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Article in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* · September 2022

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# Fear for All Women: European women's fear of harassment and aggression in public spaces

Journal of Interpersonal Violence  
2022, Vol. 37(7-8) NP4160–NP4186

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## Abstract

This work is based on the inequality that women suffer in public spaces, with fear being a constant in their lives. Women must learn to live to accept a limited and constrained existence. Based on this approach, this research establishes a European description and comparison of the insecurities, fears, or concerns expressed by women facing the risk of aggression/harassment, and the prevalence of sexual harassment in public spaces. For this, we used the Survey on Violence Against Women in the European Union (EU; 2012). In the fieldwork, we performed a factorial analysis, as well as a logistic regression analysis between the sociodemographic variables (age, educational level, income, and habitat) and prevalence of physical or virtual sexual harassment. In general, while European women report that they have suffered harassment to a considerable extent, there are even greater concerns or fear of abuse or aggression in public spaces. A fundamental fact is that there is a significant correlation between the prevalence of harassment and per capita income, such that those countries with the highest economic development show a higher incidence of harassment towards women. Similarly, European countries with higher standards of equality

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show a greater incidence and prevention against the risk of harassment or aggression, particularly among young women. Some results suggest that more than half of Europeans avoid certain spaces or places for fear of being attacked. The main European powers, which have higher standards of equality, report the most harmful instances of behavior against women in public spaces in relation to harassment or fear. The results obtained prompt the conclusion that socialization towards European women is both victimizing and discriminatory.

### **Keywords**

sexual harassment, sexual assault, homicide, situational factors, violence exposure, violence against women

### **Introduction**

Women's fear of harassment and violence in public spaces is not a recent issue, but many of the world's biggest cities are currently proposing measures to address these problems.<sup>1</sup> Viewed as sexual objects and approached in the street, on public transport, or in other public spaces without their consent, women experience a series of violent scenarios—specifically of a sexual nature—on a daily basis. For this reason, from a gender perspective, cities are not neutral spaces that can be enjoyed equally by men and women. For Barrau Fuentes (2010) the relationship between women and the city is one that is based on fear. Women must accept and learn to live with a limited and constrained existence, while the formal arrangement by which the city determines the life of its citizens is seldom questioned. This is often referred to as the “Little Red Riding Hood” syndrome (Del Valle, 1997) where a lone woman is regarded as sexually available, with no rights to claim her privacy. When women use the city, they must be constantly on their guard against male appropriation (Darke, 1998a), their own definition and perception in sexual terms (Franck, 2002) and an urban environment that consistently transmits to women the message that they must know their place (Darke, 1998b).

In this respect, social media have contributed to these spatial equality initiatives with campaigns regarding the daily measures that some women should take when returning home alone at night. For example, phrases such as: “you should put the keys between your fingers, like spikes, when walking home through the subway at night,” “pull out your mobile phone and pretend to talk,” or “I have the emergency number on speed dial all the way” and even “I move around so as not to walk through a street where nobody would hear

me if I shouted.” Some testimonies provided by these women reveal how they “walk in the center of the sidewalk so that you could not be taken into a car or an entrance” “or pretend to greet someone in order to look as though you are not alone.”<sup>2</sup> Audiovisual evidence has also been disseminated regarding the responses of women to the question: “What do women feel when they discover that the person walking behind them at night is a woman and not a man?” “Relief” is the word most often used by women when answering this question.<sup>3</sup> There are numerous examples of videos where the protagonist suffers fear, harassment, and insecurity in the streets.<sup>4</sup> We can even find news reports where the solutions offered to this dangerous situation often partially revolve around the vigilance of the women themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the feminist demonstrations held during International Women’s Day in 2018 and 2019 produced an unprecedented historical mobilization against gender inequality in all of its forms (pay gap, discrimination, or sexual violence). One of the main slogans heard in Spain during these demonstrations was “on the way home I want to be free, not brave” in obvious reference to the fear and lack of security that grips the lives of women.

Taking into account the issues previously exposed, this research aims to establish a European description and comparison of the insecurities, fears, or concerns expressed by women facing the risk of aggression and harassment, along with the prevalence of sexual harassment in public spaces. For this, the Survey on Violence against Women in the EU (2012)<sup>6</sup> is used, administered to 42,000 women in the 28 member states of the European Union (EU). Some results suggest that more than half of European women avoid certain spaces or places due to the fear of being attacked, particularly younger women and those living in large cities. Furthermore, the data show that in the most egalitarian European countries, women report to suffer more harassment and they are more afraid of being attacked. Inversely, countries where there have been less intense responses to harassment and concerns about sexual assault present very negative data regarding the achievement of equality. The results obtained strongly suggest the need to continue this line of research in greater depth and point towards the existence of a form of socialization towards European women that is victimizing and discriminatory.

## **Theoretical Framework**

A classic concept in sociology is that of the *flâneur*, a figure that symbolizes an archetype of the nineteenth-century urban revolution. He was a creature of Paris in the first decade of the 1800s: the symbol of a modern city. The term *flâneur* is used to describe an observer, who, above all, is a man whose objective gaze rests on women, and embodies modernity. Wolff (1990) would

argue that in theory the *flâneuse* could not exist, because only men could behave in such a manner. It is inconceivable that a woman could exploit the city in the same way as a man. The essential characteristic of the *flâneur* is that he takes possession of the city, that is, he is the embodiment of the possessive male gaze. Therefore, he is a man who observes women and adopts an evaluative view of them. Thus, the concept of the *flâneur* could be regarded as another attractive idea that turns out to be only for men. In other words, is another analytical and powerful sociological concept that actually excludes women (Wilson, 2001). More than two centuries later, public spaces continue to be the domain of men, while women are forced to cope with this discriminatory situation. In this sense, Elkin (2018) says that for the *flâneuse*, the recreational use of the street is a demonstration of a subversion of feminism.

