

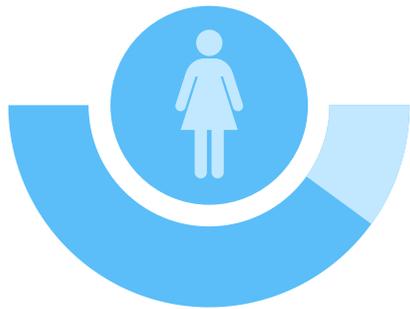
thrive

STRANGER HARASSMENT

BUSINESS CASE



AT A GLANCE



**OVER
80%**

of women aged 18-34 in the UK have experienced sexual harassment in a public space.¹



66%

of those who experienced stranger harassment at work experienced it in the last 12 months.²



45%

of women who experienced harassment in a public space did not think reporting it would help.³



**LESS THAN
50%**

of those who experienced stranger harassment at work reported the most recent incident to their employer.⁴

“Stranger harassment is [sexual] harassment perpetrated by people who are not known to the victim in public domains such as on the street, in stores, at bars, or on public transport.”⁵

STRANGER HARASSMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY

Stranger harassment is a pervasive form of gender-based violence that impacts the right of every individual to feel safe in their day to day life.

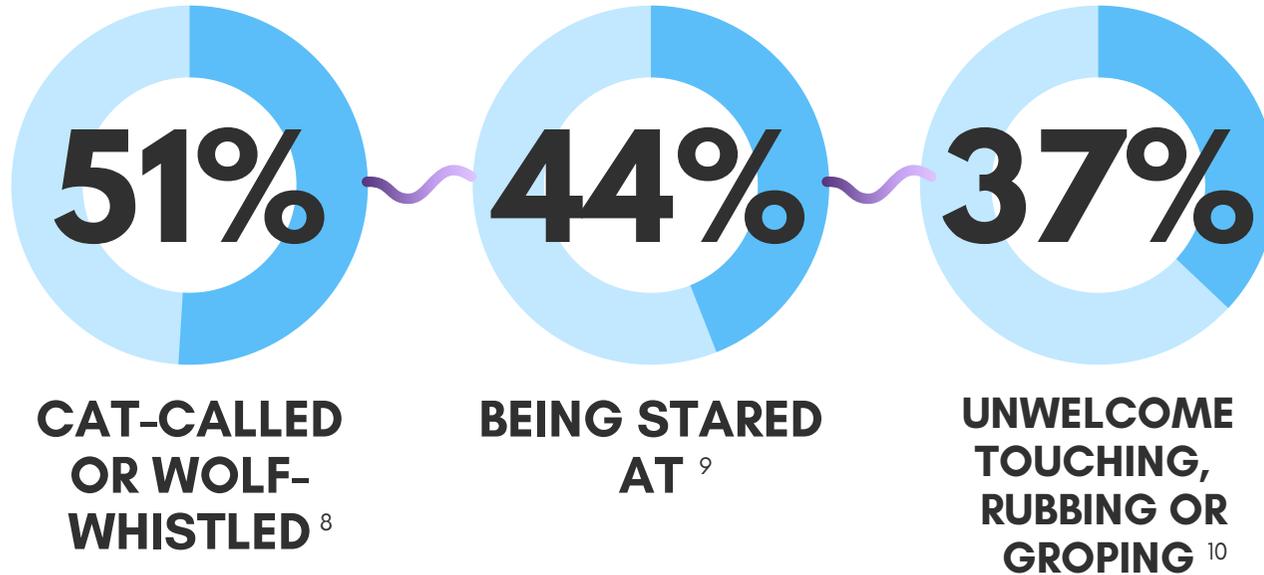
Encounters of stranger harassment are often so normalised and engrained in the social fabric of public life that these 'everyday' incidents are rarely named as harassment. Although anyone can experience stranger harassment, vulnerability to incidents are directly linked to other aspects of one's identity, such as gender, sexuality, race or religion.

