

UNSAFE IN THE CITY



RESEARCH SUMMARY

In the course of this ground-breaking research, thousands of girls and young women have shared their stories of harassment and violence for the first time, providing a never-before seen glimpse of what they experience in their cities and the impact this has on their lives.

“For us there isn’t anything new [in the research]. The most important finding isn’t for us but for the world that you can see how insecure we feel. They harass us, they touch us, they do everything to us. There is finally somewhere where it is written down.”

YOUNG WOMAN, 21, RESEARCH WORKSHOP, MADRID

THE EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

The rights and needs of adolescent girls are at the heart of Plan International’s work. This research aimed to find out what girls and young women actually experience as they move around their cities: how safe do they feel, how, where and when might the fear of violence and harassment impinge on their daily activities? What, when girls are restricted and intimidated, are the longer-term implications for their futures?

Each one of the cities that took part in the project is unique, with its own language, culture and geography. And yet, in each of these cities, and all over the world, girls and women face barriers to using the public spaces which boys and men take for granted. In none of the cities was a young woman’s experience of city life free from fear.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

- ◆ Cities are not safe places for girls and young women: on the streets, on public transport and in most public spaces they are frequently made to feel uncomfortable, unsafe and intimidated, just because they are young and female.
- ◆ The underlying cause of many girls’ and young women’s feeling of insecurity is male behaviour. The problem cannot simply be blamed on a lack of security and lighting.
- ◆ Transport hubs, train and bus stations and bus stops are prime locations for groping and harassment – central meeting points, crowded places through which men could pass quickly without being identified.
- ◆ In all five cities, to be groped, cat-called and abused is so common, girls start to perceive it as “just normal”. Girls and young women are harassed at all times of the day and night.
- ◆ For the most part, witnesses just stand by and do little or nothing to help and girls feel that there is little point in reporting harassment to the authorities because they believe the authorities have neither the will nor the power to do anything about it.
- ◆ The indifference and inaction of city authorities and wider society leads many girls and young women to blame themselves for abuse and harassment.
- ◆ Girls and young women are forced to modify their own behaviour to keep themselves safe: this places limitations on their freedom, opportunity and equality. Many girls avoid certain places on their own. Some have even dropped out of school or had to leave their jobs because they simply can’t get around their cities safely.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



Changing the behaviour of men and boys

Men and boys need to recognise that sexist behaviour is intolerable and learn to respect girls and women as their equals.

Boys and young men need to be empowered to be champions of change, to intervene and challenge the group culture.

Whether it be one to one, within the family, at school or at work, everyone should **start the conversation** about girls' and women's experiences.

Girls and young women need spaces to lead the **public discussion** about discrimination in cities without fear of reprisals.

Municipal governments, private sector, donor and civil society organisations can all play a part in **public campaigning** against harassment and abuse.

Everyone, but especially politicians, celebrities, business women and men, and other leaders, can be **allies and champions** for girls and young women.



Increasing girls' participation in decisions

City mayors, managers and planners must **gather information**, listening to and working with girls and young women.

City authorities need to prioritise data collection to quantify the levels of abuse.

Girls should be involved in **design and planning** of their cities, including infrastructure, services and policies.

The business community, municipal and transport authorities must support girls in difficulty by setting up girl-friendly **safe spaces**.



Enforcing laws and policies against sexual harassment

Governments must adopt and implement **legislation and policy** that criminalises all forms of gender-based violence.

Tackle the areas where alcohol and drug taking facilitates abuse by providing more properly trained security personnel and reviewing licensing laws.

Train and target frontline staff including police, transport staff, security companies and local government officials – including designing effective reporting mechanisms that respond to girls' needs and initiate action against the perpetrators of abuse.

“In my imaginary city there would be equality but in my current city there's no equality.”

YOUNG WOMAN, KAMPALA, RESEARCH WORKSHOP

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The data was gathered in partnership with Monash XYX Lab and Crowdsport in Delhi, Kampala, Lima, Madrid and Sydney through **Free to Be** – a map-based online social survey tool. It was co-designed with girls and young women, enabling them to identify the areas in their city where they feel safe or unsafe. They did this by dropping a 'good' pin on locations they enjoy and a 'bad' pin on the places they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. They were then invited to leave a comment about that part of the city. Reflection workshops were held subsequently in every city to test the main research findings.

