

Transport for NSW

Safer Cities Survey Report:

Perceptions of safety in public spaces
and transport hubs across NSW

July 2023



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OFFICIAL

Transport for NSW acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal people and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

Many of the transport routes we use today – from rail lines, to roads, to water crossings – follow the traditional Songlines, trade routes and ceremonial paths in Country that our nation's First Peoples followed for tens of thousands of years.

Transport for NSW is committed to honouring Aboriginal peoples' cultural and spiritual connections to the lands, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

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Cover image: [Your High Street Funded Grant Program](#), No Name Lane (Artists: Yanni Pounartzis and Hilary Wardhaugh), Queanbeayan-Palerang Regional Council

Credit: Queanbeayan-Palerang Regional Council, Yanni Pounartzis and Hilary Wardhaugh

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Long Summer Nights Program, The Rocks
Credit: NSW Government

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Minister's message

Safe and inclusive cities are essential to ensure people can fully participate in all that NSW has to offer. Whether walking or riding a bike down a street, through a park, or waiting at a train station, everyone has the right to feel safe wherever they go – and however they choose to get there.

Feeling safe is crucial for everyone's well-being, and research shows that for women, girls and gender diverse people, perceptions of safety are particularly important. When they feel unsafe, they often change their behaviours in a variety of ways. Some avoid traveling alone at night, some avoid public transport and others refrain from going out at all. This can have profound effects on what opportunities people can access.

The Safer Cities program is part of the NSW Government's commitment to helping make cities feel safer and more equitable for everyone. We are taking a diverse approach that includes testing short-term interventions in public spaces such as our streets or transport hubs, undertaking research and community engagement, and creating a toolkit to support industry, local and state government in creating more welcoming spaces for all.

The Safer Cities Survey was one step towards gaining greater understanding about perceptions of safety in NSW. This report is focused on the data we gathered through a state-wide survey from December 2022 to February 2023. I thank everyone in NSW who took the time to tell us how they feel when moving to, through and within public spaces and transport hubs across the state.

Striving towards places that feel safer for women, girls and gender diverse people, will make places that feel safer for everyone.



The Honourable Jo Haylen
Minister for Transport

Executive summary

Citizen-led engagement is at the heart of our approach to creating great places in NSW. We aim to ensure our cities and neighbourhoods are integrated with a range of modes of transport, helping to make our places and public spaces such as streets inclusive, walkable and feel safe for all to enjoy.

What we did

The NSW Government is investing \$30 million over two years to help improve perceptions of safety in our cities and towns, particularly for women, girls and gender diverse people as they walk or cycle to, through and within public spaces through the Safer Cities program. This includes our parks, streets, laneways, and plazas, as well as public transport hubs such as bus stops and train stations.

As part of planning and research to support the Safer Cities program, Transport for NSW developed the Safer Cities Survey which was open to the community between 13 December 2022 and 8 February 2023.

The survey was open to all NSW residents over the age of 16. Across the online survey, poll and ideas board, we heard from nearly 5,500 members of the community. 80+% of participants identified as women.

The purpose of the Safer Cities Survey was to gather data and evidence focused on perceptions of safety for people across NSW when going about their day-to-day travel in public spaces. In the Safer Cities Survey and in this report, when we use the terms walking and moving, we mean any way to travel without a car or bike, inclusive of all abilities, such as using a wheelchair or other type of mobility aid.¹

Findings from the Safer Cities Survey can then be used to help create better public spaces, such as through approaches to infrastructure, amenities, and activations that aim to help improve the community's perception of safety in our cities and towns.

Findings in this report are primarily focused on women, girls and gender diverse people due to the overarching aims of the Safer Cities program.

What we heard

A number of key insights emerged:

1. Most women do not feel safe in public spaces after dark.
2. After dark, women were twice as likely to feel unsafe in public spaces compared to men.
3. For most people, a sense of safety in public spaces influences the routes they choose.
4. If they felt safer in public spaces, people would be more likely to walk more, catch public transport more and go out during the day and after dark more.
5. People feel safest in activated public spaces with plenty of people around.
6. People's sense of safety can differ across age, ability, cultural background and identity.
7. People's sense of safety in public spaces can differ depending on where they live.

Safer Cities program

The Safer Cities program incorporates research and engagement with the community to test and trial approaches to help:

- Increase women, girls and gender diverse people's perception of safety and access to public spaces;
- Increase women, girls and gender diverse people's engagement with how public spaces and public transport are designed and managed; and
- Enable women, girls and gender diverse people to move freely, alone or in a group in their community.

This consultation has highlighted the need and opportunity for further research and engagement to understand:

- The specific experiences and perceptions of safety for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, people of different ages and LGBTIQ+ people broadly; and
- The experiences and perceptions of safety for gender diverse people across NSW who represented a small percentage of all respondents.

1. [NSW Guide to Walkable Public Space - Ideas for open spaces, streets and public facilities, 2022, Transport for NSW.](#)

What we did

The purpose of the Safer Cities Survey was to gather data and evidence focused on perceptions of safety for people across NSW when going about their day-to-day lives in public spaces. Findings from the Safer Cities Survey can then be used to help inform better public spaces, such as through approaches to infrastructure, amenities, and activations to help improve the community's sense of safety in our cities and towns.

The Safer Cities Survey was open to the community from 13 December 2022 to 8 February 2023. The Safer Cities Survey included an online survey, quick poll and ideas board where we heard from nearly 5,500 members² of the community, including:

- **4,850+** people completed the survey;
- **3,760+** people voted in the quick poll: *Do you change how you travel because you've felt unsafe in the past?*; and
- **500+** people contributed to the ideas board where we asked how can we make public spaces feel safer.

The Safer Cities Survey was open to NSW residents aged 16 years and over.

The questions covered topics including:

- Perceptions of safety in public spaces, including when travelling to and from public spaces;
- What factors influence the routes people choose to take; and
- Demographic information.

The survey also asked participants to share experiences walking³ or moving to, through and within public spaces, and ideas for how we can make public spaces feel safer through open-ended comments. This report features quotes from the open-ended comments to complement the data analysis.

Participants were given the option of skipping questions and in the case of demographic questions, they could opt to not identify this information. Throughout this report, the number of responses analysed has been indicated. Some questions vary in responses from 11 to 3,898. In the case of fewer responses, the opportunity for further consultation or research has been identified.

Definitions

Public space

The [NSW Public Spaces Charter](#) defines public spaces as all places that are publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. They include:



Public open spaces

Both active and passive (including parks, gardens, playgrounds, public beaches, riverbanks and waterfronts, outdoor playing fields and courts, and publicly accessible bushland).



Public facilities

Such as public libraries, museums, galleries, civic/community centres, showgrounds and indoor public sports facilities.



Streets

Streets, avenues and boulevards, squares and plazas, pavements, passages and lanes, and bicycle paths.

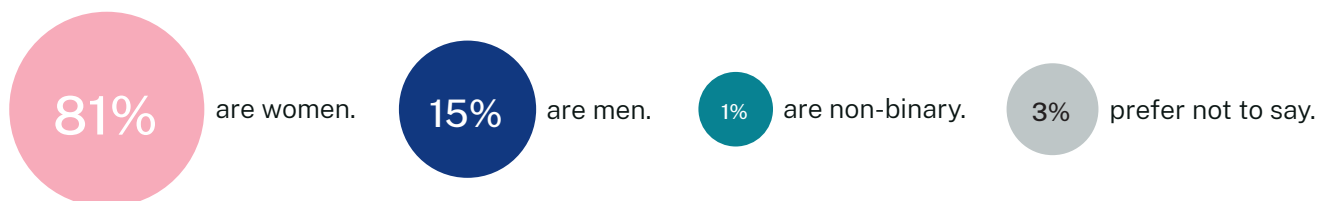
Gender identity in the Safer Cities Survey

Gender or gender identity refers to one's sense of whether they are a man, woman, non-binary, agender, gender queer, genderfluid or a combination of one or more of those definitions. Gender can be binary (either a man or a woman), or non-binary. This includes people who have no binary gender at all and people who have some relationship to binary gender/s.⁴ In the Safer Cities Survey, we gave participants the option to self-identify or not specify their gender/s.

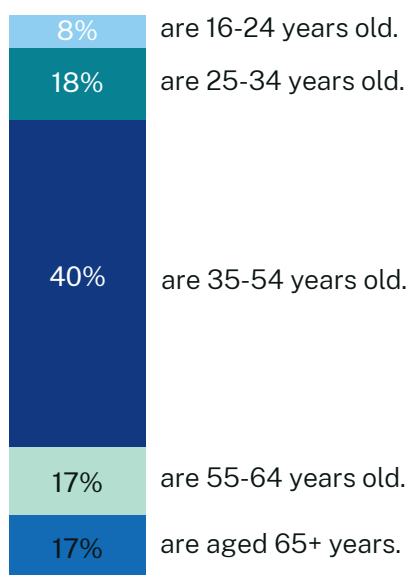
2. The Safer Cities Survey had a total of 5,443 engaged participants, who are defined as anyone who contributed to the Safer Cities Survey either by completing a survey, completing the quick poll and / or commenting in a discussion.
3. When we say walking or moving, we mean any way to travel without a car or bike, inclusive of all abilities, such as using a wheelchair or other type of mobility aid.
4. [NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022-2027, NSW Health.](#)

Who we heard from

Over 80% of participants identify as women.

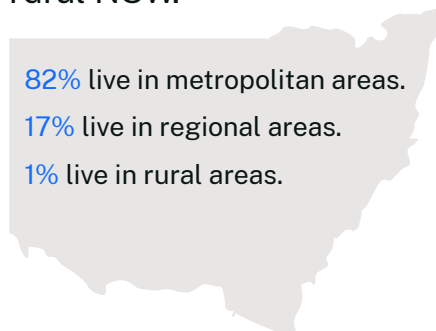


The majority of survey participants are aged 35 to 54 years (40%).



2% of participants are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Survey participants live in metropolitan, regional, and rural NSW.



1 in 4 participants (28%) have children under the age of 18 living with them.



1 in 10 participants (10%) are part of the LGBTIQA+ community.



1 in 10 participants (10%) are a person with disability.

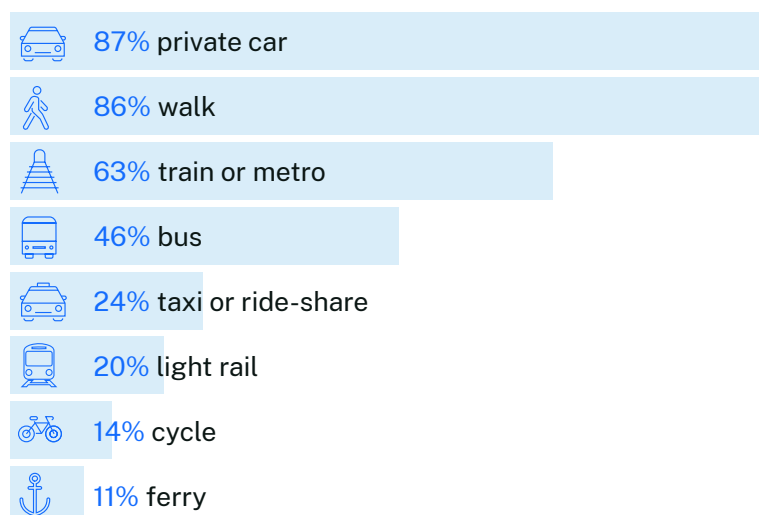
13% are caring for a person with a disability.



