

# Transport safety for young women: Research report

Produced by SMPL Research for Connected Places Catapult, December 2022  
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## About SMPL Research

We are a full-service research agency based in Essex. We are experts in designing research around our customers' needs, using a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methods. We believe that research doesn't have to be complicated, and pride ourselves on our ability to deliver simple yet powerful insights that lead to action.

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all the young women who took part in this research, and everyone who shared this opportunity with young people they know.

Thank you for sharing your views and experiences with us - your contributions have been invaluable.

[All names used within this report have been changed to protect participants' identity.]

**Warning: You might find the content in this report triggering and upsetting, as it includes accounts of sexual harassment and violence.**

## Overview

Connected Places Catapult commissioned SMPL Research to carry out research into the experiences of young women in relation to transport safety. This took place between November-December 2022.

The research findings are intended to help inform interventions to improve safety for young women while travelling, and informed a wider piece of work for the Department for Transport, which looked at how to grow the market for interventions to support women and girls' personal safety on the transport system.

The key research objectives were to explore:

- Experiences and perspectives of personal safety for young women while travelling and using transport.
- Similarities/differences of travel experiences based on characteristics of traveller and types of travel.
- What makes young women feel safe/unsafe when travelling and how does that impact on behaviour or actions.

The findings were originally shared with Connected Places Catapult as an oral presentation with supporting slides. Content has been transferred to this document to create an accessible report, and as such, it relies heavily on quotes from the research participants to convey and bring to life the key findings.

## Methodology

### Sampling and recruitment

A screener survey was developed to recruit participants. The survey was shared with youth organisations across the country, identified through social media. This included youth groups, sports clubs and voluntary sector organisations working with children and young people, who shared the survey with their members. The screener survey used is included as [Appendix 1](#).

Thirty-five responses were received to the screener survey. From this, a diverse sample of eleven young women (aged 12-17) were selected to participate in virtual interviews. The sample were recruited using the sampling frame detailed in [Appendix 2](#). Consideration was given to age, ethnicity, geography and transport modes used (including public and private).

Six of the eleven participants interviewed were then invited to take part in the next phase of research, which involved completing tasks and activities via Field Notes, a mobile ethnography app.

The sample of six were selected based on gauging interest in participation in this phase within interviews, and again seeking to recruit a diverse sample. Consideration was also given to suitability of the participants for the research method, with older participants and those making more frequent journeys being more suitable due to the activities involved.

## Research activities

Virtual interviews were semi-structured and lasted around 30 minutes, covering:

- Types of journeys undertaken
- Feelings of safety when travelling and what things make them feel safe/unsafe
- Tactics for managing safety
- Incidences experienced and response/impact of this
- Bystanding behaviours
- Reporting behaviours

The interview guide is included as [Appendix 3](#). It should be noted that a flexible approach to interviews was taken, with researchers using their expertise to gauge the appropriateness of questions with each individual and probing on different areas depending on responses provided.

## Field Notes: a mobile ethnography app

Field Notes is a mobile app which enables participants to capture and share a range of mixed media (e.g. photos, videos, voice notes, text), in response to questions and activities. Field Notes was selected as a suitable tool for this research as it provides an effective way of allowing participants to capture journey experiences in 'real time' wherever they are (e.g. taking photos on the walk to school).

The mobile ethnography was carried out over a two-week period directly after the interview phase and included a combination of capturing current or recent journeys carried out within the fieldwork period, as well as reflecting on previous historical experiences. Activities for participants set on Field Notes included:

- Explaining a recent journey undertaken as a written response
- Providing a voice note describing a time where they previously felt unsafe when making a journey
- Capturing photos and videos of their journeys during the fieldwork period
- Completing a short survey around factors impacting on safety
- Sharing their own ideas for campaigns to improve safety for young women

The fieldnote activities is included in [Appendix 4](#).

## Research activity timeline

- Project initiation: 18th November 2022
- Participant recruitment began: week commencing 21st November 2022
- Virtual interviews conducted: 28th November - 8th December 2022
- Field Notes mobile ethnography conducted: 5th - 19th December 2022
- Report and presentation delivered: 22nd December 2022

## Approach to analysis

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the interviews and responses received via Field Notes, to identify recurring patterns, themes, and narratives across all data captured. This involved a coding process to categorise insights and facilitate the identification of emerging themes, following a data review to ensure accurate capture and to validate the analysis.

This informed the development of the narrative for reporting on key themes aligned to the research objectives, involving triangulation of data from the different sources. This method ensured a systematic and rigorous exploration of the qualitative data collected during the research period.

### Research participants

A total of 11 young women aged 12-17 were interviewed.

Interview participants were located across England, including Essex, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Yorkshire, and Merseyside.

#### Age:

- 1 x age 12
- 2 x age 13
- 1 x age 14
- 2 x age 15
- 3 x age 16
- 2 x age 17

#### Ethnicity:

- 8 x White British
- 1 x Asian British Pakistani
- 1 x Mixed White/Black Caribbean
- 1 x Black British African

Participants used a range of different transport modes (including public and private transport) to get to school, college, and other activities.

Six of the 11 young women then participated in ethnographic activities, via the Field Notes app.

- 1 x aged 14 (Essex, White British)
- 1 x aged 15 (Yorkshire, Black British)
- 1 x aged 16 (Essex, White British)
- 1 x aged 16 (Oxfordshire, White British)
- 1 x aged 16 (Liverpool, White British)
- 1 x aged 17 (Yorkshire, Asian British Pakistani)

### Strengths and Limitations of the Research

The report provides rich insight into the lived experiences of the young women who participated in the research, with verbatim quotes used to illustrate their experiences. The research aimed to access the breadth and diversity of participants' experiences and views. However, the views of the young women interviewed will not be representative of all potential participants, especially given the small and self-selecting nature of the sample, and therefore must be treated as indicative. It is not possible to draw general conclusions of young women's experience and views of personal safety on transport from these findings –

further research on a larger scale, and with a more representative sample would be required to do so.

