’s unpleasant. And then whether I am walking in a park or a public footpath, it makes you feel that you don’t want to go out on your own and do that walking, it can stop you.’ (P50)

Notably, some Muslim participants felt that they were at an increased risk of verbal and physical harassment in public spaces due to their religious identity. They felt targeted in particular from wearing the headscarf, underscoring the gendered and embodied nature of religious and racist harassment towards Asian Muslim women and girls (see also comment from P19 in viewpoint 2, chapter 4).

‘A lot of times your religion or what you are wearing [points at headscarf] that makes me feel vulnerable. It makes people think you are not from around here.’ (Group 3)

Furthermore, some women felt uncomfortable using or parks or other public spaces in predominantly white areas due to feeling conspicuous and at greater risk of harassment.

‘So, if I was to go to an area that’s dominant, like most people are not from my identity, I would feel less safe because I feel like maybe most of the people there share the same views about my ethnicity and my religion... because it’s visible that I’m from a different ethnicity. And I feel like if the whole people like there are from the same background, and that’s what I identify with my background, it would be easier for them to harass me or nobody would stand up for me... I’m not saying that my identity is the sole reason why I feel unsafe in parks, but it’s a very big factor of it,... especially not white and you, and, you know, just not being the typical woman in the UK.’ (P66)

For some girls from Black ethnic backgrounds, this sense of spatial exclusion was connected to being perceived as ‘suspect’ by others, including by police. For one girl, this intersected with socio-economic background, with the exclusionary white areas also seen as the ‘posh’ areas.

‘Say you were a group of five people and they was all white and you was the only Black person, you’re most likely gonna get targeted just because of the skin colour. So I’d feel more safe if police wasn’t there... Just because of your skin colour, you get targeted. I’m not doing anything wrong but I’ll get the blame... I went to school to a more white area, and like I went to the park... you’re just staring. It depends where you are really. Cos I went to like [area], that is like really, really posh... I see a police officer, I’d probably go home then stay in the park.’ (Group 9)

One girl felt safe, even when going in the shops, because of her colour. One younger woman said following me in the shops makes me not feeling anything wrong because of my colour. Because of the area that I was in at that time in the All White Park and I was in a traffic light. Thank God. That’s the only light. ‘If I can’t trust being in a shop, then I can’t trust being in a park.’ (Group 2)

Given these experiences, some women explained that they felt safer or more comfortable ‘being in areas with similar people to them’, as they would experience less prejudice. Their words indicate that racist also functions to exclude some women and girls from parks in certain areas, thereby producing forms of spatial exclusion impacting park use.

‘Yes, again because I’m older now. Not so fast on my feet now… Because now young people they like look internet, they not go outside or if they have any problem like in family maybe they not want to talk about them anymore. They do things alone… grow up and then explode for people, older people. So, this also not safe.’ (P52)

Yet while the type or nature of the harassment may be different to that experienced by younger women, older women’s experience of agist harassment in public space may still be produced through differentiations in power, as the intersection of gender and age were often experienced by older women, indicating their fear of verbal abuse from teenage boys. Yet, teenage girls were also perceived to verbally harass older women.

‘...just the children in parks isn’t it, the lads that are abusing older women and calling them all sorts of names, you know what I mean. I’ve seen it - you can’t intervene can you, because then they’re going to start on you. And I can’t do it at my age, I can’t be intervening, I’m 68 years old. Soyeah, I’ve heard lads, and girls even, telling people to F-off and throwing stuff and rubbish all over. Do you know what I mean? It’s not nice. And I don’t feel safe, so I just walk away, I can’t - I intervene with somebody then I’m going to get hurt.’ (P22)

Furthermore, as indicated in the previous quote, some women in older age groups indicated a sense of physical vulnerability or powerlessness to defend themselves or intervene in the harassment of other women. Yet, while this perception of unequal power resonates with girls’ experiences, it was also experienced differently by some older women who explained that their sense of vulnerability was related to reduced mobility. This was felt to limit their capacity to escape threats, further shaping their feelings of insecurity in public space.

