



*September 2022  
UoY Railway Studies Masters  
Dissertation Survey Results*

# Women & Non-Binary People's perceptions of Safety whilst traveling via rail in Britain.



*Emily Pownall*  
[EmilyKatePownall@gmail.com](mailto:EmilyKatePownall@gmail.com)

*Please contact if you would like a full copy of the dissertation  
or would like more information on the findings.*

Thank-you to all those who completed the survey. With special thanks to Network Rail's Inspire & Archway Networks, Women in Rail, Rail Future, Govia Thames Link, Transport for London, and all my friends and family.

### Brief Outline:

The questions focused on women & nonbinary people's experiences on British trains. Sexuality and Trans identity data was collected to compare LGBTQ+ experiences to the overall group. The Survey had 230 valid responses, 5% identified as transgender and 38% identified as Lesbian, Bisexual/ Pansexual, Queer or 'Other'.

Further investigation into transgender experiences would improve the reliability of these results.

### *Specific questions asked:*

- *How safe respondents felt expressing their physical appearance and if they had ever altered their appearance.*
- *If respondents had ever been made to feel uncomfortable, due to their gender or appearance.*
- *If they had ever been sexually harassed or assaulted.*
- *Whether they know how to seek help and, if they had previously, what their experiences of help were like.*
- *Their thoughts on how to improve perceptions of safety.*
- *Their thoughts on women only carriages.*
- *Whether they would increase the number of journeys they take if they felt safer.*

Of those who answered:

60%

*had experienced a situation where they were made to uncomfortable, due to their gender or physical appearance.*

Nearly 20%

*experienced sexual harassment or assault occasionally or regularly.*

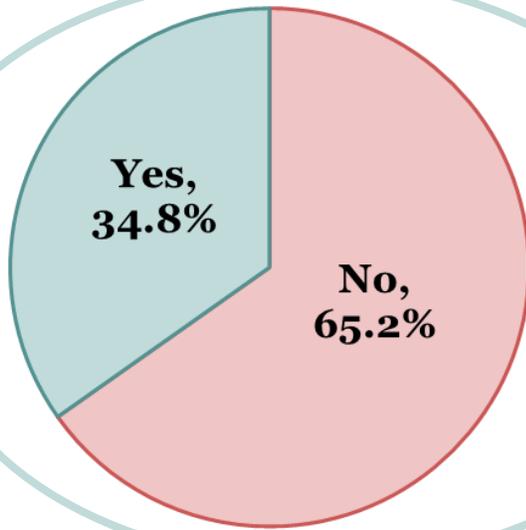
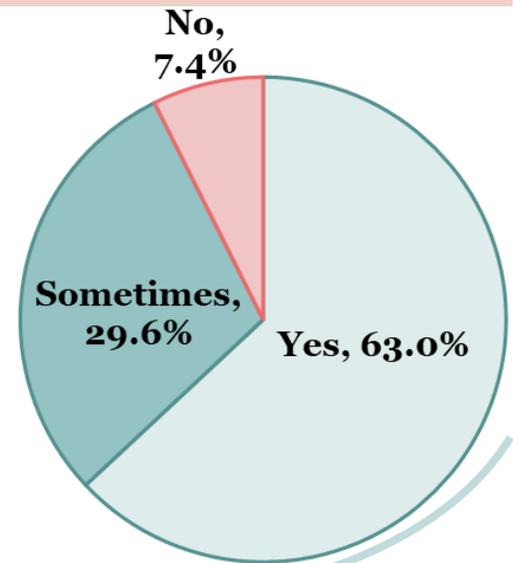
50%

*had experienced sexual harassment or assault.*

40%

*did NOT know where to get help in a situation where they were sexually harassed or assaulted.*

Respondents, *generally*, felt safe *expressing themselves* through their physical appearance whilst traveling via train. However, 29.6% only sometimes felt safe and 7.4% answered, no, they did not feel safe.



*Over a third* of respondents answered 'yes', they had purposefully *changed their appearance* on a journey.