Where gender is concerned, stranger harassment faced by women is often sexual in nature. Catcalls, stares, unwelcome touching, and remarks are faced disproportionately by women. **UN Women UK estimates that 71% of women of all ages in the UK have experienced some form of sexual harassment in a public space.**⁶



Stranger harassment is a widespread issue, and the frequency of such events is concerning. According to TUC polling of over 4,500 workers, **at least half of those who have experienced stranger harassment at work have been subjected to the behaviour three or more times.**⁷

EXAMPLES OF STRANGER HARASSMENT



Cat-calls, staring, and unwelcome touching are the most commonly reported forms of stranger harassment amongst women. However, **in-person comments or 'jokes', unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favours**, being **physically followed**, and **indecent exposure** are also common examples of stranger harassment reported by women.

The result of these microaggressions is hyper-awareness of one's environment. When instances are repeatedly experienced, they are underpinned by an awareness of, and fear towards, the **threat of more serious violence**.



**PUBLIC
TRANSPORT &
TAXIS**



**HOSPITALITY
VENUES**



RETAIL



**STREETS AND
PARKS**



ONLINE SPACES

CREATING SAFE SPACES AT WORK



Companies may assume that stranger harassment is not relevant to the workplace, as private offices are not public spaces. However, **there are numerous occasions throughout the working day when employees enter the public sphere** to travel, meet clients, source products or make sales. Furthermore, **many employees have public-facing roles**, such as, working in retail, public services, events and hospitality. As employees undertake these activities, they become vulnerable to stranger harassment.

Underreporting is a major barrier to change - in and out of the workplace.

We know that stranger harassment is a significantly underreported problem. Research found that, in the UK, **over 95% of all women did not report their experiences of sexual harassment in a public space.**¹¹

55% DID NOT THINK THE INCIDENT WAS SERIOUS ENOUGH TO REPORT¹²

45% DID NOT THINK REPORTING THE INCIDENT WOULD HELP¹³

For those who experience stranger harassment at their place of work, **less than half reported the incident to their employer.** Respondents reported managers and supervisors who dismissed the harassment altogether. For others, no action was taken even with multiple offences. This led employees to stop reporting incidents altogether and, worryingly, workers reported accepting harassment as '**part of the job**'.¹⁴

"Women currently experience shouted insults, determined trailing, and pinches and grabs by strange men and are fairly certain that no one - not the perpetrator and probably no official - will think anything of note has happened"¹⁵

STRANGER HARASSMENT AT WORK

EMPLOYEE TESTIMONIALS¹⁶ (TUC, 2019)

"Customers sexually harassing staff members and myself whilst drunk. It also occurs when they are sober. It happens every time I work. **My managers think it's funny.**"

"An elderly male photographed me as I was working, which involves me bending over at times. **A man wolf whistled at me and told me he loved to see a woman on her knees** as I was stocking a bottom shelf. An elderly man **kept complimenting my body**, such as telling me to look into his eyes [so he could] admire my eye colour."

"I've been told my **customers that my voice sounds sexy** and they would love to see me in person [...] I have also been in situations where the customer was shouting at me and calling me abusive names and swearing at me."

"[I receive] **repeated humiliating comments** related to gender from contractors, use of offensive language related to gender by consultants."

