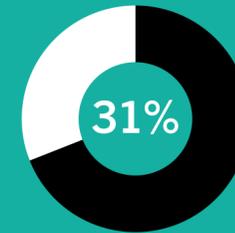


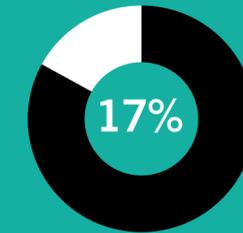
Girls' views on safety in parks



Parks benefit health and wellbeing. Yet concerns about safety can constrain girls' use and experience of them.



of girls in Yorkshire feel unsafe in parks compared to...



of boys (Yorkshire Sport 2022).

THE RESEARCH

What makes parks feel safe and unsafe?

50 girls aged 13-18 years from across West Yorkshire rated their agreement or disagreement with 49 statements about their local parks, which they arranged on a grid according to their own subjective viewpoint.

Afterwards, girls reflected in group discussions on why the statements were 'like' or 'unlike' their views. Girls who rate statements in a statistically similar way share a viewpoint.

We found that girls perceive safety differently in parks. Girls' views clustered into three distinct viewpoints. Across these viewpoints, there were five areas of agreement.



GIRLS AGREE:

1. Parks do not feel safe after dark.
2. Parks feel safer during daylight hours though there are situations where girls feel unsafe.
3. Girls feel reassured by the idea of emergency help points in parks.
4. Girls feel unsafe in secluded and hidden areas of parks with thick vegetation.
5. Girls feel safer on the edges of parks.

VIEWPOINTS

1. People not parks



People, not parks, are the problem: 'No matter facilities in parks, or how parks look, or whatever - it's the people in it that are the problem, not the actual park.' Busier and familiar parks do not necessarily feel safer.

Walking past groups of teenagers, men and boys, and people drinking or using drugs feels intimidating as they may 'say stuff' or dominate park space. Other women and girls in parks makes them feel safer.

Authorities are not doing enough about girls' safety. Yet, adding security measures may not address underlying problems. Park design should help girls spot dangers, escape easily and get help in an emergency.

The solution should not have to be girls taking personal safety measures or changing their behaviour or dress. To improve feelings of safety, girls want societal attitudes towards women and male behaviour to change.

2. Security and familiarity



Going to a familiar park with friends, family or as part of an organised activity is important to feeling safe. 'It's about being in a group.'

More can be done to make parks feel safer throughout the day. Busier parks with a range of facilities, amenities and organised activities, feel safer. Visible staffing and security measures, like lighting, help points and CCTV, would make parks feel safer. Lots of exits make escape easier. Signage improves way-finding.

Changing social attitudes towards women and tackling men's behaviour are lesser priorities than improvements to parks. Parks can be designed and managed as inclusive spaces where girls feel safe.

3. Men and patriarchy



Girls' fears relate to the threat of predatory behaviour of men and boys in a patriarchal society. Societal change is needed to improve girls' feelings of safety in public.

Everyday harassment and hearing about other women's bad experiences reinforce a view that nowhere is safe for girls. Authorities do not take harassment seriously enough or educate boys about acceptable behaviour. Measures that help girls to spot dangerous men and attract bystanders in the park, like lighting and help points, would feel safer. Presence of other women also helps.

Authorities should focus on changing societal norms and attitudes that underpin predatory male behaviour. Taking personal safety measures is necessary to stay safe.