‘Besides being a woman what other aspects of my identity affect my sense of safety in parks. Yes, again because I’m older now. Not so fast on my pins, so if somebody did try and attack me, I can’t run away quickly. Or if I try they’ll catch me. It just adds to the extra uncertainty.’ (P52)
Further more, experiences of embodied inequality may exclude older women from parks in other ways. As one woman explained, while the provision of public toilets may be important for ‘people of all generations’, including those with children, they may be particularly essential for older women’s sense of ease, comfort and security in using parks.

’ve do we bring back public toilets’... you know, that’s probably quite an important feature really in a park... and drinking fountains and those sorts of things... Because whether you have got a child or yourself or whatever, it just makes it easier for people. I have been with an older woman who just had to squat down and have a wee... the had to do it. And it just felt like there should have been somewhere that she could have gone to use the toilet rather than that. (P41)

Disability and gender

Disability and gender also emerged as a key intersection for some women’s feelings of unsafety in parks. Aligning somewhat with the viewpoints of older women presented above, women with physical disabilities explained that they felt less able to defend themselves from potential attack due to reduced mobility, as well as excluded from parks given lack of public toilet provision.

‘I’m disabled, I wouldn’t be able to reach [safety], you know running from people, from a bad area and, yes, if they rape, pulling you.’ (P56)

‘My disability, I can’t go to the parks because of the distance of needing a toilet to be local. So, I never go. I need special public toilets that are looked after... There is one, but whether it’s open, it’s always a bit flaky. And the distance from, say, like the canal up to there is [too far].’ (P4)

Another participant who did not identify as having a disability also indicated that more provision in parks for disabled people would help to improve accessibility.

‘With people maybe in a wheelchair... I think more can be done for them with access and making it more accessible for people with disabilities as well.’ (P80)

LGBTQ+ and gender

Some participants felt that LGBTQ+ individuals were more likely to be verbally harassed in parks.

‘I have got friends who are lesbian and gay and I know they do get [comments].’ (P18)

‘If you’re LGBTQ+ or you know, you wear a hijab or have some kind of mark of religion that makes you more likely to be attacked.’ (P1)

‘...age and LGBTQ+, these two I think it is the most important to highlight how to be so vulnerable to go into the park to any other area in the dark, most likely get harassment.’ (P72)

Furthermore, while participants’ gender identity did not emerge as a central theme in interviews and discussions, some girls did raise their concerns that women-only areas in parks could exclude trans or non-binary people (Group 4). In relation to this issue, some professionals noted the difficulties of defining and enforcing women-only spaces, particularly around gender identity. Their comments underscore the need for further research on park safety in relation to gender identity.

Powerful intersectionality

In contrast to the experiences presented above, other women did not feel that intersections of their identity, beyond being a woman, negatively affected their safety in parks. Some women also recognised that they belonged to certain powerful identity categories, notably being white, without a disability, and heterosexual, which protected them from certain forms of prejudice or harassment. Thus, in their awareness of power inequalities among women, as well as recognition of the greater insecurity experienced by other women from minority or less powerful groups, their comments further emphasise the need for attention to intersectionality to ensure all women and girls feel safe in parks.

‘So, I think that my identity other than being a woman, I am white British, I am heterosexual, and I have not got a disability, so I am a similar identity of the people who have got power in our society. So, I know other friends who are gay or Black they experience more prejudice than me, the only prejudice I would ever experience is because I am a woman.’ (P1)

‘I don’t think there is anything other than me being a woman that probably would affect me. I get that for other people it probably does though.’ (P19)

‘The reason I don’t feel safe going into parks really at night is, because I am female and I am white. I have the benefit of not feeling that my race is an additional kind of risk factor for me. I live in a predominately white society. I am straight, nobody would know if I had a religion by looking at me. So there aren’t other, you know, I am kind of a white British woman, there is nothing else, there is no other factors for me, I don’t have a disability so there aren’t things that would be an additional thing.’ (P21)

Intersectionality and safety in parks

This section has explored how women and girls’ differential experiences and perceptions of safety in parks are linked to their intersectional identities. While some women felt that they didn’t have any further ‘risk factors’ beyond being a woman, other women and girls felt they were at greater risk of prejudice, harassment, and violence in parks according to intersecting power structures of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexuality. In addition to feelings of unsafety, these heightened risks, particularly of racism, may curtail women’s and girls’ full and equal right to use and enjoy (certain) parks and public spaces perceived as unsafe for them. Furthermore, the lack of adequate provision of public facilities in parks, particularly toilets, may prevent older women and those with physical disabilities from recreating in parks.