### *The Facts: Harassment*

The first element to be analyzed in this research is concerned with sexual harassment. The most recent studies on sexual harassment can be grouped into (a) harassment suffered through new technologies and (b) the type of harassment that occurs in the street or on public transport. With respect to the latter type of harassment, there is no specified terminology for labeling them, with a multitude of terms being used, the most predominant of which appear to be the concepts of “sexual harassment in the street or street harassment.” This is the case in spite of the fact that the work of Fileborn and Vera-Gray (2017) points out the limitations of referring to these spaces only as streets, which should be extended to other public spaces such as transport and other public / private spaces such as bars and clubs. This term was first coined in the 1980s, and was originally used to refer to gender-based harassment that occurred in public places (Holly, 2010). Thus, “street harassment”—a street issue—has become the most used concept by academics and activists of notable distinction (Holly, 2010; Vera-Gray, 2016). Other terms that refer to the same behaviors include “stranger harassment,” which is the harassment perpetrated by strangers, “gender-based public harassment,” referring to public harassment due to gender, and “sexual harassment in public places” (Vera-Gray, 2016).

Among the behaviors that could be classified as “street harassment” are: whistling, staring, making sexually explicit comments, grunting, making offensive comments about the body, honking the horn of a car, exhibitionism, or masturbation on public transport or in the streets (De Luna-Meza, 2013; Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017). These behaviors share the common characteristic that the aggressor is unknown to the victim, which makes the experience particularly difficult to anticipate and, therefore, avoid (Gaytán, 2007; MacMillan et al., 2000; Observatorio contra el Acoso Callejero de Chile, 2015).

These practices reveal power relationships between genders, since they are carried out primarily by men alone or in groups and directed mainly towards women, and such practices are not associated with a consensual relationship but rather the imposition of one's desires onto another. They are usually performed quickly in public streets or on public transport (Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017; Vallejo Rivera, 2013).

### *The Spaces*

The second element of analysis in this research is the female perception of insecurity, fear, and concern in public spaces when faced with the possibility of being a victim of aggression, particularly that of a sexual nature. These perceptions also contribute to the socialization of women from childhood with respect to public spaces, marking such places potentially dangerous spaces for them. Naredo (1998) states that, in this sense, women feel more insecure than men for two main reasons:

1. From infancy, they have internalized the danger and learned that their behavior is critical when it comes to escaping from such danger, that is, they have learned to be continuously on-guard. Women put into practice innumerable self-protection strategies, which severely limit their freedom and personal autonomy. Women's lives are filled with limits of this kind, which affect autonomy and can become as victimizing as crime itself.
2. Women suffer daily offenses, jokes, and "compliments", while their private space can be invaded by a man at any time. And although all these behaviors are not classified as crimes, they play a fundamental role in maintaining the asymmetrical relations between men and women.

There are numerous studies that analyze public spaces as social constructions lacking in neutrality. People, with their senses and thoughts, give meaning to the spaces they inhabit and frequent on a daily basis. Faced with exact, objective, and mechanistic models, there is a need to identify the way in which the burden of human feelings, identity, and meanings are associated with external spaces (Barinas Salcedo, 2016). When a place is described as insecure, it is necessary to address three main sources: personal experiences, the stories of other people, and stories disseminated from the media (Martel & Baries, 2006). In this way, scelerophobia is created, a fear of crime that can occur in certain places based on personal experience, reaction to the media, or the influence of other people (Cook, 2010).

Moreover, women generally blame themselves if something happens in an urban space—the socialization of which is masculine, and therefore

forbidden for women—which leads them to feel responsible if they are victims of certain crime on public streets (Falú, 2009).

The planning of cities has led to a reduction in hope, turning them into spaces characterized by a “geography of fear” (Del Valle, 2005). There are two main sources of instability that threaten the normalized use of spaces: darkness, and the lack of people (Barrau Fuentes, 2010). According to Hernández Pezzi (1998), at night, in the big cities, all women are agoraphobic. In the end, women learn to be continually on the guard for themselves.

### *The Sensations: Fear and Worry<sup>7</sup>*

Fear is an instrument of social domination and control that is very powerful and effective and, in this case, it limits the freedom of movement of half of the population. Reducing their fundamental rights and perpetuating inequality, “fear works as a sounding board of the ancestral discourse that considers that the woman and street association refers to those that are out of place or out of time” (Román, 2009, p. 138). This fear or worry not only hinders social interactions but also restricts the living space, confines the individual, and dwarfs perception and sensitivity, all of which are fundamental factors in our relationship with space (Gutiérrez, 2005).

A tentative concept related to the concerns that certain places entail is the “fear of crime” that is defined as a phenomenon that is cognitive (Fernández & Grijalva, 2012; Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987), affective (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987) or behavioral (Fernández & Grijalva, 2012), since it can generate protective behaviors (Ruiz, 2007). Other authors choose to measure the fear of crime in terms of anxiety (Fisher & Allan, 2004), frequency (Farrall & Gadd, 2004) or by the act of taking self-protective measures or ceasing to carry out certain activities (Gutiérrez, 2005; Warr, 2006).

