



A RIGHT TO THE NIGHT

May 2016

Australian girls on their safety in public places

Plan International Australia and Our Watch survey



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 30 percent of Australian girls and young women aged 15-19 in a survey commissioned by Plan International and Our Watch agreed that “girls should not be out in public places after dark.”
- The results show that many girls and young women are internalising widely-held beliefs that public places are unsafe for them, particularly after dark, and that it is their responsibility to modify their behaviour.
- This perception, along with a pervasive culture of victim-blaming – where it is common to ask “why was she out after dark?” and “what was she wearing?” in response to incidents of violence or sexual harassment against women and girls in public places - is unfairly shifting the responsibility for safety in public places away from the perpetrators of crimes and onto women and girls.
- Such perceptions are limiting the rights of girls and young women in Australia and around the world to move freely in public places and participate in activities outside the home.
- Plan International’s global research shows this perception is not unique to Australia.
- Australian girls and young women think sexual harassment in public places is both a serious issue and never justified. They offered a range of solutions to the general public, urban planners and government to address this issue.
- Solutions suggested by participants included better education – both of the public and in schools – about gender equality, respect and girls’ rights to be and feel safe. Other suggestions related to improved street lighting, CCTV cameras and policing.
- Building on young women’s insights and aligning with the evidence base on how to prevent violence against women, Our Watch and Plan Australia make the following recommendations:
 1. Challenge the attitudes, common beliefs and behaviours, and practices which drive or condone gender-based violence, with particular focus on victim-blaming and damaging reporting on women’s safety.
 2. Foster inclusive public dialogue with young people – both young men and women - about gender equality, respect, and women’s and girls’ rights to feel safe and freely access public places.
 3. Involve girls and young women in developing the solutions for safer and more inclusive public places.

2. INTRODUCTION

– THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE

Plan International Australia and Our Watch commissioned a survey of 600 Australian girls and young women aged 15–19, asking their views on personal safety and gender equality, including their sense of security in public spaces.

The findings show that 30 percent of Australian girls surveyed agreed that “girls should not be out in public places after dark.” This finding is not unique to Australia – similar surveys conducted by Plan International in four countries – Ecuador, Nicaragua, Pakistan and Zimbabwe in 2015, show a similar situation for girls and young women’s freedom of movement.

Broader research tells us that girls are generally less safe in their own homes than in public places,¹ but they are continuously told by adults, the media, and police that public places, especially after dark, are not safe for them. This sense of insecurity restricts girls’ rights, specifically their right to move freely in public places and access public transport, parks, streets and other spaces outside the home. Ultimately, this can mean that girls feel less connection to and ownership over public places and that they do not have the same rights to participate in activities outside the home and use public places as their male peers.

This sense of insecurity restricts girls’ rights to move freely in public places...ultimately, this can mean that girls feel they do not have the same rights to participate in activities outside the home and use public places as their male peers.

A 2015 review of international evidence on the prevention of violence against women identifies gender inequality as the key driver for violence against women.² Of relevance to the findings of this survey, violence against women and girls cannot be adequately addressed through restricting their movements, either by well-intended suggestions to not go outside after dark or by avoiding public transport at night. In fact, such restrictions – and the social messages they convey – can reinforce the condoning of violence against women who do not comply with them.

Crucial to preventing violence against women and girls is addressing its key drivers and promoting gender equality in public and private life through:

1. challenging the condoning of violence against women and girls;
2. promoting girls’ independence and decision making;
3. challenging gender stereotypes and roles; and
4. promoting positive, equal, and respectful relationships.³

Plan International and Our Watch believe that for girls to feel and be safe in public places we must aim to achieve true gender equality and tackle the attitudes, common beliefs and behaviours that contribute to this problem.

1 ANROWS, (2015) ‘Violence against women: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Personal Safety Survey, 2012: Key findings and future directions; Compass Research to Policy and Practice, Issue 02, October 2015.