Nearly 1 in 4 participants (24%) are from a culturally or linguistically diverse background.



Modes of transport used in a typical month*



*Survey participants were able to select more than one option.

Key insights



1. Most women do not feel safe in public spaces after dark.

42% of women surveyed feel unsafe 'most of the time' or 'all of the time' in public spaces after dark, compared to 17% of men surveyed who reported feeling unsafe 'most of the time' or 'all of the time' in public spaces after dark.



2. After dark, women were twice as likely to feel unsafe in public spaces compared to men.

59% of women surveyed rate their sense of safety after dark as 'not so safe' or 'not at all safe' compared to men (31%).



3. For most people, a sense of safety in public spaces influences the routes they choose.

92% of women and 75% of men surveyed agreed that a sense of safety influences the routes that they choose. Lighting was the most commonly selected factor for all participants. Both men and women consider whether a public space or route is well-maintained. Men are more likely to prioritise convenience than women.



4. If they felt safer in public spaces, people would be more likely to walk more, catch public transport more and go out during the day and after dark more.

The majority of participants surveyed indicated that if they felt safer in public spaces they would be 'extremely likely' or 'very likely' to walk more (74%), catch public transport more (67%), and go out more during the day (64% alone and 64% with others) and at night time (51% alone and 65% with others).



5. People feel safest in activated public spaces with plenty of people around.

Day and night, women and men feel safest in activated public spaces with plenty of people around, such as high streets, town centres and plazas.



6. People's sense of safety can differ across age, ability, cultural background and identity.

Some groups of women and men feel less safe in public spaces day and night when compared to all women and men surveyed. This includes: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, LGBTIQ+ women, women and men with disability, women and girls under 25 years old, and women over 75 years old.



7. People's sense of safety in public spaces can differ depending on where they live.

After dark, women in regional NSW (68%) are more likely to feel unsafe across all types of public spaces compared to metropolitan areas (57%). This is consistent with men in regional areas (44%) who are more likely to feel unsafe after dark than their metropolitan counterparts (28%).

What we heard

1. Most women do not feel safe in public spaces after dark.

After dark, nearly two in three women surveyed said they do not feel safe in public spaces. In response to feeling unsafe, according to open-ended comments, some women surveyed change their behaviours. This included not going out after dark, not catching public transport or taking various precautions while walking or moving through public spaces after dark.

During the day, the majority of women and men surveyed feel safe when walking or moving through and within public spaces, with 58% of women and 63% of men rating their sense of safety as 'very safe' or 'extremely safe' (Figure 1).

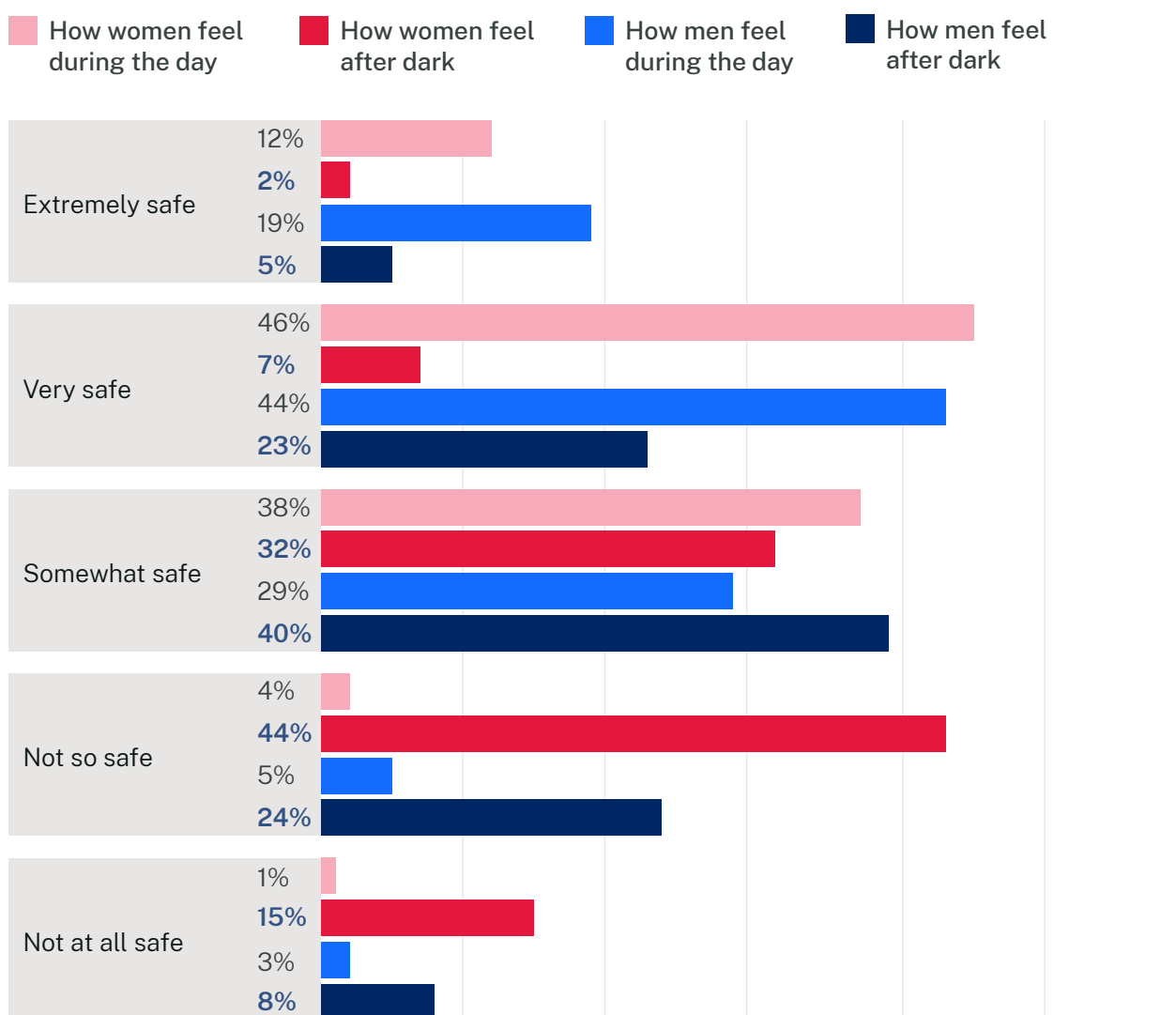


Figure 1 - Survey question: *How would you generally rate your sense of safety when walking or moving through and within public spaces such as streets, squares, parks and transport stops and stations?* (Women participants, 3,868 responses, men participants, 717 responses).

However, after dark, this decreases sharply with just 9% of women surveyed feeling safe in public spaces, and 59% indicating they feel ‘not so safe’ or ‘not at all safe’. 28% of men surveyed indicated they feel safe in public spaces after dark and 32% indicated they feel ‘not so safe’ or ‘not at all safe’. The majority of men surveyed (40%) indicated they feel ‘somewhat safe’ after dark (Figure 1).

Women surveyed indicated that they feel unsafe more often than men surveyed. Just 6% of women surveyed feel unsafe in public spaces during the day ‘most of the time’ or ‘all of the time’, while at night this rises to 42% (Figure 2). The majority of men surveyed (64%) ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ feel unsafe during the day. At night, the majority of men surveyed (49%) feel unsafe ‘sometimes’. 17% of men surveyed indicated that they feel unsafe ‘most of the time’ or ‘all of the time’.

“I won’t frequent areas that aren’t highly populated after dark and I always make sure I don’t leave venues by myself or where I have to walk a distance to my car or transport in the dark.”
- Woman participant

“I have been followed by men... I walked around a whole block before approaching a male stranger and asking him to pretend he knew me and sit with until the follower moved on...calling police feels too extreme -although the follower is intimidating, they technically have not committed any crimes.”
- Woman participant

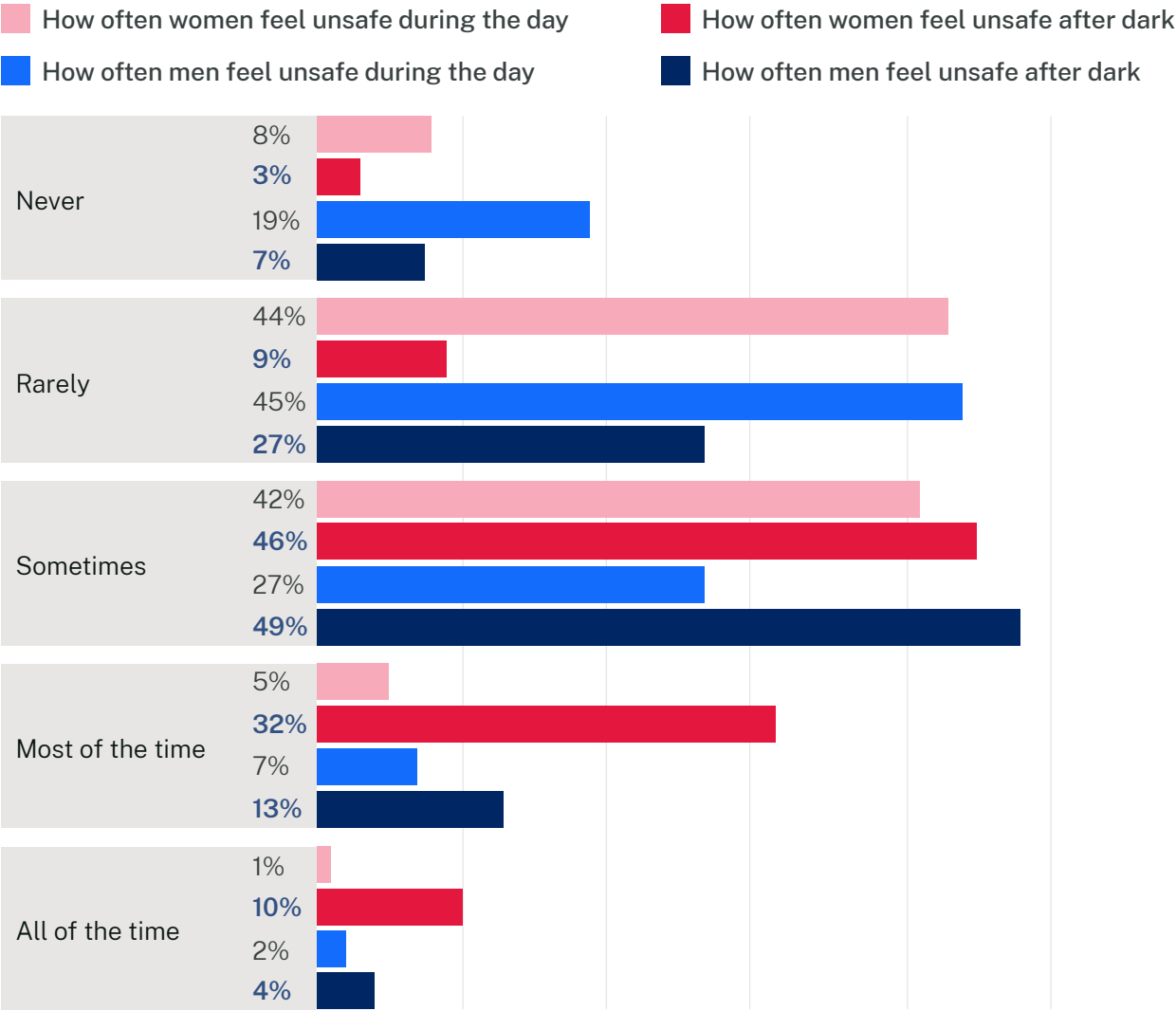


Figure 2 - Survey question: *How often do you feel unsafe when walking or moving through and within public spaces?* (Women participants, 3,863 responses for ‘during the day’, 3,867 responses for ‘after dark’, men participants, 718 responses for ‘during the day’, 719 responses for ‘after dark’).