For Doran and Burgess (2012), the concern or fear that a crime can occur has a marked social, macroeconomic, and environmental character. This includes the characteristics of the social space and sociodemographic components (age, ethnicity, gender, and disability), as well as the direct or indirect experiences of victimization and levels of vulnerability. Narváez Mora (2015) notes the importance of evaluative attitudes (legislative policies) along with cognitive (set of beliefs and perceptions about the risk of being a victim of crime) and emotional (feelings of fear of urban deterioration, age, or social homogeneity) factors. Some authors argue that there is a relationship between the fear of crime and the insecurities that are generated by unemployment and poverty. Thus, economic, social, and political insecurities all play a role in generating the fear of crime (Dammert & Fran, 2003).

In short, the fear of crime could be defined as a sense of nervousness or concern caused by the general concept of crime or particular crimes, which can be expressed emotionally, cognitively and/or behaviorally with varying degrees of intensity or frequency, and projected towards both the person and those close to them (Caro Cabrera & Navarro Ardoy, 2017).

Research in this field has revealed that fear of crime is greater among women (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987; Ortega & Myles, 1987; Smith, 1988; Smith & Hill, 1991). Hale (1996) considers gender to be the greatest predictor of fear of crime. Numerous studies have also found a relationship between age and fear of crime. For instance, older people are more fearful of crime than other citizens (Ortega & Myles, 1987). Gender has a strong impact on the feeling of insecurity, since it is one of the main predictors of fear. Women feel more apprehension than men, even though they are victims of a relatively lower percentage of crimes, which has led them to reject this perception (Dammert, 2007, p. 90).

## **Methodology**

The Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) of the EU conducted the first survey on the violence experienced by women in the 28 member states of the EU. The survey was developed in response to calls from the Council of the EU and the European Parliament to obtain comparable data on violence against women.

Prior to the FRA survey, data available across the EU on the scale and nature of women's experiences of violence were fragmented and had many gaps. Existing administrative data (for example, based on incidents recorded by the police) are not comparable across countries, and many incidents are never reported to the authorities. Moreover, the results of national surveys are not reliably comparable, due to differences in the formulation of the questions and the methodology used to conduct the surveys. In addition, certain EU member states have either failed to carry out national surveys on violence against women or the available data are old.

### ***Sample and Subsamples***

The FRA survey is based on personal interviews with 41,895 women across the EU, selected by using a random sampling technique in 2012 which has been analyzed in various recent studies (Bettio et al., 2020; Goodey, 2017). Our work aims to focus on the population under 30 years of age, which in this sample represents 1 in 6 of the total, that is, 6,827 young people, in order to compare them with the rest of the sample of women of 30 years or older,



35,068 interviewees, due to the importance of the age, that was seen in previous studies (Cuenca-Piqueras et al., 2020).

The survey in each EU country covered all women aged 18 to 74 years who were living in the member state, and who spoke at least one of the official languages of the country. In total, less than 1% of the people contacted were unable to take part because they did not speak one of the official languages. The sampling was based on a two-stage clustered stratified design with equal probability of selection for households within clusters. The response rates (42.1) have been calculated using the “response rate 3” (RR3) definition of response rates by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) (Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2014).

Though the samples are homogenous at around 1,500 interviewees in each of the EU countries, the two subsamples by age does vary quite a lot. For example, between Sweden with only 7.6% young women, compared to 37.8% from Cyprus. Likewise, the answer rate also has a wide variable, from the lowest in Sweden at only 19.7% to the highest of 84% in Bulgaria (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Sample and Subsamples by Countries with Rate Responses.

Country	Young (18–29 Years)		Adults (30+ Years)		Total Sample	Rate Response
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage		
Austria	344	22.9	1,161	77.1	1,505	57.3
Belgium	309	20.1	1,228	79.9	1,537	33.7
Bulgaria	181	12.0	1,325	88.0	1,506	58.6
Croatia	221	14.7	1,284	85.3	1,505	47.8
Cyprus	565	37.8	930	62.2	1,495	72.6
Czech Republic	274	17.0	1,336	83.0	1,610	47.0
Denmark	380	25.1	1,131	74.9	1,511	33.4
Estonia	232	15.5	1,266	84.5	1,498	64.4
Finland	207	13.6	1,310	86.4	1,517	38.5
France	198	13.3	1,295	86.7	1,493	27.1
Germany	187	12.2	1,347	87.8	1,534	53.3
Greece	266	17.8	1,232	82.2	1,498	70.4
Hungary	220	14.6	1,292	85.4	1,512	84.0
Ireland	244	15.6	1,325	84.4	1,569	48.0

(continued)

Table 1. continued

Country	Young (18–29 Years)		Adults (30+ Years)		Total Sample	Rate Response
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage		
Italy	174	11.4	1,356	88.6	1,530	58.4
Latvia	278	18.4	1,234	81.6	1,512	48.4
Lithuania	247	16.0	1,293	84.0	1,540	48.4
Luxembourg	108	11.9	800	88.1	908	18.5
Malta	176	11.7	1,324	88.3	1,500	49.2
Netherlands	153	10.1	1,357	89.9	1,510	26.5
Poland	332	22.3	1,158	77.7	1,490	40.3
Portugal	164	10.8	1,350	89.2	1,514	66.1
Romania	301	19.1	1,278	80.9	1,579	55.1
Slovakia	246	16.5	1,249	83.5	1,495	43.3
Slovenia	271	18.1	1,224	81.9	1,495	43.6
Spain	212	13.9	1,308	86.1	1,520	31.1
Sweden	115	7.6	1,389	92.4	1,504	19.7
United Kingdom	222	14.7	1,286	85.3	1,508	36.9
Total	6,827	16.3	35,068	83.7	41,895	42.1

Source. The authors (based on the data of the FRA survey).

