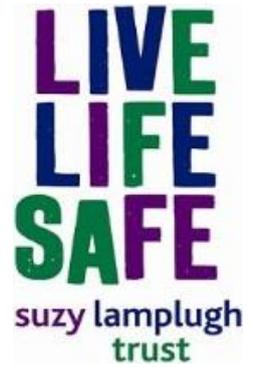


**NEIGHBOURHOOD  
WATCH™**



**STREET LIGHTING &  
PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY  
SURVEY NOVEMBER 2013**

**RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**



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## Executive summary

15,786 people responded to the survey, and respondents were almost equally divided between male and female. Over half were in the 51-70 age group.

Around half of respondents had not noticed any changes to lighting conditions or rates of crime and anti-social behaviour in their area. The majority have street lighting in their neighbourhood and almost half said that it is not dimmed or turned off between 9:30 pm and 5:30 am.

Whilst 92.9% of participants said they feel 'very' or 'fairly' safe in well-lit areas, only 22% said they do in unlit or poorly lit areas. When broken down by gender, 83% of women said they feel unsafe, while 64.9% of men said the same.

The data shows that younger age groups perceive greater risk in areas where lighting is inadequate. As age increases, the perceived risk from badly-lit areas reduces.

Respondents were asked about the perception of safety in their own local communities if they found themselves out and about between 21:30 and 05:30. 75% answered that they felt safe. Broken down along gender lines, 59% of women felt safe in their local area compared to 68% of men.

The survey identified that 38% of respondents noticed changes in street lighting in their local communities in the last three years. However, through the question's use of the word 'change', it has meant that data incorporates positive changes to lighting as well as negative change. Many comments related to positive changes to lighting highlighted the installation of brighter LED street lamps. Despite the incorporation of both positive and negative answers, a high percentage, 46%, still perceived changes to lighting to be negative and have a negative consequence on their local community.

However, if we focus on the 22% of participants who explicitly said that lighting has been dimmed or switched off in their area, 52.8% of women and 38.8% of men said that their local community feels less safe. When comparing the data by age, a higher number of younger respondents felt their safety was negatively affected.

Asked how dimming or switching off lighting affects their behaviour, 40% of respondents considered going out less, 65% avoided unlit areas and 15% said that they would take taxis rather than walk. (*Participants were invited to choose more than one option meaning that the percentages add up to more than 100%.*)

As well as concerns about crime, a small number of respondents raised other safety issues related to low lighting such as being unable to see trip hazards, which also caused them to modify their behaviour to deal with or avoid unlit or poorly-lit areas. Of those who commented (19% of all respondents) only a small minority of respondents said that low or no



lighting meant that they avoided going out altogether, most continued with their normal activities with some modifications or precautions, even if they did feel nervous or unsafe. Of the 3,037 people who commented on question 13 (on how, if at all, they modified their behaviour in lower lighting conditions), the majority stated that their feelings about an area's safety depended more on other factors such as its reputation, location, geography, their knowledge of the area, and time-specific circumstances – such as pub closing times, whether an area is deserted or busy – rather than on levels of lighting. 54 people commented that they prefer lower lighting because they enjoy seeing the night sky and in some cases felt it gives them better 'night vision', avoiding the problem of patches of darkness between lights.

The proportion of respondents who were victims of crime or anti-social behaviour did not appear to have changed significantly between 2012 and 2013 and it was not clear whether any changes related to changes in street lighting.

A small number of respondents expressed a preference for low lighting, feeling that high lighting levels constitute light pollution and prevent them from enjoying their local area to its best advantage at all hours.

The survey indicates that the majority of respondents perceive their personal safety to be more at risk in areas where dimming or switching off of street lights occurs, than in areas where lighting has been replaced or maintained throughout the night.

However, this is not totally reflected in their perception of crime or anti-social behavior in their neighbourhood. Just over half of the respondents believed that there has been no increase in crime or anti-social behavior in their neighbourhood over the last three years.

[Read the full analysis.](#)



## Background & method

NHWN and Suzy Lamplugh Trust received anecdotal reports during 2013 of street lights being turned off or dimmed in some areas. This was taking place at a time when a lot of local authorities were making budget cuts, and street lighting was hit by reductions as a result.

This survey is a joint piece of work by NHWN and Suzy Lamplugh Trust, with the questions put together in collaboration. This analysis and report is by NHWN and Suzy Lamplugh Trust based on the survey results standing alone. Suzy Lamplugh Trust undertook Freedom of Information requests to local authorities on the subject of budget cuts and reductions in street lighting. The results of the requests will be analysed alongside these survey results by Suzy Lamplugh Trust in a separate piece of work.

The survey was conducted online and was circulated by NHWN and Suzy Lamplugh Trust to their networks. In the case of NHWN, 'networks' comprised 96,365 individuals registered on their database across England and Wales, 247 of whom forwarded the message on to another contact. Information about the survey, together with a link, was forwarded by a member of staff to contacts within 8 partner organisations, 4 of which promoted it to their networks and the other 4 supported on social media.

It was also promoted on social networks, receiving over 50 retweets via NHWN and Suzy Lamplugh Trust Twitter accounts alone plus independent tweets (and subsequent retweets) from partner organisations. NHWN ran a news story on their website with a link to the survey; the news story received 334 unique pageviews.

In addition, NHWN emailed the survey information and link to its 43 force area and regional volunteer Neighbourhood/Home Watch contacts for further circulation, which may have captured some respondents not on the national NHWN database.

Because of the convenience sampling used, it must be acknowledged that the survey contains some exclusion bias. As the survey was circulated via NHWN and Suzy Lamplugh Trust, two not-for-profit organisations concerned with crime and safety, respondents have a higher likelihood than the general population of being interested or actively involved in related issues.

Although survey responses were accepted by NHWN via post and telephone, as the survey was hosted and publicised online there is a respondent bias towards those who have internet access which could also bias the sample towards certain demographic and socio-economic factors.



## Analysis

15,786 people responded to the survey. Almost a quarter (24.1%) of respondents were from the Thames Valley force area. Given some of the other areas with a high response rate, this could be due to circulation of the survey on the Neighbourhood Alert communication system, which has a high proportion of users from the Thames Valley area. It could also be because the Thames Valley force area comprises three geographical counties in an area of high population density.

Other areas with a relatively high response rate were North Yorkshire (12.1%), Cambridgeshire (9.1%), Nottinghamshire (7.4%) and Dorset (6.5%). Out of those areas, Cambridgeshire and Nottinghamshire are areas where the police also use the Neighbourhood Alert communication system alongside NHWN. ([Read more about respondents' areas.](#))

Respondents were almost equally divided between male and female. Over half (52.6%) were in the 51-70 age group. The next most common was 35-50 (22%) closely followed by 70+ (19.2%). ([View all statistics about gender and age.](#))

The largest number of respondents (41.8%) described their area as 'suburban'. 35.1% said they live in a 'rural' area and 19.1% in an 'urban' area. ([More details about type of area.](#))

Almost all respondents (98.6%) said that they feel safe 'always' or 'most of the time' when out and about in their neighbourhood during the day. This dropped to 75.6% between the hours of 9:30 pm and 5:30 am among those respondents who go out during those times. Among those respondents, there was also a significant shift towards a 'most of the time' rather than 'always' response. ([View the full statistics.](#))

The majority (90.1%) of respondents have street lighting in their neighbourhood. Almost half (48.2%) said that street lights are not turned off or dimmed between 9:30 pm and 5:30 am where they live.

