



EXPERT SURVEY

# GIRLS' SAFETY

IN **CITIES**  
ACROSS THE WORLD

SUMMARY | OCTOBER 2018

PLAN INTERNATIONAL SURVEYED ALMOST **400** EXPERTS ACROSS SIX CONTINENTS IN THESE **22** CITIES AROUND THE WORLD



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# ACCORDING TO THE EXPERTS...



**SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS THE BIGGEST GLOBAL SAFETY CONCERN FOR GIRLS – WORST IN BOGOTA AND JOHANNESBURG**

# FOREWORD

There will be approximately 1 billion girls under the age of 18 alive in 2025. Millions of them will be among the 5 billion people who will be living in towns and cities by 2030.

While some progress has been made and there are great opportunities for girls in cities, there are also increased risks. On the one hand, girls who live in cities are more likely to be educated, less likely to be married at an early age, and more likely to participate in politics. However, on the other hand, they face routine sexual harassment, exploitation and insecurity as they navigate the urban environment.

To better understand the safety situation for young women and adolescent girls, Plan International conducted an online perception-based survey on city safety among 392 experts in children's rights, women's issues and urban safety in 22 cities.

This summary presents the key findings from this survey:

- An overview of six different city dangers and an analysis of the extent to which each one represents a risk to adolescent girls and young women according to experts in each city.
- An analysis of the extent to which girls are able to participate in making decisions relating to their safety

The survey focuses on the main dangers girls and young women face in public spaces as they go about their daily lives in different cities, for example, how safe it is for them to leave their house by themselves or use public transport. It explores the extent to which young women and adolescent girls feel compelled to modify their behaviour in response to dangers and examines experts' perceptions of the frequency of sexual harassment and sexual violence in public spaces, the frequency of reporting in their cities and whether support structures are in place for the victims and survivors of such crimes. The survey also explores to what extent city dangers affect young women's and adolescent girls' ability to go to school or work.

The survey findings show that there is a long way to go to ensure safety for adolescent girls and young women within cities across the world. To change this we need to hear their voices and include them in decision-making on policies and urban design. As said by one expert in Toronto: "We need to listen more and engage adolescent girls and young women in how cities are designed and built."

**THE SURVEY FOUND THAT 78% OF EXPERTS ACROSS THE 22 CITIES DESCRIBED SEXUAL HARASSMENT AS AN EXTREMELY HIGH OR HIGH RISK FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN THEIR CITY**

# KEY FINDINGS

**69%** of experts said girls modify their behaviour always or most of the time in response to dangers in their city.



**KIDNAP AND MURDER** occur with similar frequency across the 22 cities, according to the experts surveyed. Only in Kampala and Johannesburg do more than 50% of experts see murder and kidnap as a high risk.



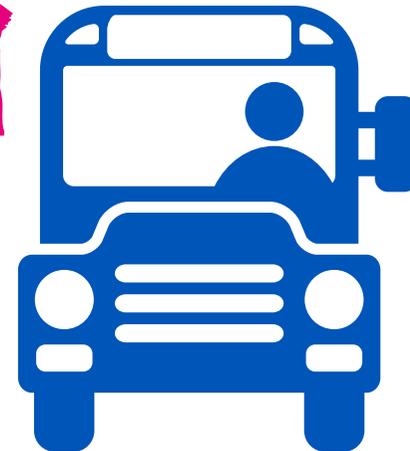
## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

is the number-one safety risk facing girls and young women with 78% of experts describing it as an extremely high or high risk for girls and 77% saying that it occurs either very or fairly often within public spaces in their city. Experts across all 22 cities surveyed see sexual harassment as the biggest risk for girls.



**SEXUAL ASSAULT/RAPE** is the second most widespread safety risk affecting girls and young women, according to the experts, with 57% of experts across the 22 cities rating it as a high or extremely high risk. Almost half (47%) said it occurs either very or fairly often within public spaces in their city but over a third say it is never or hardly ever reported to the authorities.

**THEFT AND ROBBERY** was the third biggest risk to girls and young women, according to the experts. Experts across all cities identified it as a risk, but in contrast to sexual harassment and sexual violence, most experts rated it as being a high, as opposed to an extremely high, risk for girls and young women.



While many cities' transport systems are safe for girls during the day, almost half (48%) of experts said it's either extremely unsafe or unsafe for girls to use public transport at night.



**60% OF EXPERTS SAID SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THEIR CITY IS NEVER OR HARDLY EVER REPORTED TO THE AUTHORITIES.**

**WHILE MANY CITIES ARE SAFE FOR GIRLS TO LEAVE THE HOUSE ON THEIR OWN DURING THE DAY, MORE THAN HALF OF EXPERTS (53%) SAID IT'S EITHER EXTREMELY UNSAFE OR UNSAFE FOR GIRLS TO GO OUT ON THEIR OWN AT NIGHT.**

**IN 14/22 CITIES SURVEYED, MORE THAN HALF OF EXPERTS SAID GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN NEVER OR HARDLY EVER PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING ABOUT SAFETY IN THEIR CITY.**

**IN 13/22 CITIES,** more than half of experts said girls and young women never or hardly ever have their views taken on board in local policies and planning about their safety

**IN 15/22 CITIES SURVEYED,** more than half of experts said that laws and policies to ensure girls' and young women's safety in their cities either do not exist, are not at all effective or are – at best – slightly effective



# TOP RISKS FACING GIRLS

Experts in each city rated the risk to girls and young women of six different safety concerns in their city from extremely high to extremely low. The risks were: sexual harassment; sexual assault or rape; theft and robbery; kidnap; murder; and acid attacks. This chapter explores in more detail how each of the cities fared.

