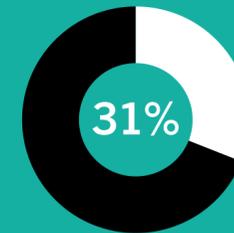


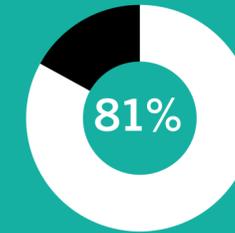
# Professionals' views on safety in parks



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



of girls in Yorkshire feel unsafe in parks (Yorkshire Sport, 2022).



of women in the UK feel unsafe walking alone in a park or open space after dark (ONS, 2021).

## THE RESEARCH

**What makes women and girls feel safe and unsafe in parks?**

26 professionals from different services within local government and the police in West Yorkshire rated their agreement or disagreement with 49 statements about women and girls' safety in parks, which they arranged on a grid.

Afterwards, professionals reflected in one-to-one interviews on why the statements were 'like' or 'unlike' their views. Professionals who rate statements in statistically similar ways share a viewpoint.

We found that professionals have similar views, despite their different roles. Professionals' views clustered in to two viewpoints, which share 29 areas of agreement. They diverge in relation to whether the focus should be on addressing structural/cultural factors in society or situational/practical factors in parks.

## PROFESSIONALS AGREE:



Many parks are safe for women and girls, but more can be done to make them safer and feel safer, especially after dark.

More staffing, lighting and visible security measures could enhance women's feelings of safety in parks subject to sufficient budget. Changes to parks should consider the potential impacts on other benefits, such as biodiversity.

Parks should be designed and managed to increase visibility and openness, which improves safety, like cutting down overgrown vegetation to reduce the amount of hidden areas and bushes. These are relatively simple and cheap changes that can make a big difference.



Broader societal attitudes and norms need to change for women and girls to feel safe in parks, as violence against women and girls is an issue in all public and private spaces.

Busier parks are safer parks because there is increased social surveillance. Parks should be designed with facilities and amenities that appeal to women, girls and families as mediating signals of safety.

Social and physical signs of disorder make women feel unsafe, like graffiti or individuals and groups behaving inappropriately.

## COMPARISONS WITH WOMEN & GIRLS

We compared professionals' views on safety in parks with the views of women and girls. If the people who shape parks have different views from users, then this might be an important driver of lack of safety, and a barrier to improving parks and public safety.

Overall, we found that professionals' views sit within the range of diverse viewpoints we identified between women and girls. However, professionals' were more likely to think that parks are fairly or very safe for women and girls.

## TWO VIEWPOINTS

### 1. Change society, do not blame victims



This viewpoint puts greater emphasis on the wider unequal context of gender relations in society as the root cause of violence against women and women's fears in public spaces. It puts less emphasis on park design and other situational interventions.

The responsibility lays with men to change their attitudes and behaviours, rather than with women to take precautions to avoid being victims. Authorities must avoid victim blaming.

### 2. Gender-sensitive design for maximum use



This viewpoint puts greater emphasis on practical changes to park design and on situational interventions that park managers and police can do to improve women's safety. The underpinning idea is to make parks more attractive and appealing to legitimate users, and particularly increasing the numbers of women using parks to reassure other women.

Parks that offer a reassuring presence of visible staff and provide a range of facilities, amenities, mixed uses and organised activities will make parks busier and safer. Safety is an equal responsibility between the provider and user. Parks should be designed to help women spot dangers and take action.