### *Instrument, Variables, and Indicators*

The questionnaire used in the FRA survey contains two questions related to street harassment, with two items and three items, respectively, it has allowed us to define our dependent or study variables. The first question asks about experiences “Since you were 15 years old until now, has the same person repeatedly done one or more of the following things to you: item 1—loitered or waited for you outside your home, workplace or school without a legitimate reason; item 2—deliberately followed you around” with the following possible answers: No; Yes, has this happened 2–5 times; or Yes, 6 or more times. The second question deals with behaviors caused by the perception of fear “At any time in the past 12 months, have you done any of the following for fear of being physically or sexually assaulted: item 1—avoided leaving your home on your own; item 2—avoided taking certain streets or going to certain areas; item 3—avoided going to places where there are no other people around, for example some streets, car parks, etc.

These two questions allow us, on the one hand, to detect those women who have ever had experiences or not of street harassment (Prevalence of Harassment in the Street = PHS) and, on the other hand, to distinguish those interviewees who have ever had behaviors in Prevention of fear of harassment/aggression in the streets (PFHS) and those who have not. Table 2 shows

**Table 2.** PHS and PFHS by Items and Subsamples.

	% Young (18–29 Years)		% Adults (30+ Years)		% Total	
	Never	Sometimes...	Never	Sometimes...	Never	Sometimes...
<b>PHS items</b>						
... loitered or waited for you outside your home, workplace or school without a legitimate reason?	94.5	5.5	95.4	4.6	95.2	4.8
... deliberately followed you around?	94.3	5.7	95.0	5.0	94.9	5.1
Total	92.4	7.6	93.4	6.6	93.2	6.8
<b>PFHS items</b>						
... avoided leaving your home on your own?	82.0	18.0	86.6	13.4	85.9	14.1
... avoided taking certain streets or going to certain areas?	54.7	45.3	66.2	33.8	64.4	35.6
... avoided going to places where there are no other people around, for example some streets, car parks, etc.?	52.9	47.1	63.3	36.7	61.6	38.4
Total	46.4	53.6	57.6	42.4	55.8	44.2

Source. The authors (based on data from the FRA survey).

the behavior of these two dichotomous indicators of prevalence and prevention of street harassment and their respective items in the target age groups of our research.

Furthermore, in the FRA survey the interviewees were also asked about their experiences of physical, sexual, and psychological violence (Cuenca-Piqueras et al., 2020). The survey included questions about violence perpetrated by a partner or an ex-partner, harassment, sexual harassment, experiences of violence in childhood, security and fear of crime, as well as knowledge of the laws and available support services. Based on the selection of 11 questions related to the prevalence of sexual harassment since the age of 15, we found two factors and we have eliminated two items due to their low scores in the communalities (“indecent exhibitionist behaviors” and “being forced to look at pornographic material against your wishes”). Thus, in the nine items selected for the factorial analysis, 54.5% of the total variance was explained and, using the Varimax rotation method, the items related to Component 1 were defined as “physical” harassment and Component 2 referred to “virtual” harassment or cyberbullying (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Principal Component Analysis: “How Often Since the Age of 15 Have You ....”

	Component 1 Prevalence of Physical Sexual Harassment	Component 2 Prevalence Virtual Sexual Harassment
Suffered unwelcome touching, hugs, or kisses	0.72	
Been leered or stared at in a way that made you feel intimidated	0.75	
Received sexually suggestive comments or told jokes that made you feel offended	0.78	
Received or have been shown sexually explicit illustrations or pictures that are offensive		0.63
Received inappropriate invitations to appointments	0.60	
Suffered indiscreet questions about privacy that are offensive	0.70	
Received indiscreet comments about physical appearance that are offensive	0.70	

(continued)

Table 3. continued

	Component 1 Prevalence of Physical Sexual Harassment	Component 2 Prevalence Virtual Sexual Harassment
Received unwanted and sexually explicit e-mails or MSMs that are offensive		0.79
Suffered inappropriate and offensive approaches on social networks or websites such as Facebook or in chats.		0.73

Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser standardization.

Source. The authors (based on data from the FRA survey).

From this analysis, two scales were constructed that correspond to the two components and their items, one on physical sexual harassment with six questions (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83) and another on virtual sexual harassment or cyberbullying, composed of three questions (Cronbach's alpha = 0.61). Thus, the prevalence of physical and virtual sexual harassment were applied as independent or explanatory variables, together with a set of sociodemographic variables.

### *Data Analysis and Objectives*

This study essentially seeks to obtain information on the opinion of European women about their experience (PHS) and fear prevention (PFHS) of harassment in the street. The analysis of the survey described above (FRA, 2014) has been carried out in three levels or steps to achieve the main objective:

1. First, a descriptive analysis of the two indicators or dependent variables of the study (PHS and PFHS) in both young and adult women in the different sociodemographic and independent variables. This first analysis will give us some key information on the profile of European women.
2. Second, a correlational analysis between countries according to their income per capita (GDP per capita) and gender equality index (GEI) with the indicators (PHS and PFHS) according to age groups. This second analysis will offer us a ranking of countries according to our study variables and age, if not also, the existing relationships with socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts by country according to income per capita and gender equality index.
3. Finally, an explanatory analysis through a series of logistic regression analyses by age groups, where the dependent variables are PHS and PFHS, and the independent variables are the sociodemographic ones

(age, education level, income, and habitat) and the proportional prevalence of sexual harassment in person and online. Finally, the results of these analyses will bring us closer to what variables would help us to predict the possibility of experiencing harassment on the street for young women and adults or for them to show behaviors to prevent harassment on the street out of fear.