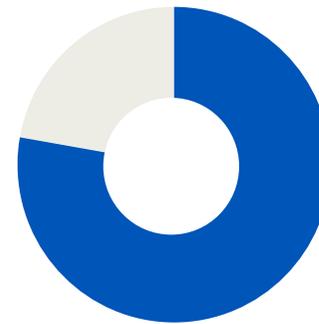
## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment was defined in the survey as hassling, eve teasing, stalking, touching, flashing and staring at girls and young women. The risk of sexual harassment of adolescent girls and young women is considered high or extremely high by experts in every city that took part in this survey (Figure 1).

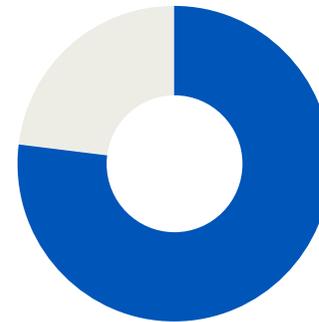
Barring Stockholm, Dublin and New York, experts considered the risk of sexual harassment when moving around public spaces to be very prominent across all cities. In five

cities, this risk is deemed high or extremely high by over 90% of experts. In Johannesburg and Bogota, 100% of experts agree that the risk of sexual harassment is extremely high or high.

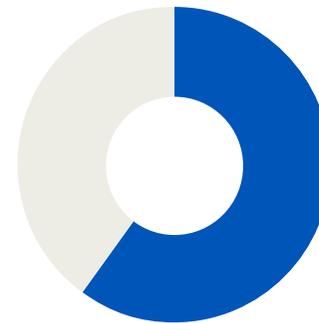
Asked how Bogota could be made a safer place for girls and young women, one respondent said: "It is very important to change gender norms, especially those that make men believe that they own public spaces and women's bodies. This would help women feel women more secure."



**78%** OF EXPERTS SAID SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS AN EXTREMELY HIGH OR HIGH RISK FOR GIRLS IN THEIR CITY



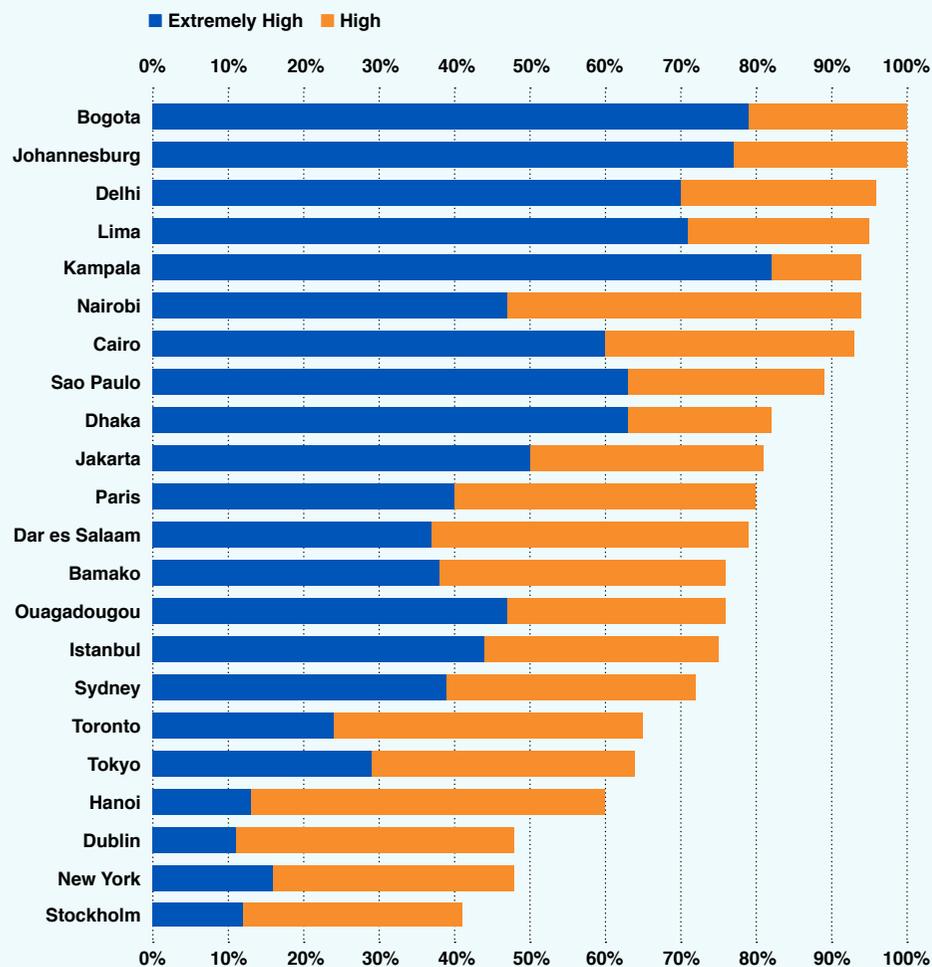
**77%** OF EXPERTS SAID SEXUAL HARASSMENT OCCURS VERY OR FAIRLY OFTEN WITHIN PUBLIC SPACES IN THEIR CITY



**60%** OF EXPERTS SAID SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS NEVER OR HARDLY EVER REPORTED TO THE AUTHORITIES IN THEIR CITY

# SEXUAL HARASSMENT (CONTINUED)

**FIGURE 1: HOW MUCH OF A RISK IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES IN YOUR CITY?**



Q. Please rate the personal safety concern facing adolescent girls and young women within public spaces within your city. Base: all experts (N=392)