## Findings

### Central Findings

- The young women interviewed reported that they most often felt unsafe as a result of the behaviour of others, most notably boys and men, or the fear that they would exhibit inappropriate behaviours.
- The research indicated that factors such as age and location may influence experiences around safety.
- Those involved in the research felt that inappropriate behaviours from men are normalised, and thoughts of feeling unsafe when travelling were seen as just a part of life. This was to such an extent that many of these young women employed a number of tactics to proactively manage their safety whenever they left the house.
- Participants generally had a lack of awareness around who/where to report things that make them feel unsafe, or what type of behaviours can or should be reported at all. Additionally, they felt that some behaviours were not serious enough to report, further normalising these behaviours.

### Experiences of feeling unsafe

All participants had experiences of feeling unsafe while making journeys. A number of incidences of feeling unsafe were disclosed across the interviews and on Field Notes.

Incidences included:

- Boys misbehaving on the school bus (starting fights and throwing things, vaping)
- Being near large groups of older children who are being loud/playing music
- Men staring on public transport
- Catcalling/comments/jeering from men while walking (particularly in school uniform)
- Men sitting next to them on the bus/trains when there are plenty of empty seats
- Touching from men including stroking hair and arm
- Cars slowing down and beeping at them while walking
- Hearing about friends being followed by men
- A man masturbating nearby on public transport
- Fights breaking out on public transport
- Being near people under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Cars driving too close when cycling

Below are a few quotes from participants depicting incidences when they felt unsafe. The quotes show that both direct behaviours targeted at the young women, and indirect behaviours that happened near them, made them feel unsafe.

*"Walking home from bus with friends...two boys [similar age] had a joke about my bottom and started shouting stuff down the road...was a bit scared but it was ok...went different way home." [13, Gloucestershire]*

*"On the top of the bus, a man behind me had his arm between me and the window and kept touching my arm, I felt very uncomfortable." [16, Liverpool]*



*"One time when I was on the metro with my friend a man was masturbating near us, it made me feel unsafe and uncomfortable." [15, Sunderland]*

*"In my area, the metro system tends to be busy, difficult to move through a crowd and full of people who look to be under the influence of drugs and alcohol, making travelling both unpredictable and unpleasant for young people." [15, Sunderland]*

*"If I'm on public transport and there's an argument going on it definitely makes me feel a lot less safe." [17, Yorkshire]*

*"I've had a few men make little comments about me, whistle at me and stuff, that's what scares me the most...I can't say anything to them because they're men and you don't know what they're going to do, do you?" [16, Essex]*

**Transcribed audio clip from a 16-year-old female in Oxfordshire:**

*"There was an occasion a couple of weeks ago when it was like the train was really empty and there was just like loads of empty seats, but somebody decided to come and sit next to me, which was a bit weird because I was like, there are loads of empty seats... I was quite anxious and, not upset but like kind of getting a bit like oh no what's going on? Luckily it was like a shorter journey so I could like quickly, get away from that. And I kind of had my friend like their contact up ready to be like 'ah help me' type thing."*

### School journeys

Participants spoke about incidences where they felt unsafe when traveling from school or college.

Particularly in the winter when it gets dark early, young women were generally more anxious around travelling home, compared to the journey in to school or college. Some of the young women talked about others messing around on the school bus and that this happened more on the way back - there was a sense that people keep to themselves and have less energy in the mornings, and that there is less fear of being 'told on' on the way home.

Some also said that whistling and catcalling from men happened more when they were wearing school uniform.

Some did not feel completely safe on the school bus due to regular incidents, and there was a sense that neither the bus company nor schools were doing much about this. Some participants were not confident that security cameras on school buses were effective in preventing inappropriate behaviours. When asked, most young people said they had not received any safety tips or advice from school. Those who had, said this was very general and not specific to travel or transport safety.

Below are a few quotes from participants depicting incidents when they felt unsafe on school journeys.

*"Get more incidents when I'm walking...men unnecessarily staring, especially when I was in Year 11 when I was wearing school uniform it was a bit more... incident cycling home past a pub and got catcalled." [17, Oxfordshire]*

*"There are cameras on the bus but they don't really use them and the school can't access them - if kids knew there was always someone watching...they might act in a different way." [13, Gloucestershire]*

*"It's often older students at the back of the bus. They buy fizzy water bottles from school, poke holes in them and spray it on the bus...feels a bit unsafe as feels like you could say something but they won't listen and will do whatever they wanna do...School hear about it...about once a month we have another driver come on to see what's happening, but then they don't act like that as they know they will get in trouble." [13, Gloucestershire]*

**Transcribed audio clip from a 16-year-old female in Essex:**

*"So I was walking back from college it was around 4:30, so obviously it was quite dark this was a couple of weeks ago and obviously it gets dark early. And some men were whistling at me and it made me feel really uncomfortable and unsafe, because I was alone and there wasn't a lot of people about. So after that it made me a bit more like conscious to travel alone, and I'm a bit more wary about my surroundings now."*