Just over half (54.2%) of respondents said that they have not noticed any changes to their street lighting over the last three years; over one-third (37.6%) have. Out of those who have, almost half (47.4%) feel about the same in terms of safety but almost as many (45.6%) now feel less safe in their neighbourhood at night. ([Read the full statistics about street lighting.](#))

92.9% of respondents feel either 'very' or 'fairly' safe when walking in a well-lit neighbourhood compared with an unlit or badly-lit neighbourhood, where only 25.3% feel 'very' or 'fairly' safe. Over half (64.8%) of respondents said that they avoid walking alone in un-lit or poorly-lit areas after dark and over one-third (38.2%) said that they go out less in the evenings due to lack of good lighting. However, some respondents (see Appendix A for details) stated that they were more likely to be influenced by the type of neighbourhood, its design and reputation than its levels of lighting. The majority of people who commented in the free text field stated that a lack of good lighting in their own neighbourhood had not caused them to modify their social activities, but instead that they had adapted their behaviour to enable them to continue with their usual social activities but with the addition of precautionary measures (such as using different routes or taking a hand-held torch). However it is important to note that the number of people (3,037) who commented in the



free text field only represents 22% of the total (13,736) who responded to the question as a whole. ([Click here to read more.](#))

Just over half of respondents feel like the rate of crime and anti-social behaviour has stayed about the same in their area over the last three years - 56.4% for crime and 53.3% for anti-social behaviour. However, 26.7% of respondents feel like crime has increased and 29.5% feel like anti-social behaviour has increased. ([View the full statistics.](#))

The majority (83.2%) have not been victims of crime or anti-social behaviour this year (2013); almost the same proportion (83.2%) were not victims of crime or anti-social behaviour in 2012 either. The number of people saying that they had been victims of crime or anti-social behaviour rose by 0.1% between 2012 and 2013 (from 14.7% to 14.8%). However, these figures do not distinguish between different types of crime. ([Read more details.](#))

People who said they had been victims of crime or anti-social behaviour this year and who had noticed changes to their street lighting in the last 3 years were more likely to say they felt less safe in their neighbourhood at night since the changes – 57% compared with 42.2% of those who had not been victims of crime or anti-social behaviour. They were also more likely to feel unsafe walking in either a well-lit or a badly-lit neighbourhood.

Respondents who had been victims of crime or anti-social behaviour this year were also much more likely to feel that rates in their area had gone up and much less likely to feel that they had gone down or stayed the same.

Over 1,200 respondents had been victims of crime or anti-social behaviour in both 2012 and 2013.

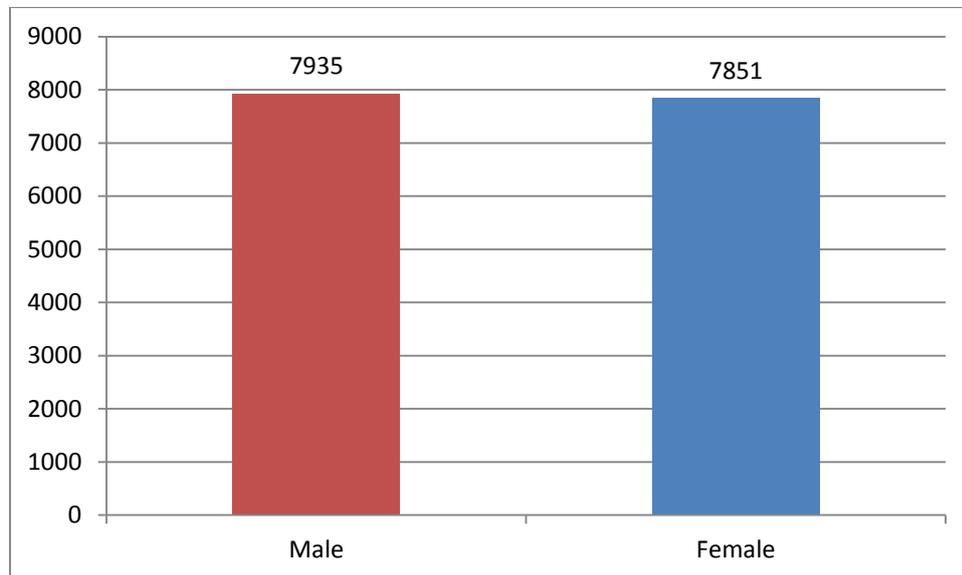
[Read the full statistics from the beginning.](#)



## Statistics

### Question 1

Do you identify as male or female?



Interestingly, more than twice as many people in the 70+ age group who responded to the survey were male (26.8% compared with 11.5%), and more of the younger respondents were female, which is surprising considering women tend to live slightly longer than men.

There was no significant male-female difference in how safe people tended to feel when out and about during the day, although women were slightly more likely to respond 'Most of the time' rather than 'Always'. Women were slightly less likely than men to be out on the street between 9:30 pm and 5:30 am and, when they were, they were less likely to feel safe 'Always' and more likely than men to feel safe 'Seldom' or 'Never'.

It was noticeable that out of those respondents who noticed changes to their street lighting during the last 3 years, 52.8% of women now felt less safe in their neighbourhood at night compared with 38.8% of men. Men were more likely than women to feel safer or about the same.

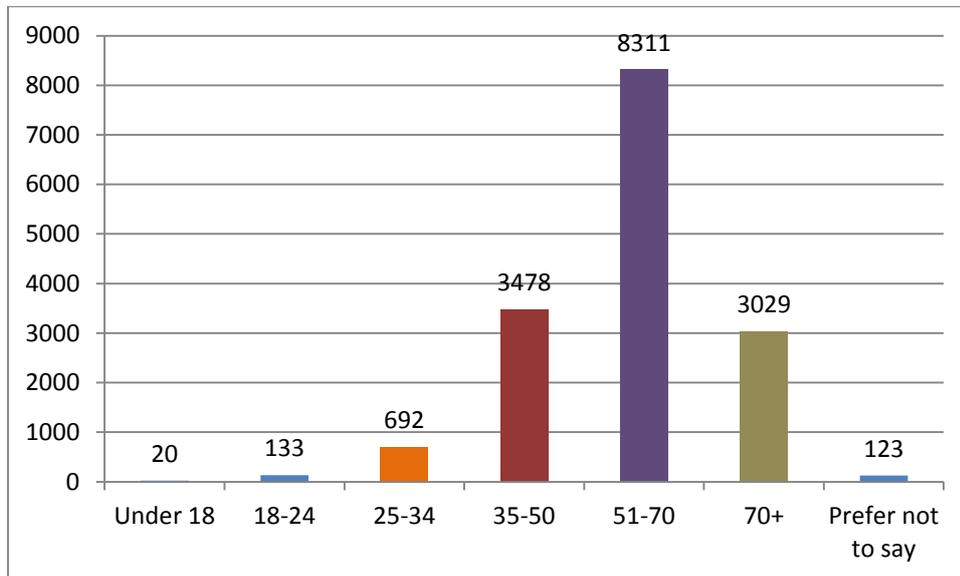
When walking in a badly-lit neighbourhood, women were much more likely than men to feel 'Very unsafe' – 48.3% compared with 18.7% of men. Women were also much more likely to take taxis instead of walking, or to avoid walking alone in badly-lit areas after dark, but only slightly more likely than men to go out less in the evenings.

In question 9, men were slightly more likely than women to have a negative response to brighter lighting and a positive response to dimmer lighting. For information about how men and women modify their behaviour in low or no lighting conditions please see [question 13](#).



## Question 2

What is your age group?