2 Our Watch, ANROWS, and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

3 Ibid.

3. MEDIA AND THE COMMUNITY'S ROLE IN PROMOTING GIRLS' RIGHTS TO PUBLIC PLACES

Women and girls often perceive public places, particularly at night, to be unsafe places for them.⁴ This is despite crime statistics that clearly show they are most likely to experience violence at the hands of family members in the home, and least likely to be assaulted by strangers in public.⁵

The disconnect between the widely held perception that women and girls are more at risk in public places, particularly at night, and reality may partly be explained by the media's tendency to extensively report on violent crimes that occur in public places⁶ and underreport assaults which occur in the domestic sphere, particularly sexual assaults.⁷

Furthermore, the media frequently mirrors society's confusion and ambivalence about violence against women.⁸ Unfortunately, while the media can play a role in dispelling myths and reinforcing information about the true nature and extent of the problem, reporting on violence against women that challenges rather than reinforces common beliefs and behaviours about gender is far less common.⁹

Recent media coverage and responses from police and community leaders to assaults on young women in public places have reinforced the damaging idea that the best way to address violent attacks on women in public places is for women to not be in public places after dark or for women to "dress appropriately."¹⁰ This unfairly shifts responsibility for these attacks away from perpetrators. As a public message, it even risks contributing to discriminatory attitudes and expectations that lead to violence against women in the first place.

The high prevalence of sexual harassment that occurs in public places – such as verbal or physical street harassment and 'cat-calling' etc. – also contributes to women and girls feeling unsafe and unlikely to want to inhabit these places.¹¹

4 Davis, B. and Dossetor, K. (2010) '(Mis)perceptions of crime in Australia', *Trends and Issues Paper*, No 396 July 2010, Australian Institute of Criminology.

5 In Australia in 2013, for females, victims were most commonly assaulted by a family member, at a rate of 192 per 100,000 female population. By contrast, females were least likely to be assaulted by strangers at a rate of 54 per 100,000 female population. (Australian Crime: Facts and Figures 2014, Recorded crime & selected crime profiles). <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/facts/1-20/2014/1_recorded.html>; Davis, B. and Dossetor, K. '(Mis)perceptions of crime in Australia', *Trends and Issues Paper*, No396 July 2010, Australian Institute of Criminology.

6 Ibid, p5.

7 In 2005, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey estimated that only 36 percent of female victims of physical assault and 19 percent of female victims of sexual assault in Australia reported the incident to police. See: <[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/056A404DAA576AE6CA2571D00080E985/\\$File/49060_2005%20\(reissue\).pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/056A404DAA576AE6CA2571D00080E985/$File/49060_2005%20(reissue).pdf)>

8 ANROWS, (2015) '*Media representations of violence against women and their children: State of knowledge paper*' Landscapes: State of knowledge, Sydney.

9 Ibid.

10 See media articles: 'Parks not safe for women, says homicide squad boss', *The Age*, 20 March, 2015. <<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/parks-not-safe-for-women-says-homicide-squad-boss-20150319-1m2rgc.html>> 'Church sorry for saying a 'faith filled' Jill Meagher would not have been killed', *The Guardian Australia*, 30 March, 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/mar/30/church-sorry-for-saying-a-faith-filled-jill-meagher-would-not-have-been-killed>> .

'Toronto police officer offers inappropriate safety tip', *The Globe and Mail*, 17 February 2011, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/the-hot-button/toronto-police-officer-offers-inappropriate-safety-tip/article611859/>.

11 In 2014, a survey released by the Australia Institute found that almost 60 percent of women had experienced lewd or sexist comments on the street. 50 percent of the women polled said they had been followed by men, 40 percent said they had had their paths blocked. See *Everyday Sexism: Australian Women's experience of street harassment*, The Australia Institute, Briefing note, March 2015. http://www.tai.org.au/sites/default/files/Everyday_sexism_TAIMarch2015_0.pdf.

4. WHAT YOUNG AUSTRALIAN WOMEN AND GIRLS TOLD US ABOUT SAFETY IN PUBLIC PLACES

4.1 Sense of safety in public places

The Plan/Our Watch survey confirmed that many young Australian girls' concerns about personal safety are curbing their freedom of movement in public places. Almost one third (30 percent) of girls surveyed agreed that "girls should not be out in public places after dark" – with 45 percent disagreeing. While half (50 percent) disagreed that "girls should not travel alone on public transport," 23 percent of girls surveyed agreed with this statement.

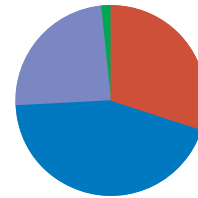
Australian girls think sexual harassment in public places is both a serious issue and never justified. The vast majority of girls surveyed (67 percent) disagreed with the statement "it's not a big deal if guys cat-call girls (e.g. wolf-whistle or make sexual comments) on the street" – 10 percent of girls surveyed agreed that cat-calling was not a serious issue. A similar proportion of surveyed girls (63 percent) also disagreed with the statement "if a girl wears revealing clothing she is at least partly responsible for unwanted attention or harassment" – 17 percent agreed with this statement.