## Results

Violence is present in the lives of women. One in five women (21%) has been worried (at least “sometimes”) about the possibility of being physically or sexually assaulted during the 12 months prior to the survey, while 15% of women are primarily concerned about possible assaults by strangers. Of all the women surveyed, 7% have been concerned about the possibility of suffering physical or sexual aggression at the hands of an ex-partner in the last 12 months. Even in the 28 EU member states, 8% of women have carried—at least occasionally—an object for the purposes of self-defense. The characteristic profile of the respondents who worry about being victims of a sexual attack are: younger women, single mothers living in urban areas, migrant citizens with less than 30 years in the host country, and women with economic difficulties or who have been unemployed in the last 12 months. The two main factors related to higher levels of concern are habitat, that is, living in an urban area and having economic difficulties or being unemployed. A third factor to consider is the impact of age. In research on fear and risk avoidance behavior, a woman’s age emerges as a key factor in determining how she feels and acts. Younger women (under 30) are particularly concerned about possible attacks in public spaces. In contrast, older women, particularly those aged 50 and above, are more concerned about the possibility of being physically or sexually assaulted in the private sphere. Young women are more concerned about the possibility of sexual assault by strangers than by acquaintances (Cuenca-Piqueras et al., 2020).

We take our starting point in the observation that in cities women express a greater sense of insecurity than men.<sup>8</sup> Almost half of all women in the EU (44.2%) try to avoid certain places or situations, at least occasionally, due to the fear of being victims of physical or sexual assault. Four out of 10 women (38.4%) avoid public places where there are no other people around and a similar percentage (35.6%) deliberately avoid using certain streets or going to certain areas due to the fear of being physically or sexually assaulted, while one in seven women (14.1%) prefer not to leave home alone due to the fear of physical or sexual assault (see Table 4).

In a first descriptive approach, both young and old women with a higher prevalence of street harassment have high education, high or low extreme incomes, and medium-sized cities and towns. This is something similar to fear of harassment in the street, except the fact that it is more frequent in larger cities, that is to say that when looking at the habitat, the highest PHS occurs in medium-sized cities, while the highest PFHS is perceived among women of the big cities.

Overall, 6.8% of European women have been harassed on the street and 44.2% have taken preventive action due to fear of suffering from such harassment. If we break down the data according to age, the youngest respondents (aged between 18 and 29 years) report a slightly higher prevalence of street harassment (7.5% vs 6.6% of adult women), but in particular, a higher percentage of young people take preventive measures due to fear of harassment in the streets (53.6% vs 42.4% of adult women; see Table 4).

The independent or explanatory variables analyzed represent, on the one hand, the prevalence of sexual harassment suffered both in physically and online and, on the other hand, a set of sociodemographic variables (education level, income, and habitat). The independent variables were cross-tabulated with the PHS and PFHS indicators according to age (adult and young), calculating the Chi-square significance level.

In the case of the adult women surveyed, as for the entire sample, for both the PHS and the PFHS indicators all the variables are highly significant (for instance in education and PHS: [ $\chi^2 (2, N = 34,747) = 30.75, p = .000$ ]; and PFHS [ $\chi^2 (2, N = 34,957) = 245.79, p = .000$ ]), while for young women, sociodemographic variables are not significant and are not associated with the prevalence of harassment (for instance in education: [ $\chi^2 (2, N = 6,801) = 3.42, p = .181$ ]); in contrast these variables are significantly associated with the PFHS (for instance in education: [ $\chi^2 (2, N = 6,801) = 61.05, p = .000$ ]). In conclusion, for both young women and adults, in the two indicators, the prevalence variables of physical or virtual sexual harassment are associated in a highly significant manner. In addition, street harassment among young women is not associated with variables such as educational level, income or habitat, that is, with variables that correspond to social stratification or social status, but are instead associated with the tendency to take preventive measures due to fear of such harassment.

Table 5 presents the results of the two indicators used to measure the prevalence of harassment in the street (PHS) and the prevention of fear of harassment in the street (PFHS) according to the 28 countries participating in the survey. Among the countries leading the list with the highest PHS are Luxembourg, France, and Belgium, and likewise on the ranking of higher PFHS Luxembourg, Sweden, and France stand out. Specifically, Sweden

**Table 4.** Descriptive Analysis of Independent Variables with PHS and PFHS According to Age.

	% Young (18–29 Years)		% Adults (30+ Years)		% Total	
	PHS	PFHS	PHS	PFHS	PHS	PFHS
Education		***	***	***	***	***
Basic	7.2	46.5	5.6	37.4	5.8	38.3
Secondary school	7.3	52.4	6.8	42.4	6.9	44.3
Higher Education	8.6	60.7	7.7	49.2	7.9	51.4
Income		*	***	***	***	***
High	8.2	56.8	7.6	45.2	7.6	46.9
Average	7.1	52.3	5.8	41.2	6.0	43.0
Low	8.6	53.5	7.0	42.1	7.2	43.8
Habitat		***	***	***	***	***
Large city	7.4	60.7	7.0	50.9	7.0	52.6
City or village	8.3	54.5	7.3	43.3	7.4	45.1
Small village	7.3	42.4	5.5	31.8	5.8	33.4
Prevalence of physical sexual harassment	***	***	***	***	***	***
No	2.3	37.8	2.1	31.3	2.1	32.2
Yes	12.1	65.8	12.3	55.0	12.2	57.1
Prevalence of virtual sexual harassment	***	***	***	***	***	***
No	5.0	49.4	5.1	40.9	5.1	42.3
Yes	17.8	69.4	21.1	62.9	20.0	65.1
Total	7.5	53.6	6.6	42.4	6.8	44.2

Source. The authors.