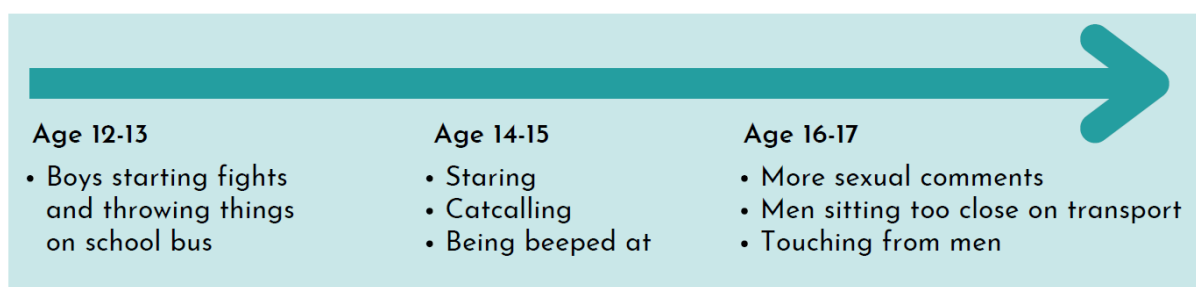
**Age differences**

It is not possible to determine if there are differences in experience by age, ethnicity, geography or other characteristics. However, the research indicates that young women's experience may change as they get older. This should be explored in further research, with larger sample sizes.

From the incidences participants disclosed, there seemed to be an escalation in the sexualisation of comments and behaviour towards girls as they age. Girls aged 16-17 more commonly reported experiencing sexual comments or even touching from men, which was reported less frequently by girls aged 12-15.

For those at the youngest end of this cohort, their main safety concerns tended to be boys misbehaving on the school bus, whereas the older age group were more likely to have experienced sexual harassment or behaviour from men/boys.

*Figure 1: Graphic depicting behaviour experienced at different age groups*



This is not to say that those at the younger end do not experience the more 'serious' incidents, as there were 13-year-olds in the sample who had experienced catcalling of a sexual nature.

### Factors impacting on safety

In the research, young women were asked about factors that impact how safe they felt. Some factors they mentioned that made them feel unsafe included:

- Travelling in the evening
- Lack of lighting
- Travelling alone compared to with others
- When an area does not look nice/feels run down
- Travelling in an unfamiliar area/less predictable journeys
- When transport is empty or very busy (there tended to be an 'optimum number' of passengers e.g. some felt safest when it was not too empty and not too busy)
- When passengers are mostly men
- History of crime/incidences in the area
- Seeing social media videos of incidences on transport
- Others wearing hoods/masks with face covered
- Lack of security cameras
- Lack of staff/officials on public transport
- Lack of visibility on transport (e.g. upstairs on bus)

Below are a few quotes from participants describing the factors that have made them feel unsafe.

*"Getting train early in the morning there's more men than women...feel safer with women around." [16, Oxfordshire]*

*"Stabbings in local area, someone was shot, reports of rape...makes you more aware when you go out, can stop you wanting to go out... wouldn't meet friends in the park where it's isolated." [16, Liverpool]*

*"I felt a lot more safe in the light, everyone could see if something did happen, when it's dark you can't really see anything." [16, Essex]*

*"Walking in dirty areas is not pleasant whilst travelling...Waiting at a bus stop with bin bags next to it makes me feel like I am in an unsafe area as people feel like they can do what they want." [17, Yorkshire]*

The young women interviewed tended to report feeling safer in their local area because it was familiar. Some perceived that people would be more helpful if they encountered a problem than those in larger towns or cities.

*"Feel safer in local area because I know everyone. If anything was to happen, a house would be there, everyone knows everyone...in [city] I don't know anyone. If I*

*ran up to someone, they'd just think I'm mad." [16, Essex]*

*"I feel safer in the village - bigger sense of community and people saying hi. In the city it's busier but everyone is busy in their own way and don't care about what's going on." [16, Oxfordshire]*

### Journey descriptions

Inappropriate behaviours which made participants feel unsafe appeared to occur indiscriminately. There were few common factors for when the incidences reported by participants occurred. These incidents appeared to happen on any type of transport, at any time of day, when girls were both alone or with friends, and resulted from inappropriate behaviours by men both on their own and in a group.

The research team created journey descriptions based on insights captured during the interviews. Participants were asked questions about regular end-to-end journeys undertaken, their feelings of safety at each stage in the journey, and which factors influenced this. A selection of these journeys were used to create case studies. The aim was to include a range of experiences, including multi-mode journeys and those involving time spent travelling independently.

The journey descriptions below aim to depict how three of the young women interviewed, may feel at different touch points on their typical journey. For participant anonymity, the actual names of the participants have been changed.

#### Journey description: Jess

Jess is 13, lives in a fairly rural area in the South West of England, and travels on the school bus with friends most days.

Jess feels safe on the drive to the bus stop with her parent, and safe at the bus stop as it is in a local area, familiar and well lit, and she is usually with a friend.

The 30–45-minute bus journey to school is usually fine, with no issues on the bus and Jess generally feeling safe.

Jess feels less safe on the school bus home - boys regularly get into fights, throw things and misbehave. This is typically on the way home from school when people have more energy and there is less fear around being reported to the school. This puts Jess and her friends on edge and feeling unsafe at times that they could get hurt.

Jess has also experienced sexual comments/shouting from boys her age while walking home from the bus stop with a male friend. This resulted in Jess walking a different way home with her friend that day.

#### Journey description: Louise

Louise is 16, lives in the North West of England and gets the bus to college and into the city to visit the youth centre.

For travel to college, Louise feels unsafe on the 20-minute walk from her home to the bus stop. She sometimes cuts through the park unless it feels empty, or it is dark because she is fearful of a potential threat and unable to see who else is in the park. For these reasons, Louise often avoids this route, particularly in winter.

