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THIS IS SURVIVAL

Why Women Change Everything to Stay Safe.

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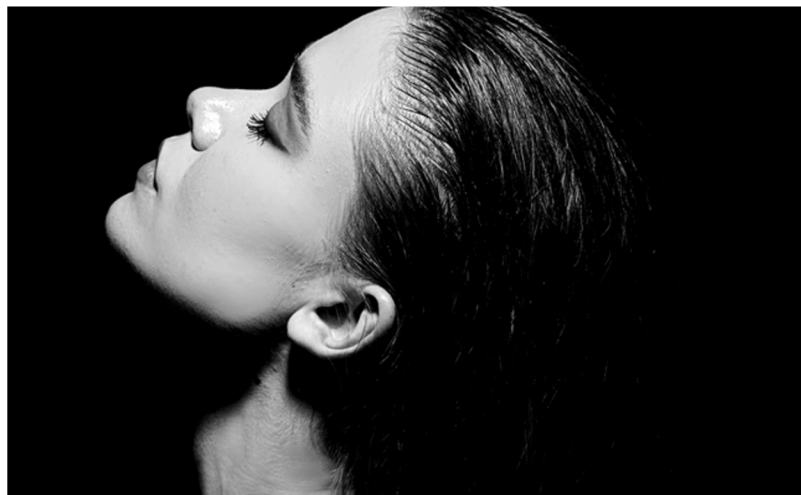


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PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report was created to expose the hidden harm of everyday violence and harassment faced by women across the UK.

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

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

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

Report compiled: August 2025
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SUMMARY



EVERY DAY, WOMEN MAKE SILENT CALCULATIONS ABOUT THEIR SAFETY: WHICH ROUTE TO TAKE, HOW FAST TO WALK, WHETHER TO GO OUT AT ALL.

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

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

It focuses on the UK in 2025 — a country with new laws, clearer statistics, and yet a persistent reality: women are still forced to adjust, shrink, and carry the weight of fear.

WHY WOMEN ARE THE ONES WHO ADAPT

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

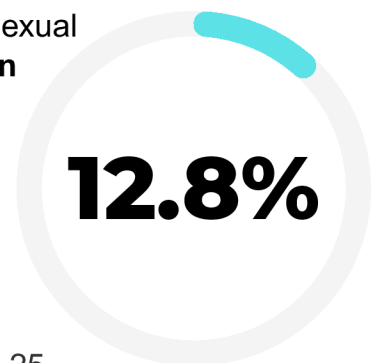
- Crossing the road to avoid a group of men
- Carrying keys between fingers
- Wearing shoes you can run in
- Texting friends when you get home
- Cancelling plans to avoid travelling alone
- Not going out at all

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

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

2025: What the Data Shows

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



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

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

LIVING IN FEAR

Everyday public spaces that men take for granted are often gauntlets of fear for women. Survey after survey confirms that women routinely feel unsafe in public, especially after dark. An Office for National Statistics poll found that half of women feel “unsafe” walking alone on a quiet street near their home at night, compared to just 14% of men.

In more isolated settings like parks or open spaces, the gender gap is even starker – 4 in 5 women (81%) feel unsafe walking alone in a park after dark, versus 2 in 5 men. This pervasive sense of danger is directly linked to women’s actual experiences of harassment. In that same study, 3 in 5 young women (aged 16–34) reported experiencing at least one form of harassment in just the past 12 months. Nearly half (44%) of women 16–34 had faced catcalls, whistles or unwelcome sexual comments, and almost 1 in 3 (29%) felt they had been followed by someone. These are incredibly high numbers for incidents that are distressing but typically go unreported.

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

Consequently, “younger women are constantly modifying their behaviour in an attempt to avoid being objectified or attacked”. For example, women often plan their routes and routines with safety in mind: avoiding empty or dark areas, sticking to well-lit roads, and traveling in groups or using taxis instead of walking alone. It’s practically a cliché that every woman knows the drill when walking home at night – keys clenched between fingers as improvised weapons, phone at the ready, staying hyper-alert to surroundings.

Advice frequently given to women includes things like don’t wear headphones so you can hear if someone is behind you, don’t get too intoxicated in public, pretend to talk on the phone, and even “if you’re attacked, scream ‘fire’ instead of ‘rape’ to get bystanders’ attention.

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





COMMON SAFETY ADAPTATIONS WOMEN EMPLOY

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

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

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

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

- For women living alone, there is often heightened caution about home entry and security – e.g. checking over their shoulder when unlocking the door, adding extra locks or door jammers, and not advertising that they live alone. The fear of a break-in and sexual assault is a top concern for single women, leading to measures like keeping lights on, double-checking windows, and even sleeping with a weapon or alarm nearby.

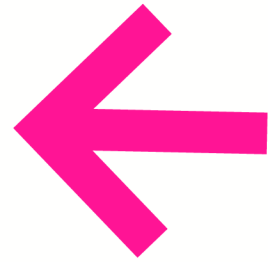
These adaptations, while understandable, come at a steep cost. They limit women's freedom and send the message that women only belong if vigilant.