However, questions of intersectionality and park safety require further in-depth exploration and research, as one participant reflected:

‘I think there’s more conversation around actually—more detail in what it is about being LGBTQ or what is it about being of a certain ethnicity or from a certain religion that makes you feel unsafe. I feel like that’s a conversation that we need to have on a larger scale.’ (P18)
Feeling that a park is safe to use is an important dimension of accessibility, without which the positive effects of parks on health and wellbeing may not be realised (Public Health England, 2020; Van Hecke et al., 2018). Yet, national statistics show high levels of perceived unsafety in parks among women, particularly after dark (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

This research shows that feeling unsafe in West Yorkshire’s parks is a barrier that needs to be addressed and prioritised to ensure that women and girls feel able to use and enjoy local parks. The majority of the 30 women and girls we interviewed felt unsafe alone in parks after dark (90% and 86% respectively). Moreover, most of the women and girls we interviewed felt unsafe in parks alone in part due to harassment and violence against women and girls as well as the specific features of park design such as thin vegetation, insufficient lighting, park layout and scale. By demonstrating that feelings of safety in parks are part of broader societal phenomena that go beyond parks, this research recommends that improvements to the design and management of parks must be part of an holistic, multi-agency approach that addresses the causes of women and girls’ unsafety, and the specific problems of violence against and being afraid of women and girls in certain parks.

The research finds that women and girls’ perspectives on feeling safe in parks cluster distinctively shared viewpoints, underpinned by broader themes such as intersectionality, responsibility, and power. Across viewpoints, women, and particularly teenage girls, have diverse views on what makes parks feel safe or unsafe, and, what might make parks feel safer.

For women, the key axes of difference include whether the physical design interventions in parks can make women feel safer, whether any parks are safe for women or whether unsafety is linked specific parks, whether danger comes from the inequalities women and girls are subjected to, or from particular park users such as men, whether something can be done to improve women’s and girls’ sense of safety in parks after dark, and whether women and girls are safe in familiar parks with familiar people. For girls, key axes of difference include these same issues, but with more divergence as to whether they perceive personal safety precautions like use of mobiles are effective in the face of motivated offenders. There is also a difference in opinion over whether other park users, such as men or teenagers, increase or decrease feelings of safety.

The shared viewpoints we outline in this report centre on whether safety is a shared responsibility between national and local government, professionals and park users and women and girls, and the presence of visible authority figures. Key axes of difference amongst women and girls feel safer, as do physical design interventions such as lighting, CCTV cameras, and the presence of women, are considered safer. Organised activities extend women and girls’ use of parks and contribute to safety. The edges of parks, particularly where there are no fences or barriers, feel safer because they are overlooked and in a less visible or obvious location. Opportunities to seek help in parks are important to women and girls, particularly the presence of visible staff and security patrols and policing for women, whereas help points were seen as unfriendly by some girls. In general, women and girls are less keen on the idea of women-only areas in parks, although some girls highlighted the importance of a safe place of refuge and mobile safety apps. While such apps can be useful, if they are seen to compromise freedom for safety.

In relation to responsibility for change, there is relative agreement among women and girls that men should take more responsibility for changing their behaviour in parks to make women and girls feel safer. In addition, there is an agreement, for girls especially, that relevant authorities are not doing enough about harassment in parks. Furthermore, there is disagreement with the idea that as long as women and girls take personal safety measures in parks, they can be safe.