Louise feels safe at the bus stop and on the hour-long bus journey as there are lots of students around. Except for the walk to the bus stop, Louise feels fairly safe on her journey to college. The return journey is much the same, and Louise will avoid walking through the park on the way home.

Louise also shared her experience of travelling to a youth centre in the city centre. For this trip Louise starts with the same walk to the bus stop which feels unsafe. She feels safer waiting for the bus and travelling when there are older people around.

Louise feels anxious going into town on the bus and has experienced incidents including a man repeatedly touching her arm.

When on the bus, Louise tries to sit downstairs, near a bell and close to the driver, or near older people - this makes her feel safer.

On the way home from the bus, Louise makes sure to have her keys and phone out on the walk and is ready to get in the door quickly.

#### Journey description: Charlotte

Charlotte is 17 and lives in Oxfordshire. Charlotte uses a bike as her preferred method of travel, and cycles to college most days unless the weather is bad.

*"My parents are against driving unnecessarily, they encourage cycling and taking public transport." [17, Oxfordshire]*

It takes Charlotte 10 minutes to cycle to college, compared to 25 minutes walking. She stated that fewer incidents (e.g. catcalling from men) are experienced when cycling compared to walking. She feels relatively safe in the morning, but cycle lanes aren't always sufficient, and cars can get too close which feels dangerous. Charlotte usually cycles home from college in the dark, but often walks part of the way where there aren't cycle lanes.

#### Managing safety

Participants were asked about any tactics they use to manage their safety risk and the impacts that feeling unsafe has on their travel behaviour.

#### Tactics for managing safety

Many of the participants were generally quite anxious about travelling and using transport. This was not just about personal safety, but also general anxiety or nervousness about travelling, particularly for journeys that were less familiar.

Participants use a number of tactics for managing safety when travelling, including both proactive behaviours which they do ordinarily when making journeys, and reactive

behaviours as a response to feeling unsafe. Reactive behaviours include both 'in the moment' responses when feeling unsafe, and longer-term changes to behaviour as a consequence of a previous incident or experience.

#### Proactive behaviours

- Keeping in touch with parents while out, so they know where they are at all times (many also used location sharing apps - Life360 was very popular)
- Always travelling with someone
- Using headphones to look like they are ignoring other passengers, but having music low enough to still be alert and aware of surroundings
- Walking a longer way home to stay in busier, well-lit areas and avoiding dark, less populated areas
- Walking quickly and 'zig zag' walking across roads (frequently crossing sides)
- Choosing seat on transport carefully – being aware of exits, sitting on the edge of a two-seater, sitting downstairs on the bus/near the bell, putting a bag on a spare seat to deter someone from sitting next to them
- Walking with their keys and phone in their hand

#### Reactive behaviours

- Changing route if they are feeling unsafe on usual route
- Avoiding areas where it is common knowledge that an incident has previously taken place
- Moving away from someone on transport if feeling unsafe
- Calling a parent/friend while travelling – they feel better talking to someone if feeling unsafe
- Pretending to be on the phone as avoidance tactic
- Modifying personal behaviour – for example, carefully considering what clothes to wear before travelling following a catcalling incident
- Avoiding travel – for example, missing out on going to clubs/activities if they have to walk home alone and can't get a lift

Below are a few quotes from participants describing the tactics they use for keeping safe or making themselves feel safer.

*"Speed walk if I see someone behind me." [16, Essex]*

*"Not being on my phone whilst waking alone." [15, Yorkshire]*

*"Changing posture and manner to appear more confident or 'bigger'." [16, Oxfordshire]*

*"I always have my keys in my hands if I feel unsafe." [16, Liverpool]*

*"Use the Life360 app [location sharing] - feel pretty safe using it, family knows where you are and can share things...aunt shared with my mum, now we all use it." [12, Gloucestershire]*

*"I sit near the button on the bus, near the driver...if see someone I don't like the look of I move...get off at a different stop if needs be." [16, Liverpool]*

*"One day when I was walking home, I noticed a group of men stood smoking on the path...my gut told me to cross the road...a car pulls up next to them and a man jumps out of the car. He begins to punch one of the men smoking. The fight between them caused multiple other fights to occur...it began to move off the pavement across from me and onto the road. I didn't think it was safe to keep walking so I hid myself behind a minibus where other passers-by could see me. Once the men left, I rushed back home. I now always trust my gut feeling and make sure I do not walk too close to strangers." [17, Yorkshire]*

### Impact of feeling unsafe

Feeling unsafe can have an immediate impact in terms of actions taken by young women to protect themselves, and there may also be longer term consequences.

For some participants, safety concerns meant that they were missing out on opportunities such as after school clubs and activities.

*"I've had to miss out on a few clubs and stuff when my friends aren't going, because I couldn't get home and wouldn't feel safe getting home by myself...if it's really dark I won't go." [13, Oxfordshire]*

The experiences of the young women interviewed suggests that negative experiences when travelling can undermine confidence and increase anxiety when travelling and potentially lead them to change their behaviour. These feelings are highlighted in the quotes below.