Respondents likelihood of noticing any changes to their street lighting varied across age groups. 23.3% of those aged 18-24 were not sure whether there had been any such changes within the last 3 years compared with 5.4% of those aged 70 or over.

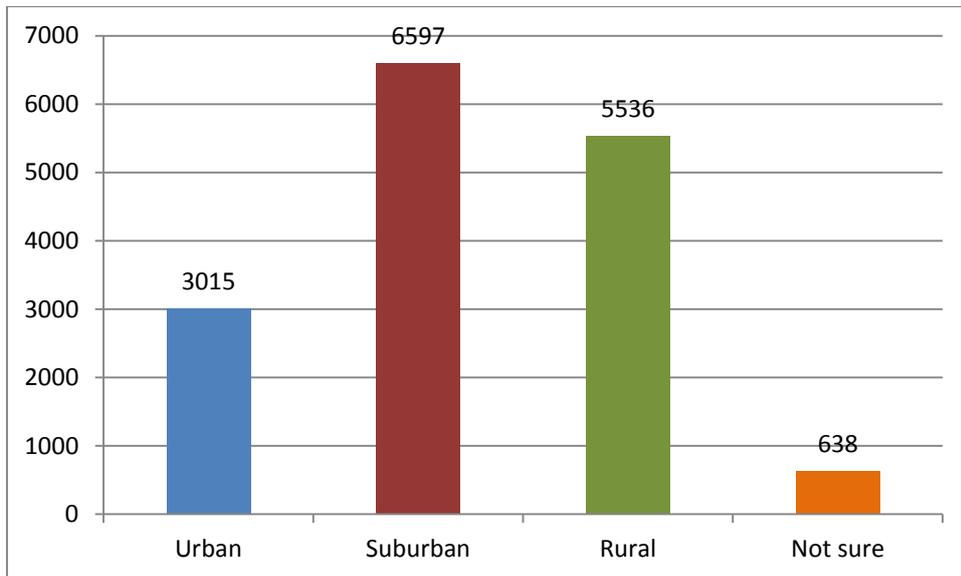
Older people were also more likely than younger people to feel that crime and anti-social behaviour had stayed the same or decreased in their area over the last three years. This could be connected with the fact that a higher proportion of older respondents lived in rural areas.

It appeared that respondents aged between 25 and 50 had been most likely to be victims of crime or anti-social behaviour in 2012 and 2013.



### Question 3

How would you describe the area where you live?

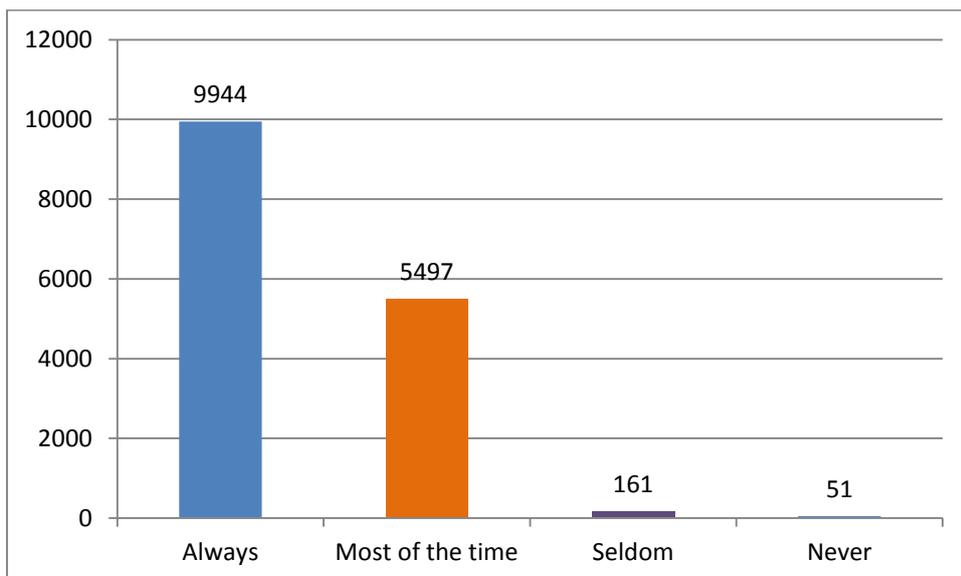


Younger people were more likely to live in an urban area, with 39.1% of 18-24-year-olds living in an urban area compared with 17.4% of those aged 70 or over. By contrast, 17.3% of 18-24-year-olds said that they lived in a rural area compared with 40.6% of those aged 70 or over.

### Question 4

Do you feel safe when out and about in your neighbourhood during the day?

(133 respondents skipped this question.)

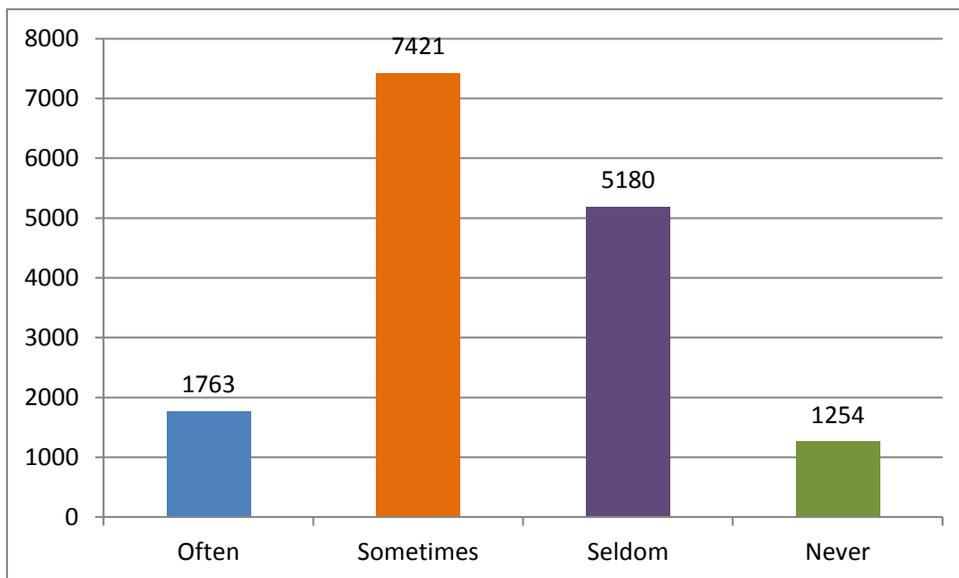


The probability of feeling safer 'Always' when out and about in your neighbourhood during the day seemed to rise slightly the older respondents got, and the proportion of people choosing 'Seldom' or 'Never' was also slightly higher in younger age groups, decreasing with age. However, the proportion of respondents selecting 'Most of the time' also decreased slightly with age.

### Question 5

Are you ever out on the street in your neighbourhood at any time between 9:30 pm and 5:30 am?

(168 respondents skipped this question.)