Research suggests feeling unsafe can stem from a number of reasons, and can result in changed behaviours when moving through and around public spaces as well as a lack of a sense of belonging in cities, towns and public spaces.⁵

Through the open-ended comments, some women participants shared that their lived experiences of harassment, assault or being followed makes them feel less safe in public spaces. Others noted that they feel less safe after dark and in certain types of public spaces, because they have heard stories from other women about their experiences. Some participants said they avoid certain public spaces after dark, in particular locations where they or heard that others have previously experienced harassment, as well as places that are not well-lit and have limited surveillance or presence of others.

According to the open-ended comments, some women participants noted that they started to avoid certain places or going out when they were younger, and have continued to do so into adulthood.

Through the open-ended comments, some participants noted that they changed their behaviour because they felt unsafe by taking a range of precautions. Examples participants noted include: holding their car keys through their fingers for self-defence, wearing baggy clothing, carrying a personal alarm or calling or texting a friend or family member when they are out at night. Some women participants said they avoid catching public transport at night and prefer to take private transportation, such as a taxi or ride-share to feel safer when moving around at night.

"I will not get public transport after dark. To get home from the CBD I have to catch a bus and a train... I drive or [take an] Uber everywhere after dark...I feel safe because the drivers' details are recorded and traceable." - Woman participant



Group of women at night
Credit: Destination NSW

5. Your Ground Victoria Report, October 2021, CrowdSpot, Monash University, Monash Art Design and Architecture, XYX Lab & Free To Be, 2018, Plan International Australia

2. After dark, women were twice as likely to feel unsafe in public spaces compared to men.

Both women and men participants said they are less likely to feel unsafe during the day (5% and 7% respectively feel 'not so safe' or 'not at all safe', Figure 3). However, this changes sharply after dark. Women surveyed are nearly twice as likely to rate their sense of safety after dark as 'not so safe' or 'not at all safe' (59%) compared to men (31%).

One in three men surveyed stated they feel 'not so safe' or 'not at all safe' after dark (31%), highlighting that men also experience fear for their safety in public spaces at night.

Survey participants that identify as non-binary or use a different term to describe their gender are much more likely to feel unsafe during the day compared to men and women surveyed, with nearly one in five (17%) rating their sense of safety as 'not so safe' or 'not at all safe'. After dark, non-binary participants are still more likely than men surveyed but less likely than women surveyed to feel less safe⁶. Additionally, 7% of all LGBTIQ+ participants indicated they feel unsafe during the day; however this increases to 56% after dark.

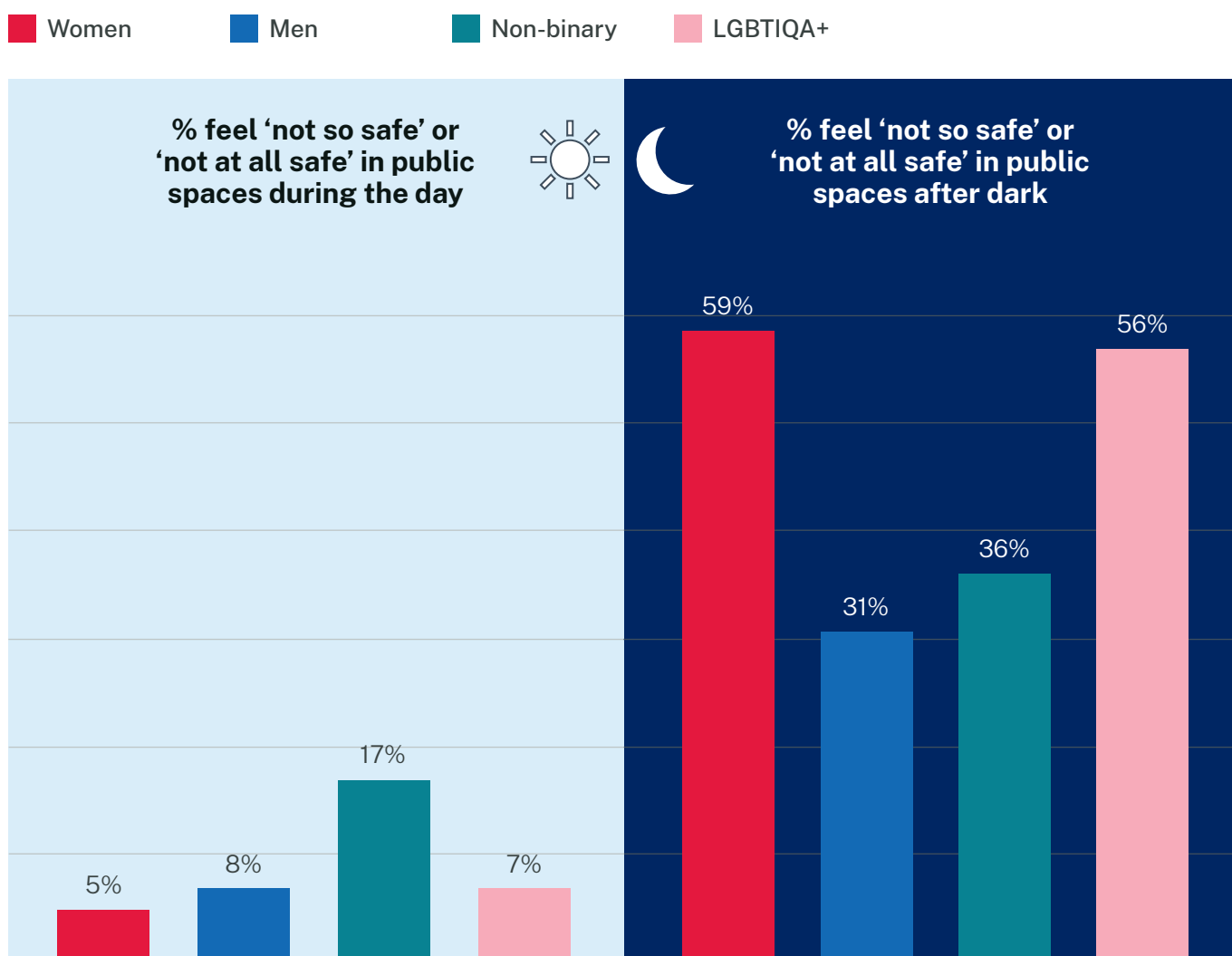


Figure 3 - Survey question: *How would you generally rate your sense of safety when walking or moving through and within public spaces such as streets, squares, parks and transport stops and stations?* (Comparing perceptions of safety across survey participants identifying as women (3,868 responses), men (717 responses), non-binary (54 responses), and LGBTIQ+ (496 responses)).

6. This consultation has highlighted the need and opportunity for more targeted research and consultation to understand the safety experiences and perceptions of gender diverse people and LGBTIQ+ people across NSW.

Some participants shared how their gender identity can shape their experience of public spaces in the open-ended comments.

“As a genderfluid person of colour my chances of coming across discrimination or racism at night are higher.”
- Non-binary participant

Some women surveyed indicated through the open-ended comments that feeling unsafe in public spaces can impact not only their experience of public spaces, but also how they engage with their cities and towns.

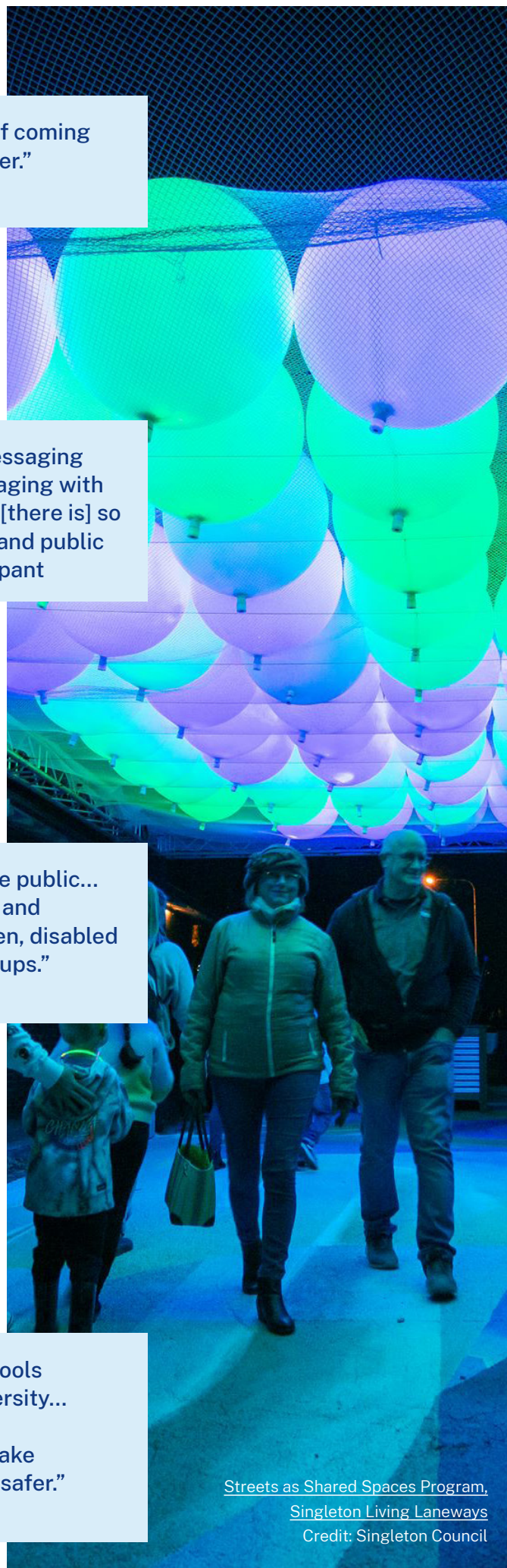
“...If a female is attacked in public space, the messaging is that women need to change how they are engaging with the space - don't go out at night, don't be alone...[there is] so much messaging to females...that public space and public life is not theirs to engage with.” - Woman participant

According to open-ended comments, some participants highlighted the need for a cultural and behavioural shift to address the issue of women feeling unsafe in public spaces. Some women noted while improving lighting and public spaces can help, they were concerned that it would not be enough without raising awareness and education.