Plan International / Heba Khalifa

# SEXUAL ASSAULT OR RAPE

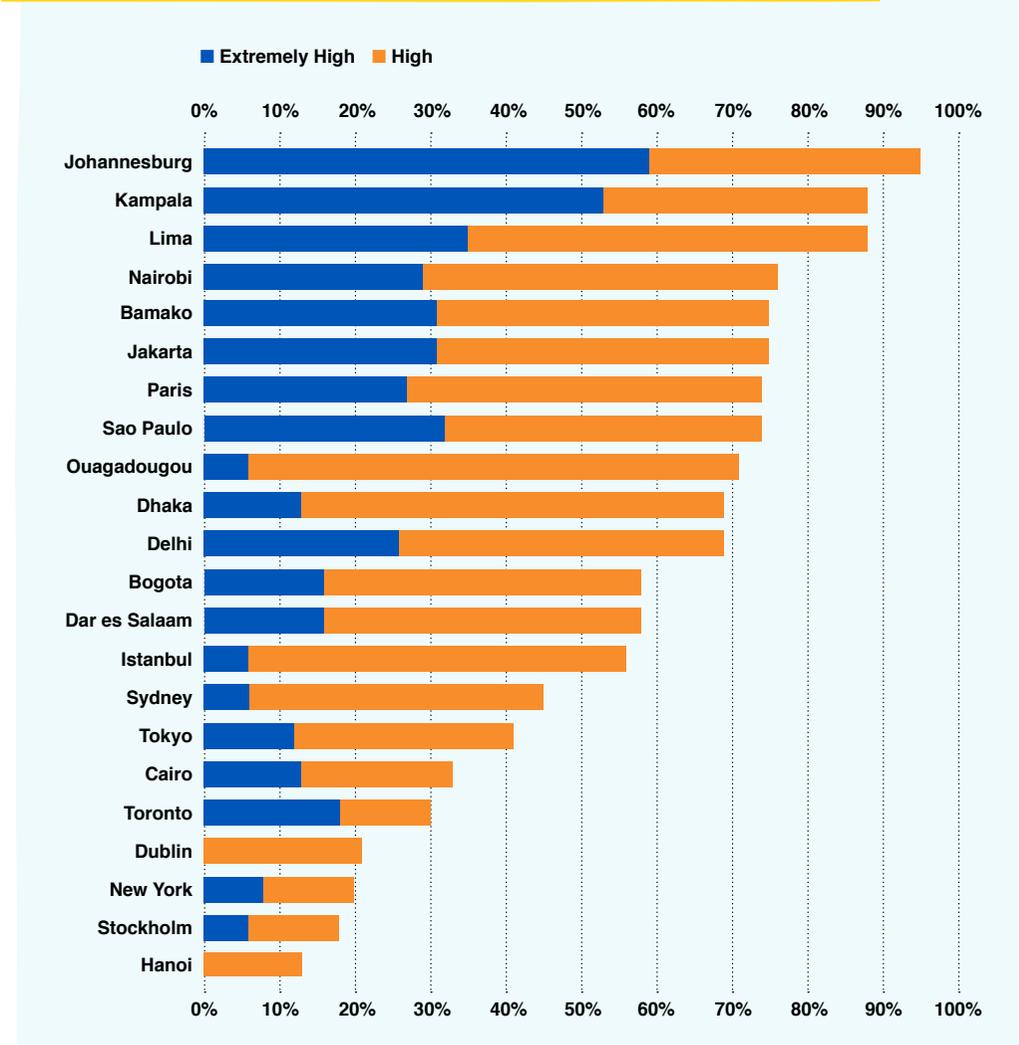
Figure 2 shows the experts' opinions on the risk of sexual assault or rape in each city. For 14 cities, more than half of the experts stated this risk was extremely high or high. Johannesburg, Lima and Kampala are the most unsafe cities for this risk.

The level of risk of sexual violence in Johannesburg was underscored by the following comment from one of the respondents in the city, who said: "Sexual harassment and violence happens so often that it is something we all feel as if we have to find ways to cope with it and go about our normal business as per usual."

For Hanoi, the lowest proportion of experts deemed the risk of sexual assault or rape facing girls or young women to be high or extremely high: 13% of respondents said that risk was high and none said the risk was extremely high. This was followed by Stockholm, where only 6% of the experts stated this safety concern to be extremely high and 12% noted it as high.



**FIGURE 2: HOW MUCH OF A RISK IS SEXUAL ASSAULT OR RAPE FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES IN YOUR CITY?**