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . ns = not significant.

sticks out with the young women who obtained the highest PHS and PFHS (see Table 5).

We then conducted a comparison between the results of the two indicators using GDP per capita (2012) published by Eurostat and the Gender Equality Index (2013) published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE),<sup>9</sup> where the EU member states obtain a final score on six main dimensions (power, time, knowledge, health, money, and employment). The



**Table 5.** PHS and PFHS Indicators According to Age.

Countries	GDP per Capita*	GEI**	% Young (18–29 Years)		% Adults (30+ Years)		% Total	
	Eurostat 2012	EIGE 2013	PHS	PFHS	PHS	PFHS	PHS	PFHS
Luxembourg	263	61.2	5.4	68.5	13.5	61.9	13.5	62.7
France	108	67.5	9.8	69.2	13.0	52.7	13.1	55.2
Belgium	122	69.3	11.6	63.1	12.5	52.0	12.9	54.3
Sweden	130	80.1	27.8	72.2	11.7	57.7	11.6	58.8
Malta	84	54.4	3.0	60.8	10.4	42.4	10.7	44.6
Netherlands	136	74.0	4.0	53.6	10.5	37.8	10.4	39.4
UK	110	68.7	6.1	57.2	10.4	51.1	10.0	52.1
Germany	124	62.6	2.9	47.1	8.9	38.3	9.0	39.4
Finland	117	73.1	5.0	50.7	9.1	34.8	8.9	36.9
Denmark	129	75.2	8.2	72.1	8.8	46.0	8.6	52.6
Cyprus	91	49.0	12.6	56.1	5.2	41.5	7.9	46.9
Italy	103	53.3	13.9	66.7	7.3	52.7	7.1	54.3
Europe	<b>100</b>	<b>63.8</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>53.6</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>42.4</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>44.2</b>
Ireland	133	65.4	5.3	61.5	5.7	61.4	6.3	61.4
Bulgaria	47	55.0	6.8	55.8	5.0	45.2	5.8	46.4
Austria	133	58.7	14.9	35.8	5.9	30.9	5.2	32.0
Croatia	61	52.3	3.3	28.1	4.5	15.5	4.9	17.3
Greece	73	48.6	5.7	67.3	4.1	55.8	4.7	57.8
Spain	91	66.4	14.6	54.2	4.3	35.9	4.5	38.4
Slovakia	77	53.0	5.6	57.3	4.3	59.6	4.2	59.3
Slovenia	83	62.7	7.7	29.2	4.2	15.6	4.2	18.1
Latvia	61	55.2	12.5	59.4	3.9	43.6	4.2	47
Portugal	76	53.7	4.1	37.2	4.2	34.7	4.1	35
Lithuania	71	54.9	9.8	63.6	3.6	43.8	3.8	47
Estonia	75	53.4	9.6	53.0	3.3	36.3	3.7	39
Poland	68	55.5	4.1	39.8	3.2	33.3	3.6	35
Hungary	66	52.4	5.4	36.4	3.3	21.3	3.6	24
Czech Republic	83	55.6	10.4	63.5	3.3	60.6	3.3	61
Romania	54	50.8	7.7	36.9	2.6	27.2	2.8	29

Source. The authors.

Note. \*Eurostat (2012); \*\*Gender Equality Index <https://eige.europa.eu/>

**Table 6.** Correlations Among GDP and GEI with PHS and PFHS Indicators According to Age.

		GDP*	GEI**	Total		Adults (30+ Years)		Young (18–29 Years)	
		Eurostat 2012	EIGE 2013	PHS	PFHS	PHS	PFHS	PHS	PFHS
GDP	Pearson correlation	1	0.52**	0.70**	0.42*	0.72**	0.42*	0.08	0.30
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.69	0.13
GEI	Pearson correlation	0.52**	1	0.63**	0.22	0.68**	0.21	0.29	0.29
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00		0.00	0.26	0.00	0.28	0.12	0.16

Source. The authors.

Note. \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* $p < .05$ .

maximum score is 100, which would represent true equality in all areas. The highest score is obtained by Sweden (80.1), followed by Denmark (75.2), Netherlands (74.0), and Finland (73.1). The countries with the lowest scores in terms of equality are: Greece (48.6), Romania (50.8), Croatia (52.3), and Hungary (52.4). The data, in general terms, show that the countries with the highest score on the equality index also present a higher prevalence of street harassment.

As a preliminary conclusion, it appears that both prevalence (PHS) and taking preventive measures due to fear (PFHS) of harassment correlate significantly for each country ( $r_{28} = 0.44, p = .02$ ), but even more significant is the correlation between PHS and income per capita, offering the impression that street harassment occurs predominantly in rich countries. Examining the data according to country, the highest prevalence is found mainly among the richest or most developed countries within Europe, such that there is a highly significant correlation between PHS and income per capita ( $r_{28} = 0.70, p < .01$ ) and between GDP per capita and PFHS ( $r_{28} = 0.63, p < .01$ ).

On the contrary, the gender equality of index (GEI) by countries is highly significant for PHS ( $r_{28} = 0.63, p < .01$ ) but not for PFHS ( $r_{28} = 0.22, p = .26$ ). It is also striking that the correlations of European countries are not significant in any case for young women or in GDP per capita or GEI, which would require a more extensive and careful study (see Table 6).

Table 7 shows the percentage differences between the two indicators according to age group (young women vs. adults) and country. For the PHS we found negligible differences among the EU countries (0.9%), although in young women there is a considerable difference between the percentage of points obtained by Sweden (16.1%) and those obtained by Luxembourg

**Table 7.** Percentage Differences Between the Two Indicators According to Age Group (Youngsters vs. Adults) and Country.