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

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



Psychological and Societal Impacts

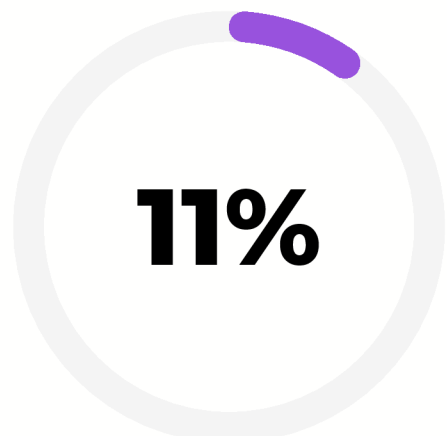


The psychological toll of persistent harassment and the threat of violence cannot be overstated. Being constantly on guard erodes women's mental health over time. Victims of catcalling and public harassment report feeling anger, anxiety, and vulnerability in the immediate aftermath – over 75% feel anger or anxiety after being catcalled, and nearly half feel incredibly vulnerable. Over the long term, this can manifest as chronic stress, low self-esteem, depression, and hypervigilance (always feeling “on edge”).

Women internalize that their safety is never guaranteed, which can lead to changes in personality and habits, some become more withdrawn and distrustful, others restrict their social life. It's telling that many women and girls start to “shrink” their world in response to fear – not going out at night, avoiding certain public places, cancelling plans if they can't find a way to get home safe, etc. For example, a woman might stop going to the gym if it means walking through a dark car park afterward, or forego evening work events, or decline dates that require traveling alone.

One UK survey found 11% of girls said fear of sexual harassment negatively affected their education – some skipped classes or avoided extracurricular activities due to safety worries. In essence, harassment and fear curtail women's opportunities and quality of life.

Socially and economically, there are ripple effects. If women feel unsafe in city centres, high streets, or nightlife areas, they are less likely to participate in those economies – meaning fewer women shopping in the evenings, fewer women in restaurants, pubs, clubs, or cultural events after dark. This “gender safety gap” can subtly alter the character of public life, reinforcing male dominance of certain spaces. In the wake of the 2021 Sarah Everard murder (a case that horrified the nation, where a young woman was abducted and killed by an off-duty policeman), many women spoke of temporarily staying home after dark out of fear.



Some businesses noted declines in female customers at night, and a surge in women paying for taxis or ride-shares for even short distances. Women's freedom to simply exist in public without fear is a cornerstone of equality – when that freedom is compromised, it undermines progress toward gender parity in every arena, from the workplace to politics, because it sends the message that women are not full participants in public society.

Moreover, the fear doesn't stop at the doorstep. As noted, women who live alone have unique anxieties about home invasion or stalking. High-profile cases of women attacked in what should be the safety of their homes (e.g. by ex-partners or burglars) amplify these worries. It's common for single women to share tips like not putting full names on doorbells, or installing extra peepholes and cameras.

The mental health impact of feeling unsafe even at home – a place that should be a refuge – can include severe stress, hyper-alertness to noises at night, and a feeling of helplessness.

All of this shows how violence against women casts a long shadow, affecting not just those directly victimised but all women as a class, altering how they navigate the world.



LAW PROTECTION & JUSTICE

Key Highlights:

- A new law against public sexual harassment was passed in 2023.
- It will make behaviours like catcalling, following, or blocking someone's path a criminal offence.
- The law includes penalties of up to 2 years in prison.
- Domestic abuse laws have expanded in recent years, including protection orders and stalking measures.
- New legal tools exist — but they are often not used consistently.

Ongoing Failures:

- The 2023 harassment law is still not in force (as of 2025) due to lack of police and court guidance.
- Most street harassment isn't reported — 96% of women stay silent, knowing it won't be taken seriously.
- Verbal abuse in public (like shouting sexual remarks) is still not criminal unless it includes a threat.
- In 2024, over 71,000 rapes were reported, but only 2.7% led to charges.
- Many women still struggle to get protection orders upheld or enforced consistently across police forces.

What's Changing:

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

Campaigners are pushing for:

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

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

THE BIGGER PICTURE: **WHY THIS MATTERS**

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

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

This fear also creates an economic burden: women spend more on precautions, avoid night shifts, and withdraw from public life.

Despite new laws, real change still depends on:

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

One woman shared how she changes her life to feel safe:

"If I finish work after 6pm, I drive instead of taking the train. I carry flats in my bag so I can run. I've stopped going to my favourite gym because the car park is too dark."
This shouldn't be normal in 2025 — but it is.

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

Areas for Improvement



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

1. Police Resourcing and Response

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

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

- The 2023 public harassment law must be brought into force with full guidance for police and courts.
 - Verbal abuse and low-level intimidation should no longer be dismissed as “minor.”
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4. Prevention and Culture Change

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

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

- Police, councils, and landlords must face consequences when they fail to protect victims.
 - Offenders — especially repeat and high-risk cases — must be monitored, and foreign nationals convicted of serious violence should face deportation where lawful.
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CONTACT US

Kulturalism® is a not-for-profit organisation.

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

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