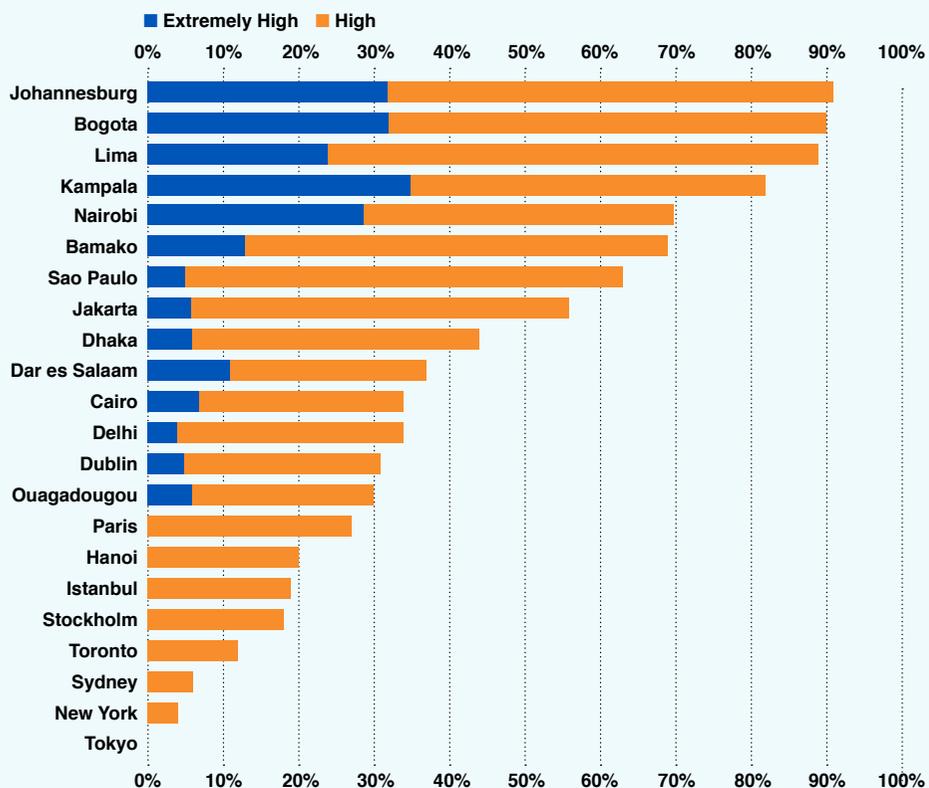
Q. Please rate the personal safety concern facing adolescent girls and young women within public spaces within your city. Base: all experts (N=392)

# THEFT AND ROBBERY

Johannesburg shows the greatest risk for girls and young women to be subjected to theft or robbery, but Bogota and Lima are not far behind (Figure 3). Around 90% of experts in both cities said adolescent girls and young women have an extremely high or high chance of becoming victims of theft and

robbery whilst moving around public spaces. This contrasts with Tokyo, where experts deemed this risk to be minimal as none of the respondents marked this risk to be extremely high or high. For both New York and Sydney, less than 10% of experts said that the risk is high.

**FIGURE 3: HOW MUCH OF A RISK IS THEFT OR ROBBERY FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES IN YOUR CITY?**



Q. Please rate the personal safety concern facing adolescent girls and young women within public spaces within your city. Base: all experts (N=392)



Plan International / Vivek Singh

# KIDNAP AND MURDER

Kidnap is of a particularly grave risk in Kampala (Figure 4), with nearly 90% of the experts stating this risk to be high or extremely high - a much greater risk than in any other city. Even though this risk is still significant in Johannesburg, Lima and Delhi, it is only about half as high as in Kampala. Kampala and Johannesburg are also the cities where

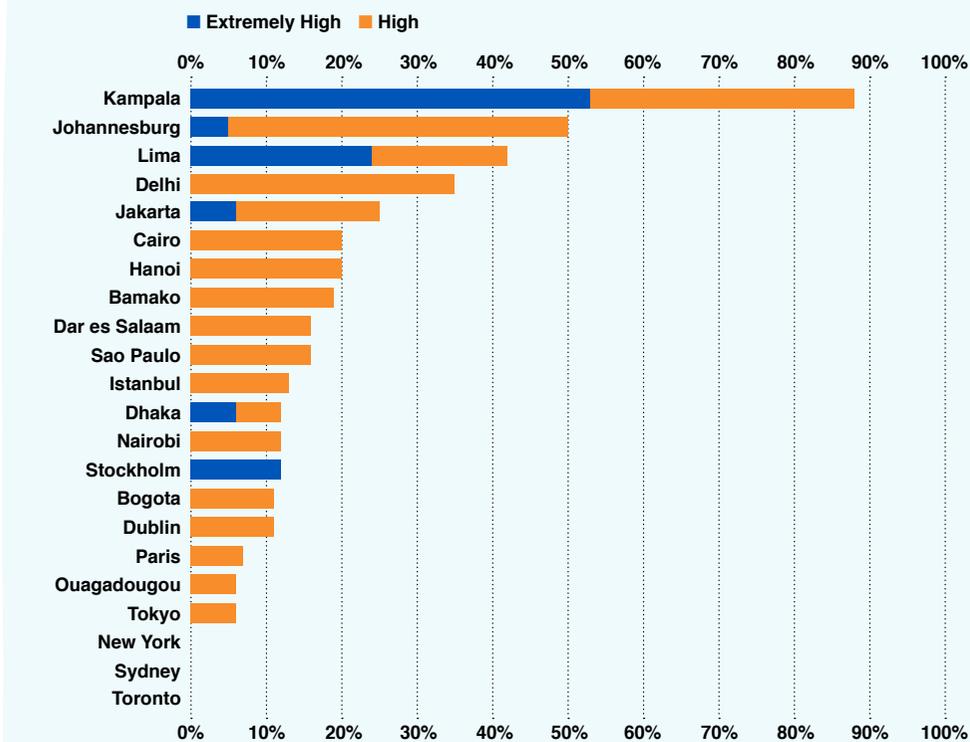
murder is stated to be a significant safety concern for adolescent girls and young women (Figure 5).

In Kampala over 60% of the experts stated this risk to be high or extremely high, with 40% alone saying it was extremely high – the highest for all the cities. However, in Lima

the danger of murder is also significant for adolescent girls and young women with close to 50% of the experts stating this risk to be high or extremely high. On the other hand, in five other cities – Cairo, New York, Paris, Tokyo and Toronto – none of the experts surveyed marked this risk to be high or extremely high.