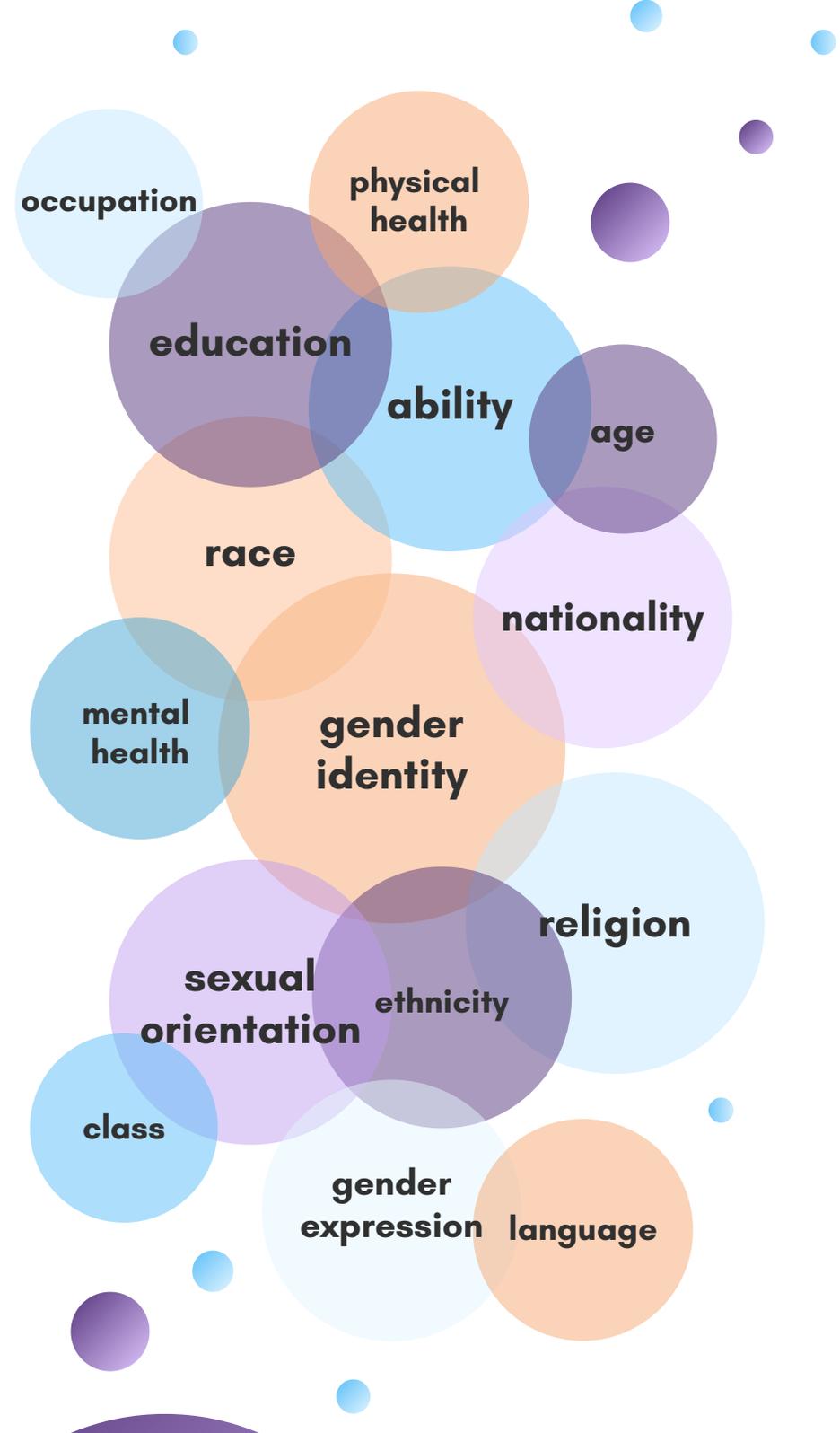
"One time I really remember is when I was serving an older gentleman who was buying underwear, **he said he would love to see me in them.**"

AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS

creates a deeper, more accurate understanding of how experiences of stranger harassment may be **compounded by other factors relating to one's identity**, such as gender expression, sexuality, race, religion, ethnicity, age and/or disability. This effects types of harassment, the frequency of such events, as well as additional barriers to reporting. For example, there may be greater distrust towards public services, especially the police force, in some communities. Language barriers and fears surrounding citizenship status may also impact someone's access to support and help.