*"I panic about what I'm wearing, like is this gonna bring attention to me...When I was getting whistled at the other day I was wearing leggings and obviously there's nothing wrong with wearing leggings, but it made me think 'oh that's why'...It makes me not wanna go anywhere. It makes me just want to stay inside because I'm safer inside than going on the train or whatever." [16, Essex]*

### **Transcribed audio clip from a 14-year-old female in Essex:**

*"One time when I was walking home from dance, there was a group of us of about maybe six people, six girls and we walked past one of like the local pubs in our area. And there was two guys in a van who had just come out the pub. We reckon they were a bit drunk and they were kind of shouting stuff at us.*

*It kind of made us feel very very unsafe. And then they continued to kind of drive around and it seemed like they were following us around. Afterwards, I kind of always made sure to check for a red van in the car park, because it still makes me feel uncomfortable, but it's gotten better. It's just the first like three or four weeks afterwards I always made sure to check out for a red van, and I still do it now sometimes."*

## Reporting behaviours and the role of others

Participants were asked about their awareness of reporting methods and any campaigns around reporting. They were also asked about their confidence in bystanders and what might encourage them to report safety concerns.

## Reporting behaviours

The participants had a lack of awareness around reporting methods other than the Police, and what type of behaviour can or should be reported.

Most participants said if something happened to them while travelling and they felt unsafe, they felt confident that they could tell their parents and/or school. Apart from parents or a trusted adult (e.g. teacher), participants did not know who/where they should report inappropriate behaviours to. However, most also said if something 'serious' happened, they would tell the Police.

From interviews, it appeared that many behaviours (particularly catcalling) are normalised by the young women involved in the research. It was seen as part of life, and they didn't know who/where they would report this kind of behaviour to, or if it is 'report worthy' at all.

Many were aware of 'See It, Say It, Sorted' when asked if they recognised the campaign, however this was generally perceived as for 'emergencies' only. Awareness of other safety campaigns was low, with the young women unable to recall any others. One 13-year-old recalled a poster about catcalling (TFL), but wasn't sure what the message was or what it was telling you to do if something happened.

Below are quotes describing how some of the young women viewed 'See It, Say It, Sorted.'

*"On the train they have announcements like 'if you see something that doesn't look right text the transport police', but in my mind that would be if something really serious happened like if someone pulled out a knife, not if someone said or did something to me." [16, Oxfordshire]*

*[See it, say it, sorted] is to make people aware you can report things like that [comments from men], but at the same time people tend to brush those things over because they don't see it as important enough." [15, Yorkshire]*

There was a tendency for participants to downplay or minimise uncomfortable experiences where they felt unsafe, often for fear of not wanting to make a fuss.

Participants often had clear boundaries in their mind around the threshold for what behaviour is 'reportable', and what behaviour they 'put up with' and would not feel they could or should report.

For many, crossing this line appeared to be when it became physical - i.e. touching. However, some had experienced men touching them in some way on public transport and still did not feel this was 'serious enough' to report or that it didn't sound like a 'big deal' when describing the incident out loud.



"Person behind me on the bus stroked my hair. To me that's quite a big thing like this person I don't know has touched my hair, but it didn't feel big enough to report because it's like, well they just touched my hair...I always feel it's not serious enough to bother somebody about." [16, Oxfordshire]

"If it was really bad I'd probably call the Police, but I don't know what other numbers I would call...I feel like catcalling, it's bad but it's not Police bad is it. I feel like touching, that's when you should call the Police." [16, Essex]

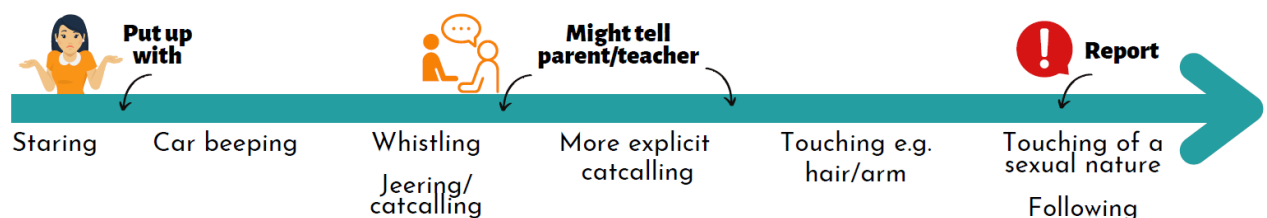
### Transcribed audio clip from a 15-year-old female in Yorkshire:

"So when you're like walking home and someone like a man is driving and then they slow down their car and then they beep the horn or something like that and like, it's just weird...And then also like when you're walking home or someone like, I don't know, just someone catcalls you, I feel like those are like things that you would brush off.

But things that you would report is like, if someone's following you home and stuff like that. Like the slowing down of the car, that happens sometimes like it happened a lot during summer, but now it doesn't really happen that much.

And cat calling, that's just all the time. Like sometimes on the way to school, mostly on the way home from school, maybe like two or three times a month. So not that a lot, but...we just tend to walk away to be honest."

Figure 2: Graphic depicting the young women's reporting behaviours depending on the incident



### Expectations around reporting

Participants were not confident that reporting an incident would lead anywhere or that anything could be done about it, and this impacts on how likely they are to report things at all. There was a sense that in many cases, an incident might occur but then 'the moment is gone', and little can be done about it afterwards.

Some participants felt that they would not be able to approach the bus driver unless it was a 'serious' situation. Bus drivers were generally felt to be unapproachable, and participants were not confident that drivers would be able to do anything to manage the situation.

"Wouldn't tell bus driver or anyone else [about being touched on arm] because people wouldn't care." [16, Liverpool]

*"It probably would have stopped by the time the Police got there." [14, Essex]*

However, in general participants were uncertain about how, when and who to report incidents to.

*"We're told 'tell someone' but they never fully go into who...your parents or a teacher, but it's not always the easiest 'in the moment' on a bus or train. The incidents passed by then and you don't know the person, so it would just be 'this person did this and they looked like this'. You can't really do anything based off that." [16, Oxfordshire]*

#### Bystanding behaviours

When asked about bystanding behaviours within interviews, some participants felt fairly confident that someone would step in to help them if needed on public transport.