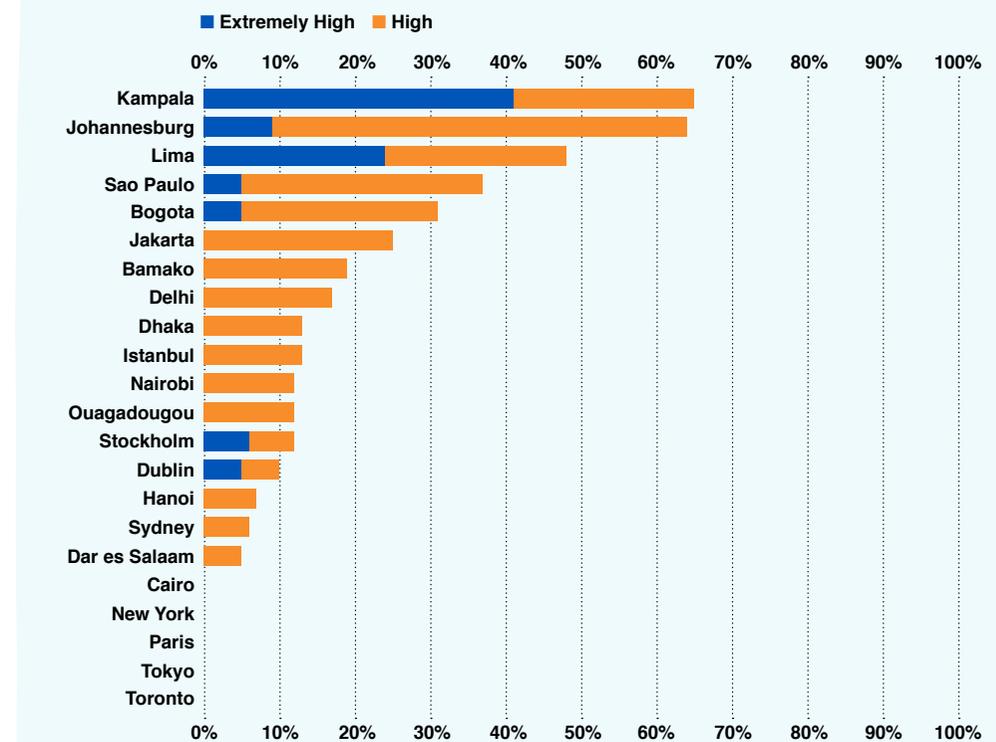
One of the survey respondents in Kampala said: “[The] Government needs to improve the security within the city to curb the rampant kidnaps, sexual violence and murders of especially young women and girls. Justice for girls who report should be guaranteed. Also, sensitisation to break the silence.”

**FIGURE 4: HOW MUCH OF A RISK IS KIDNAP FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES IN YOUR CITY?**



Q. Please rate the personal safety concern facing adolescent girls and young women within public spaces within your city. Base: all experts (N=392)

**FIGURE 5: HOW MUCH OF A RISK IS MURDER FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN PUBLIC SPACES IN YOUR CITY?**



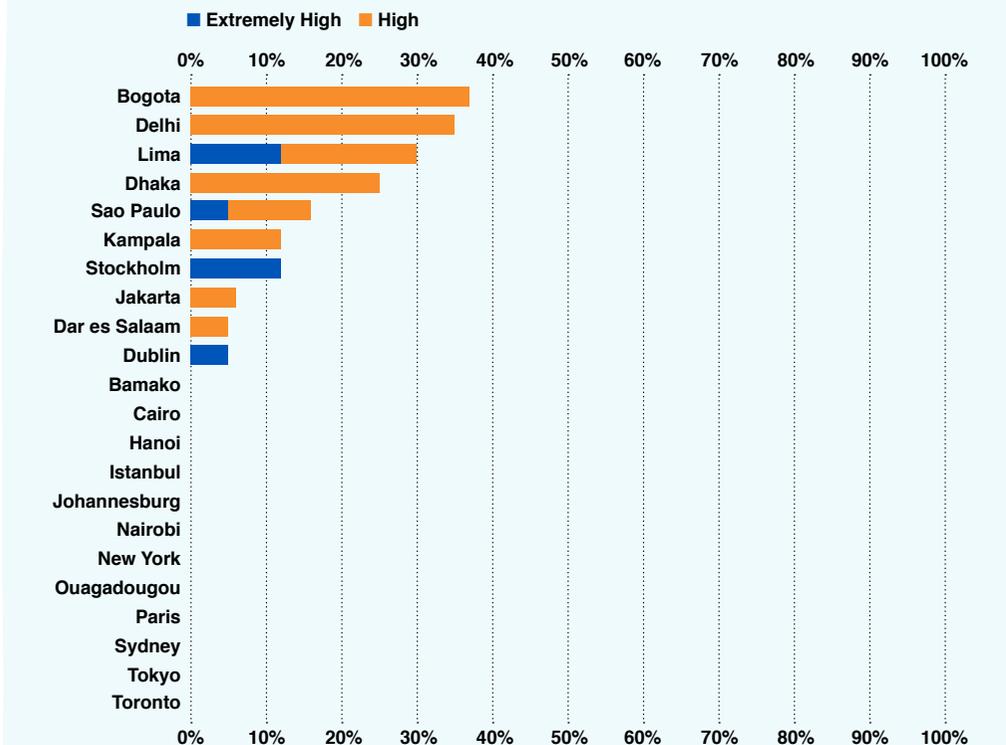
Q. Please rate the personal safety concern facing adolescent girls and young women within public spaces within your city. Base: all experts (N=392)

# ACID ATTACKS

Acid attacks are deemed a high or an extremely high safety concern by experts in 10 out of the 22 cities that took part in this survey and are considered particularly high risk in Bogota, Delhi and Lima (Figure 6). Of all the safety risks examined by this survey, the lowest proportion of experts marked acid attacks as a safety risk for girls.

