

RUN WITH TURIA PITT

Introduction

In March 2024, I sent out a survey to my audience on running safety.

I was curious if they ever felt unsafe while out running, and more specifically, I was curious if they'd ever been harassed while out running.

It's worth noting that I have a women's running group (Run with Turia). So the issue of running – and not feeling safe – is really important to me.

If I reflect on my lifetime, I could think of numerous times when I felt unsafe running.

There was that time when I was 14 running along the beach near my house and a guy started chasing me. I sped up, ran off, and avoided running there for the next few months.

There was that time at the gym when I was on a treadmill, and that guy followed me outside and asked for a lift home, and when I said no screamed YOU BITCH.

There was that time when I returned to running after being burned to 65% of my body, and that car honked, and the guy said FUCKING HURRY UP.

There was that time when I was training for Ironman and I thought a car was following me so I hid in some bushes, waited for the car to drive off, and quickly ran home.

There was that time when I was training for a mountain run, and there was this guy who stood in the middle of the path and looked at me. And so I quickly turned around, and I did not finish my run that day.

I feel “lucky” in that none of these events resulted in me being raped, injured, or killed.

Aren't we all so “lucky”?

If I tell people (friends, family) about the harassment I have received, I know they would say in a loving tone that I need to be more careful.

Y'know, avoid dark areas. Avoid running in the late evening. Share your location. Don't run with music. Could you run with someone? Could you just do a group class at the gym instead?

I am not the problem.

I should be able to go for a run without needing to be “careful”.

Here's what my audience said about their experiences running. ▶

How Safe Do Women Feel Out Running

Results

Close to 2,000 people filled in the survey.

I offered a chance to win a \$100 voucher to Adore Beauty, because asking people to do unpaid labour for this felt icky.

99.3% of survey respondents identified as a woman. No surprises there. That's my audience.

Close to eighty percent of perpetrators were identified as being a man (78.5%). Again, no surprises. Also, I get that not "all men" harass women while they run. Duh. But the data doesn't lie.

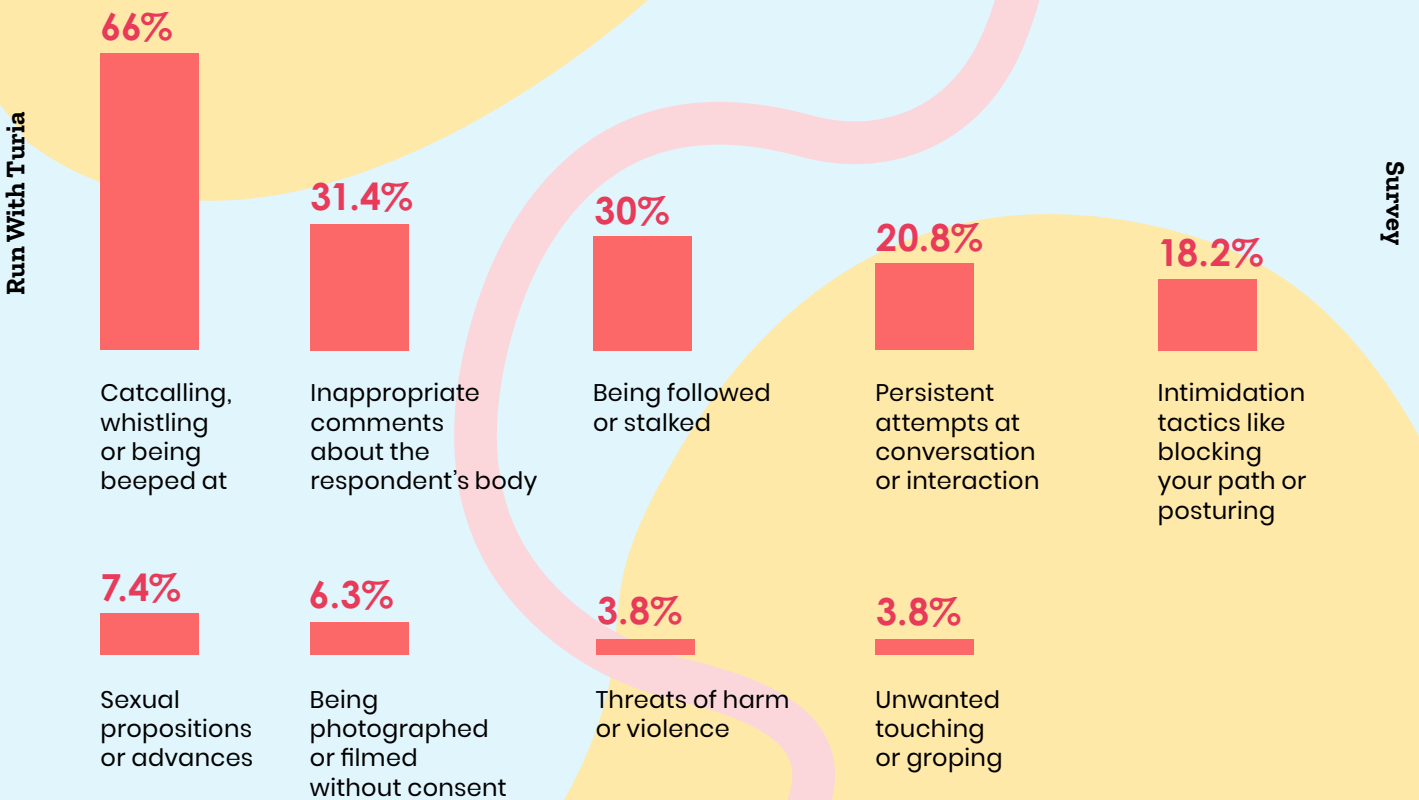
Oh, and 81.4% of perpetrators were complete strangers.