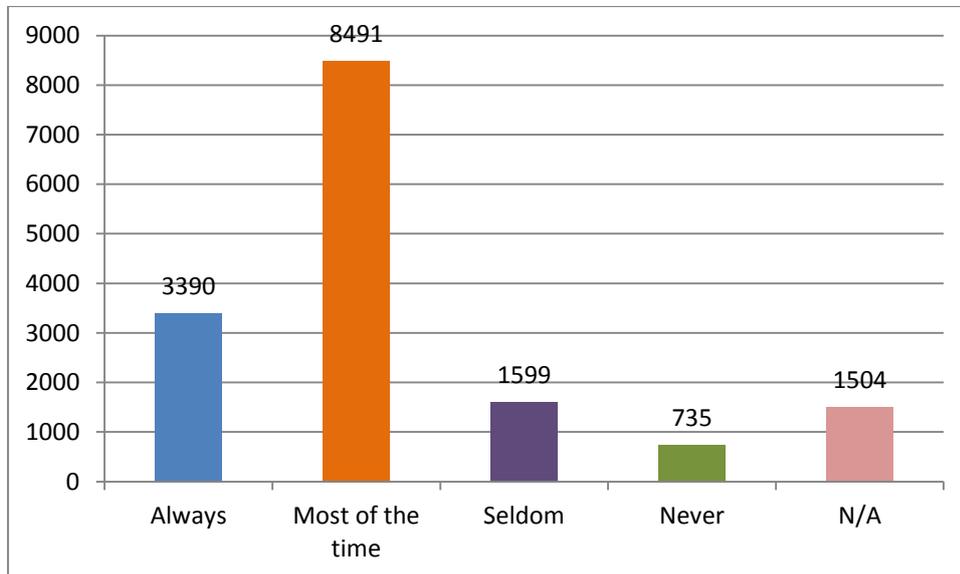
The link between these figures and age group was noticeable. Almost a quarter of people aged 18-24 were 'Often' out and about on the street between these times compared with just 7.4% of those aged 70 or over. Conversely, only 16.8% of 18-24-year-olds selected 'Seldom' compared with 39% of those aged 70 or over.



## Question 6

Do you feel safe when out and about in your neighbourhood between 9:30 pm and 5:30 am?

(67 respondents skipped this question.)



(N/A = “I don’t go out and about in my neighbourhood between 9:30 pm and 5:30 am.”)

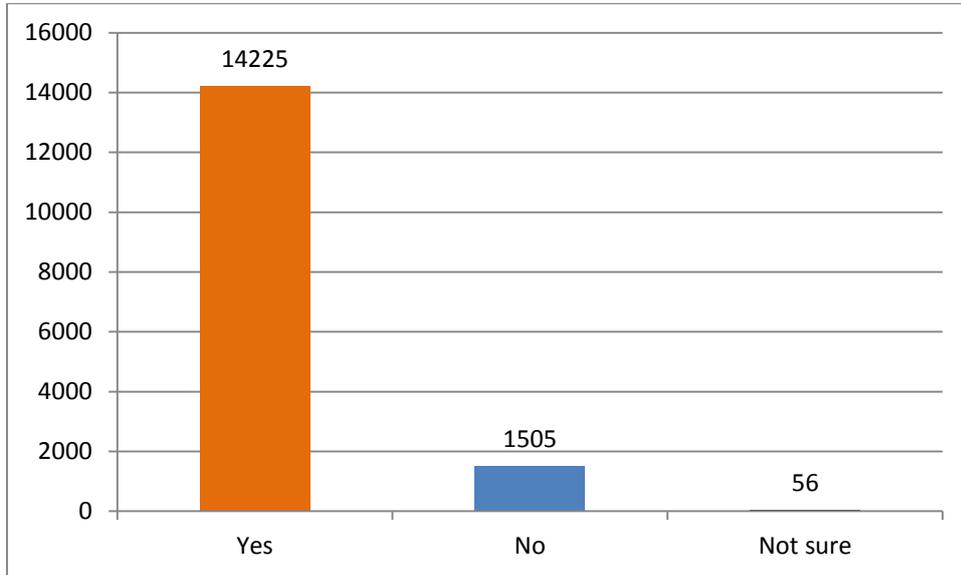
Perhaps surprisingly, 27.5% of those aged 70 or over selected ‘Always’ compared with 4.6% of those aged 18-24. 13.7% of 18-24-year-olds selected ‘Never’ compared with 2.8% of those aged 70 or over. However respondents in younger age groups were slightly more likely to feel safe ‘Most of the time’ when out and about during these times.

There is a stereotype of older people feeling more vulnerable, but statistically younger people are more likely to be victims of crime, so these figures make sense in that context. Also bearing in mind that more of the older people in this survey live in rural areas, that might contribute to their feelings of safety.



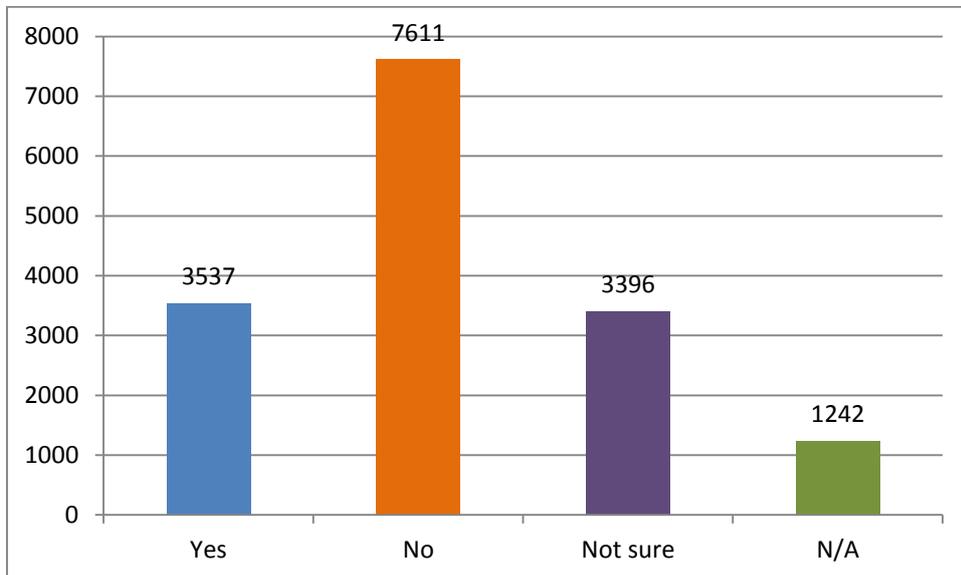
### Question 7

Do you have street lighting in your neighbourhood?



### Question 8

Are street lights switched off or dimmed at any time between 9:30 pm and 5:30 am where you live?

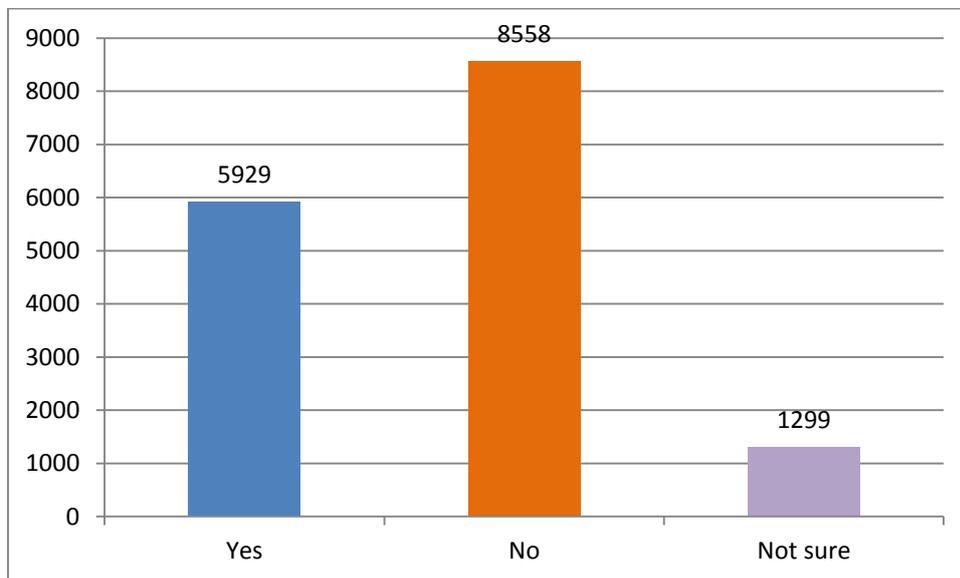


(N/A = "There is no street lighting where I live.")