Looking at the proportion of experts who said acid attacks were a “moderate” risk in their city (not shown in Figure 6), it is notable that in Hanoi 33% of experts said that the risk is moderate, which is still considerable.

**FIGURE 6: HOW MUCH OF A RISK ARE ACID ATTACKS FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN YOUR CITY?**



Q. Please rate the personal safety concern facing adolescent girls and young women within public spaces within your city. Base: all experts (N=392)



Plan International / Heba Khalifa

# DECISION-MAKING

Experts were asked to what extent adolescent girls and young women are given the ability to participate in local decision-making bodies about their personal safety and to what extent their views are taken on board in local policies and planning. According to experts in Tokyo (89%), girls and young women in the Japanese capital are never or hardly ever able to participate in local decision-making bodies about safety. Tokyo is followed closely by Istanbul, where 88% of the experts said the same (Figure 7). In both Lima and Dhaka, the proportion of experts giving this view stood at more than 80%. In 14 of the 22 cities surveyed, more than half of experts said girls and young women never or hardly ever

participate in decision-making about safety in their city.

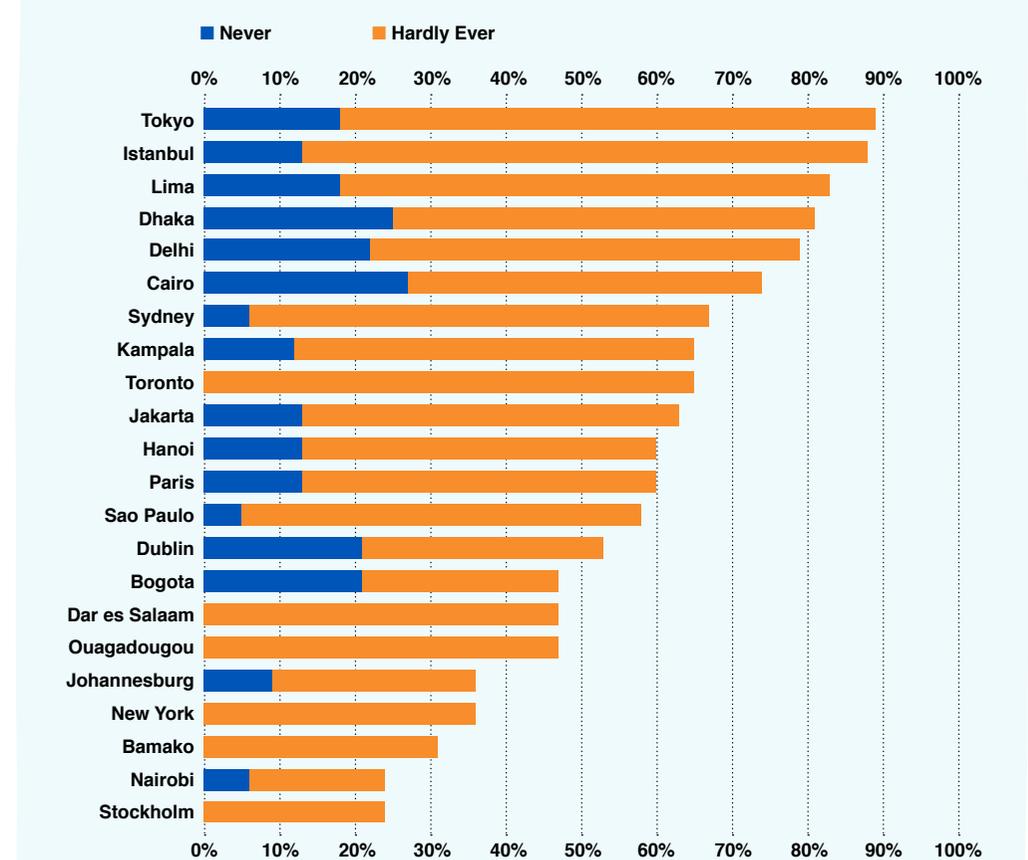
One of the respondents in Istanbul said what was needed to improve the situation there was “inclusive and consultative crime prevention and planning that ensure the participation of women and girls” and that city planning needed to be updated regularly, with women and girls and other potentially vulnerable groups also be involved in this process.

This should of course apply to all the 22 cities taking part in the survey, although in Nairobi and Stockholm girls tend to have more input into decision-making, according to the experts.