Countries	Diff. PHS	Diff. PFHS	Diff. PFHS – PHS	
	Young–Adults	Young–Adults	Adults	Young
Sweden	16.1	14.5	46.0	44.4
Spain	10.4	18.3	31.6	39.6
Austria	8.9	4.9	25.0	20.9
Latvia	8.6	15.8	39.7	46.9
Cyprus	7.4	14.6	36.3	43.5
Czech Republic	7.1	2.9	57.3	53.1
Italy	6.6	14.0	45.4	52.8
Estonia	6.3	16.7	33.0	43.4
Lithuania	6.2	19.8	40.2	53.8
Romania	5.1	9.7	24.6	29.2
Slovenia	3.5	13.6	11.4	21.5
Hungary	2.1	15.1	18.0	31.0
Bulgaria	1.8	10.6	40.2	49.0
Greece	1.7	11.5	51.7	61.6
Slovakia	1.3	–2.3	55.2	51.7
Europe	0.9	11.2	35.7	46.1
Poland	0.9	6.5	30.1	35.7
Portugal	–0.2	2.5	30.4	33.1
Ireland	–0.4	0.1	55.7	56.2
Denmark	–0.6	26.1	37.2	63.9
Belgium	–0.9	11.1	39.6	51.5
Croatia	–1.2	12.6	11.0	24.8
France	–3.1	16.5	39.8	59.4
Finland	–4.1	15.9	25.7	45.7
UK	–4.3	6.1	40.7	51.1
Germany	–6.0	8.8	29.4	44.2
Netherlands	–6.5	15.8	27.3	49.6
Malta	–7.4	18.4	31.9	57.8
Luxembourg	–8.1	6.6	48.4	63.1

Source. The authors.

**Table 8.** Logarithmic Analysis for PHS and PFHS by Young and Adult Women.

	PHS Adults		PHS Young		PFHS Adults		PFHS Young	
	B	P-value	B	P-value	B	P-value	B	P-value
Age	-0.036	.068	0.145	.162	0.011	.277	-0.401	.000
Education	-0.042	.031	0.032	.447	0.050	.000	0.124	.000
Income	0.093	.001	0.095	.085	0.066	.000	0.032	.304
Habitat	-0.037	.168	0.085	.115	-0.283	.000	-0.247	.000
Prevalence of physical sexual harassment (1)	-1.352	.000	-1.170	.002	-0.852	.000	-0.956	.000
Prevalence virtual sexual harassment (1)	-1.000	.000	-0.927	.000	-0.443	.000	-0.33	.000
Constant	-0.947	.000	-2.249	.000	0.959	.000	1.52	.000
Statistical coefficients	Wald 11557.95 $p < .001$		Wald 2590.777 $p < .001$		Wald 520.626 $p < .001$		Wald 29.399 $p < .001$	
	Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.056$		Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.049$		Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.080$		Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.107$	
	Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.144$		Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.117$		Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.108$		Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.142$	

Source. The authors.

(-8.1%). For the other indicator (PFHS), in all European countries except Slovakia, young women always take more preventive measures than their older counterparts, leading to an overall difference of 11.2% in the EU. In other words, prevalence is similar across ages, although prevention due to fear of harassment is greater among younger women, which also means that the difference between the two indicators according to age is greater among young European women (46.1%) than adult women (37.5%). In this case, it appears that there is strong support for the hypothesis that lifestyle and socialization factors could be underlying for age-related differences in fear of harassment.

Finally, we conducted a logistic regression analysis between the sociodemographic variables (age, educational level, income, and habitat) and prevalence of physical or virtual sexual harassment (measured categorically by the item “have you suffered harassment ...” = 1) (see Table 8).

1. The explanatory model in general is less powerful for explaining the PHS than the PFHS.
2. Habitat and age are not significant for the model in the PHS.

3. For adult women, all independent variables are highly significant except age in the PFHS, while for young women these are all significant with the exception of income.
4. The fact that age contributes significantly to the model in the PFHS strongly supports the idea that the youngest women are those that more frequently take preventive measures due to fear of harassment in the street.

## Conclusions

In general, while European women report that they have suffered harassment to a considerable extent, there are even greater concerns or fear of abuse or aggression in public spaces. These findings are in agreement with the interpretations of Barrau Fuentes (2010), who states that the relationship between women and the cities in which they reside is one based on fear, particularly with respect to dark and deserted spaces. Women even create self-protection strategies (Warr, 2006) by carrying some form of object for the purposes of self-defense. However, the data presented here are not compatible with the idea that the fear of suffering harassment is more prevalent in older women (Ortega & Myles, 1987) since it is the younger women who show the greatest levels of concern with respect to deserted streets. Employment instability, belonging to single-parent households, or being a migrant at risk of exclusion are all relevant factors when it comes to experiencing the fear of crime in public spaces, which is in line with the work of Dammert and Fran (2003). Almost 2 women in 10 claim that their fear corresponds to concerns about strangers, which is in accord with the proposals of Gaytán (2007) and MacMillan et al. (2000).

A fundamental fact is that there is a significant correlation between the prevalence of harassment and income per capita, such that those countries with the highest economic development show a higher incidence of harassment towards women. Similarly, European countries with higher standards of equality show a greater incidence and prevention against the risk of harassment or aggression, particularly among young women. At this point it is necessary to consider the possibility that a discriminatory and victimizing socialization (Naredo, 1998) is more present in countries that advocate gender equality and therefore European women are more likely to recognize the limits to their freedom and spatial autonomy.