4.2 Young women give their solutions

When asked to identify some effective actions to help girls feel safe in their communities, many respondents pointed to:

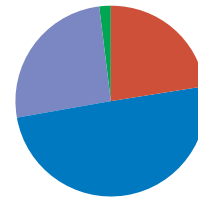
- Tougher penalties for boys or men who abuse or are violent towards girls or women, such as longer prison sentences (78 percent of respondents);
- Girls feeling able to report violence or abuse to community leaders, local authorities or police without being afraid (71 percent);
- Parents and people who work with young people (like teachers, coaches) actively promoting gender equality (59 percent);
- Make public transport and our streets safer, e.g. improving lighting (42 percent);
- Girls having better access to information and training to protect themselves from violence (40 percent).

'Girls should not be out in public places after dark.'



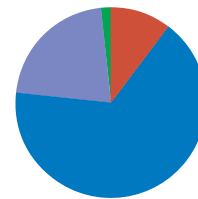
Agree: **30%**
Disagree: **45%**
Neither agree nor disagree: **24%**
Don't know/prefer not to say: **1%**

'Girls should not travel alone on public transport.'



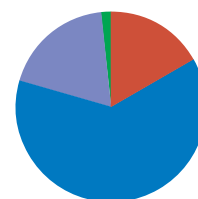
Agree: **23%**
Disagree: **50%**
Neither agree nor disagree: **26%**
Don't know/prefer not to say: **2%**

'It's not a big deal if guys cat-call girls (wolf-whistle or make sexual comments) on the street.'



Agree: **10%**
Disagree: **67%**
Neither agree nor disagree: **21%**
Don't know/prefer not to say: **1%**

'If a girl wears revealing clothing she is at least partly responsible for unwanted attention or harassment.'



Agree: **17%**
Disagree: **63%**
Neither agree nor disagree: **19%**
Don't know/prefer not to say: **1%**

Suggestions from girls were broad ranging, and while some suggestions placed the responsibility on girls to protect themselves (avoid going out at night, travel in groups, learn self-defence, etc.), many girls also identified the need to change attitudes, common beliefs and behaviours which limit the movement of young women in public places.

“Educate boys and girls on the issues. Teaching boys not to be offenders rather than telling girls not to go out at night [or] wear certain clothing” young woman aged 19.

“Educate boys, girls, parents and teachers about healthy, respectful relationships. Challenge every day sexism,” young woman aged 15.

“Provide safer transport for women who are traveling late at night and improve education for young women on how to avoid situations which are risky or dangerous. HOWEVER, I don’t think women should need these improvements because I believe males should be brought up to believe that females are equal and it is not okay to be violent towards them,” young woman aged 18.

“No physical [solutions] will help until social attitudes change,” young woman aged 18.

5. A GLOBAL PROBLEM, A GLOBAL GOAL

Young Australian women and girls are not alone in their sense of insecurity around public places. A similar comparative country survey of 4,219 girls in four countries conducted by Plan International in 2015 revealed at least the same percentage to the statement “girls should not be out in public places after dark.”

Country	Agree	Disagree
Ecuador	41%	44%
Nicaragua	23%	60%
Pakistan	66%	22%
Zimbabwe	85%	10%

Research conducted by Plan International around the world as part of its Safer Cities program reveals that girls seldom feel safe in cities, that they experience physical and sexual violence, and that they are often excluded from decision-making processes that impact their safety.¹² For example, only three percent of girls surveyed in Kampala, Uganda and just over two percent in Lima, Peru reported they ‘always’ feel safe in public places.¹³ This effectively limits their freedom, as many girls choose not to leave their homes out of fear of harassment or violence.¹⁴ Families may also choose to restrict girls’ freedom of movement because of safety concerns.

Safe, affordable, accessible and reliable public transportation is crucial to enabling girls’ independent movement and access to education, health and other important services. However, an overwhelming majority of girls reported feeling unsafe when using public transport; for example, only six percent of girls in Hanoi, Vietnam and Cairo, Egypt reported ‘always’ feeling safe.¹⁵

¹² Global Girls Innovation programme, Safer Cities for Girls Overview. Plan international 2016.

¹³ Plan International, Adolescent Girls’ Views on Safety in Cities: Findings from the Because I am a Girl: Urban Programme Study in Cairo, Delhi, Hanoi, Kampala and Lima, 2013.

¹⁴ In Delhi for example, over 21 percent of girls and women choose not to venture outside their home out of fear of sexual harassment or violence. See UN Women and ICRW (2013) “Unsafe: An Epidemic of Sexual Violence in Delhi’s Public Spaces: Baseline Findings from the Safe Cities Delhi Programme” UN Women: New York and ICRW: Washington D.C.