**IN 14/22 CITIES, MORE THAN HALF OF EXPERTS SAID GIRLS NEVER OR HARDLY EVER PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING ABOUT SAFETY**



**FIGURE 7: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION MAKING BODIES ABOUT SAFETY?**

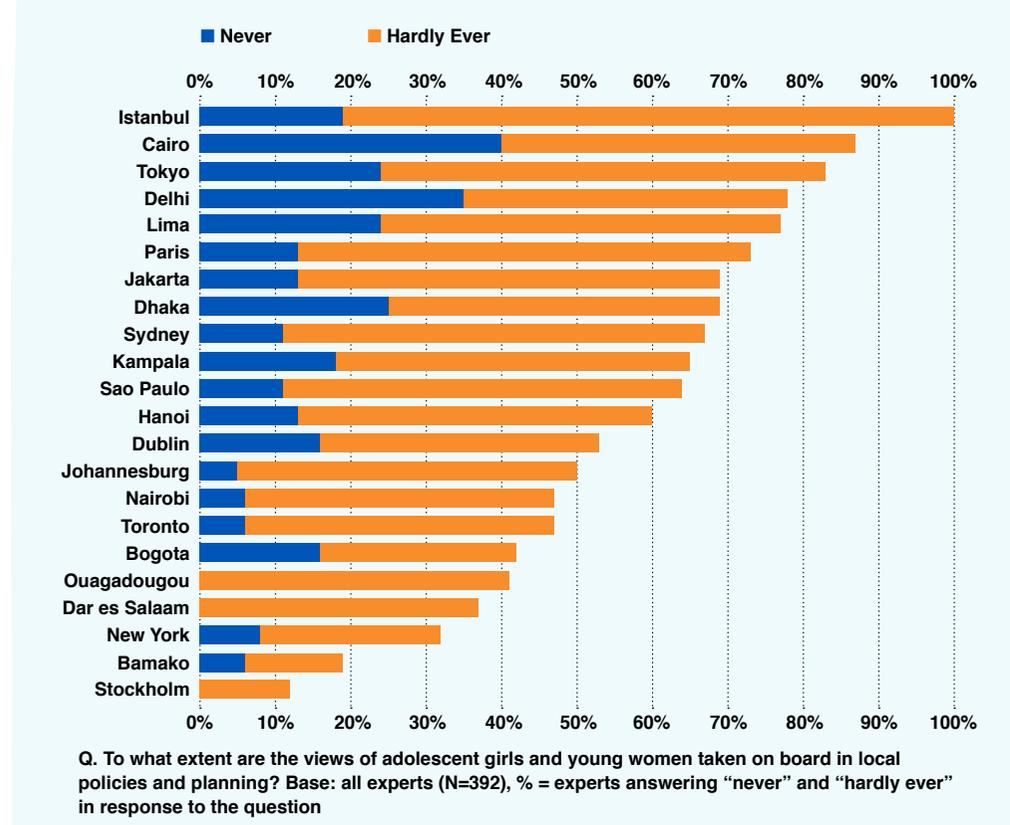


Q. To what extent are adolescent girls and young women given the ability to participate in local decision-making bodies about personal safety issues in your city? Base: all experts (N=392), % = experts answering “never” and “hardly ever” in response to the question

When experts were asked about the extent to which the views of adolescent girls and young women were taken on board in local policies and planning, in 13 out of 22 cities surveyed, more than half of the experts said “never” or “hardly ever”. In the case of Istanbul, all experts felt this was the case, followed by Cairo and Tokyo (Figure 8), where more than 70% of the experts held the same view.

Generally, the data shows that all cities have real scope for improving the extent to which girls’ and young women’s views are taken into account in local policies and planning. As confirmed by one of the experts in Delhi: “Young girls and women need to be part of the design and evaluation of policies and plans.”

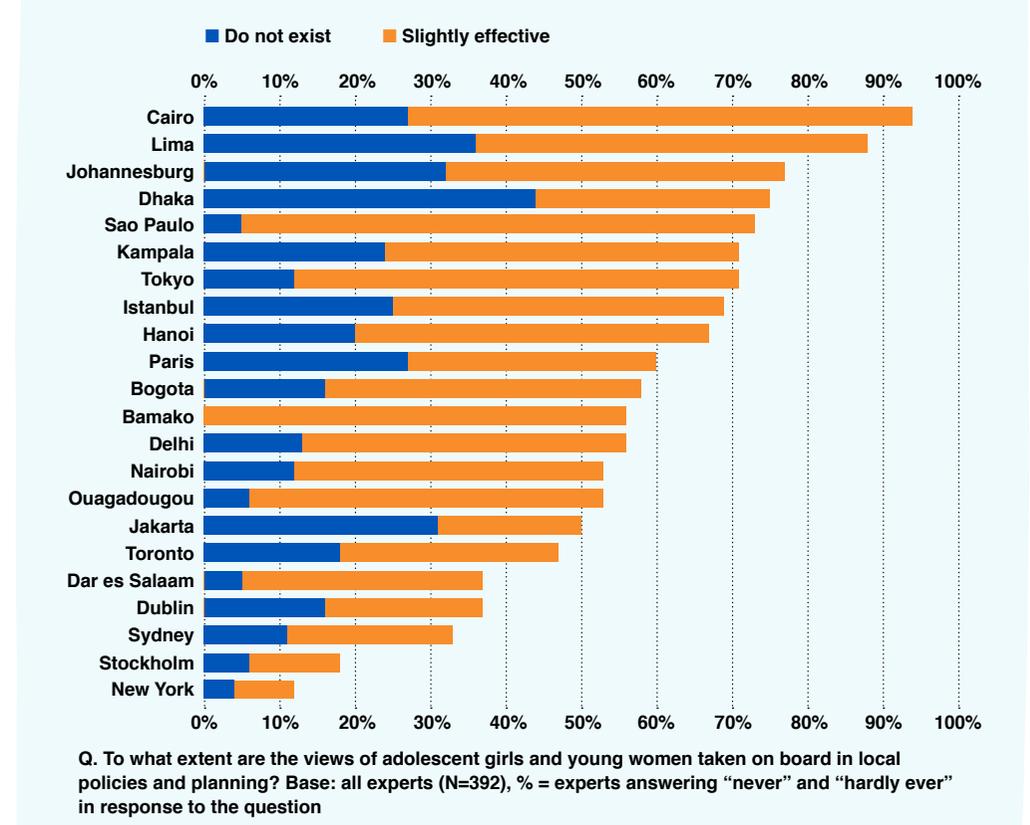
**FIGURE 8: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE VIEWS OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN TAKEN ON BOARD IN LOCAL POLICIES AND PLANNING?**



When experts were asked about the effectiveness of any laws and policies which existed in their cities to ensure adolescent girls’ and young women’s safety, in 15 of the 22 cities surveyed, more than half of experts said they did not exist or were not at all effective or were only slightly effective (Figure 9). In the case of Cairo, more 90% of experts held this view, whereas in Lima, this was more than 80%.