Future lines of research should further establish that generationally, it seems that there is a greater Prevalence of harassment in the street (PHS) and Prevention of Fear of harassment in the street (PFHS). In relation to European countries, there are important differences that require further analysis and it

would be interesting to identify the social and cultural contextual factors that underlie the reactive behaviors to “fear of street harassment”, particularly among young women, such as socialization and education around bullying, the general culture of the country, victimization, and statistics related to the assessment of women’s responsibility. It is therefore a question of delving deeper into the hypothesis of socialization in fear among young people.

In agreement with Hale (1995), some of the main consequences of fear and concern about possible aggressions include a fractured sense of community, the abandonment of public spaces, favorable attitudes towards more punitive criminal policies, negative psychological effects at the individual level and the change of habits (adopting security measures and avoiding certain areas). In general, the feeling of insecurity does not correspond to crimes and is relatively independent of actual crime, given that fear can increase even when crime decreases. One interesting aspect of these findings is that they show, according to Muratori and Zubieta (2010), and in line with the issue raised by Koskela (2011) that the fear of crime has been conceptualized as a problem in itself, relatively independent of whether or not the individual has been a victim of a crime. A feeling of fear is not always the consequence of an attack or previous crime, since it is the *fear* of being attacked (Barrau Fuentes, 2010). In the case of women, the indirect effects are multiple and complex, including the feelings of insecurity along with their subordination to the patriarchal culture that impose patterns of behavior in both public and private spaces, and which bring with them a series of consequences (CAFSU, 2002). These include the restriction of freedom, barriers to participation in social life, dependence on protection, lack of self-confidence, perception of a threatening and dangerous outside world, isolation, and transmission of the feeling of insecurity to young women and other women in terms of their displacement and personal and social development activities, and even a sense of guilt in the face of harassment and aggression in public spaces. In summary, and in agreement with Morey (2007), the end result of real violence, its perception, and the psychological consequences of fear, is self-censorship and a loss of autonomy, which translates into a reduced status as a citizen and a decrease in quality of life. For all of these reasons we have to demonstrate the citizens’ need to rewrite the meaning of the public space in a sense of equality, starting with “we could put on our shoes and go out the door” (Elkin, 2018, p. 93).

Possible courses of action could include the implementation of policies and action plans at EU and member state level, aimed at preventing and ending violence against women, and these measures should be developed on the basis of experiences of violence reported by women. Thus, surveys that constitute a concerted effort to collect information on the scope and nature of the

experiences of violence suffered by women should be promoted and supported financially at both community and member state level.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Notes**

- 1 An example of this is the incorporation of bus stops that are “on-demand”, “intermediate” or “anti-harassment” (Vigo, Bilbao, Zaragoza, and Barcelona). On public transport in many cities, women are living in situations of sexual violence. In Mexico City, due to situations of stalking and sexual harassment, different coaches for women and men have been implemented in the “Colectivo Metro” transportation system during peak hours. In the city of Tokyo, nine private train companies and a public subway line have also introduced, during “peak” hours, exclusive coaches for women, in order to avoid sexual crimes.
- 2 [https://verne.elpais.com/verne/2015/09/09/articulo/1441805553\\_868329.html?fbclid=IwAR0kVaS93eaTcmWsHJhJ5vEu1gZ9G\\_BnjdUILp-zkgxBRjTbVAoO1gnV88A](https://verne.elpais.com/verne/2015/09/09/articulo/1441805553_868329.html?fbclid=IwAR0kVaS93eaTcmWsHJhJ5vEu1gZ9G_BnjdUILp-zkgxBRjTbVAoO1gnV88A)
- 3 [https://verne.elpais.com/verne/2018/03/18/articulo/1521373890\\_255911.html?fbclid=IwAR2NC5yjb-EB8kzoN3urYXMKw0FNsUe1HmvFSbBvwT-v3DZ9c8qVCyNXGuh8](https://verne.elpais.com/verne/2018/03/18/articulo/1521373890_255911.html?fbclid=IwAR2NC5yjb-EB8kzoN3urYXMKw0FNsUe1HmvFSbBvwT-v3DZ9c8qVCyNXGuh8)
- 4 [https://verne.elpais.com/verne/2018/03/18/articulo/1521373890\\_255911.html?fbclid=IwAR2NC5yjb-EB8kzoN3urYXMKw0FNsUe1HmvFSbBvwT-v3DZ9c8qVCyNXGuh8](https://verne.elpais.com/verne/2018/03/18/articulo/1521373890_255911.html?fbclid=IwAR2NC5yjb-EB8kzoN3urYXMKw0FNsUe1HmvFSbBvwT-v3DZ9c8qVCyNXGuh8)
- 5 <https://www.elmundo.es/tecnologia/2019/02/15/5c6561b6fc6c832d538b4649.html>
- 6 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2012/fra-survey-gender-based-violence-against-women>
- 7 “Fear of crime” is a term established in the victimization survey of this investigation. In itself, the term may not accurately reflect how people feel about criminal victimization. For this reason, and reflecting the contribution of experts during the development of the survey and the piloting of the survey questionnaire, the word “concern” was used in the questions of the survey. This was thought to better reflect a range of “worry” responses through “fear.”
- 8 In Montreal, Canada, an opinion poll conducted in 2000 revealed that around 60% of women fear walking alone at night in their neighborhood in comparison with only 15% of men. A survey was conducted in five cities of South America

within the framework of the urban gender indicators program for urban governance (2002). The results indicate that in four of these five cities, women perceive the city to be more dangerous than men, and it was found that it is women who change their daily routines, motivated by the fear of traveling at certain times, particularly at night.

9 <https://eige.europa.eu/>

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