

Report reveals extent of public sexual harassment experienced by Black and minoritized girls in the UK

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A new report reveals the extent of public sexual harassment (PSH) experienced by Black and minoritized girls in the U.K.—with many

saying it has impacted on their mental health, self-esteem and identity.

The [report](#), written by researchers at the University of York, is believed to be the first report on this topic in the U.K. Researchers worked with 34 Black and minoritized girls and [young women](#) aged 16–21 to better understand how and where they experienced PSH.

Cultural change

The authors of the report say it is clear from the findings that there is a need for systemic and [cultural change](#) and the long overdue transformation of sex education and sexual harassment education for [young people](#), teachers, and other authority figures.

Key findings from the report include:

- Public sexual harassment included intimidating [body language](#) and staring; being followed or honked at in cars; receiving comments about their bodies or appearance; being groped, touched and sexually assaulted
- Harassment was perpetrated in a range of places, including online and in schools, universities and [public spaces](#)
- The harassment often hinged on their difference from the White or majority norm, in terms of appearance, attire, and body shape
- Their bodies were commented on by strangers and peers and this was linked to an oversexualization of Black girls and young [women](#)'s bodies in particular
- The bodies of minoritized girls and young women who wore modest or religious clothing were also commented on, and in some cases, their religion or perceived ethnicity was used to insult or degrade them
- Girls and young women spoke about how experiencing PSH had impacted on their mental health, self-esteem and identity. It

particularly impacted on their body image

Previous surveys by Plan International have shown that 81% of young women and girls have experienced PSH outside in a public area, while 37% have experienced it on [public transport](#).

Structural inequalities

The lead author of the report, Professor Vanita Sundaram from the University of York's Department of Education, said, "All the girls and young women who took part in this research expressed a reluctance to report the public sexual harassment they had experienced to the police and other authorities—with structural inequalities clearly contributing to the obstacles that Black and minoritized girls and young women face when reporting.

"Whilst progress is being made, the findings from this report highlight that there is some way to go to address the widespread PSH that girls face in general, and in creating meaningful change for Black and minoritized girls and young women in particular."

The authors of the report have come up with a number of recommendations, including:

- Make public sexual harassment a criminal offense
- Listen to the unique experiences of minoritised girls and young women
- Invest in education on public sexual harassment for [public officials](#), including teachers, lecturers, and the police
- Improve reporting processes and systems for girls
- Include communities as part of the solution

A bill to make public sexual harassment a criminal offense is currently

going through the House of Commons.

Rose Caldwell, CEO of Plan International U.K., said, "This report could not come at a more important time. Public sexual harassment is sadly experienced by the majority of women and girls, but this report highlights the ways in which mixed-race, Black and Asian girls are disproportionately likely to be subject to this harmful and threatening behavior, and the specific barriers they face in reporting it.

"The powerful stories they shared reveal the damaging impact of public sexual [harassment](#) on their lives, leaving them feeling unsafe in public, in school, or even online."

More information: The report is available online: plan-uk.org/act-for-girls/crime-not-compliment

Provided by University of York

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