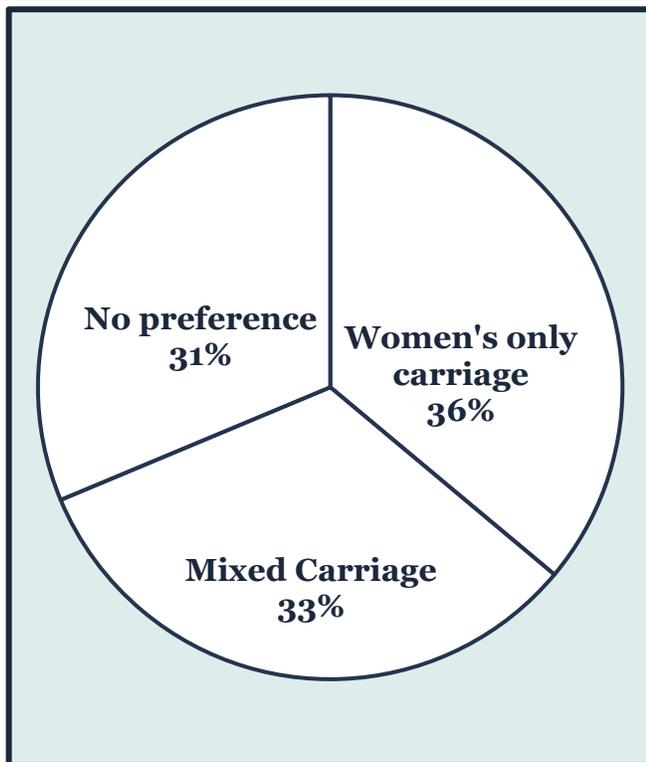
*Trans people and LBQ+ people were*

# 3 times

*more likely to change their appearance.*

The main ways of changing appearance were:

- **Altering Clothing**
  - For Example, dressing "modestly", "covering up", wearing baggy clothes, dressing less feminine.
- **Wearing headphones** (often without music)
- **Hiding LGBTQ+ imagery**
  - For Example, removing pride pins and hiding "queer coded" items.



When asked to imagine all conditions within 'Women's Only Carriages' and 'Mixed Carriages' were identical (e.g. seat availability), responses were evenly split between; intentionally choosing a women's only carriage, intentionally choosing a mixed carriage and having no preference.

However, Trans people were twice as likely to choose the 'Mixed' carriage.

For those who had a preference of carriage, approx. 45% said their choice of carriage was based on their perception of safety.