¹⁵ Plan International (2015) Because I am a girl Urban Programme – Global Baseline Analysis Report. Baseline Findings from Delhi, Kampala, Hanoi and Cairo. September 2015.

In 2015, Australia signed on to an ambitious set of 17 international goals, the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the 'Global Goals'. Goal 11 is to 'make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.' A key target of Goal 11 is to provide 'universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces in particular for women and children...'¹⁶ Along with 193 countries of the United Nations, Australia has undertaken to meet these goals and to contribute to the universal achievement of the goals by 2030. Addressing the drivers of harassment and violence against women and girls in public places as well as working in partnership with young people and girls in particular will be crucial in achieving this goal. What our survey shows is that Australia has significant work to do to achieve this goal, both in the countries where it implements its overseas aid program and within Australia.

6. HOW PLAN INTERNATIONAL IS RESPONDING

Plan International strives for a world that advances the rights of children and young people. We know that equality between boys and girls is key to achieving the rights of all children. Plan International's 'Because I am a Girl' campaign, seeks to challenge attitudes, policies and laws that underpin gender inequality and to support young women to advocate for the changes they want to see. Plan International worked at the global level along with other international organisations to ensure gender equality was included as one of the Global Goals. Plan International also lobbied for the interests of adolescent girls and young women to be given particular attention in the drafting of each of the goals.

Plan International ensures our work around the world targets gender inequality, promotes girls' empowerment and reduces persistent inequalities that affect girls.

Plan International's Safer Cities program

Through Plan International's Safer Cities program, we seek to build safe, accountable and inclusive cities with and for adolescent girls. In Hanoi, Cairo, Delhi, Kampala and Lima, Plan International has worked to:

- Influence governments and policy makers to make laws and city services more receptive and inclusive to girls' safety;
- Influence families and communities to promote a supportive social environment that promotes girls' safety and inclusion in cities; and
- Work with adolescent girls and young women to be active citizens and agents of change by helping them to engage with decision makers about the kinds of public places they want to inhabit.

In 2016, Plan International Australia will continue to engage with Australian girls to respond creatively and positively to the issue of how to create urban public places that are welcoming for girls and women.

¹⁶ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>.

7. HOW OUR WATCH IS RESPONDING

With the long-term goal of preventing violence against women and their children by addressing the drivers of gender-based violence in both the public and private sphere, Our Watch is delivering a number of initiatives:

- **Working with the media sector to ensure that the reporting of gender-based violence – which occurs in both public and private spaces – is done in an ethical, accurate, and responsible way.** In 2015, Our Watch launched the *Our Watch Awards*¹⁷ to promote responsible journalism when reporting on domestic and family violence and sexual assault. The awards emphasise that media reporting should not sensationalise or trivialise gender-based violence, nor should it add to the distress of victims, further endanger their safety, or shift blame from the perpetrator.

Our Watch is also working with relevant media experts and stakeholders to develop a unit of curriculum for current and future journalism students. The unit will examine issues around violence against women and provide practical approaches to reporting on related issues in an accurate and ethical way.

- **Engaging young women and men in conversations around gender equality, respect, and non-violence.** *The Line*¹⁸ is a social marketing campaign that engages young people on issues relating to relationships, gender, sex and respect. Aimed at young men and women aged 12 to 20, *The Line* encourages young people to develop healthy and equal relationships and to reject violence, disrespect and sexist behaviour. *The Line's* Facebook community discusses diverse topics such as street harassment, consent, gender stereotypes, healthy relationships, and everyday sexism.
- **Piloting and promoting the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in Australian schools.** In 2015, Our Watch piloted the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in secondary schools across Victoria. The evaluation of the pilot will be released by mid-2016, however, preliminary findings show success in improving knowledge, attitudes and classroom behaviour of students, while also being key in initiating classroom conversations around a broad range of issues, including gender equality, the impact of street harassment and how it infringes on girls' right to mobility and access to public places.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to create inclusive, safe, and accessible public places for everyone, particularly for women and girls, Plan International and Our Watch make the following joint recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Challenge the attitudes, common beliefs and behaviours, and practices which drive or condone gender-based violence, with particular focus on victim-blaming and damaging reporting on women's safety.

- Provide training for the media, law enforcement, and community leaders on the importance of avoiding victim-blaming when responding to or reporting on

¹⁷ More information about the Our Watch Awards can be found at the Walkley Foundation website: <<http://www.walkleys.com/awards/our-watch-awards/>>.

¹⁸ <<http://www.theline.org.au/>>.

incidents of violence against women in public (and private) spaces.