## Question 9

Have you noticed any changes to the street lighting in your neighbourhood within the last 3 years?



Comments were open for this question. 5,993 respondents (38%) commented.

(The following figures are given in numbers rather than percentages as some responses fell into more than one category.)

2,249 people said that lighting had been reduced over the last three years in their area or nearby, either as a result of fewer street lights, dimmer quality of lighting, increased 'off' periods, use of motion sensors or any combination of those. 1,651 (73.4%) of these respondents did not express an opinion about whether the reduced lighting level was positive or negative for them. Of the 598 respondents who did express a view on reduced street lighting, 85.3% (510) expressed negative feelings and 14.7% (88) expressed positive feelings.

Positive responses included words and phrases like 'better', 'improvement', 'perfectly safe', 'easier to sleep', 'beautiful', 'happy with the savings on electricity', 'fabulous', 'good for the environment', 'less light pollution', 'fantastic' and 'much more pleasant'. Positive comments focused on the benefit to the environment, the reduction in light pollution and the ability to see the night sky and stars better.

10 respondents specified that there had been no increase in crime as far as they were aware since lighting was reduced in their area. 4 said that they felt criminals actually benefit from higher levels of lighting. 3 people gave anecdotes about incidences in which reduced lighting helped to avoid crime, anti-social behaviour and accidents in their area.

Negative responses included words and phrases like 'scary', 'insecure', 'dangerous', 'disturbing', 'makes me feel less safe', 'unpleasant', 'horrible', 'difficult to see', 'vulnerable', 'nerve-racking' and 'intimidating'. Negative comments included concerns about crime and



other issues such as being unable to see underfoot clearly / pedestrian safety, traffic safety and being unable to see any suspicious incidents clearly.

48 of the respondents who felt reduced lighting was negative gave anecdotes of crimes or spates of crime taking place in their neighbourhood since the reduction, which they linked to the reduction in lighting. In addition 16 respondents said that they now avoid going out after dark while 6 reported that friends or neighbours avoid going out after dark. 2 have been involved in a traffic accident which they attributed to poor lighting, 3 had a 'near miss', 8 have had a fall or other pedestrian accident and 2 have a friend or neighbour who has fallen on the street in low lighting conditions.

352 (2.2% of total respondents) respondents said that the lights in their area have got brighter, or there are more of them. Of these respondents 62.7% (221) did not express any opinion about this. Of those 131 individuals who did express an opinion 57.3% (75) felt it was negative and 42.7% (56) felt it was positive. Negative comments included things like 'really irritating', 'give me headaches', 'intrusive', 'cannot sleep properly', 'over the top', 'horrific', 'waste of money', 'terrible' and 'annoying'. Positive comments included 'improvement', 'much better', 'pleasure to walk here', 'excellent', 'makes you feel more safe', 'very welcome', 'much better if you are on a bike' and 'I suddenly felt much happier'.

964 people commented that they had had new street lights within the last 3 years but did not state whether these were dimmer or brighter than the previous ones. 620 respondents simply stated neutrally that they had had new lights, posts or bulbs – in some cases commenting about a different type, style or colour of light without expressing an opinion about whether this was better or worse than the previous. 89 respondents felt negative and 255 felt positive about the new lights in their area.

Negative comments included 'positioned badly', 'harsh', 'very poor', 'inferior', 'less efficient', 'far too many', 'less effective', 'not as good as the old ones', 'dreadful', 'horrible', 'inadequate' and 'CRAP'. Positive comments included 'improved', 'more attractive', 'less intrusive', 'eco friendly', 'much nicer' and 'much better'.

A number of respondents commented that new lighting in their area seems to be 'whiter' than previously. Some people felt this was an improvement but there were also comments that although individual lights were whiter and brighter, they were now more widely spaced, resulting in darker shadowed patches between them. A smaller number of respondents said that their lights had been changed to a yellower-coloured light, and some people commented on the new lights being 'more efficient', 'greener' or 'more eco friendly'.

348 respondents commented negatively on the maintenance of street lights in their area, saying things like 'no one mends them', 'light bulbs are not replaced', 'many lights do not work', 'it takes far longer now for faulty street lighting to be repaired', 'less maintenance', 'not repaired', 'stopped working for months before being fixed' and 'often faulty'.

29 people commented positively on street light maintenance, saying things like 'better maintained', 'fixed reasonably promptly', 'Council ensures they are in good condition', 'great service', 'repaired when reported' and 'repairs are carried out within 10 working days'.



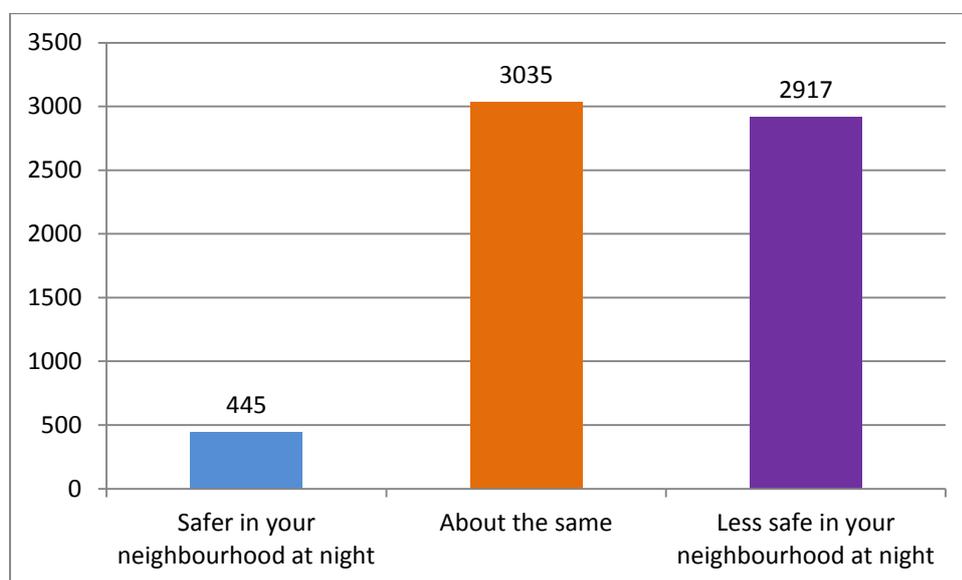
1,085 respondents made other comments, which did not directly relate to changes in street lighting over the last 3 years, in response to this question. These were mostly comments about the street lighting which people currently have – some respondents would like more; others are happy with their present levels (including in cases where they do not have any lighting) and others would prefer less/lower lighting. One common thread among the comments seemed to be foliage – a noticeable number of people commented that trees were obscuring street lights and had not been cut back.

For full free text responses see Appendix A.

### Question 10

If you answered yes to question 9, since you noticed these changes do you feel:

(9,389 respondents skipped this question.)



Comments were open for this question. 2,472 respondents (39% of those who responded to this question) commented. The majority of respondents commented that they feel less safe following reductions in lighting levels, and some stated that there have been crimes committed in their area since these reductions which they attributed to the reduced lighting.