Thoughts on whether they themselves would step in to help someone else varied, based on how confident they felt to do this, and whether or not they knew the person. Below are quotes from the participants that describe in which incidents, if any, they may intervene in.

*"I prefer it when it's busier...it's more likely that if something does happen there's more chance someone could help and step in." [16, Oxfordshire]*

*"I know if I saw something I'd jump in and see if they're ok and would hope people would do the same. I believe people would jump in because that's someone's daughter...think females would jump in, men would because not all men are like the ones we're talking about, but think women understand it more and get it more than men do." [16, Essex]*

*"If it was a friend I was with, yes I would say something and would probably step in. If it was a stranger and something more severe, I wouldn't know what to do. I'd like to say I would step in but I know in the situation I probably wouldn't have the confidence to say something." [14, Essex]*

#### Interventions to improve safety

When participants were asked what suggestions they had for making their journeys feel safer, they shared a number of ideas. These are depicted in the quotes below.

##### Improved travel environment

*"Having more available Wi-Fi." [14, Essex]*

*"Lighting...how well lit something is can massively change the atmosphere of the place and make people feel safer." [16, Essex]*

*More cameras - "Bus has posters like 'we're here for your safety, we've got security cameras', but they're obviously not because if they were then the bus wouldn't be*

*running the way it is [bad behaviour] and they would have improved it by now if cameras had actually been there." [13, Gloucestershire]*

*"Having a safe space in the community...well lit, CCTV cameras, mobile signal, alarm button...can be used if someone needs to feel safe for whatever reason." [16, Essex]*

Increased presence of staff and police

*"Trained staff to prevent anything from happening." [17, Yorkshire]*

*"More Police officers being there to go to...you don't really see any around in [city]."  
[17, Yorkshire]*

Participants were asked about what additional interventions could be done to improve their feelings of safety, and shared a number of ideas. While these haven't been tested or validated for their effectiveness, they may be useful for a number of issues which young women may experience whilst travelling (e.g. awareness raising around what behaviours should be reported and how to do so).

Interventions to increase awareness of what to do in case something happens while travelling  
*"I think a workshop/PowerPoint could be created to deliver in schools. Things that may be included:*

- *What do to if there is bad behaviour on transport*
- *Where to report bad behaviour*
- *How to make yourself feel safer on public transport*
- *Facts and statistics about transport safety*

*To make it more interactive, games such as word searches could be included, or something that would make the workshop memorable." [16, Essex]*

*"Something that would help people speak out if something happened on public transport but they don't have a support system to help them." [15, Yorkshire]*

*"More posters or announcements on transport of what to do would help - something that's for smaller things, not Transport Police emergencies but like here's what you can do if there's not such a serious incident but still something that has happened." [15, Yorkshire]*

*"...Also I believe making it compulsory to be spoke about at school, especially as school (mainly secondary) has young girls who travel alone and in the winter gets dark fairly early so this being spoken about will raise awareness." [16, Essex]*

Interventions to make it easier to report

*"A system to make it easier for people to report inappropriate behaviour of others in schools or in public areas such as a library or even leisure places like swimming pools and gyms." [16, Oxfordshire]*

*"I believe apps that have numbers to be able to call if feeling unsafe would be great and different tips on the app for different situations and what to do if feeling unsafe*

*whilst travelling alone...everyone has a phone so if they feel uncomfortable you could get the app up.” [16, Essex]*

## Conclusion

The experiences shared by the young women who participated in this research suggests that system wide change may be needed to address the underlying drivers of why young women can feel unsafe and have negative experiences when travelling.

The participants shared that the behaviour of boys and men, or the fear that they would exhibit inappropriate behaviours, was the main contributor to them feeling or being unsafe on their journey. These inappropriate behaviours were normalised among the young women involved in the research, to such an extent that they employed various tactics to prevent and react to incidents and made them hesitant to report incidents because they felt they were too trivial. The young women reflected that some environmental factors such as lighting, the number of other people around, predictability and familiarity of journeys, and visibility of staff affected their feelings of safety. Participants had a lack of awareness about who/where to report incidents that made them feel unsafe or what they can and should report.

The young women who participated in this research suggested several interventions that could improve their perceived and actual safety while travelling. This included improvements to the travel environment (i.e. lighting, cameras, Wi-Fi), increased staff and police presence, better reporting mechanisms, and interventions which inform young women about what behaviours/incidents are reportable and what to do.

The findings from this research are based on a small sample of participants and further research is required to explore these issues amongst a larger group of women and girls to determine whether they hold true for the wider population. The research pointed to four areas that could be explored in further research:

- Safety experiences of boys and young men and their views around what can be done to tackle violence against women and girls and broader anti-social behaviour
- Design of interventions such as a journey planning safety guides and transport safety modules within the school curriculum
- Development of campaign messaging and materials to explore what will be most effective for different audiences
- Age and geographical differences in experiences around transport safety (e.g. are there experiences which are specific to younger girls compared to older teenagers?)

## Appendix 1

### Screening survey: Safety of women and girls while using transport

#### Intro

[SMPL Research](#) are a small research company based in Essex. We have been asked to do some research by a company called [Connected Places Catapult](#).

The research involves talking to **girls and young women aged 12-17**, to find out about their experiences of using transport, how safe they feel while travelling, and how safety could be improved.

The findings of the research will be used to **improve safety for women and girls** while travelling and using transport.