“Perhaps this issue is also about education of the public... to create a better sense of shared responsibility and accountability for keeping spaces safe for women, disabled people, gender diverse and other vulnerable groups.”
- Woman participant

Some participants suggested educating people about the impact of their behaviour on people's perceptions of safety. Examples from the comments include: embedding lessons in schools, shedding light on the negative impacts of different behaviours on people's sense of safety, educating people on behaviours that make vulnerable groups feel safe or unsafe, and encouraging shared responsibility for calling out inappropriate behaviour in public spaces such as through a campaign.

“[I suggest providing]...education starting in schools and workplaces to encourage and celebrate diversity... If I knew everyone was receiving comprehensive education on marginalised groups and how to make public spaces more accessible I would feel a lot safer.”
- LGBTIQ+ man participant



Streets as Shared Spaces Program,
Singleton Living Laneways
Credit: Singleton Council

3. For most people, a sense of safety in public spaces influences the routes they choose.

Survey participants were asked if a sense of safety influenced the routes they choose to take. They were also asked what factors influence how they choose to move through or get to public spaces.

Over nine in ten women surveyed agree that their sense of safety influences the route they choose when walking or moving through or within public spaces (92%). This is much higher compared to men surveyed (75%) and survey participants that identify as non-binary or those who use a different term to describe their gender (70%).

Lighting is the most important factor a participant considers when choosing a route (Figure 5). Across the top five factors that influence the routes that

people choose, almost all of them are more important for women surveyed than for men surveyed or for all participants. The only exception is that all participants as a whole consider whether a route or public space is well-maintained to be equally important.

The least important factor for both women and men surveyed is whether a route is off a main road (15% and 22%, respectively).

While women and men surveyed consider similar factors when choosing routes, women participants indicated that they are much less likely to choose a route because it is more convenient (48%) compared to men surveyed (57%). This may be because they prioritise safety considerations over the most direct route.

92% of women surveyed agree that their sense of safety influences the routes they choose, compared to 75% of men surveyed and 70% of gender diverse people.

Figure 4-Survey question: *Does your sense of safety influence the route you choose when walking or moving through or within public spaces?* (Women, 3,870 responses, men, 718 responses, gender diverse people, 54 responses).

The top five factors that influence the routes people choose to make are:

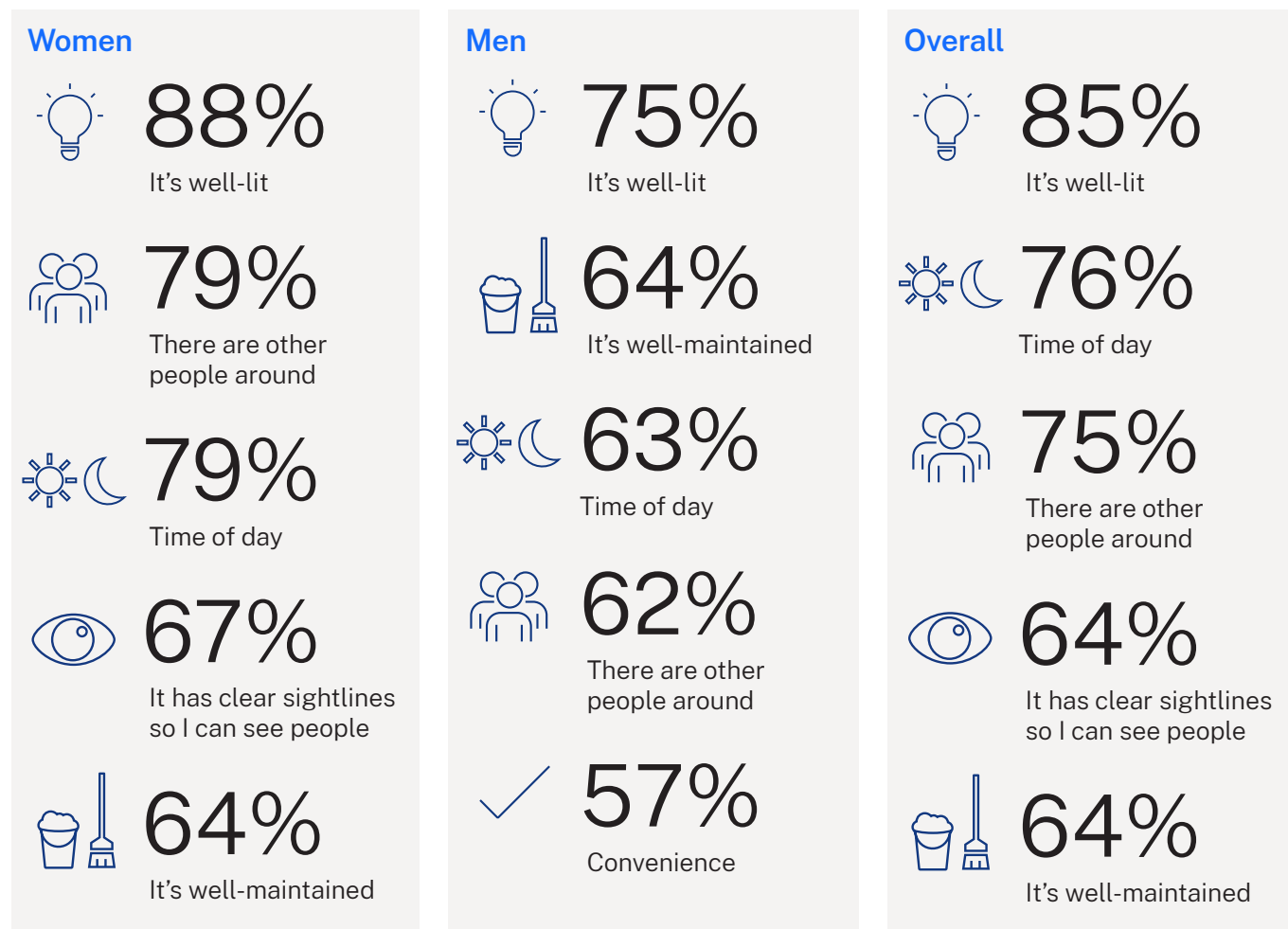


Figure 5-Survey question: *What factors influence the route you choose to take?* (Women participants, 3,876 responses, men participants, 720 responses, overall, 4,803 responses). (Participants could select more than one option).

Factors influencing the route women and men choose to take

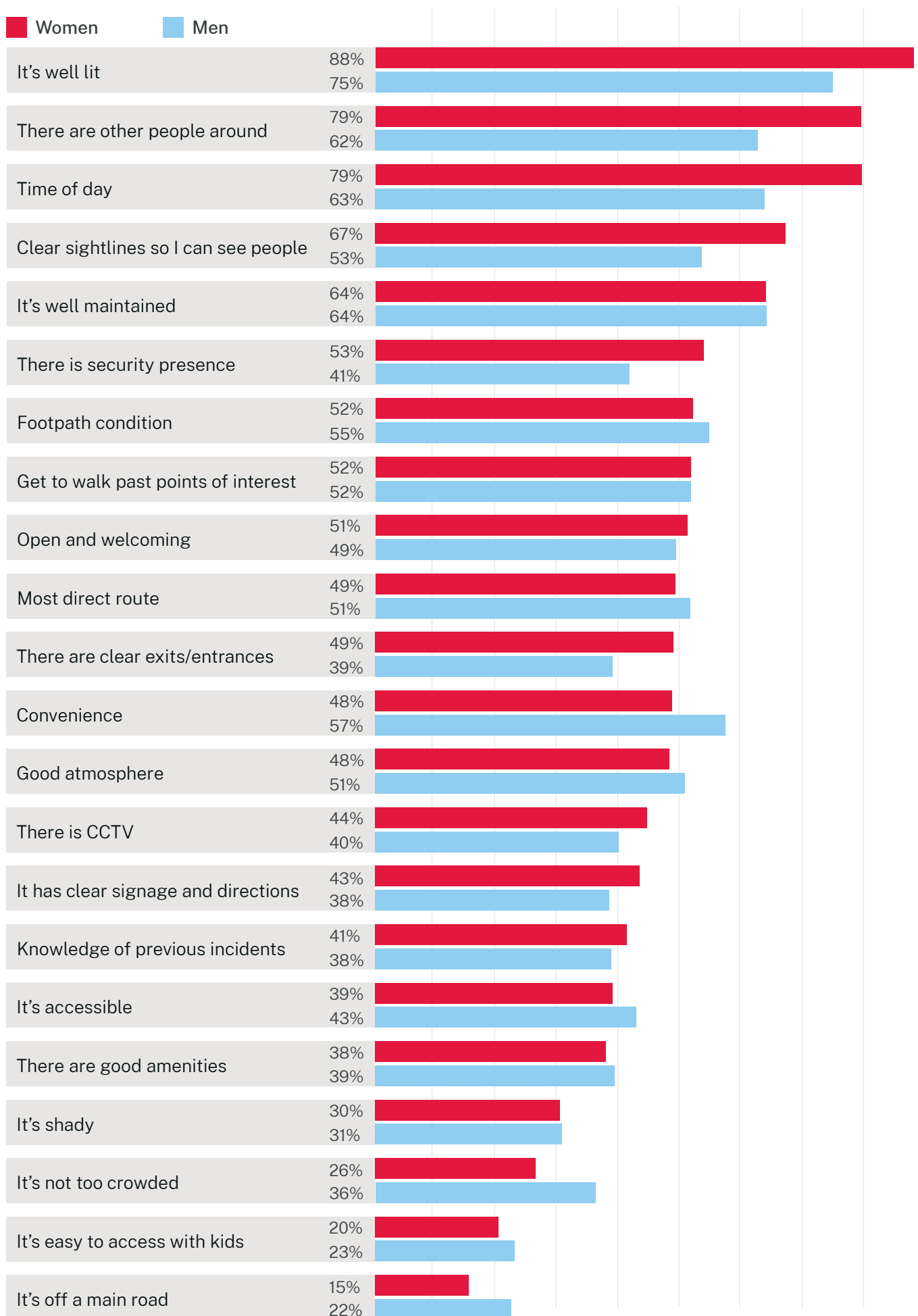


Figure 6 - Survey question: *What factors influence the route you choose to take?* (Responses have been ranked from highest to lowest according to responses from women). (Women, 3,876 responses, men, 720 responses).

Is it well-lit?



88% of women surveyed and 75% of men surveyed consider whether a route or public space is well-lit, in comparison to 85% of all participants. Through the open-ended comments and contributions to the ideas board, many participants shared how important lighting was to their perceptions of safety. Some participants shared that they would like to see more lighting in laneways and footpaths, parks, carparks and around public transport stops. Some participants also noted specific kinds of lighting that encourages a social atmosphere helps them to feel safe.

Nearly 60% of the open-ended comments⁷ spoke about the need for improved lighting after dark to increase a sense of safety in public spaces, including local streets, bus stops, train stations and parks.