We also explored professionals’ views on women and girls’ safety in parks to find out whether those working in parks have different understandings to the women and girls we interviewed. We found that professionals think parks in their areas of West Yorkshire are very or fairly safe for women and girls, contrasting with the views of the majority of women and girls we interviewed who were exposed to and very much indicated that they did not understand what makes parks feel safe or unsafe for women and girls, but there is little evidence to support this from our other data. Instead, this difference could explain by other factors, for example, women and girls could be drawn to their fears and feelings, which may overestimate crime risk, whereas professionals could be drawing on recorded crime statistics. Furthermore, we found that professionals are not wholly homogeneous in their views of what makes parks feel safe or unsafe and their views tend to sit within the spread of views of women and girls, rather than being outliers.

There is considerable consensus amongst professionals working in parks on what can be done to improve women and girls’ feelings of safety, as well as a strong sense that parks can and should be safer and that authorities could do more to improve safety. For example, they recommend: increasing the number of patrol officers, extending women and girls’ use of parks and contributing to busyness. The edges of parks, particularly where there are no fences or barriers, feel safer because they are overlooked and in a less visible or obvious location. Opportunities to seek help in parks are important to women and girls, particularly the presence of visible staff and security patrols and policing for women, whereas help points were seen as unfriendly by some girls. In general, women and girls are less keen on the idea of women-only areas in parks, although some girls highlighted the importance of a safe place of refuge and mobile safety apps. While such apps can be useful, if they are seen to compromise freedom for safety.

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We recommend that:

- Parks managers, gardeners, and landscape architects improve visible surveillance by using examples of lowering hedges and cutting back dense, above eye-level, or overhanging vegetation by paths, and considering visibility and lightline in park tree planting programmes.

- Parks managers and landscape architects maximise passive surveillance and perceptions of ease of escape around the edges of parks, for example by reducing physical barriers such as fences and walls, and considering pathways around the perimeter of parks.

- Parks managers ensure easy movement within the site, for example well-populated, wide routes through parks and clear signs and directions. Paths should lead from or be busy to another with clear sights of lines.

5. Changes to parks should be made to address women and girls’ perceptions of safety after dark.

6. Women and girls avoid parks after dark because they do not feel safe. In certain seasons with shorter days, parks without lighting become inaccessible to many women in early mornings and from late afternoons.

- Women and girls avoid parks after dark because they do not feel safe. In certain seasons with shorter days, parks without lighting become inaccessible to many women in early mornings and from late afternoons. Women and girls avoid parks after dark as it leaves the structural and cultural factors underpinning violence and harassment against women untreated. In some instances, women identified well-used active travel routes through dark parks as safe because there are lots of people using them, including women. This illustrates that lighting and other physical design interventions should not be considered in isolation; rather, a holistic, multiagency response (e.g. via the ‘Street Safe’ app) is required to challenge misperceptions and change societal assumptions towards women, and to empower women to feel safe. Women and girls also need to feel that lighting would be sufficient for them to use or feel safer in parks after dark. This highlights the structural and cultural factors underpinning violence and harassment against women untreated.

- In some instances, women identified well-used active travel routes through dark parks as safe because there are lots of people using them, including women. This illustrates that lighting and other physical design interventions should not be considered in isolation; rather, a holistic, multiagency response (e.g. via the ‘Street Safe’ app) is required to challenge misperceptions and change societal assumptions towards women, and to empower women to feel safe. Women and girls also need to feel that lighting would be sufficient for them to use or feel safer in parks after dark. This highlights the structural and cultural factors underpinning violence and harassment against women untreated.

Parks managers and landscape architects improve visible surveillance through well-designed lighting and other design interventions, including examples of lowering hedges and cutting back dense, above eye-level, or overhanging vegetation by paths, and considering visibility and lightline in park tree planting programmes.

Parks managers and landscape architects maximise passive surveillance and perceptions of ease of escape around the edges of parks, for example by reducing physical barriers such as fences and walls, and considering pathways around the perimeter of parks.

Parks managers ensure easy movement within the site, for example well-populated, wide routes through parks and clear signs and directions. Paths should lead from or be busy to another with clear sights of lines.