Some respondents stated that they did not think any reduction in lighting had made a difference to crime rates in their area.

A significant concern for respondents that commented was safety, as much as crime or anti-social behaviour. People stated that they found it difficult to see pavements and trip hazards. They were also concerned that it was difficult to see and identify people at night time, which could affect the reporting of crime or anti-social behaviour as perpetrators cannot be so easily identified by sight.

Respondents mentioned road and traffic safety. There were some comments that reduced lighting might contribute to an increase traffic accidents.

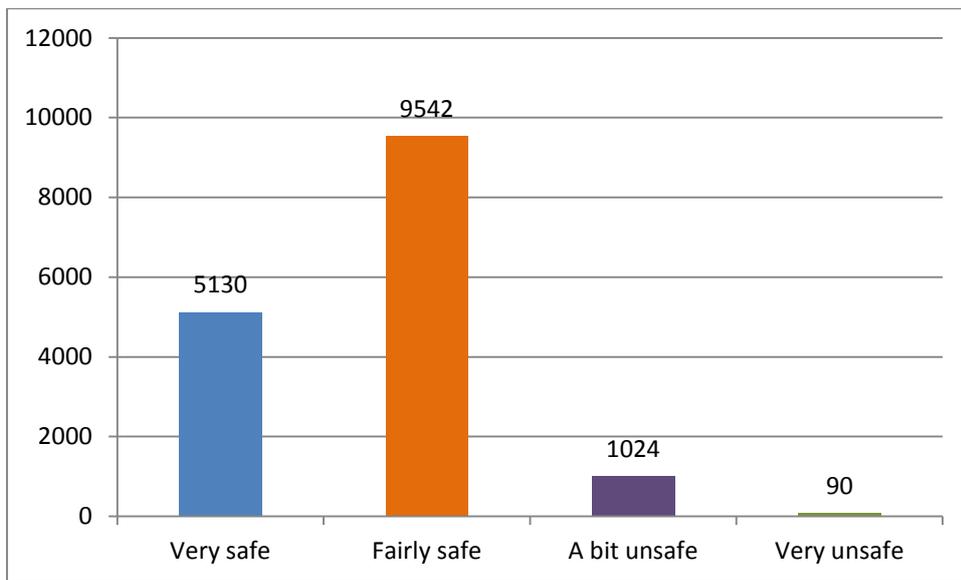


Feelings of safety varied noticeably by age group. A higher proportion of people aged over 50 felt safer or about the same at night after the changes, whereas respondents aged under 50 were much more likely to feel less safe in their neighbourhood at night. Younger people are statistically more likely to be victims of certain types of crime so this could explain why they appear to feel less safe on the streets at night. Also proportionally more younger people responding to the survey lived in urban, as opposed to rural, areas, which could also contribute to a feeling of being less safe at night.

For full free text responses see Appendix A.

### Question 11

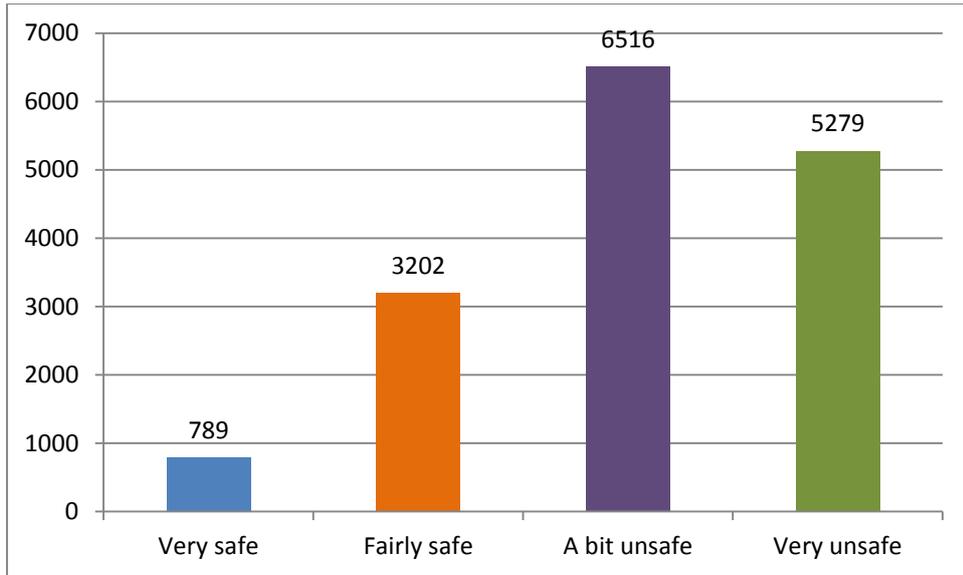
How safe do you feel when walking in a well-lit neighbourhood?



### Question 12

How safe do you feel when walking in an unlit or badly-lit neighbourhood?





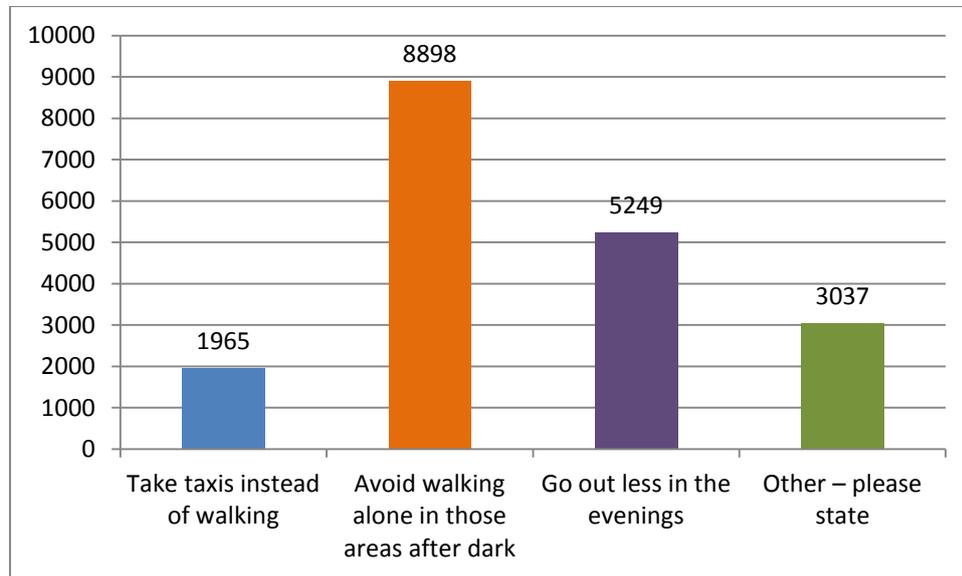
People in younger age groups were noticeably more likely to feel unsafe when walking in an unlit or badly-lit neighbourhood. This could be connected with their higher likelihood of living in an urban, as opposed to a rural, area.



### Question 13

Does lack of good lighting ever make you (please tick all that apply):

(2,050 respondents skipped this question.)



3,037 people commented under the ‘Other’ responses field.

Some of these stated that their feelings of safety and their actions would depend on the area they were travelling through to get to and from their activities. Their decision was likely to be affected by a number of factors such as the area’s location, reputation and design as well as the amount of street lighting. See Appendix A for more details.

Based on the 3,037 comments, people who say they live in a rural area seem to be more used to the dark or having little street lighting where they live, and less likely for any reduction to affect their activities.