"I'm generally quite confident and go wherever I want/need to, day or night. I do, however, find it very disconcerting when an area isn't well lit."
- Woman participant

"...Lighting [that] illuminates the areas where they are walking or gathering...most public lighting currently...doesn't function well for people walking or cycling or just having a chat."
- Ideas Board submission

Are there other people around?



79% of women surveyed and 63% of men surveyed consider whether there are other people around, in comparison to 75% of all participants. Through open-ended comments, some women surveyed also noted that they generally feel safer and will choose routes where there are more people around, especially other women and families. However, public spaces with crowds of men and people that may be using alcohol or drugs can feel less safe.

"I feel much safer when there are lots of other people around, especially families and other women." - Woman participant

What time of the day is it?



79% of women surveyed and 62% of men surveyed consider the time of the day, in comparison to 76% of all participants.

"I would never walk through a laneway, park, oval, or out-of-the-way thoroughfare at night. I always message family friends at different points of my journey and ask female friends/family to do the same." - Woman participant

Does it have clear sightlines so I can see people?



67% of women surveyed and 53% of men surveyed consider whether there are clear sightlines, in comparison to 64% of all participants. Through open-ended comments, some women participants commented that they opt for routes where they can see other people and other people can see them, especially after dark. Some open-ended comments also suggested that clear sightlines and visibility is important in public transport hubs such as bus stops and train stations.

"Clear sightlines in all directions is needed...Wide streets make me feel safer even if [there is] not a lot of cars, as they make me feel like I could see any on coming danger." - Woman participant

Is it well-maintained?



People prefer routes and places that look cared for. 64% of women, men and all participants surveyed consider whether a route or public space appears well-maintained.

"We need to keep public areas clean and well maintained. Graffiti, vandalism, and shopping strips with vacant tenancies feel unsafe."
- Woman participant

7. 1,538 out of 2,737 open-ended comments mentioned improving lighting after dark would help to increase a sense of safety in public spaces.

Is there a security presence?



53% of women surveyed and 41% of men surveyed consider whether there is a security presence, compared to 51% of all participants. Through the open-ended comments, some women spoke about how a security presence, or being able to get help, can increase their sense of safety. Suggestions include: greater security presence at night, on streets, and on public transportation, and access to security alert buttons.

“More security, lights and vibey [sic] atmosphere where there are plenty of people around, will help encourage other women to go out at night and feel safe.” - Woman participant

Conversely, through the open-ended comments, some participants, particularly those who identify as non-binary, reported feeling less safe in the presence of security, highlighting the varying impacts security presence can have on perceptions of safety for different people.

**“As an LGBTIQ+ person I feel LESS safe when there is a higher...security presence”
- Non-binary participant**

What is the footpath condition?



While 52% of all women surveyed consider the footpath condition, women with disability and women over 75 years old indicated this was more important for them (64% and 63%, respectively). 55% of men surveyed consider the footpath condition, in comparison to 52% of all participants. This is slightly more important for men with disability (57%) but much more important for men over 75 years old (70%).

Through the open-ended comments, some participants suggested better maintenance of footpaths and cycle paths to eliminate trip hazards and injuries, improved appearance and condition of footpaths and underpasses to make them more inviting, and reduced car presence would help make public spaces feel safer.

**“I recently broke my leg and found the condition of surfaces and lack of kerb ramps to be a barrier to my temporary reduced mobility. Wheelchair users, visually impaired and pram pushers etc would all be affected by this.”
- Non-binary participant.**

Is there CCTV?



44% of women surveyed and 40% of men surveyed consider whether there is CCTV when choosing a route or public space, in comparison to 43% of all participants.

A common suggestion in the open-ended comments was for more and better CCTV across public spaces, with participants noting that it could both deter perpetrators, or potentially help victims' access to justice. Many participants spoke about feeling safer in places where there was visible CCTV. However, some participants from different demographic groups noted that CCTV does not make them feel safer.

“Cater for pedestrians first above all else... with clear paths, clear routes, clear entry/exit points...” - Woman participant



4. If they felt safer in public spaces, people would be more likely to walk more, catch public transport more and go out during the day and after dark more.

Survey participants were asked how much more likely they would be to do certain activities such as walking, catching public transport and going out if they felt safer.

The majority of participants indicated that if they felt safer in public spaces they would be 'extremely likely' or 'very likely' to do more of all of the activities listed as options. The majority of women surveyed would be even more likely to do all activities if they felt safer (Figure 7).

A much lower proportion, but still nearly half of participants would be 'extremely likely' or 'very likely' to ride their bike more (46%), indicating that there may be additional barriers for people impacting their

choice to cycle. 48% of men surveyed indicated they would cycle more if they felt safer, which is slightly higher than women surveyed (46%) and all participants (46%). However, for women surveyed who already ride their bike in a typical month, nearly four in five (78%) would cycle more if they felt safer in public spaces.

Through the open-ended comments, some participants suggested that making public spaces more pedestrian and cycle-friendly would help them feel safer. Some suggestions include: reducing speed limits in pedestrian-heavy areas, separating cyclist and pedestrian walkways, and improving wayfinding in public spaces.

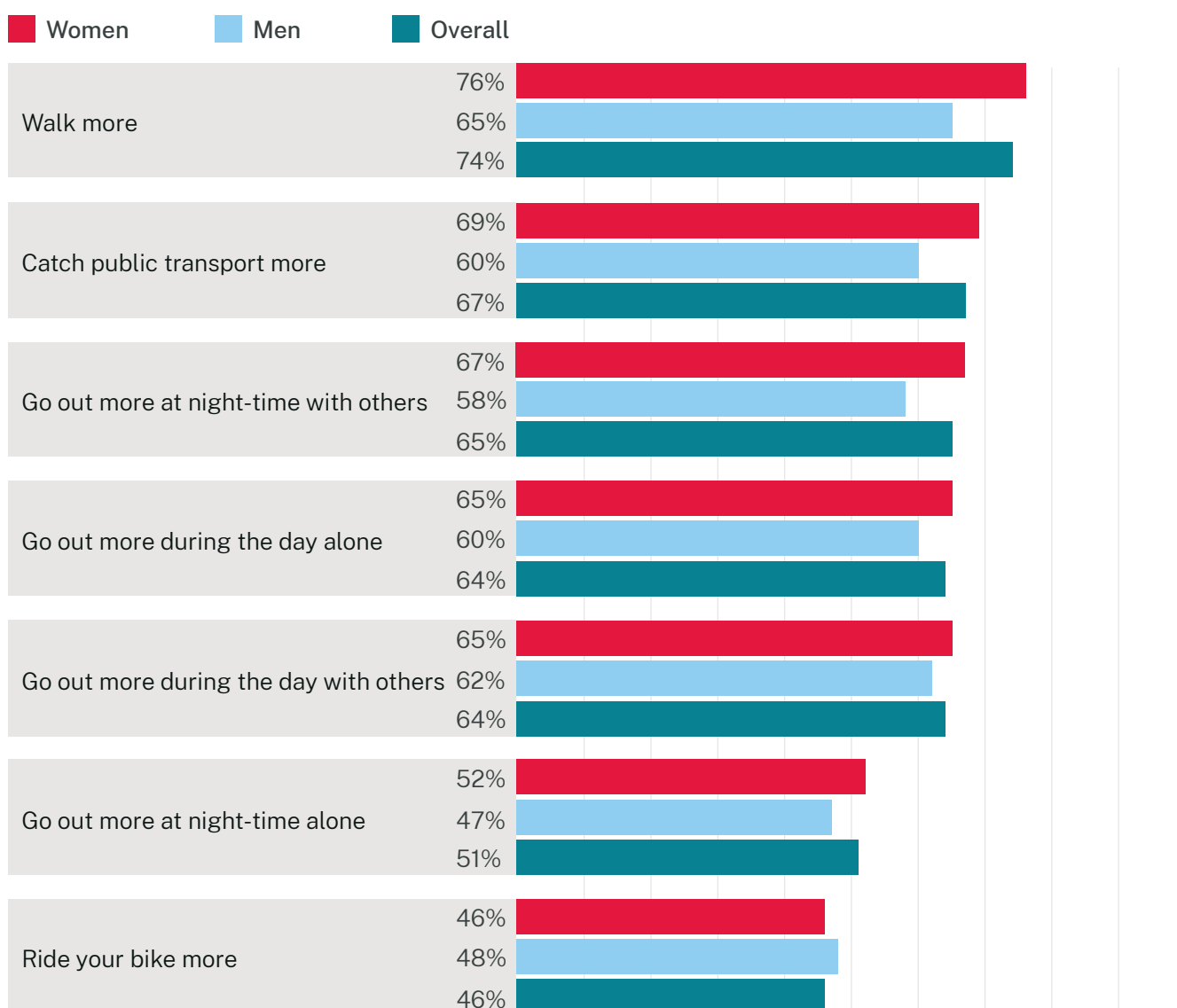


Figure 7 - Survey question: *If you felt safer in public spaces how likely would you be to: ('Extremely likely' or 'very likely', women participants, 3,535 responses, men participants, 532 responses, overall, 4,220 responses).*

5. People feel safest in activated public spaces with plenty of people around.

Survey participants were asked to rate their sense of personal safety moving through or within different types of public spaces and at different times of the day. Day and night, all participants feel safest in activated public spaces with plenty of people around, such as high streets, town centres and plazas.

People's sense of safety differs across public space types. During the day, both women and men surveyed indicated that they were most likely to feel safe in busier spaces including high streets, city/town centres and plazas. During the day, women surveyed indicated they were least likely to feel safe in the following types of places: laneways, train stations and parks. Men surveyed indicated they were least likely to feel safe in laneways, taxi ranks and bus stops (Figure 9).

After the sun sets however, for women surveyed, their sense of safety drops sharply across all types of public space, especially in parks, laneways and other public spaces e.g. beaches. After dark, men surveyed are also less likely to feel safe across all public space types, especially laneways and parks; however their sense of safety does not decrease as drastically as that of women surveyed.

“Make public spaces safer and more vibrant by encouraging more pedestrians and cyclists to use them. This would make public spaces more enjoyable to spend time in and improve passive surveillance.”
- Man participant

What is an activated space?

An activated public space entices people to visit, use, stay and enjoy the space. This may involve the inclusion of amenities such as seating, public art, food and beverage options, and programming or events that promote a diverse range of activities and foster a sense of community. It is typically associated with terms like ‘vibrancy’, ‘animation’, ‘liveliness’ and ‘programming’.