That's the dataset.

The third question I asked was: have you ever been harassed while out running?

Over 77% of the respondents said that they'd been harassed while on a run.

This harassment ranged from:



I felt enraged reading the respondent's answers. And sad. And also, what's the point of doing this anyway because is it really going to change a single thing?

I know that's a defeatist attitude. I try and remind myself of what my Mum used to say to me as a kid. "If you think you're too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito". ▶

A word kept popping up in the responses. The word “just”.

In that, the respondents felt “lucky” in that the harassment was...

- **Just** inappropriate and aggressive comments
- **Just** males in cars catcalling, beeping, lewd comments
- **Just** mainly drive-byes
- **Just** stupid comments and whistles and cars slowing down behind me

It's strange how tolerant society is of this.

It's not okay that we **just** put up with this behaviour.

Specific descriptions of harassment

The survey respondents had an opportunity to describe the harassment that they'd experienced.

Below are some of their descriptions. A warning that some of these are distressing, so please skip this part if you are at your limit when it comes to hearing about harassment and violence.

“ A teenage boy on a bike rode past me. Then he returned and **proceeded to expose himself to me**. He was not deterred when I told him to go away. Only when I started screaming “R*pe” multiple times did he ride off.

“ A teenage boy came out of nowhere as I was going for a walk along a suburban street and started talking to me. At first, I was polite, but he kept following me, asking if I had a boyfriend, and then he started trying to touch me (arm around my shoulder). I had to shove him a few times to get off. **I still can't believe how polite I was trying to be while all this was going on**. Why is that? I didn't know what to do. After about 20-30 minutes, he gave up and headed back in the direction he had come from. When he'd got a safe distance away, I ran all the way home, checking over my shoulder to make sure he wasn't following me. I never walked down that street again.

“ Just this **constant feeling of being unsafe, scanning, not being able to focus on the exercise - it takes away all the joy**. When I was younger, men would follow me while I exercised. It was horrific - right to my car and then waving as I drove away. Like it's a game to see how much fear I show in my face. You never forget that feeling of fear, and it stays with you, and the worst thing of all is you transfer your fear to your daughters. Fear is such a vicious cycle for women.