## The reasoning broadly fell into the below categories:

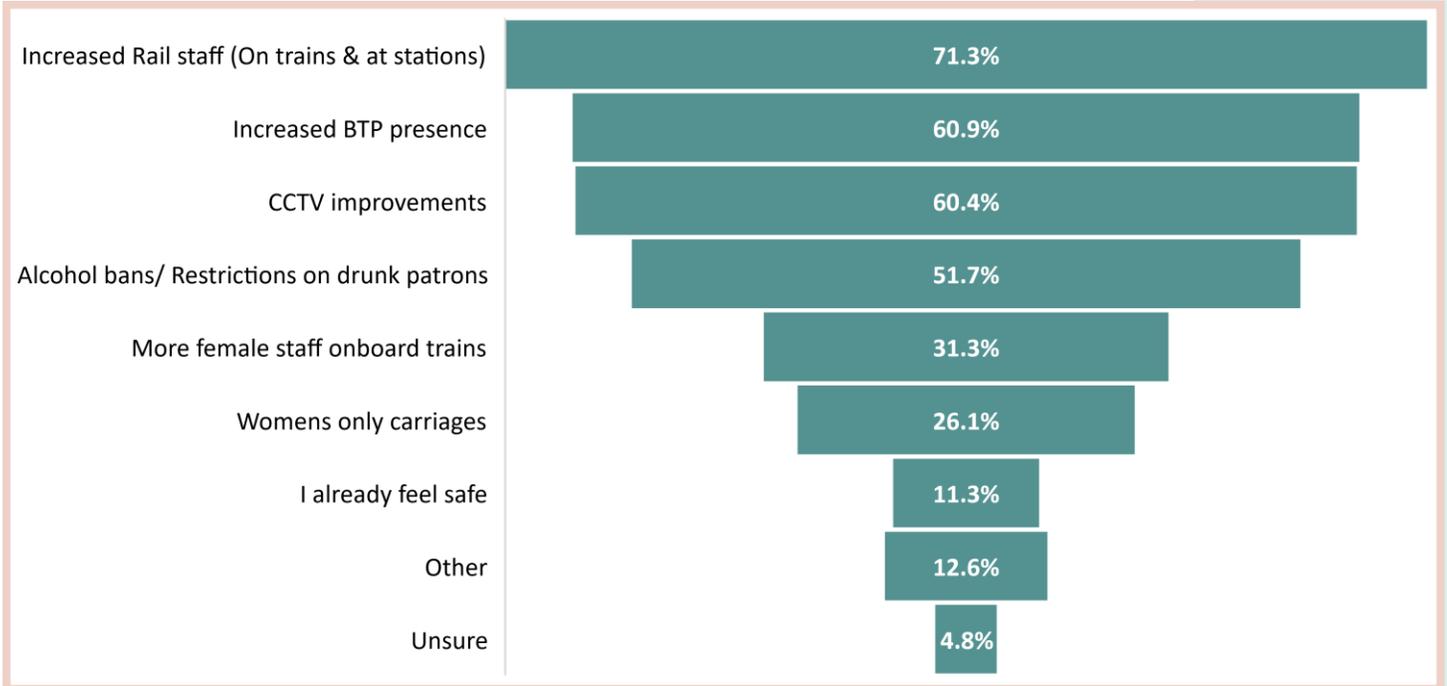
For those who chose the 'Women's' Carriage:

- Generally, *just feeling safer*.
- To decrease anxiety at *night* and/ or when *alone*.
- To decrease anxiety around *drunk people* (particularly groups of men).

For those who chose the 'Mixed' Carriage:

- Nervous about *reactions from others* about their appearance and/or perceived gender within a 'Women's Only' carriage.
- Women's carriages potentially create a *'target' for abuse*.