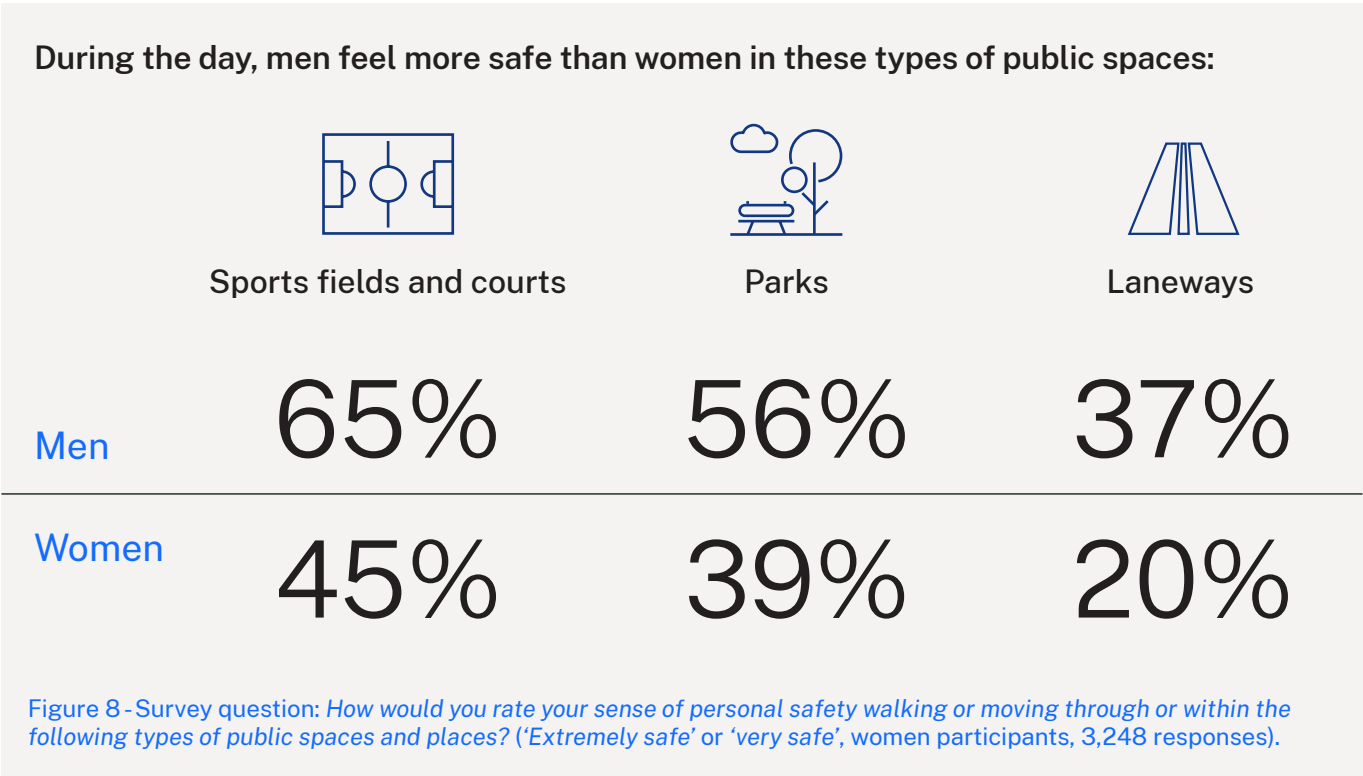
When a public space is activated in a way that is appropriate to the space, a diverse range of people feel welcome there, use the space for a variety of purposes and are more likely to develop a sense of ownership of the space (adapted from [NSW Guide to Activation](#), 2022).



Summer Night Fund Program, Endless Summer Markets & Music in Coffs Harbour
Credit: And the Trees Photography

Even if men and women surveyed may feel similarly about types of public spaces, there are still differences in their senses of safety. During the day, the biggest discrepancy between the experience of safety for men and women surveyed is that women surveyed feel much less safe in specific spaces such as: sports fields and courts (45% vs 65% feel ‘extremely safe’ or ‘very safe’), parks (39% vs 56%) and laneways (20% vs 37%) (Figure 8).

Through the open-ended comments, some women participants suggested that they may feel safer in high streets, town centres and plazas because these places are more likely to have an active street life, with diverse people, shops and services around, which can increase their sense of safety. The comments also suggest that women participants can feel less safe in parks and laneways when there is a lack of lighting, poor visibility and sightlines, and fewer people around to help in case of an emergency.



% of women and men that feel safe in different types of public spaces during the day and after dark

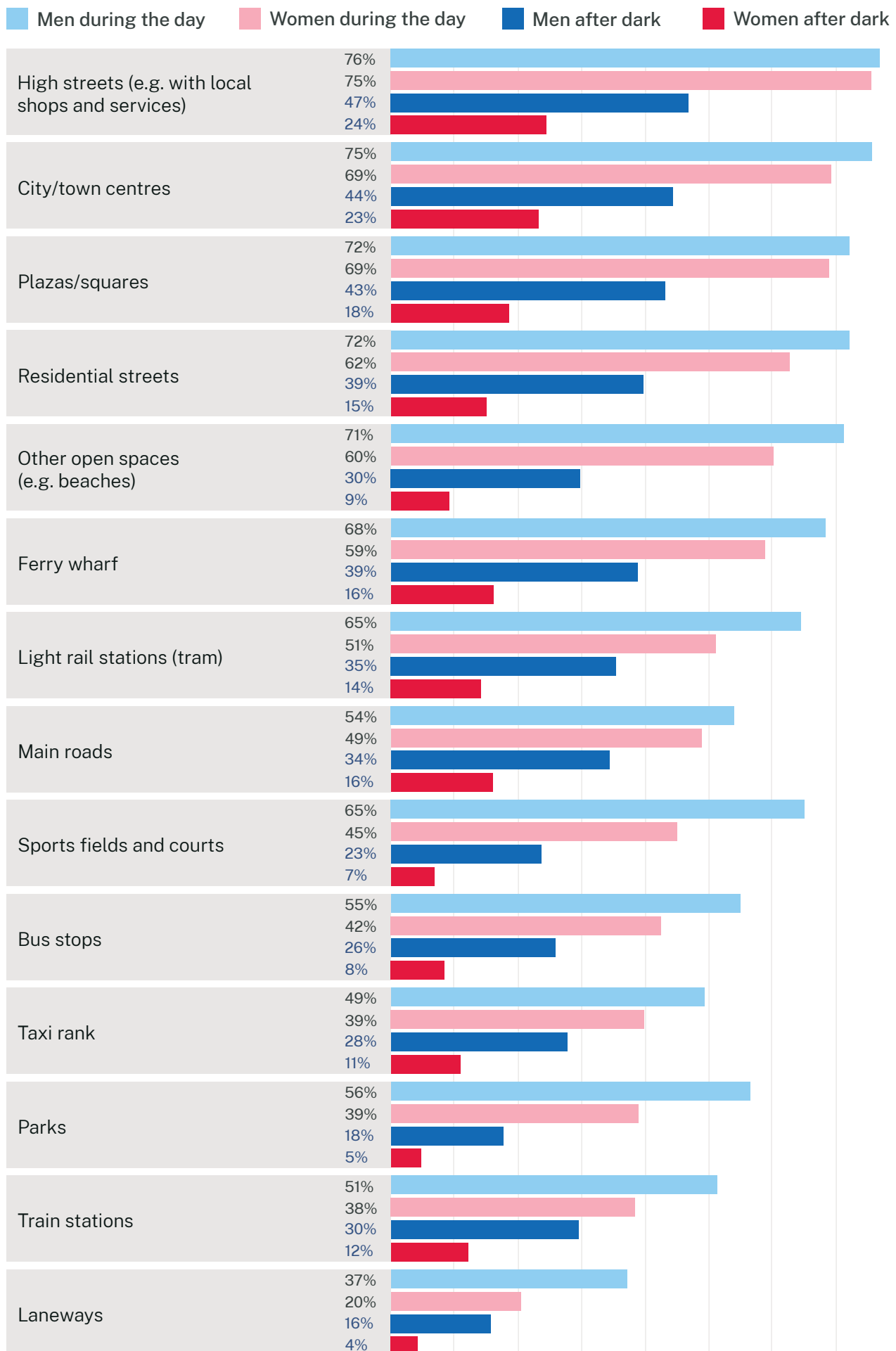


Figure 9 - Survey question: How would you rate your sense of personal safety walking or moving through or within the following types of public spaces and places? ('Extremely safe' or 'very safe', women participants, 3,633 responses, men participants, 680 responses).

6. People's sense of safety can differ across age, ability, cultural background and identity.

Survey participants were asked to identify demographic information such as their gender identity/ies, age and cultural background. The information collected through the survey indicated that different people experience public spaces differently. This section focuses on the key differences among women and men participants.

“As a female we have to think twice about our commute, how far away a venue might be from where we park, the time of day, whether there's security/ CCTV if something was to happen, and what items we have in our handbag that we could use to defend ourselves... It is exhausting having to put so much thought into everyday experiences that should not make women feel unsafe.”
- Woman participant