56.4% of respondents stated that they would avoid walking alone in areas with less street lighting after dark, whilst one third of people said they would go out less in the evenings. However 6.4% (1012) of individuals said that they would not modify their behaviour patterns due to a reduction in lighting. Sometimes this was because they have no choice and have to go out for work or in order to walk dogs; sometimes they already do not go out much at night so a reduction in lighting would not affect their activities; however in many cases people found that taking some basic safety measures enabled them to carry on with their activities.

381 people stated that they often drive instead of walking, but almost as many, 377, said that they were not bothered by low lighting in their area. A number of these said that they prefer having low lighting as it enables them to enjoy the stars, and a small number of people feel safer without street lighting as their eyes adjust to the darkness and have better ‘night vision’. Some respondents stated that the question does not apply to them as they are happy with the level of lighting in their neighbourhood and do not often travel outside of their neighbourhood after dark.



243 respondents use a torch, 200 say that they feel unsafe but continue with their usual activities anyway, 171 people plan or vary their walking route to avoid dark or badly-lit areas and 167 people do not modify their activities but make a conscious effort to be more aware of what is around them in low lighting conditions. 79 people make an effort to walk with a companion(s) and 75 people take increased security measures (such as carrying a personal alarm); 38 people take their dog on walks and feel that provides additional protection.

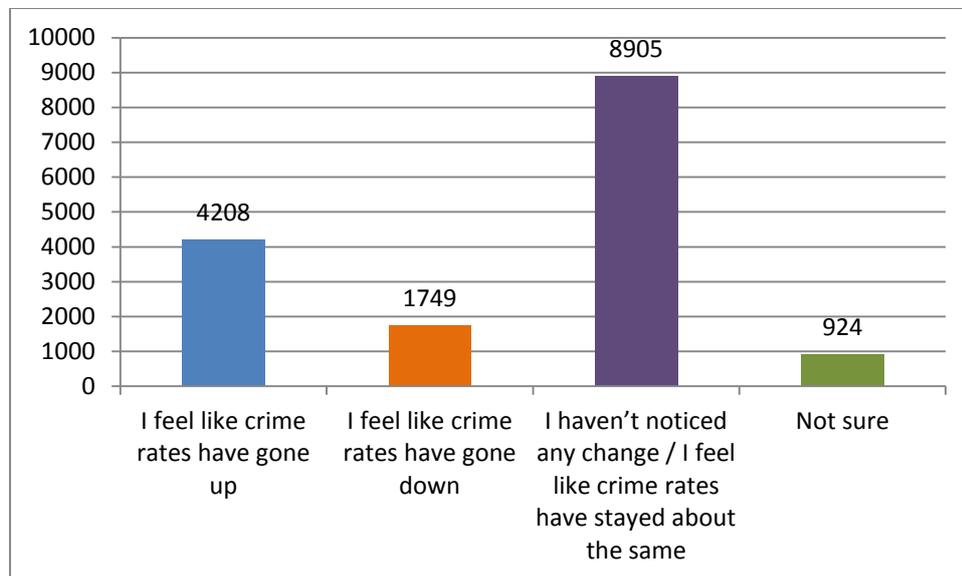
People take other precautions such as using the bus, cycling instead of walking or walking faster. 80 people say that they avoid walking or going out after dark; 52 people modify their activities in some way such as coming home earlier from social events.

Men and women were affected in different ways. Women were 4 times more likely to make efforts to be accompanied by someone. Almost twice as many men than women said that they were not bothered by low or no lighting and/or were happy with lighting levels as they are at present in their neighbourhood. More than twice as many men than women said they did nothing different as a result of situations/areas with low or no lighting. 3 times as many women said that they would modify their activities based on lighting levels, for instance avoiding staying out after dark.

For the full free text responses see Appendix A.

#### Question 14

Which of the following statements best expresses how you feel about crime rates in your area over the last three years?

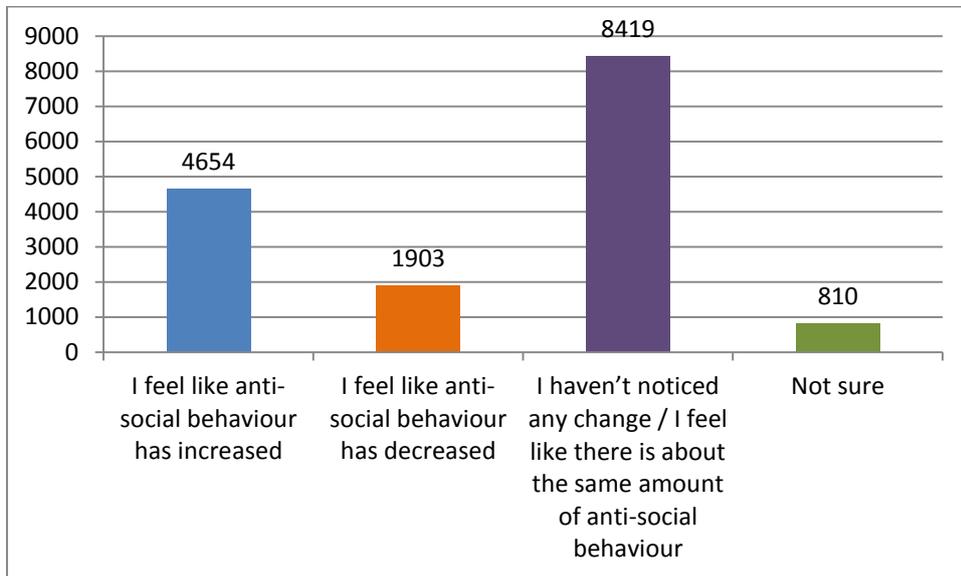


Women were slightly more likely than men to feel that crime rates had gone up, and men were more likely than women to feel that they had gone down or stayed the same.



### Question 15

Which of the following statements best expresses how you feel about anti-social behaviour in your area over the last three years?

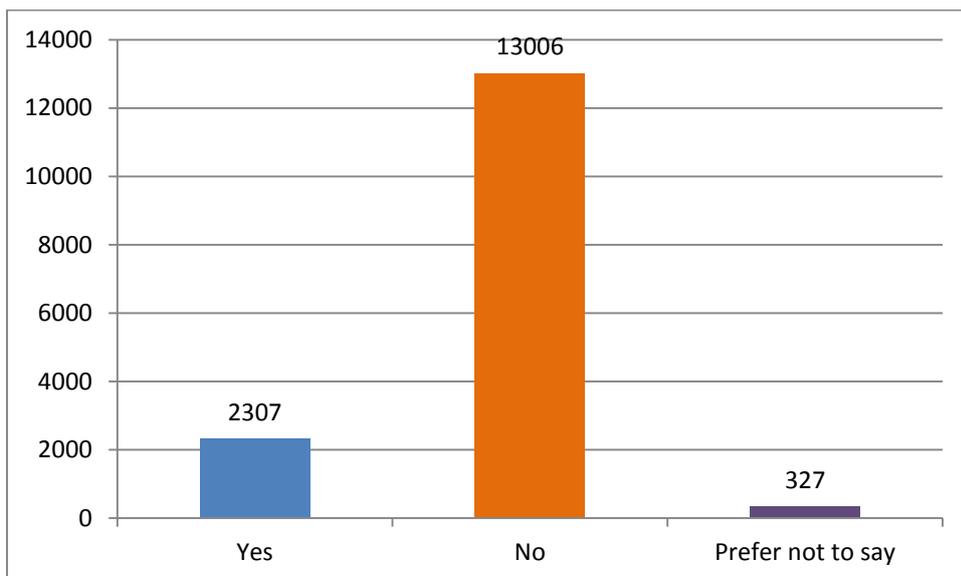


Women were slightly more likely than men to feel that rates of anti-social behaviour had gone up, and men were more likely than women to feel that they had gone down or stayed the same.

