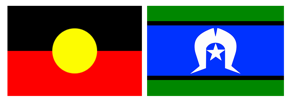
A person riding a bicycle

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading advocate for young people aged 12–25 and the youth sector in Victoria.

Our vision is that the rights of young people in Victoria are respected, and they are active, visible and valued in their communities.



YACVic respectfully acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this continent. We pay our respects to the ancestors and Elders past and present of all Aboriginal nations in Victoria.

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# Background

Violence against women continues to be a widespread problem in Australia.[[1]](#endnote-2) Despite the development of domestic violence action plans at both the national and state levels, gender-based violence remains endemic in Australian society.[[2]](#endnote-3)

### Context

The persistence of gender inequality and violence against women within Australia has galvanised public debate and activism in recent months. Notably, the appointment of outspoken advocate for survivors of sexual assault Grace Tame as Australian of the Year, and various allegations of sexual assault occurring in Parliament House, have increased attention on women’s safety and gender inequality within politics and the broader Australian community.

A recent petition detailing young women’s experiences of sexual assault - created by a young NSW woman - has highlighted the alarming prevalence of gender-based violence that young women experience.[[3]](#endnote-4) The prevalence of women experiencing physical and sexual violence is highest within the 18-24 age group, so it is essential that young people are targeted by initiatives that aim to address gender-based violence in Australia.[[4]](#endnote-5) Similarly, gender equity education and anti-violence campaigns must target young people because they have been identified as a key cohort that is more likely to endorse attitudes that are supportive of violence.[[5]](#endnote-6)

Therefore, it is important to incorporate the experiences, knowledge and perspectives of young people into any research, program development or data collection concerning women’s safety, in order to ensure that gender-based violence can be effectively addressed.

### Research

YACVic is the leading peak body representing young people and the youth sector in Victoria. In 2020 YACVic conducted a women’s safety survey, and this report analyses the data collected. The survey focused on the safety of women in public spaces and the solutions that are available to improve this.

Overall, there were 131 responses to the survey. The vast majority of respondents were young women. For the purpose of this report we have excluded the data of women aged over 25 and all male respondents unless otherwise stated. The analysis in this report will instead focus on the responses of young women, non-binary young people and the responses of people who did not disclose their gender. Thus, any data mentioned collected from ‘respondents’ in this report refers to young women and young non-binary people unless otherwise stated.

### Consulting with Young People

The survey conducted by YACVic about young women’s safety is notable for its focus on collecting information from young people about how they think safety can be improved for all young people who experience gender-based violence. The collection of data that records the perspectives and experiences of women is important because there is currently a significant lack of gender-disaggregated data within Australia and the world.[[6]](#endnote-7)

The need to better understand, document and respond to the voices and experiences of people who face gender-based discrimination has become particularly relevant in Victoria since the passing of the Gender Equality Act 2020 which made incorporating a gendered lens into policy, planning and politics a legal imperative.[[7]](#endnote-8)

Similarly, we must consult with young LGBTIQA+ people because we know that there is a lack of data collected on their experiences of gender-based discrimination and violence.[[8]](#endnote-9) Ensuring that the experiences and perspectives of young LGBTIQA+ people are incorporated into data collection and research relating to young people’s safety is especially important given that young LGBTIQA+ people still face significant discrimination and harassment within many areas of private and public life.[[9]](#endnote-10)

Survey Results

### Demographics of Respondents

Of the 131 people who responded to the survey, 108 were aged between 13-25. The majority of respondents were female, with 119 women responding to the survey, 5 males, 3 non-binary people and 4 respondents who did not disclose their gender. Thirty-eight per cent of respondents had an experience of mental illness, 25 per cent identified as LGBTIQA+, 13 per cent identified as CALD and/or migrant and/or refugee and 9 per cent identified as disabled.

### Unsafe Locations

Respondents were asked to indicate all the places they have felt unsafe from the locations listed in the graph below.

Respondents were most likely to feel unsafe whilst on the street, using public transport or in a park. Seventy-one per cent of respondents reported feeling unsafe on the street, 68 per cent reported feeling unsafe whilst using public transport and 56 per cent reported feeling unsafe in a park.