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We recommend that:

- Local authorities provide a single point of contact on safety concerns, and how to report harassment or violence against women and girls in parks through multiple channels of communication, including online parkpipe.

- Local authorities and police collect and share data on safety concerns and incidents of violence against women and girls in and around parks to feed into holistic, multiagency responses (e.g. via the ‘Street Safe’ app).

- Local authorities, police, and community safety partnerships include local authority, police, and parks managers in women’s and girls’ strategies, action plans, and public campaigns.

- Parks managers work with police to develop strategies to empower park users to be bystanders willing to intervene in the event of witnessing harassment or problematic behaviour in parks.

- Local authorities establish Aids for Age-friendly type provision in parks, for example with staff who work in parks, cafés, halls, and libraries.

- Local authorities and parks managers engage local authority, police, and parks managers in women’s and girls’ strategies, action plans, and public campaigns.

- Parks managers work with parks managers and local authorities to develop strategies to empower park users to be bystanders willing to intervene in the event of witnessing harassment or problematic behaviour in parks.

- Local authorities establish Aids for Age-friendly type provision in parks, for example with staff who work in parks, cafés, halls, and libraries.
9. REFERENCES


Park for London 2022. Young, Green, and Well A research study on young Londoners’ green space use and mental wellbeing. Hamish Drake, Young Persons’ Health Project Officer; Dr. Meredith Whitten, Researcher in Residence; Tony Leach, Chief Executive.


I feel safe in parks after dark
Nothing could be done to parks to make me feel safe enough to use them after dark.
Even during daylight hours there are times when I feel unsafe in parks, for example mornings or lunchtimes.
Men and boys should take responsibility for changing their behaviour to make women and girls feel safer in parks, for example not walking or jogging too close.
I find the presence of groups of men and boys in parks intimidating.
The presence of lone men in parks makes me feel unsafe.
I feel safer using parks with friends and family.

I find the presence of some park users, for example drinkers, drug users, makes me feel less safe.

I feel safer in areas of parks with thick vegetation, for example hedges, trees and bushes.
I feel safer in areas of parks where I can see a good distance around me.
I feel safer in more secluded areas of parks that are hidden from view.
Having lots of entrances and exits to a park makes me feel safer.
I feel safer nearer the middle compared to the edge of parks.
Fences or walls around the edges of parks make me feel safer.

Women and girls would feel safer in parks if there was a panic button/emergency help point.
Women and girls would feel safer in parks if there was regular, high visibility patrols by park security staff.
Relevant authorities, for example the police or council, don’t do enough about harassment of women and girls in parks.

You can’t rely on other nearby park users to intervene when a women is being harassed or threatened in a park.
Parks would feel safer if there were more park staff present, for example gardeners and maintenance staff.

I feel safer using parks if I can see other park users of similar identity to me.
I would feel safer in parks if there was a panic button/emergency help point.
Clearer signage and maps in parks would help me feel safer.

It is safer to challenge unwanted comments or attention from men and boys in parks than to ignore them.

Women and girls feel safer in areas of parks where they are on a mobile phone app.

Clearer signage and maps in parks would help me feel safer.

I feel safer in areas of parks with thick vegetation, for example hedges, trees and bushes.
I feel safer in areas of parks where I can see a good distance around me.
I feel safer in more secluded areas of parks that are hidden from view.

Women and girls feel safer near to amenities in parks, for example cafes, kiosks and ice cream vans.

I feel safer using parks if there was more park staff present, for example gardeners and maintenance staff.
Police officers in parks don’t make me feel safe.

I feel safer in areas of parks with thick vegetation, for example hedges, trees and bushes.
I feel safer in areas of parks where I can see a good distance around me.
I feel safer in more secluded areas of parks that are hidden from view.
Having lots of entrances and exits to a park makes me feel safer.

I feel safer in parks nearer to amenities in parks, for example cafes, kiosks and ice cream vans.

As long as women and girls take personal safety measures in parks, they can be safe.
I would feel safer in a park if a trusted person could see where I am on a mobile phone app.