Mother and daughter jogging
Credit: Liliana Drew -Pexels

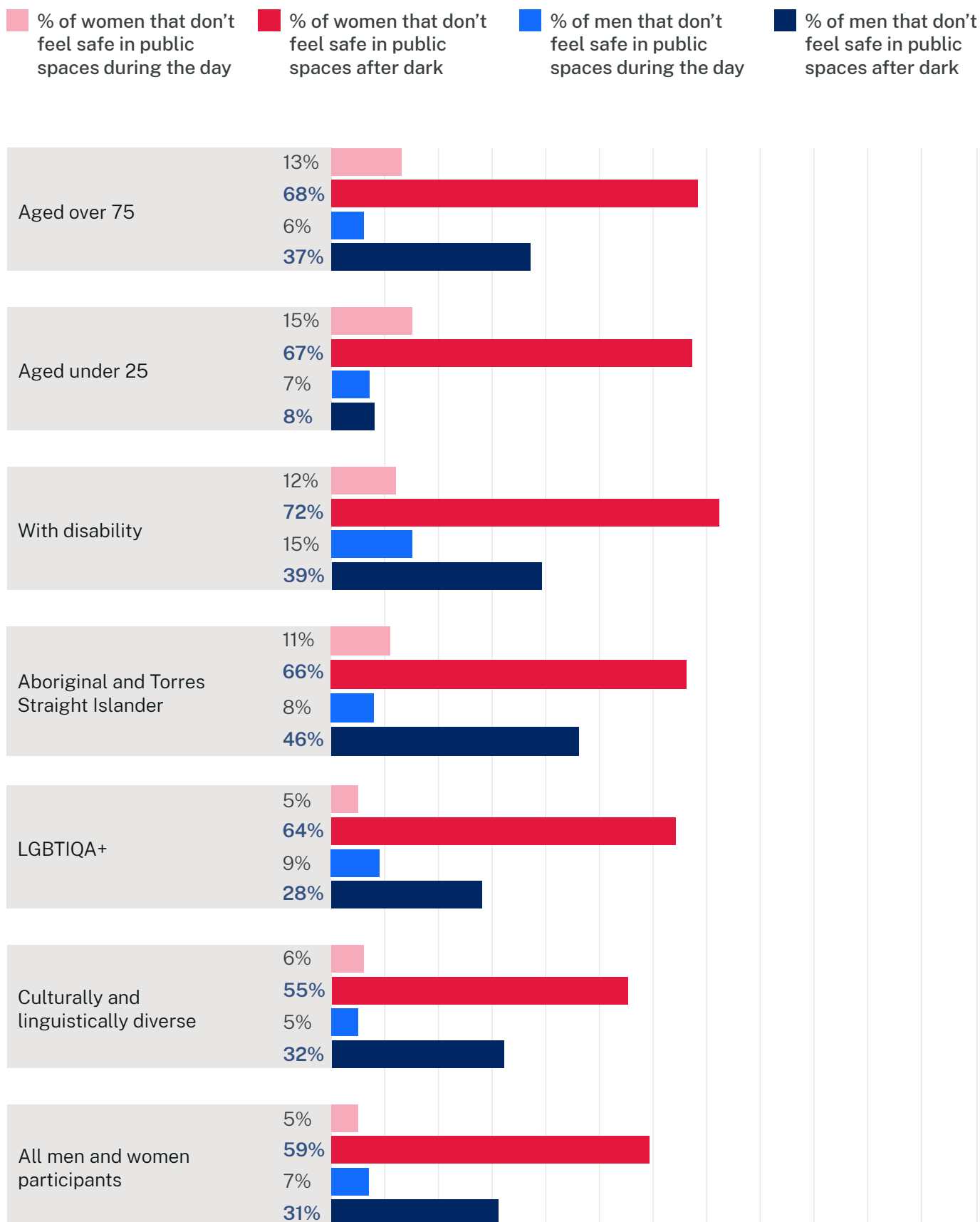


Figure 10 - Comparing sense of safety day and night for all women (3,868 responses), all men (717 responses), LGBTIQ+ women (360 responses), LGBTIQ+ men (74 responses), culturally diverse women (919 responses), culturally diverse men (177 responses), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (84 responses), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (13 responses), women with disability (386 responses), men with disability (66 responses), women aged under 25 (359 responses), men aged under 25 (29 responses), women aged over 75 (112 responses) and men aged over 75 (65 responses). This is based on responses to the survey question - *How would you generally rate your sense of safety when walking or moving through and within public spaces such as streets, squares, parks and transport stops and stations?*

Day and night, people with disability feel much less safe in public spaces.

During the day, women participants with disability are more than twice as likely to feel unsafe, and after dark, this increases to more than 72% compared to all women surveyed (59%). Men surveyed with disability are twice as likely to feel unsafe during the day compared to all men surveyed (15% compared to 7%). After dark, 39% of men surveyed with disability feel unsafe in public spaces.

Some open-ended comments suggest that the accessibility of the built environment plays an important role in sense of safety for women with disability, with survey participants highlighting the need for smooth, even pathways that are well-lit.

Women and men surveyed with disability are also more likely to consider multiple factors in choosing their route. They are much more likely to consider footpath condition; security presence; whether there are clear exits/entrances; whether it is accessible; whether there is CCTV; whether it is not too crowded; and whether there is clear signage and directions compared to all women and men surveyed.⁸

“I have mobility and balance issues that affect how far I can walk. I have had a few serious falls so it’s best if the walking surface is good and level, and there are people around who can see me if I were to fall again...Lighting at night helps me see the surface that I am walking on and avoid anything that I could trip or slip on.”

– Woman participant

“I would like to feel safer when moving outdoors both day and night with and without my family/ friends and workers, if barriers were removed allowing accessibility for the disabled...”

– Man participant

Day and night, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel much less safe in public spaces.

Day and night, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women surveyed were much more likely to feel unsafe when moving through public spaces compared to all women surveyed. During the day, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were more than twice as likely to feel unsafe (11% compared to 5%), and after dark, this increases significantly (66% compared to 59%).⁹

“Being in a town with extremely limited public transport I have to either drive or walk...So it is rare to go out at night for me.”

– Woman participant

After dark, LGBTIQ+ women are more likely to feel unsafe in public spaces. LGBTIQ+ men feel less safe during the day.

LGBTIQ+ women surveyed were only slightly more likely to feel unsafe during the day, however were more likely to feel unsafe after dark (64%) in comparison to all women surveyed. In comparison to all women surveyed, LGBTIQ+ women surveyed are also more likely to consider whether a public space is open and welcoming; whether there are clear exits and entrances; and whether it’s not too crowded.

For LGBTIQ+ men surveyed, they were slightly more likely to feel unsafe during the day (9%) and were slightly more likely to feel safe after dark (28%) compared to all men surveyed (31%). LGBTIQ+ men surveyed were more likely to agree that their sense of safety influences the routes they choose (80% compared to 75% of all men surveyed).

For LGBTIQ+ women and men surveyed, they were overall more likely to walk more, ride their bike, catch public transport more and go out more alone and with others at night if they felt safer. LGBTIQ+ women surveyed indicated that they would be less likely to go out more during the day with others if they felt safer (59% compared to 65% of all women surveyed).

Some open-ended comments suggest that LGBTIQ+ women and men surveyed may be less likely to feel safe due to fear of discrimination or harassment based on sexuality and highlighted that education and cultural change is linked to helping LGBTIQ+ people feel safer.

“We need bright lighting everywhere, accessible paths with regular seating, safety alarms that call for immediate response along these paths, but most of all education and change of culture.”

– Woman LGBTIQ+ participant with a disability

“As a transgender woman I feel the need to be on guard at all times...My experience has shown that there is still a lot of hatred towards trans and gender diverse minorities...and that’s a shame because I feel it stops me from going to certain places at night.” – Woman participant

8. Survey question: What factors influence the route you choose to take? (Participants could select more than one option).

9. There were 13 responses from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. There is an opportunity for further consultation or research for this group.

Women who live with children have a similar sense of safety to those who don't live with children.

There were no significant differences in sense of safety in public spaces for women and men participants who live with children aged under 18 years, and those who do not. However, men participants who live with children are more likely to feel unsafe after dark (37%) than those who do not live with children (30%).

Both women and men participants who live with children are much more likely to consider whether a route is 'easy to access with kids' (49% for women and 52% for men) compared to those without (8% for women and 12% for men).

Analysis of open-ended comments also suggests that some people experience public spaces differently when travelling with children, and are more alert to their sense of safety in their surroundings.

"Now that I'm a mum my experience of a place with a child impacts my perception of public spaces more - can my daughter use this space freely, are there conflicts with vehicles, is it clean, is it safe for her?" - Woman participant

"More clear and open places to walk easily and visibly with the pram (sidewalks in residential areas) or CCTV and more lighting on residential streets and small town shops would help." - Woman participant

"[If] the space is good enough for families, it's good enough for the majority of the public." - Man participant

Women from culturally diverse backgrounds are less likely to feel unsafe in public spaces.

Women surveyed from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds have a similar sense of safety during the day, however were less likely to feel unsafe after dark compared to all women surveyed (55% compared to 59% overall). Men surveyed from CALD backgrounds were slightly less likely to feel unsafe during the day (5%) and only slightly more likely to feel unsafe after dark (32%) compared to all men surveyed (31%).

However, open-ended comments from CALD respondents also indicate experiences of racism, as well as an awareness of the impact of their intersectionality on their perceptions of safety.

"My experiences of being unsafe are primarily due to my treatment as a woman of colour, particularly by white men." - Woman participant

In most cases, younger and older people are more likely to feel unsafe day and night.

Older women participants aged over 75 years and younger women participants aged under 25 years rated their general sense of safety during the day and after dark lower than all women participants overall. Men surveyed over the age of 75 years old also rated their general sense of safety after dark lower than all men surveyed.¹⁰

Open-ended comments suggest that older women surveyed may be more fearful in public spaces because they are more likely to have a disability, mobility issues and be scared of falling, which can impact their sense of confidence when going out in public spaces.

Women and men surveyed over the age of 75 years old are also significantly less likely to do things like walk more, catch public transport more and go out more alone if they felt safer, indicating that other barriers such as mobility and a sense of confidence might impact their sense of safety.

Women and girls surveyed aged 16 to 25 years old were much more likely to walk, catch public transport and go out at night-time with others more if they felt safer in public spaces compared to all women surveyed¹¹. This indicates that younger women's autonomous mobility would benefit significantly from initiatives to make public spaces safer. Results showed if younger women and teenage girls felt safer:

- 92% would go out at night-time with others more;
- 92% would walk more; and
- 92% would catch public transport more.



Two women at night
Credit: Destination NSW

10. There were 29 responses from men and boys under 25 years old. There is an opportunity for further consultation or research for this group.

11. Survey question: If you felt safer in public spaces how likely would you be to: Ride your bike more; Go out more at night-time alone; Go out more during the day with others; Go out more during the day alone; Go out more at night-time with others; Catch Public Transport more; and Walk more.

7. People’s sense of safety in public spaces can differ depending on where they live.

People living in metropolitan, regional and rural areas can have different senses of safety in public spaces from one another.

During the day, women surveyed across metropolitan and regional areas experience a similar sense of safety when moving to, through and within public spaces (Figure 11). However, after dark, women surveyed living in regional NSW are much more likely to feel unsafe compared to women participants living in metropolitan NSW.

Men surveyed in regional areas (12%) indicated that they are more likely to feel unsafe during the day than men participants in metropolitan NSW (6%) when moving to, through and within public spaces. After dark, men participants in regional areas indicated that they feel unsafe (44%), compared to men participants living in metropolitan NSW (28%).¹²