The place where the lowest number of respondents reported feeling unsafe was in the home. However, whilst only 10 per cent of respondents overall reported feeling unsafe in their own home, 22 per cent of respondents who have an experience of mental illness and 30 per cent of respondents who have a disability reported feeling unsafe whilst in their own home.

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### What makes young people feel unsafe while in public spaces

Respondents were asked an open-ended question about what makes them feel unsafe in public spaces. Respondents identified that the actions, behaviour and presence of men is a key contributing factor to them feeling unsafe whilst they are in public spaces. Most commonly respondents reported feeling unsafe due to aggressive behaviour from men, men in groups and being subjected to unwanted comments or attention from men. Forty-nine per cent of respondents noted that men made them feel unsafe in public spaces.

Additionally, poor lighting, night-time and being alone were frequently identified by respondents as making them feel unsafe. Twenty-seven per cent of respondents mentioned that darkness/night-time made them feel unsafe. Sixteen per cent of respondents noted that being alone in public spaces made them feel unsafe.

### Changing behaviour

Respondents were asked to identify if they have changed their behaviour to avoid feeling unsafe when in a public space. Ninety per cent answered yes, 7 per cent answered no and 6 per cent of respondents answered maybe to this question.

They were then asked to outline how they have changed their behaviour when they are in public spaces. Respondents outlined a range of behaviour changes that they most commonly use to avoid feeling unsafe in a public space.

Fifty-three per cent of respondents mentioned at least one of the following behaviour changes:

* Avoid specific venues
* Avoid being alone
* Avoid going out at night
* Avoid people (generally men)

### Frequency of feeling unsafe

The average amount of times respondents had felt unsafe in a public space within the last 12 months was five times.

Fifty-five per cent of respondents to this question have felt unsafe in a public space more than four times in the last year.

Findings

### Improving the safety of young people

Respondents were asked to choose what actions the government should take to improve the safety of women. The respondents were provided with 11 solutions and asked to assign each a ranking from 1-11, with 1 considered to have the most positive impact and 11 considered to have the least positive impact. Fifty-six per cent of respondents answered this question, by ranking these proposed solutions:

* Have better education on gender equity for boys at school and behaviour change education for older men
* Make sure girls have genuine input on decisions made around safety
* Change policies so laws are better enforced
* Tougher penalties for boys or men who abuse or are violent towards girls or women, such as longer prison sentences
* Make reporting violence or abuse to community leaders, local authorities easier
* Improve lighting on public transport, stations and streets
* Make a safety app so you can report incidences at any time
* Parents and people who work with young people (like teachers, coaches) promote gender equality more actively
* State-wide public awareness campaign to challenge harassment and encourage reporting
* Give girls better access to information and training to protect themselves from violence
* Educate Public Transport Victoria’s authorised officers about gender-based violence and harassment

In order to analyse the data collected from this question the rankings were grouped into three categories: a ranking of 1-3 was considered to have a high amount of positive impact; a ranking of 4-6 was considered to have a medium amount of positive impact; and a ranking of 9-11 was considered to have a low amount of positive impact.

The table on the next page lists the actions that were provided in the survey for respondents to rank, with the corresponding percentage of respondents who ranked that action as having a high positive impact.

The most popular solution chosen was ***‘Have better education on gender equity for boys at school and behaviour change education for older men’*** with 54 per cent of respondents ranking this option as a high priority.

The second most popular solution was ***‘Make sure girls have genuine input on decisions made around safety’*** with 37 per cent of respondents considering this option as a high priority.

The third most popular solution was ***‘Change policies so laws are better enforced’*** with 35 per cent of respondents considering this option to be a high priority.

The least popular solution that was chosen was ***‘Educate Public Transport Victoria’s authorised officers about gender-based violence and harassment.*** Only 8 per cent of respondents considered this to be a high priority solution.

### Implementing young people’s solutions

Survey participants were then asked to describe what their top ranked solution looked like in practice. Only 49 per cent of participants responded to this question, compared to the 56 per cent of respondents who ranked the provided options.

Twenty-two per cent of respondents wanted to see tougher consequences and greater accountability for sexual harassment and gender-based violence and a further 20 per cent of respondents considered education a vital component of addressing women’s safety. Fifteen per cent of respondents suggested that an increase of women in leadership positions and increased decision-making power for women would help to improve their safety.

