

Predatory behaviour and street sexual harassment: Evidence-based proactive policing

Identifying, understanding and disrupting street sexual harassment and predatory behaviours in the night-time economy and other public spaces.

Key details

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Police region	West Midlands
Collaboration and partnership	Thames Valley Police
Level of research	Professional/work based
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Date due for completion	September 2026

Research context

Sexual harassment is a widespread but under-researched and under-policed issue, encompassing an array of behaviours from unwanted sexual comments and touching to stalking and exposure. Two-thirds of all experienced sexual harassment in the UK takes place in public spaces, making street sexual harassment a pervasive form of sexual violence. It is also especially prevalent in and around night-time economy settings, such as outside bars and clubs and the public spaces between them, with Thames Valley Police data further highlighting the persistence of associated predatory behaviours such as loitering.

Reactive intervention is no longer enough – evidence-based, preventative approaches are needed instead. Proactive identification and disruption are useful avenues for reducing escalation, easing pressure on police resources, improving bystander interventions and rebuilding public trust. To that end, Thames Valley Police has implemented [Project Vigilant](#), which trains police officers in behavioural observation to identify and intervene with concerning behaviours at public hotspots in the night-time economy.

Research gaps remain in understanding specific perpetrator behaviours, behavioural patterns, situational determinants and dynamic influences relevant to street sexual harassment. Also missing is a clearer understanding of what sexually predatory acts are in the night-time economy and other public spaces and how they combine with street sexual harassment to indicate risks and harm on a continuum of sexual violence. Such insights can inform proactive policing, strengthen early intervention and support long-term disruption as part of the wider street violence and violence against women and girls prevention efforts.

In light of these gaps, this project seeks to:

- systematically identify and understand predatory behaviours and street sexual harassment in night-time economy hotspots
- understand the general public's lived experiences of street sexual harassment and predatory behaviours in public spaces, perceptions of safety and views on related policing
- build an evidence base to strengthen Project Vigilant

Research methodology

This project uses both primary and secondary data collection in a mixed-methods design which combines qualitative and quantitative data. There are five data streams from three main data sources:

- from the police: Vigilant post-patrol logs and interviews with Vigilant-involved police officers and operational, tactical and strategic leads
- from the community: national lived experiences survey and brief questionnaire with night-time economy goers
- from the field: behavioural observation of members of the public in night-time economy hotspots

Research participation

For the primary data collection, the participants are:

- Vigilant-involved police officers and operational, tactical and strategic leads
- adult members of the UK general public with lived experiences of personal or experienced street sexual harassment and/or predatory behaviours in public spaces
- adult members of the UK general public in public spaces at night-time economy hotspots where Vigilant officers are deployed

Related Practice Bank entries

Thames Valley Police: [Project Vigilant – preventing sexual violence](#)

Additional resources

[Project website](#)