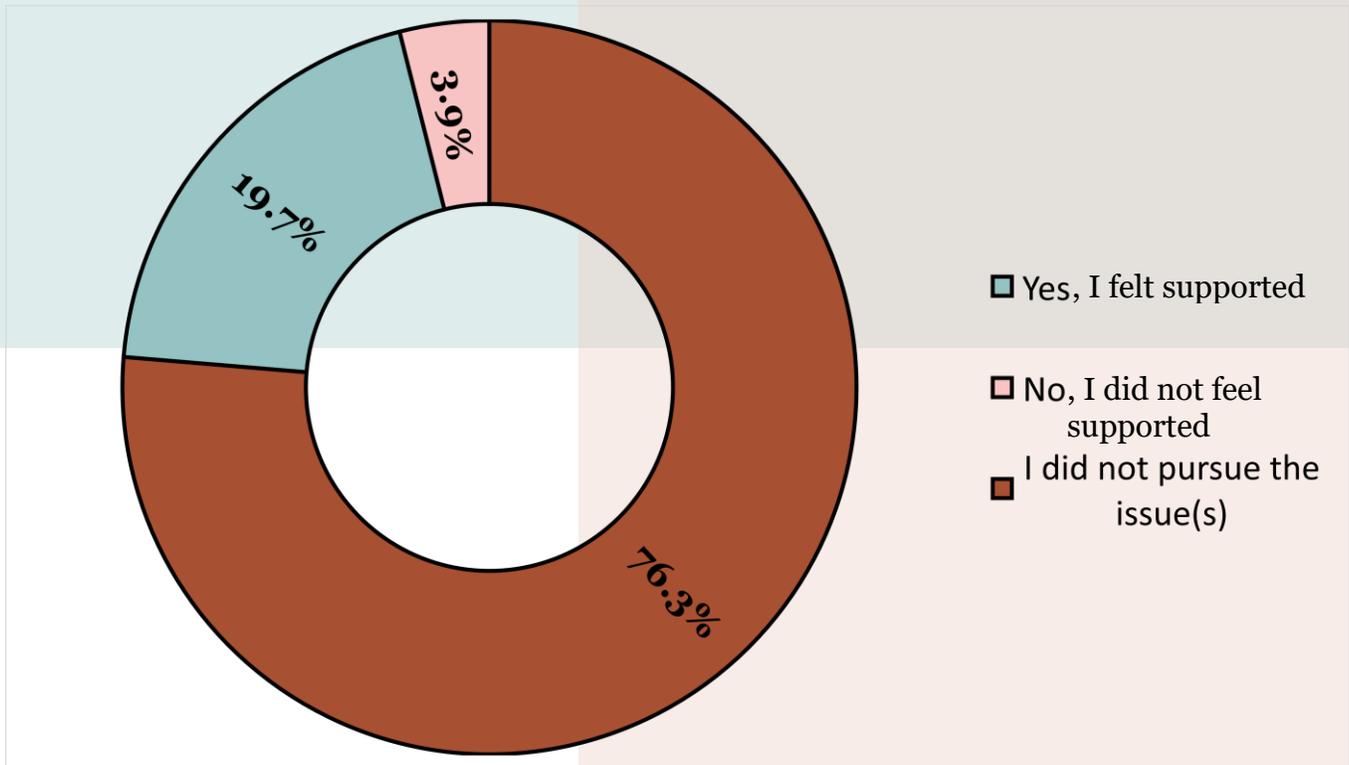
Below outlines the percentage of people who selected certain policy changes or resources to improve perceptions of safety.



*‘Other’ comments can be broken down into these main categories:*

- *Announcements/ Ads*
- *Better policies/ laws/ Punishments in place*
- *Restrictions on social groups*
- *Lighting*
- *Improved Staff Training*
- *Wider seating*

Most respondents did not pursue issues which arose, but those who did, mainly felt supported.



**Positive** experiences were generally due to train and station staff.

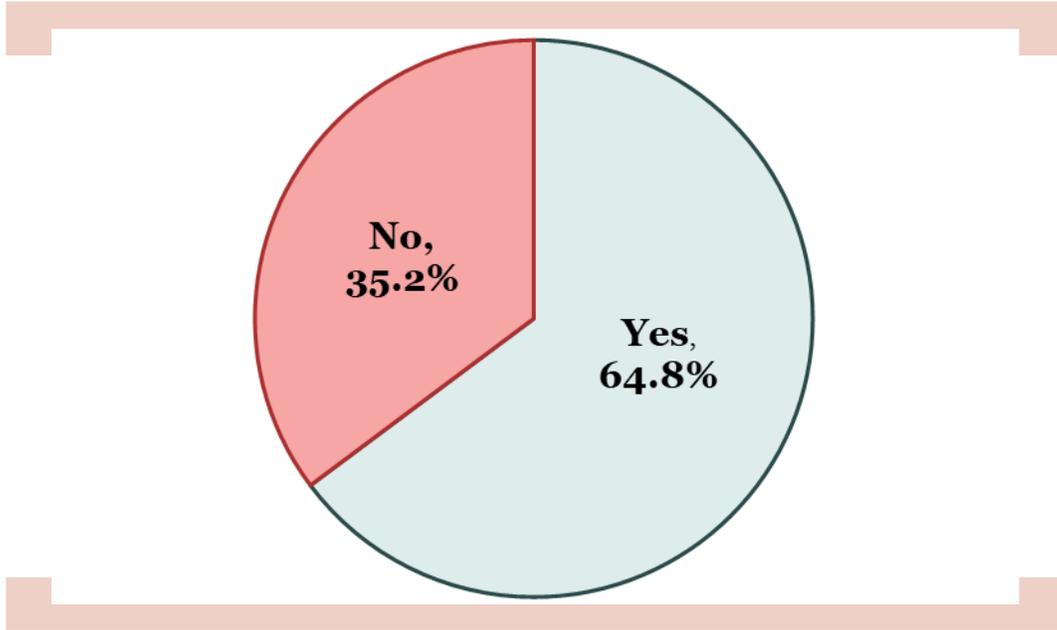
**Negative** experiences were due to receiving no response from texting the BTP about an incident.