Education within schools that targets young men, school teachers and/or parents was most commonly mentioned. However, in addition to the 20 per cent of people who wanted education programs that targeted the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys, 3 per cent of respondents to this question wanted education programs that assist young women to protect themselves from assault and identify predatory behaviour.

### Innovative ideas for public policy

Respondents were offered an opportunity to provide additional ideas and solutions for government to improve public safety. Suggestions provided by respondents included the introduction of safety zones in the CBD, increased security on public transport and the creation of a mass media education campaign. For example, one respondent specifically suggested “security on trams and trains after dark” in addition to the security personnel/Protective Service Officers (PSOs) that are often present at train stations. Similarly, another respondent would like to see increased PSO presence in public spaces and for PSOs to be used to “walk people from dark train stations”.

Other respondents would like a safety app to be developed so that it is easier for women to report their experiences of feeling unsafe in a public space.

### Safety in the workplace

The safety of workers in the workplace has recently become a topical issue in Australia after the 2018 Human Rights Commission national survey revealed one in three people have experienced sexual harassment whilst at work in the past 5 years.[[10]](#endnote-11) Following on from this survey an inquiry into sexual harassment in the workplace was completed by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner in 2020.[[11]](#endnote-12)

Notably, YACVic’s survey found that only 16 per cent of respondents mentioned the workplace as a location where they had felt unsafe. This finding may be partially due to the fact that this survey was not designed to gather information that related to sexual harassment within the workplace or workplace safety. Based on people’s responses to this survey, young people are more concerned about safety in outdoor public spaces than indoor spaces.

However, 76 per cent respondents who identified that they had felt unsafe in the workplace were from a marginalised group (i.e. LGBTIQA+, experience of mental illness or disability). This data is consistent with findings from the 2020 sexual harassment national inquiry report which outlined that young people, LGBTIQA+ people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, disabled people, and culturally and linguistically diverse people were more likely to experience sexual harassment in the workplace.[[12]](#endnote-13)

# Diversity

In the next section we will provide disaggregated data for disabled young people, LGBTIQA+ young people, CALD and/or migrant and/or refugee young people and young people with an experience of mental illness.

These groups of people are known to be particularly vulnerable to experiencing gender-based discrimination and violence.[[13]](#endnote-14) For example, research has shown that disabled people and LGBTIQA+ people are more vulnerable to experiencing gender-based violence and discrimination compared to the general population.[[14]](#endnote-15)[[15]](#endnote-16)

Recent research has also indicated that disabled young people are most at risk of experiencing violence with 17 per cent of disabled people aged from 18-24 experiencing violence.[[16]](#endnote-17) Understanding of gender-based discrimination and violence is also limited by the lack of disaggregated data of vulnerable groups.[[17]](#endnote-18) Thus, the data below highlights the unique experiences of disabled young people, LGBTIQA+ young people and CALD young people, with the aim of better understanding how to support these groups.

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### Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and/or refugee and/or migrant young people

Thirteen per cent of participants in this survey identified as CALD and/or refugee and/or migrant.

The suggested solutions to improve safety provided by respondents who identified as CALD and/or refugee and/or migrant were very similar to the solutions proposed by the broader group of young people. CALD and/or refugee and/or migrant respondents believe that educating young men and boys, increasing penalties for gender-based violence and improving numbers of women in leadership roles will help to improve the safety of women in public spaces

Despite young CALD and/or refugee and/or migrant respondents offering similar solutions to the issue of women’s safety, their experiences of feeling unsafe in public spaces differed from other respondents. This was due to their experiences of racial intimidation and fear of racially motivated violence. Twenty-five per cent of CALD and/or refugee and/or migrant respondents have felt unsafe in public spaces due to racially motivated intimidation and fear of racial violence.

Thirteen per cent of CALD and/or refugee and/or migrant respondents mentioned that COVID-19 has contributed to them feeling more unsafe in public spaces due to racially motivated attacks on the Asian community occurring during the pandemic. Six per cent also identified that being fearful of authorities (i.e. police, security) contributed to their experience of feeling unsafe in a public space.

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### Disabled young people

Seventy-eight per cent of disabled respondents have changed their behaviour to avoid feeling unsafe in a public space. This is 5 percentage points higher than non-disabled respondents. Notably, 60 per cent avoid going out or to certain venues to avoid feeling unsafe in a public space.