### Question 16

Have you been a victim of crime or anti-social behaviour this year (2013)?

(146 respondents skipped this question.)



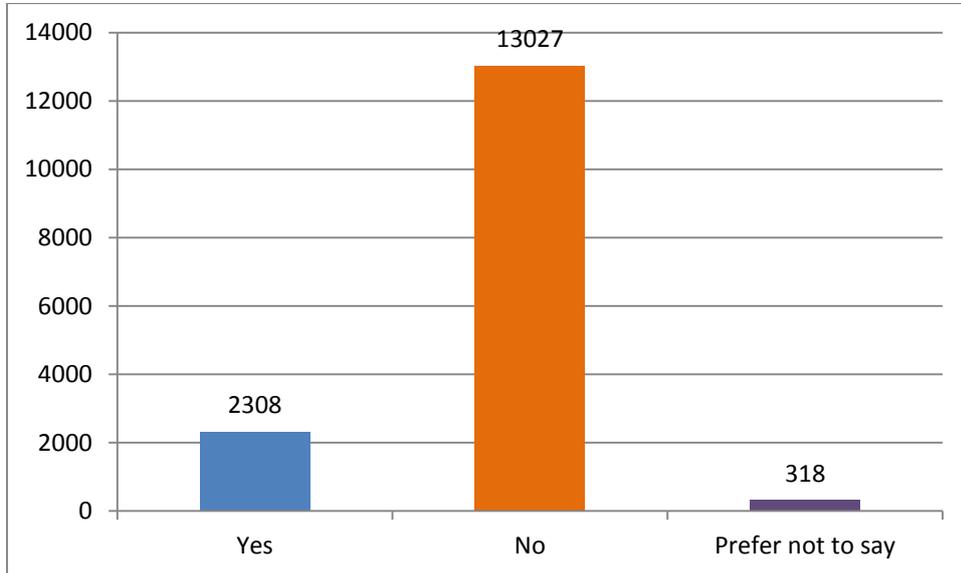
Women were slightly more likely than men to have been a victim of crime or anti-social behaviour during this period. People who had *not* been victims were also slightly more likely to live in areas without street lighting (10% compared with 6.8%).



### Question 17

(133 respondents skipped this question.)

Were you a victim of crime or anti-social behaviour in 2012?



Women were slightly more likely than men to have been a victim of crime or anti-social behaviour during this period but only by 0.1%.

### Question 18

If you answered yes to question 17, you can tell us more about it here if you like.

2,168 respondents completed this field. See Appendix A for more details.

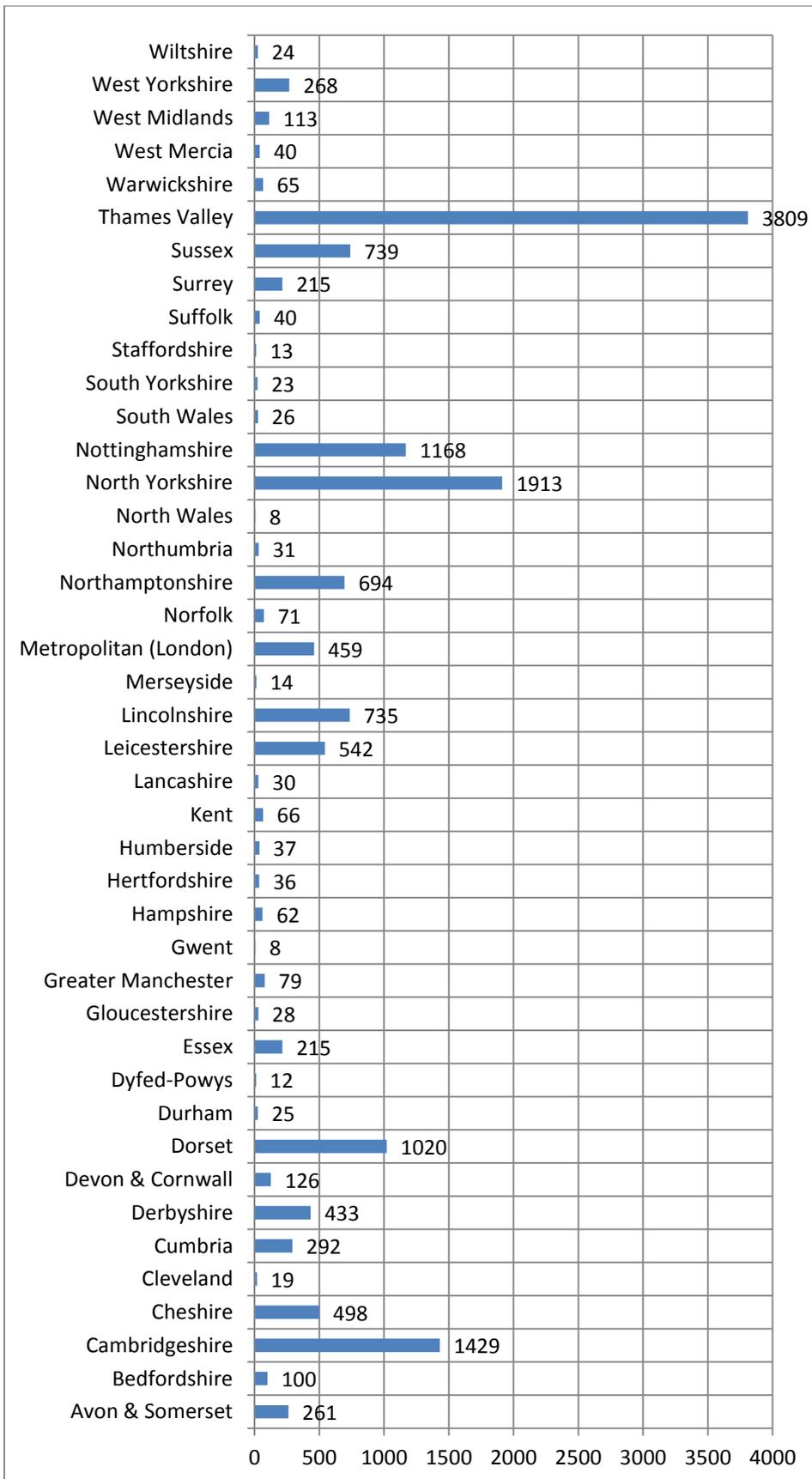


**Question 19**



Which police force area do you live in?





## **Question 20**

Please tell us which town/city/village, county and local authority area you live in.

(208 respondents skipped this question.)

See separate Question 20 document for more details.

## **Question 21**

Do you have any more comments about the street lighting in your neighbourhood?

Opinion seemed to be divided between those respondents who would like more lighting and those who would prefer less, as well as those who are happy with current levels of lighting in their area and do not want them to be increased or decreased. The majority of people who have absolutely no street lighting in their neighbourhood do not want any as they feel it would destroy the rural character of their area. Please see Appendix A for further details.

Those people who do feel nervous or afraid of going out in the dark tend to, understandably, feel very strongly about it. Some people are afraid of having an accident (such as a fall or traffic accident) just as much as of crime.

Most people who commented were keen to find a solution to make cost savings while still retaining useful levels of street lighting. Suggestions included dimming, timer switches and motion sensors, as well as updating lights to a more modern and efficient technology where this has not already been done.

See Appendix A for more details.