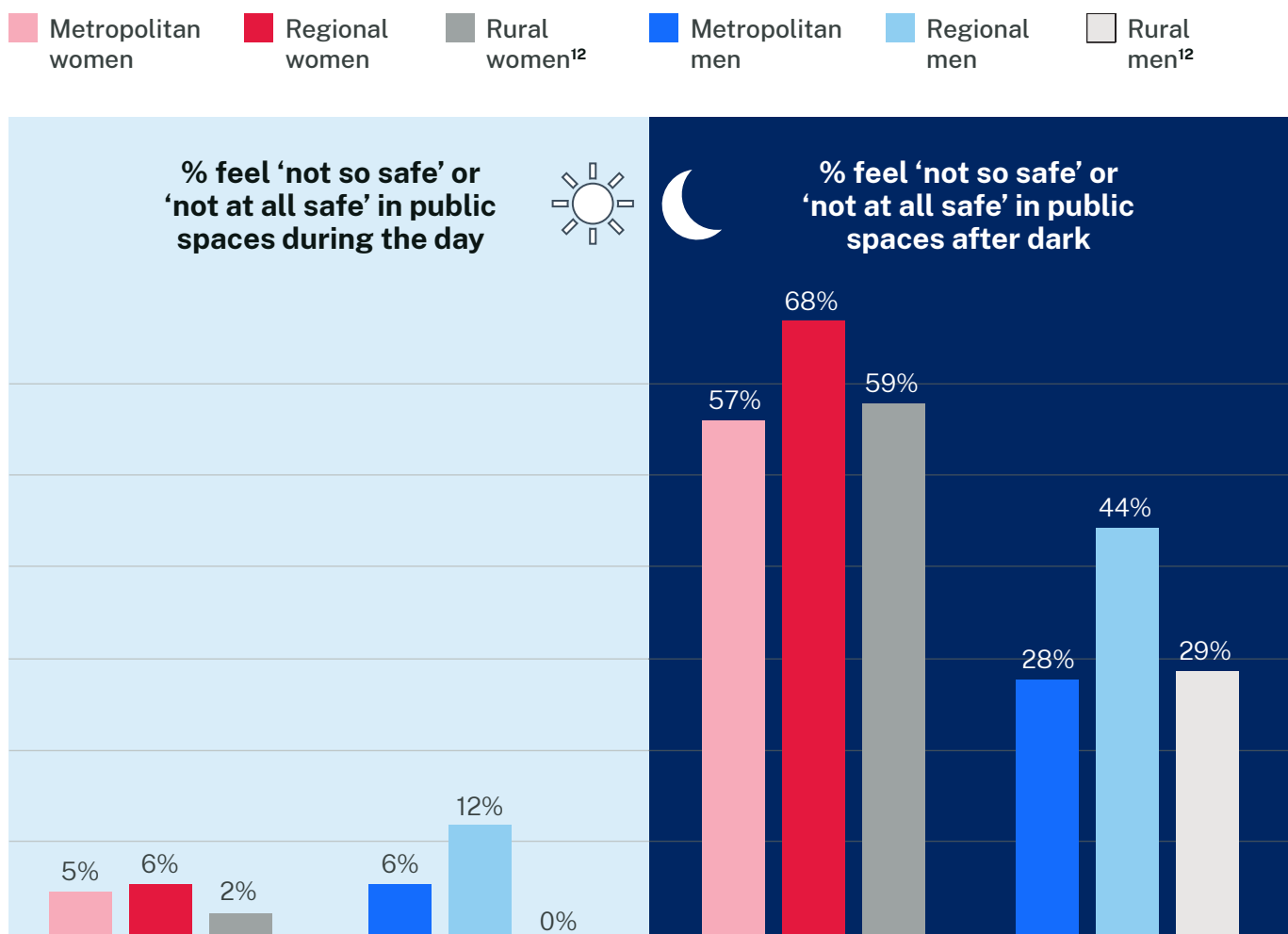


Figure 11 - Comparing sense of safety day and night for women living in metropolitan (2,953 responses), regional (614 responses) and rural NSW (44 responses), and men living in metropolitan (546 responses), regional (113 responses) and rural NSW (7 responses). This is based on responses to the two survey questions - *How would you generally rate your sense of safety when walking or moving through and within public spaces such as streets, squares, parks and transport stops and stations?* and *What suburb do you live in?*

12. There were 44 responses from women and 7 responses from men in rural NSW. There may be an opportunity for further consultation or research with these groups.

In particular, women and men surveyed in regional NSW are much more likely to feel unsafe at transport hubs compared to those living in metropolitan areas (Figure 12).

Some open-ended comments suggest that some of the reasons why women surveyed may feel unsafe in regional areas are: there are fewer people around, more infrequent services resulting in longer wait times, and potentially inadequate amenities such as poor lighting. The feeling of unsafety can also impact how women living in regional areas can engage in activities outside of their places of residence. They are also likely to take precautions to help make them feel safer.

However, despite indicating that they feel less safe at transport hubs, women surveyed living in regional areas indicated that they are still much less likely to

catch public transport more if they felt safer (58%) compared to those living in metropolitan areas (72%). 52% of men surveyed in regional areas indicated that they would catch public transport more if they felt safer, compared to 63% of men surveyed in metropolitan areas. This may be due to other factors such as more limited access to public transport services at appropriate times or locations.

“I find myself missing out on after work events in the city because I will get home late and will be travelling outside of peak times -or I will drive halfway so that my commute is shorter and somewhat safer.”
- Woman participant



Commuters at Lithgow Station
Credit: State of New South Wales

% of women and men in metropolitan and regional NSW that feel unsafe at transport hubs day and night

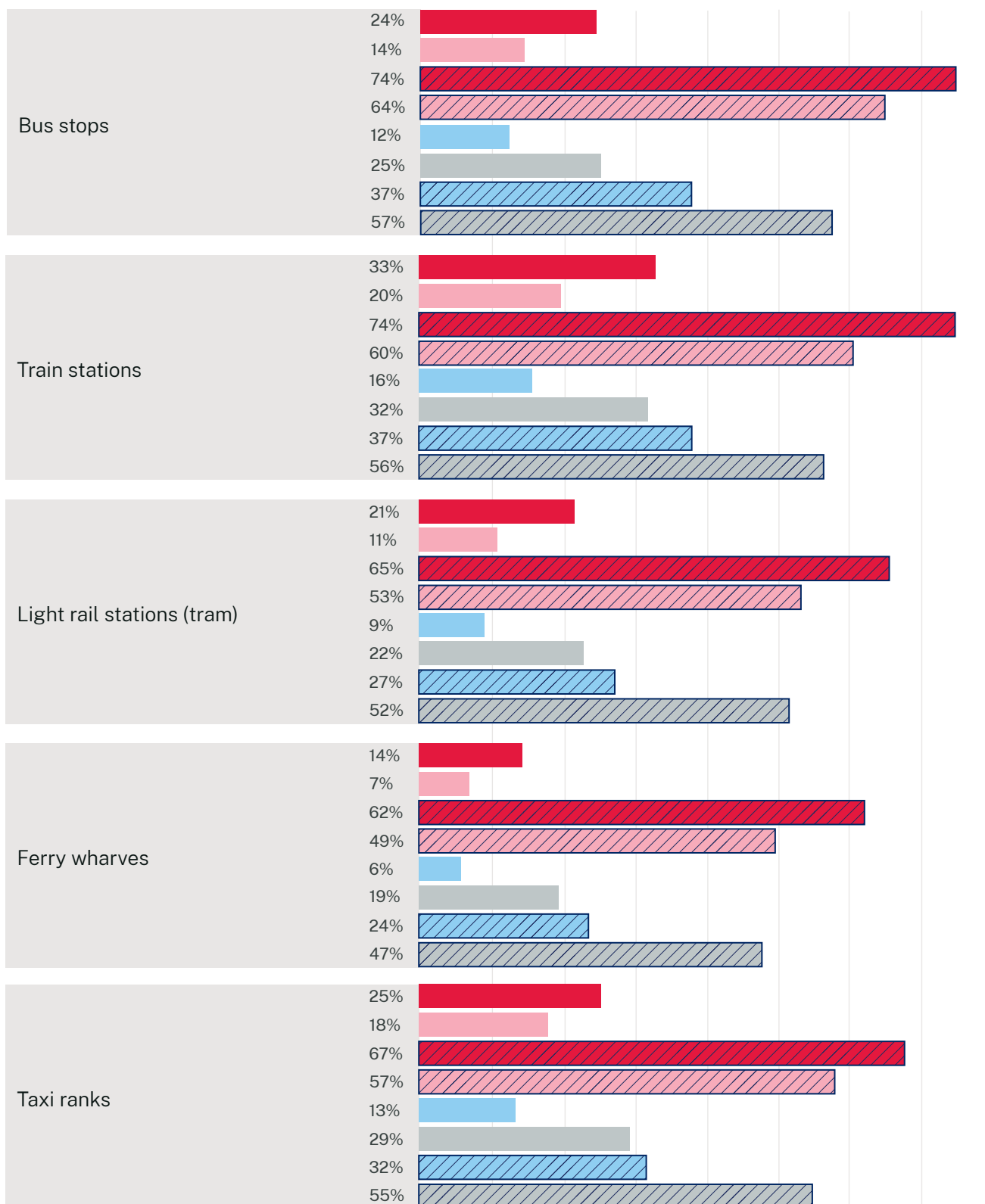
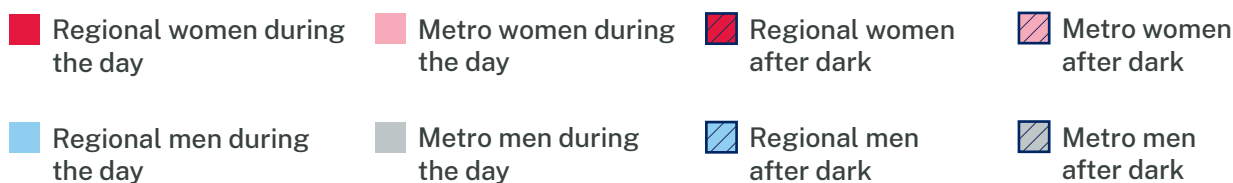


Figure 12 - Survey question: How would you rate your sense of personal safety walking or moving through or within the following types of public spaces and places? ('Not so safe' or 'not at all safe', women participants, metropolitan (2,953 responses), regional (614 responses), men participants, metropolitan (546 responses), regional (113 responses)). (Participants could select more than one option).

What's next

Streets as Shared Spaces Program, Spaced Out

Lismore City Council

Credit: NSW Government

Conclusion

The purpose of the Safer Cities Survey was to gather data and evidence on perceptions of safety for people across NSW when going about their day-to-day lives in public spaces.

In summary, the results of the survey suggest that:

- Nearly two in three women surveyed do not feel safe in public spaces at night. While men surveyed do report that they can feel unsafe, women are twice as likely to feel unsafe in public spaces after dark.
- People feel safest in activated public spaces that have plenty of people around, like high streets, town centres and plazas no matter what time of the day it is. Day and night, women and men report feeling less safe in laneways and parks; however, women report feeling much less safe in public spaces after dark compared to men.
- Day and night, women and men with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men feel much less safe in public spaces compared to all women and men surveyed. This is also the case for younger and older women, and for older men after dark. After dark, LGBTIQ+ women are more likely to feel unsafe in public spaces, while LGBTIQ+ men are more likely to feel unsafe in public spaces during the day.
- After dark, men and women surveyed in regional NSW are more likely to feel unsafe across all types of public spaces identified as options compared to those living in metropolitan areas. In particular, women and men surveyed in regional NSW are much more likely to feel unsafe at transport hubs than those living in metropolitan areas.
- In response to feeling unsafe, some women surveyed indicated that they change their behaviours. The comments identified changes such as not going out after dark, not catching public transport or taking various precautions while walking or moving through public spaces after dark.
- If they felt safer in public spaces, people would be more likely to walk more, catch public transport more and go out more. The majority of all women would be even more likely to do these activities if they felt safer, compared to all participants surveyed.
- 92% of women and 75% of men surveyed agree that their sense of safety influences the route they choose when walking or moving through or within public spaces. People consider a number of factors when choosing their routes. The highest ranked factors were: lighting, time of day, presence of people, if there are clear sightlines and if it is well-maintained. Women are less likely than men to choose a route if it is convenient. Other things that make some people feel safer include: the condition of footpaths, a security presence and surveillance technology.

Safer Cities program

The Safer Cities program is incorporating research and engagement with the community to test and trial approaches to help:

- Increase women, girls and gender diverse people's safety and access to public spaces;
- Increase women, girls and gender diverse people's engagement with how spaces around them are designed and managed; and
- Enable women, girls and gender diverse people to move freely and alone in their community.

This consultation has highlighted the need and opportunity for further research and engagement to understand:

- The specific experiences and perceptions of safety for CALD people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, people of different ages and LGBTIQ+ people broadly; and
- The experiences and perceptions of safety for gender diverse people across NSW who represented a small percentage of all respondents.



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