One hundred per cent of disabled respondents indicated that they feel unsafe on public transport, parks and the street.

Forty per cent of disabled respondents indicated that they had felt unsafe in someone else’s home. This is significant given that only 13 per cent of non-disabled respondents reported feeling unsafe in someone else’s home.

### LGBTIQA+ young people

Collecting data from LBGTIQA+ people is particularly important because there is currently limited data available that documents violence experienced by the LGBTIQA+ community.[[18]](#endnote-19) However, the data that does exist indicates that LGBTIQA+ people experience violence at rates that are at least equivalent to straight cis gender women, with some data indicating that LGBTIQA+ people experience higher rates of violence than the general female population.[[19]](#endnote-20)

Twenty-five per cent of respondents of this survey identified as LGBTIQA+. One hundred per cent of LGBTIQA+ respondents reported that they have experienced feeling unsafe in a public space. This is higher than the broader group of respondents, of whom 94 per cent identified that they had felt unsafe in a public space.

Thirty per cent of LGBTIQA+ people did not respond to the question relating to feeling safe in their own home. Twenty-nine per cent of LGBTIQA+ people who did respond to this question indicated they have experienced feeling unsafe in their own home. This figure is 19 percentage points higher than the broader respondent population for this survey.

Whilst only 14 per cent of respondents reported feeling unsafe within a place of education (i.e. school, TAFE or university), 47 per cent of the people who reported feeling unsafe in a place of education also identified as being a member of the LGBTIQA+ community.

The over representation of young LGBTIQA+ respondents amongst people who have felt unsafe in an educational environment is consistent with previous research which found that 80 per cent of homophobic bullying involving LGBTIQA+ young people occur at school.[[20]](#endnote-21)

Sixty-four per cent of LGBTIQA+ young people who responded to the question “What makes you feel unsafe in public spaces” mentioned the presence, actions or behaviours of men making them feel unsafe.

Summary of Key Findings

Respondents were most likely to feel unsafe whilst on the street, using public transport or in a park. The most commonly reported reason why respondents felt unsafe in public places was the actions, behaviour and presence of men, with 49 per cent of respondents mentioning that men made them feel unsafe in public spaces.

Whilst only 16 per cent of respondents chose the workplace as a location where they had felt unsafe in Victoria, 76 per cent of the people who identified that they had felt unsafe in the workplace were from a marginalised group (i.e. identified as LGBTIQA+, CALD and/or migrant and/or refugee, disabled or have an experience of mental illness).

There was a notable focus on the importance of educating boys and men in order to create a safer society for women and gender-diverse people. For example, the most popular women’s safety initiative chosen by participants was ‘Have better education on gender equity for boys at school and behaviour change education for older men’ with 54 per cent of respondents ranking this option as a high priority.

Twenty-five per cent of CALD and/or migrant and/or refugee young women have felt unsafe in public spaces due to racially motivated intimidation and fear of racial violence.

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### Conclusion

This report has evaluated the experiences of young women in public spaces and investigated what they think the government should do in order to improve public safety. A significant number of young people would like to see greater education of men and boys about gender equity, as well as providing more opportunities for people who face gender-based discrimination to have genuine input into decision making in order to improve their safety.

In response to these survey results, YACVic will be running a focus group to learn more about young people’s perspectives of public safety and gender-based discrimination and violence. The results of this focus group will be used to inform future gender equity initiatives and advocacy undertaken by YACVic.

Ongoing consultation with young people about public safety and gender-based violence and discrimination will be essential as we strive to create a more gender equal society that is free from gender-based discrimination and violence.

Appendix 1

### Limitation of the Research

There are some limitations with the findings of this report which must be taken into consideration, these are:

* The number of people who participated in this survey is too small to be considered an appropriate sample size of the broader population.
* The only method of data collection used was an online survey that was written in English. This lack of accessibility is likely to have prevented a more diverse range of people from participating in this survey.
* The title of the survey (Women’s Safety Survey) may have discouraged people of other genders to respond.
* Several questions had a response rate of under 80 per cent which has implications for the data.
* There was limited participation from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people and non-binary young people. Only 2 per cent of respondents were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and only 2 per cent of respondents identified as non-binary.

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