Women and girls would feel safer in parks if there was regular, high visibility patrols by park security staff.

Clearer signage and maps in parks would help me feel safer.

It is safer to challenge unwanted comments or attention from men and boys in parks than to ignore them.

Women and girls feel safer near to amenities in parks, for example cafes, kiosks and ice cream vans.

Clearer signage and maps in parks would help me feel safer.

I feel safer using parks if there was more park staff present, for example gardeners and maintenance staff.

Nothing could be done to parks to make women and girls feel safe.

Women and girls would feel safer in parks if there were regular, high visibility patrols by park security staff.

Relevant authorities, for example the police or council, don’t do enough about harassment of women and girls in parks.

Walking boldly and confidently would make women and girls feel safer in parks.

Women and girls would feel safer in parks if there were more park staff present, for example gardeners and maintenance staff.
Police officers in parks don’t make women and girls feel safe.
Women and girls would feel safer in parks if there was regular, high visibility patrols by park security staff.
Relevant authorities, for example the police or council, don’t do enough about harassment of women and girls in parks.

I feel safer in parks nearer to amenities in parks, for example cafes, kiosks and ice cream vans.

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Women and girls feel safer in parks nearer to amenities in parks, for example cafes, kiosks and ice cream vans.

As long as women and girls take personal safety measures in parks, they can be safe.
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Clearer signage and maps in parks would help me feel safer.

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Clearer signage and maps in parks would help me feel safer.

It is safer to challenge unwanted comments or attention from men and boys in parks than to ignore them.

Women and girls feel safer near to amenities in parks, for example cafes, kiosks and ice cream vans.
APPENDIX B

Interview questions with women
After women rank ordered the statements, we asked:
1. Reason(s) for their highest ranked statements (i.e. +5, -5, +4 and -4)
2. To identify other statements (rank ordered anywhere on the grid) that are important to understand their subjective views on feeling safe in parks.
3. To identify any factors or issues related to feeling safe in parks that they felt may be missing from the set of statements.
4. To identify ways that their local parks could be improved to make them feel safer and more welcoming to use, including what the council or police could do.

Focus group questions / activities with girls
After girls rank ordered the statements, we discussed:
1. Reason(s) for their highest ranked statements (i.e. +5, -5) and similarities and differences among girls.
2. What they like and dislike about play spaces in parks, using photos of standard and gender-sensitive designs.
3. What changes could make parks feel safer and more welcoming for girls to use.

Interview questions with professionals
After professionals rank ordered the statements, we asked:
1. Reason(s) for their highest ranked statements (i.e. +5, -5, +4 and -4)
2. To identify other statements (rank ordered anywhere on the grid) that are important to understand professional views on women and girls’ feeling safe in parks.
3. To discuss whether specific consideration is made for women and girls in decisions about the design, management or policing of parks.
4. To identify ways to improve women and girls’ safety and feelings of safety in parks.
5. To discuss issues, challenges or barriers to improving safety of parks for women and girls.

APPENDIX C

Summary of women’s sample by viewpoint

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure/Prefer not to say</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary of professionals’ sample by viewpoint

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Viewpoint 1</th>
<th>Viewpoint 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Viewpoint 1</th>
<th>Viewpoint 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Viewpoint 1</th>
<th>Viewpoint 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of work</th>
<th>Viewpoint 1</th>
<th>Viewpoint 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community safety/Policing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design/planning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent to which park is part of job responsibilities within job description</th>
<th>Viewpoint 1</th>
<th>Viewpoint 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of main responsibilities</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A minor responsibility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not part of responsibilities, but sometimes work on it</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent in this role, or similar roles</th>
<th>Viewpoint 1</th>
<th>Viewpoint 2</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+ years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistics given in this table are for 48 participants as two Q sorts were excluded from the analysis.
## APPENDIX D

These tables list all the statements used in the study, from most consensus to least consensus, as ranked by participants.