#### What are we asking you to do?

We'd love it if you could take part in an **online 30 minute conversation** with a member of our team, which will be held virtually via Zoom or Teams at a time that's convenient for you. This will take place between 28<sup>th</sup> November – 9<sup>th</sup> December.

This will involve telling us about how you currently travel to school/college, clubs, or other places you might go in your spare time. We'd like to hear about the journeys you take, the things you and others you know do to feel safe, situations where you may feel unsafe while travelling, and how you think safety while travelling could be improved..

Everyone that takes part in a conversation with us will receive a **£50 One4All gift card** as a thank you for your time.

You might also be asked to take part in the next phase, which will involve **testing out some ideas** aimed at improving safety, and sharing your thoughts and experiences on it with us. This will include using apps on your phone or other technology, and everything will be clearly explained to you. This phase will take place in the first half of December, and participants who take part will receive an **additional £50 One4All gift card as a thank you payment**.

If you're interested in taking part, please **complete this short survey** to tell us a little about yourself. If you're under 16, we'll also need consent from your parent/carer.

We will only be speaking to a limited number of people, so unfortunately not everyone who completes this survey will be selected to take part. But, everyone who completes this survey will have the chance to be entered into a **prize draw to win £20 One4All gift card**.

#### Data protection

SMPL Research fully complies with information legislation. If you would like more details of how we use personal data, and the rights you have about its use, please go to

<https://smplresearch.co.uk/privacy-policy>.

## Screener questions

### About you

**1. What is your age? (12-15 – route to question capturing parental consent)**

- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17

**2. If you are under 16, your parent/carer must give their permission for you to complete this survey and take part in the research. If you are selected to take part, you will be contacted within the next week with more information about what to expect, and a consent form to give your consent to take part in the research.**

**Please ask your parent/carer to give consent and provide their contact details below:**

- I give consent for my child/young person to complete this survey and take part in the research [checkbox]

Name:

Email address:

Phone number:

### Taking part in research

If you'd like to take part in this research, please tick below to say you are happy for a member of the SMPL Research team to get in touch with you.

Please note this does not mean you are obligated to take part, and if you are selected you have the right to stop the research at any time. If you are selected to take part, you will be contacted within the next week with more information about what to expect, and a consent form to give your consent to take part in the research.

- I am interested in participating in this research [checkbox]
- I would like to be entered into the prize draw to win a £20 One4All gift card [checkbox]

**Please provide your contact details below, so that we can get in touch with you:**

Name:

Email address:

Phone number:

**3. What is your postcode?.....**

**4. Which of these ethnic groups do you belong to?**

- Asian or Asian British Indian
- Asian or Asian British Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British Other
- Asian Other
- Black or Black British African
- Black or Black British Caribbean
- Black Other
- Chinese
- Gypsy/Roma
- Mixed White/Asian
- Mixed White/Black African
- Mixed White/Black Caribbean
- Mixed Other
- Traveller of Irish Heritage
- White British
- White Irish
- White Other
- Not known
- Prefer not to say

**5. Do you have any additional needs or disabilities? Please tick any that apply to you**

- Autism spectrum disorder
- Hearing impairment/deaf
- Learning difficulties/disabilities
- Physical impairment
- Visual impairment/blind
- Other (please tell us.....)
- None of the above
- Prefer not to say

**6. How do you usually get to school or college? Please tick all options that you use, including any walking to/from using transport (e.g. walking to the bus)**

- Walking
- School bus (for school children only)
- Public bus
- Train
- Tube
- Lift from someone
- Drive myself
- Cycle
- Taxi
- Other (please specify)

**7. How do you usually get to any clubs/social activities outside of school? Please tick any options that you regularly use**

- Walking
- Bus
- Train
- Tube
- Lift from someone
- Drive myself
- Cycle
- Taxi
- Other (please specify)

**8. How safe do you generally feel when travelling to and from places?**

- Very safe
- Somewhat safe
- Not sure
- Somewhat unsafe
- Very unsafe

**9. Is there anything in particular that makes you feel unsafe when you are travelling to and from places? Please tell us what.....**

**10. Do you have a smartphone with access to the internet?**

- Yes
- No



## Appendix 2

### Sampling frame for selecting participants for the interviews

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Research sample (11 participants aged 12-17 in total)</b>
Age	Minimum of 2 participants within each of the following age groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 12-13</li><li>• 14-15</li><li>• 16-17</li></ul>
Geography	Minimum of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 participants from urban areas</li><li>• 3 participants from rural areas</li></ul>
Type of travel	We will seek to recruit a mixed sample which includes participants using a range of travel options including walking, bus, train, tube, and combined methods such as walk-bus-walk, train-tube-walk etc.
Ethnicity	We will seek to include diverse representation in relation to ethnicity where possible.
Additional needs	We will seek to include participants with additional needs where possible and will adapt our research methods accordingly to ensure it is inclusive.

## Appendix 3

### Interview guide: Transport safety for young women

#### Key research objectives:

- Understand experiences and perspectives of personal safety as a young female traveller
- Identify similarities/differences of travel experiences based on characteristics of traveller and types of travel
- Understand what makes girls feel safe/unsafe when travelling and how that changes their behaviour or actions

#### Things to cover at start of interview:

- Introduction – who we are and recap purpose of research – to help improve safety for women and girls while travelling
- Refer to information sheet to cover confidentiality, safeguarding, consent etc – parental consent
- State that we can stop at any time, only need to answer questions they feel comfortable with etc
- Consent for recording conversation

#### Key questions

##### Introduction

- Any questions you would like to ask before we start?
- Tell me a little bit about yourself
  - Whereabouts do you live and who with, any siblings, pets?
  - Any hobbies/sports/part time job (age dependent)?
  - Describe your local area – is it more rural/urban? How far is your nearest town/city?