Without an intersectional approach, data does not necessarily portray an accurate picture of how experiences of harassment vary between women.

According to research conducted by TFL in 2017, 10% of all adults in London had experienced sexual harassment on public transport in the 12 months prior. However, this figure rose to 16% for those who identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community, 17% for Londoners with a disability, and 20% for all young women aged 16-34 years old.¹⁷



AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS

AMY KAVANAGH

#JUSTDON'TGRAB

Amy Kavanagh started the #JustDon'tGrab campaign to raise awareness of the disproportionate levels of street harassment faced by people with disabilities, especially women, in the UK. ¹⁸

Amy is blind and experiences street harassment frequently. She estimates that people are aggressive or sexually abusive to her about twice a month on the streets of London, and reports facing hostility from people when she has not accepted help. ¹⁹

Disabled women are twice as likely than non-disabled women to experience sexual assault and harassment generally. ²⁰

Despite this, the focus on women's safety in the public arena pays little attention to the experiences of women with disabilities, the consequence being a severe emotional toll and physical risk for affected women.

"For me, I don't know whether the next person who touches me is trying to steal my bag, grope me, or help me across the road." ²¹

WHY SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED AS AN EMPLOYER?



IT CONCERNS EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND SAFETY

Harassment can have a significant impact on employees' mental health and feelings of safety and confidence in and out of the workplace.



COMPANY REPUTATION

Company response to incidents of harassment indicates how serious the company is about wider social issues. This is very important for customers, investors, clients and employee retention.



OBLIGATION TO THE WIDER SOCIETY

Stranger harassment, especially sexual harassment, is underpinned by harmful belief systems about gender roles and sexual objectification that, as a society, requires collaboration across sectors.



BUILDING WORKPLACES THAT ARE PRODUCTIVE

Employee wellbeing is directly related to productivity and satisfaction in the workplace. Showing care for employees beyond the workplace boosts productivity and loyalty of staff.



EMPLOYERS HAVE A DUTY OF CARE TO EMPLOYEES

All employers are under a statutory duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their staff. This means identifying the risks employers may be exposed to and taking appropriate measures to control and deal with those risks.

TAKE ACTION

1 Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of harassment, abuse and bullying from a third-party.

Abusive third-parties can be banned from using company services, and companies can offer support to staff with reporting abuse and harassment to police. In addition, employers should provide counselling and/or an Employee Assistance Programme to support staff who have experienced harassment.

2 Carry out risk assessments and strengthen harassment prevention policies.

Risk assessments are particularly important for employees working in public-facing roles, lone and night working, those who may be closing premises, and consider employees' commute to and from work.

3 Provide comprehensive training for staff at all levels to ensure proper support for employees.

Comprehensive training that includes managers and supervisors ensure that policies are clearly communicated to staff and senior team members are equipped with the tools to deal with incidents of stranger harassment.

4 Conduct company research with employees to assess the scale of the problem

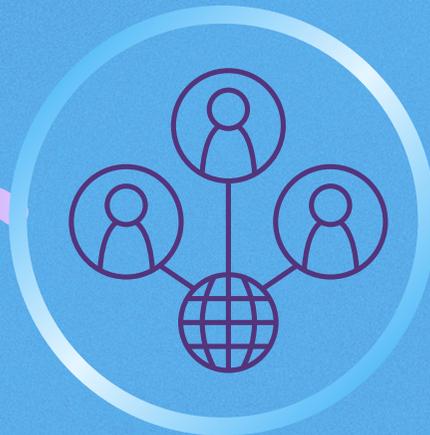
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WHAT CAN THRIVE DO FOR YOUR ORGANISATION?



SAFE SPACES TRAINING

Practical, expert-led, interactive training in partnership with UN Women UK



THRIVE BUSINESS NETWORK

Join a community of businesses committed to gender equality



ADVOCATE AND SHARE

Sharing the progress your workplace has made shows what is possible to other businesses.

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