In Bamako one of the respondents said: “Cases of sexual harassment or sexual assault or rape reported to local authorities should face the full force of the law in order to deter others. Justice should be enforced regardless of social and cultural traditions.” And in Cairo one of the experts said: “[We need] activation of the harassment law and the adoption of more stringent laws to punish the aggressors”.

**FIGURE 9: HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THE LAWS AND POLICIES TO ENSURE GIRLS’ AND WOMEN’S SAFETY IN YOUR CITY?**



# CONCLUSION

This pioneering survey is the first of its kind to examine the safety risks facing girls and young women on such a large scale, highlighting the universality of the dangers girls face in cities across different societies and cultures. Girls' and young women's safety in cities is an issue which affects the lives of millions and yet remains ignored.

One of the biggest benefits of this study is that it will enable Plan International to raise awareness among the public of the safety issues facing girls and young women. But that's not all. We already run our Safer Cities for Girls programme in eight cities around the world: Delhi, India; Hanoi, Vietnam; Cairo, Egypt; Kampala, Uganda; Nairobi, Kenya; Lima, Peru; San Francisco, Paraguay, and Honiara, Solomon Islands. The programme aims to build safe, accountable and inclusive cities with and for adolescent girls. The expected outcomes of the programme include increased girls' safety and access to public spaces; increased active and meaningful participation for girls in urban development and governance; and increased autonomous mobility for girls in the city.

The data captured by this survey provides us with invaluable insights into girls' safety across six continents, which we can build on as we put into action our plans to scale up our programme to 20 cities globally over the next few years.

As part of the research, experts were asked to contribute solutions as to how their city could be made safer for adolescent girls and young women.

Many said that harmful gender norms need to be tackled so that girls and young women can be equal citizens within their societies. Gender training and awareness-raising among boys and men was frequently mentioned as a crucial step in achieving this. A respondent in Nairobi said: "There needs to be a major assault on the culture and politics of patriarchy. Furthermore, there needs to be a denunciation of the culture of impunity of the police and of men who violate women. Organisations are needed that actively counter this."

Numerous experts also referred to the need for more political will to change the status quo and for improved law enforcement. In Toronto, an expert said: "[We need] more young girls and women on government committees entrusted with safety planning." In Jakarta, a respondent said: "Of course there should be a behaviour change of the society in looking at women's and girls' rights in general. The government and law enforcement should have the laws that protect and guarantee the safety of women and girls."

Many experts also commented on the need for improvements to city infrastructure. An expert in Paris said what was needed was "appropriate public facilities and truly public spaces with good visibility" and "appropriate

lighting at night". The respondent also called for a ban on drinking alcohol in public and the "presence of mediators in the most exposed and busiest locations." An expert in Hanoi called for an "improvement of public spaces" to render them more open, with better lighting and more attractive, as well as for improvements to the Vietnamese capital's public transport system.

The lack of reporting of crimes against girls and young women also featured heavily among the experts' observations. In Dublin, one of the experts said: "There needs to be a culture change so girls/women feel comfortable reporting incidents of harassment and violence, and so they feel confident that their reports will have consequences."

Plan International believes that more research needs to be carried out into the experience of girls and young women in the world's cities so the violence and discrimination they face can be addressed and so they can exercise their right to live in safety. Please see Plan International's Unsafe in the City report, out on 11 October 2018 (International Day of the Girl) for in-depth qualitative analysis into girls' safety in five cities (Lima, Kampala, Delhi, Sydney and Madrid), including recommendations and testimonials from girls and young women.

**"More in-depth research needs to be carried out into the experience of girls and young women in the world's cities so the violence and discrimination they face can be addressed"**

# METHODOLOGY

The expert survey was conducted online in 22 cities between May and August 2018. Cities were selected on the basis of their size and geographical location, with those considered among the biggest in the world prioritised. Care was taken to choose a selection spread across six continents: Asia, South America, North America, Europe, Africa or Australia.

The survey was designed by Plan International in collaboration with the expert polling consultancy ComRes and research consultant Adrienne Monteath-van Dok of Bloem Consulting. The survey was designed for online use with all but one question using a five-point Likert scale. It was translated into Spanish, French and Japanese.

In each city, experts in children's rights, women's issues and urban safety were identified through the local Plan International office and its networks, as well as through online searches. Experts were also asked to recommend other experts. A range of professional backgrounds were included: staff of non-governmental organisations, government workers, healthcare and social workers, as well as activists, social commentators and experts working for corporates or foundations. The survey was issued to a select group of 741 experts worldwide, of which 392 responded.

Please see the full report for a detailed description of the methodology.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the almost 400 experts across the globe who generously donated their time and insights to make this survey possible.



Plan International / Ignacio Marín



## ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

Cover photo: Plan International / Quinn Neely