##### Journey to school/college/elsewhere

We'd like to find out a bit more detail about your journey to and from school/college, starting with when you leave your home in the morning:

- How far is school/college from where you live and how long does it take to get there?
- What time do you leave home in the morning?
- How do you normally get there: walk to bus/bus/train/lift?
- Do you travel alone or with anyone, friends/siblings?
- Do you come straight home from school/college or stay for after school clubs/socialising?
- How do you tend to get home?
- Is it dark for either of these journeys?

- How do you feel about your journey to school? Any points in the journey that you feel uncomfortable/uneasy? Why is this?
- If so, has this made you do anything differently/change arrangements etc? How did this make you feel?

(Journey to clubs/social events...same as above)

- What journeys do you take at weekends?
- How safe do you feel during these journeys? Why is this?

### **What makes you feel safe/unsafe**

- How safe do you feel when out and about in your local area?
- How about when travelling to other towns/cities nearby?
- Does the time of day make a difference to how safe you feel?
- Any other factors that have an impact on how safe you feel? E.g. who you are with, regular journeys vs. travelling somewhere different?

### **What things make you feel safe?**

- Anything about the environment? E.g. lighting, cameras, security, staff on transport, other people...
- Anything that you do to feel safer? Any actions you take/changes to behaviour/route etc? i.e., not wearing headphones, talking on phone, let someone know where you are, avoiding certain times/places, carry alarm etc
- Is there anything you've seen or heard that others do to feel safer when out/using transport? (Anything you've seen on social media?)

### **What makes you feel unsafe when you're travelling or using transport?**

- If you're ever in a situation where you feel unsafe, what do you tend to do? (Changes to behaviour etc)

### **Experiences and bystanding**

Have you ever seen or heard about any incidents on transport where something has happened, or someone has appeared to be unsafe/uncomfortable?

- If yes – can you describe what happened? How did this make you feel? Did others respond and if yes, how?
  - Did you do anything about it or talk to anyone? If no – would you know where to go to tell someone?
  - Did this affect how safe you now feel on transport?/travelling to particular areas?
  - Did this affect your behaviour at all for the rest of the journey, or future journeys? Did you make any changes after that?
- How confident are you that a member of the public would help you if someone was behaving inappropriately towards you when out in public/on transport?

- How confident are you that you'd be able to intervene safely if you saw someone behaving inappropriately when out in public/on transport?
- Is there anything that would make you feel more able to help someone/report something?

### **Reporting**

- Would you know where to report an incident if you saw something?/Where would you look to report something?
- Is there anything that would make you more likely to report incidents?

### **Things that need to change to make you feel safer**

- What things do you think need to change to make you and others feel safer when out/using transport?
  - E.g., lighting, police, security, cameras, awareness raising, boys and men's behaviour, transport, knowing risk in area
- What actions do you think people could take to help females feel safer in public spaces/areas?
- Anything else you could suggest?

### **Anything else you would like to add?**

## Appendix 4

### Fieldnotes online community project plan: Transport safety for young women

#### **Objectives:**

1. To understand the experiences and perceptions of school-age girls regarding transport safety
2. To identify factors impacting their safety during journeys
3. To generate ideas for campaigns to improve safety for young women

#### **Activities in chronological order:**

##### **Activity 1. Explaining a journey that they made during the research period (written note).**

Purpose: To understand a common journey that a participant would make in a typical day.

##### **Activity 2. Providing a voice note describing a time where they previously felt unsafe when making a journey.**

Purpose: To provide voice data in their own words to help understand a time in a previous journey where they felt unsafe.

##### **Activity 3. Capturing photos and videos of a journey during the fieldwork period, or sharing photos/videos which represented feelings of safety during recent journeys undertaken.**

Purpose: For participant to capture and share images to help understand a journey they undertake on a regular basis and feelings of safety around this, to add richer context to interview insights.

##### **Activity 4. Completing a short survey around factors impacting on safety.**

Purpose: To determine behaviours and attitudes around feeling safe when travelling and carrying out journeys.

Survey questions included:

Which of these factors has the biggest impact on how safe or unsafe you feel when making a journey? Please select 3:

- Level of lighting
- Visible staff on transport
- Visible Police
- Time of day
- How busy the area/transport is
- Security cameras on transport
- How well you know the area
- Behaviour of others
- Who you are with (alone or with others)

Have you ever done any of the following to make yourself feel safer when making a journey?  
Please select all that apply.

- Let someone know when to expect you
- Avoid certain areas
- Not wear headphones so you can hear surroundings
- Change your clothing
- Talk to someone on the phone
- Wear headphones to block out surroundings
- Share your location with someone
- Pretend to be on the phone
- Change your route depending on time of day
- Carry a personal alarm

Which of these things sound most useful to improve young women's safety when making journeys? Please rank in order of most useful to least useful.

- More street lighting
- Campaigns aimed at changing behaviour of others (e.g. staring, catcalling, sitting too close)
- More trained staff on public transport
- Apps to report things that make you feel unsafe
- More cameras on public transport/at bus stops/train stations
- Campaigns providing safety advice to young women
- Location sharing apps
- Apps providing safety advice
- Safety advice from school/college

What is the ONE biggest thing that could be done to make you feel safer when making a journey? (Free-text)

**Activity 5. Sharing their own ideas for campaigns to improve safety for young women.**

Purpose: To give participants an opportunity to generate ideas for a campaign to improve feelings of safety, using their own language and messaging that would resonate with school-aged girls