The media have an important role to play in helping shape attitudes, perceptions and knowledge that give rise to, minimise or excuse violence against women and their children. It is therefore crucial that journalists are trained to report on violence in an ethical and balanced way by including context regarding its causes and its prevention.

It is also important to note that the responsibility for improving media reporting does not lie exclusively with the media industry. People who are often called to provide expert opinion on issues of public safety, including police and community leaders, must also have the knowledge and capacity to challenge damaging attitudes, common beliefs and behaviours, and practices which drive or condone gender-based violence.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Foster inclusive public dialogue with young people – both young men and women - about gender equality, respect, and women and girls’ right to feel safe and freely access public places.

- Develop and implement public campaigns which allow young people to learn about and discuss issues relating to gender equality and respect.
- Promote and fund whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in schools.

One of the key suggestions made by survey participants was that there should be better public education about girls’ right to be safe in public spaces. One way of improving people’s understanding of the issues is via social marketing campaigns, such as The Line which is managed by Our Watch. The Line allows young people to discuss issues relating to gender inequality, sex and relationships, consent, and respect.

The latest international and national evidence also suggests that a whole of school approach to Respectful Relationships Education is an effective way to build skills and promote gender equal and respectful attitudes and norms among young people. Using the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change, Respectful Relationships Education engages schools, as both educational institutions and workplaces to comprehensively and holistically address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence.¹⁹ Plan International Australia and Our Watch urge governments across Australia to work with schools to promote Respectful Relationships Education in schools and ensure that Respectful Relationships Education includes discussion of how sexual harassment in public places infringes girls’ rights to mobility, access to public places, and freedom to participate in activities outside the home.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Involve girls and young women in developing the solutions for safer and more inclusive public places.

- Councils, Urban and Public Transport Planners should listen to the views of young people, particularly young women, about the use of public places and public transport.

As a child and youth focussed organisation, Plan International advocates globally for young people to be given the opportunity to express their opinion and have a say in decisions affecting them.²⁰ By engaging with young women in particular, Plan International believes that those who build our public places will be able to go beyond mere safety or an absence of violence, to the creation of places that include and welcome young women.

¹⁹ Our Watch (2015) *Evidence Paper: Respectful Relationships Education in Schools*, Melbourne, Australia.

²⁰ See *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, article 12, which states that children are entitled to the freedom to express opinions and to have a say in matters affecting their social, economic, religious, cultural and political life.

9. ABOUT THE SURVEY

In December 2015, Plan International Australia and Our Watch surveyed young women and girls aged 15-19 from across Australia. Participants, who were drawn from all states and territories of Australia and evenly spread across all age cohorts, completed the survey about their perceptions of personal safety and gender equality. The random sample of size 600 gives a margin of error at a 95% confidence level (meaning there's a 95% likelihood that the sample accurately reflects the attitudes of the population), of 0.98/24.49 or 0.04 - 4%.

This Australian survey builds on previous surveys conducted by Plan International in a range of countries around the world, including Ecuador, Nicaragua, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe, to provide girls and young women with an opportunity to share their experiences relating to gender inequality and to make suggestions about the changes and solutions they would like to see. Parental consent was sought from all participants aged 17 and under and the survey adhered to the ESOMAR Code of Conduct for market research. Participants were also provided with the details of support organisations which they could contact if they felt they were affected by any issues raised as part of the survey.

The 2015 Australian survey is the first survey to be conducted in partnership with Our Watch, Australia's national foundation to prevent violence against women and their children. In March 2015, Plan and Our Watch released a separate report, "Don't send me that pic," based on the survey findings, specifically highlighting girls' perceptions of safety in the digital context.²¹ Later this year, Plan International and Our Watch will release a full report on the survey, which canvasses a range of issues relating to gender inequality in Australia. Our Watch and Plan International Australia look forward to offering further insight into the level of empowerment and aspirations of young Australian women.

10. ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA AND OUR WATCH

Plan International is one of the world's oldest and largest child rights development agencies. We work in over 70 countries around the world to tackle the root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice. Plan International's 'Because I am a Girl' campaign is working to create a world that values girls, promotes their rights and ends injustice.

Our Watch is a national, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to preventing violence against women before it starts, through challenging its primary drivers – gender inequality and restrictive gender stereotypes. The organisation works to increase gender equality and respect in all aspects of everyday life, such as in schools; workplaces; media; sporting organisations; and through social marketing, and developing and influencing public policy.

²¹ <https://www.plan.org.au/~media/plan/documents/reports/dont-send-me-that-pic.pdf?la=en>.