Those who **did not pursue the issue**, generally, fell into the below categories:

- *Didn't know whether it was deemed harassment.*
- *Conditioned to accept it.*
- *Didn't want the stress of reporting the incident.*
- *Didn't think anything would be done or that anyone would listen.*
- *Fear of being called a liar.*
- *Fear of the perpetrator escalating their behaviour.*

Ultimately, nearly **2/3rds**

of respondents answered, yes, they would increase their journeys via train, to some extent, if they felt safer.



**7.5%**

Said it was their **number one priority**.

Transgender people were

**over 40%**

more likely to increase their journeys, compared to cisgender people, if they felt safer.

## Conclusion:

The below is an edited extract of the results conclusion submitted:

In conclusion, 88.7% of women felt their perception of safety could be improved whilst travelling via train in Britain and 64.8% would increase their number of journeys, to some extent, if they felt safer. Therefore, there is large scope for TOCs and the BTP to introduce policy and resources improvements, to increase women's perceptions of safety and increase patronage. Associations of stereotyped gendered behaviours create assumed preferences and promote a limited and faulty generalisation for the group. Therefore, when allocating resources and introducing policy, organisations should evaluate the effects that personal characteristics have on the effectiveness of these proposals. Companies and Governments must listen to the desires and individual needs of customers if proposals are to be deemed effective. This research analysed the individual characteristics of sexuality and transgender identity as an influence on perceptions of safety and opinions on improvements. Based on respondents' comments, LBQT+ women were more likely to have been made to feel uncomfortable due to their gender or physical appearance but were no more likely to experience sexual harassment or assault. Moreover, LBTQ+ women felt less safe expressing themselves through their physical appearance and were nearly twice as likely to alter their appearance. Consequently, LBQ+ sexuality and transgender-identity are significant factors on women's perceptions of safety and resulting defensive behaviours. By diverging from heteronormative societal expectations, LBTQ+ people are made to feel more vulnerable and have a resulting depreciation in their perceptions of safety.

Additionally, most respondents advocated for presence of railway staff onboard to provide both formal and informal guardianship and improved perceptions of safety. Railway staff, such as train guards, were the preferred choice for this guardianship as increased BTP presence proved controversial, particularly amongst LBTQ+ respondents. This dissertation recommends that TOCs evaluate their current staffing levels and how they could use their resources to have the

impactful improvement to women's perceptions of safety. Wallace notes that, women felt less safe than men but were more likely to notice safety enhancements and to feel safer as a result."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, if successful, these changes would see notable improvements to women's perceptions of safety on British trains. This research gave a voice to women's first-hand perspectives to avoid the male dominated architecture of traditional transport research and created debate amongst the use of women's-only carriages. Those who favoured women's-only carriages simply wanted to feel safer and believed that this mechanism would sufficiently do that. The survey outcomes and comments made lead to the suggestion that women's-only carriages are not an effective way to improve women's perceptions of safety or decrease potential sexual harassment or assault. Ultimately, it is difficult to find an all-encompassing solution that is effective and safeguards marginalised communities. Therefore, further, more detailed, TOC specific research must be done to maximise any improvements to women's perceptions of safety. It is recommended that future research broadens its scope to also consider race, disability, location, and class as potential contributing factors towards women's perceptions of safety on public transport.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wallace, Rodriguez, White, and Levine "Who Noticed, Who Cares? Passenger Reactions to Transit Safety Measures": 133-138