The last column in the table shows whether a statement is a ‘consensus’ statement (meaning it was given a highly similar rating by all participants, at a significance of p<0.001, or a ‘distinguishing’ statement (meaning that the different clusters of participants gave a different rating, at a significance of p<0.05). While consensus statements indicate similarity across viewpoints, distinguishing statements indicate divergence in viewpoints and determine whether a participant aligns with a particular viewpoint.

For each viewpoint and each statement, we list the composite Q score, which is where, if this Viewpoint represented a single person, they would have ranked this particular statement on the grid. We also list the z-score, which is the statistical value underpinning the factor analysis.

To depict the underlying scores for each statement, we have coloured the factor analysis using shading decreasing closer to 0, indicating relative agreement, with shading decreasing closer to 0. Note that with this methodology, these are not absolute measures of agreement, but relative orders of agreement and disagreement. A score of 0 does not represent the midpoint of neutrality between agreement and disagreement. Typically, respondents noted that the area of neither agreeing nor disagreeing in absolute terms lay within statements scores at -1 and 2.

### Statements from most consensus to least consensus by women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Viewpoint 1</th>
<th>Viewpoint 2</th>
<th>Viewpoint 3</th>
<th>Most to least consensus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>The presence of other women and girls in parks makes me feel safer</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>0.987</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>I would feel safer in a park if a trusted person could see where I am on a mobile phone app</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0.249</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>I feel safer in parks with tidy grass and flowerbeds</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-0.746</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>I think to challenge unwanted comments or attention from men and boys in parks than to ignore them</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-1.574</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>I feel safer using parks if I can see other park users of similar identity to me</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>I would feel safer using parks as part of organised group activities, for example sports, exercise, social activities, or volunteering</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>You can’t rely on other nearby park users to intervene when a women is being harassed or threatened in a park</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.235</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>I feel less safe when the park is busy with people</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-1.228</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>I feel safer nearer the middle compared to the edge of parks</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-0.851</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>I feel safer in more secluded areas of parks that are hidden from view</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-1.249</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>I feel safer in areas of parks with thick vegetation, for example hedges, trees and bushes</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-1.142</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>I feel safer in parks when they are with their families</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>1.146</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Having lots of entrances and exits to a park makes me feel safer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Inspirational statues and murals of women and girls in parks would make me feel safer</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-0.534</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>People in parks don’t make me feel safe</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.547</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Police officers in parks don’t make me feel safe</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>1.041</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>No parks are safe for women and girls</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>高</td>
<td>0.270</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### For each viewpoint and each statement, we list the composite Q score, which is where, if this Viewpoint represented a single person, they would have ranked this particular statement on the grid. We also list the z-score, which is the statistical value underpinning the factor analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Viewpoint 1</th>
<th>Viewpoint 2</th>
<th>Viewpoint 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe in parks after dark</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-1.77</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safer nearer the middle compared to the edge of parks</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-0.72</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safer in more secluded areas that are hidden from view</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-1.33</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel safer in parks if there was a police box or button</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even during daylight hours there are times when I feel unsafe in parks</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel safer in a park if I could see where I am on a mobile phone</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of crime or violence in the past makes women and girls feel unsafe in parks</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signs of disorder make me feel unsafe in parks, for example rubbish, needles and graffiti</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safer in areas of parks where I can see a good distance around me</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safer in areas of parks with thick vegetation, for example hedges, trees and bushes</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-2.06</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safer in parks with tidy grass and flowerbeds</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks do not look or feel like they are designed with women and girls' safety in mind</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking boldly and confidently would make me feel safer in parks</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of other women and girls in parks makes me feel safer</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not feel intimidated by men's presence in parks when they are with their families</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of some park users, for example drinkers, drug users, makes me feel less safe</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel safer using women-only areas of parks</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social attitudes towards women and girls, for example sexism and prejudice, need to change for me to feel safer in parks</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the presence of groups of men and boys in parks intimidating</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is safer to challenge unwanted comments or attention from men and boys in parks than to ignore them</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-0.95</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing lots of visible security measures in a park makes it seem like an unsafe place</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-0.61</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing could be done to parks to make me feel safe enough to use them after dark</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men and boys should take responsibility for changing their behaviour to make women and girls feel safer in parks, for example not walking or jogging too close</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safer using parks if I can see other park users of similar identity to me</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs in parks make me feel safe</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant authorities, for example the police or council, don't do enough about harassment of women and girls in parks</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fences or walls around the edges of parks make me feel safer</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-1.82</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can't rely on other nearby park users to intervene when a women is being harassed or threatened in a park</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel safer using parks as part of organised group activities, for example sports, exercise, social activities, or volunteering</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearer signage and maps in parks would help me feel safer</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No parks are safe for women and girls</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safer nearer to amenities in parks, for example cafes, kiosks and ice cream vans</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational statues and murals of women and girls in parks would make me feel safer</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing about other women suffering bad experiences in parks makes me fearful of going to parks myself</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCTV cameras do not make me feel safe</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having lots of entrances and exits to a park makes me feel safer</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel safer in parks if there were regular, high visibility patrols by park security staff</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Besides being a woman/girl, there are aspects of my identity which affect my sense of safety in parks, for example my religion, ethnicity, age, LGBTIQ+, nationality or disability status</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel less safe when the park is busy with people</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police officers in parks don't make me feel safe</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safer using parks with friends and family</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe in parks that provide a range of facilities and mixed uses, for example sports grounds, playgrounds or sitting areas</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having lighting in parks would make them feel safer for me to use after dark</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of lone men in parks makes me feel unsafe</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safer in parks that I am familiar with</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks would feel safer if there were more park staff present, for example gardeners and maintenance staff</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday harassment of women and girls in public places, for example unwanted comments and attention, makes me feel unsafe in parks</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As long as women and girls take personal safety measures in parks, they can be safe</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-2.24</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the presence of groups of teenagers in parks intimidating</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Women and girls feel safer in parks that they are familiar with

24 Social attitudes towards women and girls, for example sexism and prejudice, need to change for them to feel safer in parks

+3  1.991  +2  1.16  C

30 The presence of other women and girls in parks makes women and girls feel safer

+3  0.897  +3  1.28  C
Endnotes

1 Notably, creating safer spaces is a key pillar of the Policing Violence Against Women and Girls National Delivery Framework (National Police Chiefs Council, 2021) which requires police forces to create problem profiles of the most dangerous public, private and online spaces, including drawing on information from women about where they feel unsafe and at risk. This work is being taken forward as part of a follow-on collaborative project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, from 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023 (ES/X002861/1). For more information about this project, see: https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/law/news/article/1621/dr-anna-barker-leads-new-project-to-improve-understanding-of-women-and-girls-safety-in-parks

2 This research would not have been possible without the assistance of women’s organisations and youth services across the five districts of West Yorkshire who played a vital role in organising and hosting interviews and focus groups with women and girls. Our thanks go to Leeds Women’s Aid and Women’s Lives Leeds (Leeds); Ched (Bradford District Community Empowerment Network Ltd), City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council Youth Services and Joint Activities & Motor Education Services (Bradford), WomenCentre (Calderdale and Kirklees), and Well Women Centre (Wakefield). We would like to give particular thanks to those who helped to facilitate focus groups and engage girls and young women in the research activities in an inclusive and supportive way.


4 The Home Office SafeStreets app is a service for people to report where they feel unsafe. Reports include identifying reasons for feeling unsafe, which can be behavioural (e.g. catcalling, harassment), environmental (e.g. vandalism): it is being used in West Yorkshire to produce monthly analytical reports which are fed back to neighbourhood policing teams.


6 Searches included Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, University of Leeds Library, Google, The Conversation and GoVuK with the terms: women, girls, children, park(s), public space, green space(s), fear, unsafe.

7 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons (CC-BY 4.0) licence.

8 https://makespaceforgirls.co.uk/case-studies/.

9 The Home Office SafeStreets app is a service for people to report where they feel unsafe. Reports include identifying reasons for feeling unsafe, which can be behavioural (e.g. catcalling, harassment), environmental (e.g. vandalism).

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