“ Went for a run while on holiday in unfamiliar territory, got beeped at, men on the work site heckled me, and **called me a “fat b*tch”**

“ I'm tired of being afraid. **How can I be 57 and still get stalked and harassed?** Does it never end?

“ It makes what should be a **relaxing experience an anxious one**, and I avoid exercise for this reason - it's another job I have to tick off with a possible negative/unsafe outcome each time I do it. ▶

Run With Turia

Survey

“ I was walking after finishing my exercise routine when **a man just jumped from nowhere and put his hands inside my shorts, on my butt, and squeezed**; then he pushed me to the floor. I fell and got my knees bruised. It happened so fast that I couldn't understand what was happening at that moment. I stayed there for a few minutes. I was shaking, and then I ran to my house. I was unable to cry, and I kept thinking about what I did wrong to give him this opportunity, you know? I blamed myself. After that, I started to cover my butt, and I've been aware all the time. It's horrible because you should go exercise to relax, but you keep "awake and aware" all the time.

“ Every time I go out running, I am wary when I approach a man or group of men. **My body stiffens, and I am on guard to ensure I have space between me and them.** When we pass, I ensure they are continuing before I relax somewhat.

“ A man was sitting on a bench beside a popular running trail. As I approached, he stood up and yelled out, **"your shoelace is untied!"**. **I slowed my pace and looked down. It was not.** He said, "Sorry, haha, I had to get you to stop. Can we run together?". He was not in activewear or wearing running shoes. I said "No" and tried to pass him. He stepped sideways to block me. I looked around and realised we were alone, and I suddenly felt very afraid. I was furious and beginning to tear up. He said, "I want a running buddy, c'mon, why can't we?". A cyclist came flying around the corner and was on an intersecting path about 100m away. I yelled out, "This man stopped me," and the male cyclist stopped. Before the cyclist could even say anything or approach us, the man who stopped me turned around and started running off a side street. He had deliberately sat in a place runners pass by and targeted me by tricking me into stopping. I am terrified to think what may have happened if he hadn't been interrupted.

How safe did they feel out running?



78.9% of respondents **have changed their running routine due** to harassment or safety concerns.



17.7% of them **always feel this way.**



Over 65.6% of respondents sometimes feel like **their life is in danger** when they go out for a run. ▶

What did they do about feeling unsafe?

Women aren't waiting around for policy changes. Women know that they're a potential target.

Some survey respondents have stopped running altogether.

Others implemented some of the following strategies:



Run with someone else

- Dog
- Brother
- Husband
- Son (a 15-year-old teenage boy is safer than an adult woman!)
- Male friends (another woman is not enough)



Scope out potential running routes ahead of time

- Avoid trails
- Avoid parks
- Avoid bushland
- Avoid construction sites (or other places where men congregate)



Don't run in the dark

- Inconvenient running hours (no late nights or early mornings)
- Stick to well-lit roads



Avoid listening to music

- No earbuds
- Only one earbud
- Expensive, open-ear headphones only like Shokz
- Low volume



Change running route

- Permanently after encountering a creep
- Daily (switching it up to be more unpredictable)
- Depending on daylight
- Upon seeing anyone who might be a threat



Always carry a phone, even if it's bulky or inconvenient

- Can't make distress calls from more convenient devices (e.g. a Garmin) ▶

How Safe Do Women Feel Out Running



Always tell someone:

- Where you are
- What route you're running
- When you're coming back
- When to call the police



Don't change the running plan you told someone about

- No fun, impromptu detours
- No extending the run, even if it feels great



Carry defensive tools

- Keys in hand
- Pepper spray
- Knife
- Screwdriver



Have husband monitor your movements via GPS



Be hyper-vigilant while running

- Check what houses have lights on (safe spots to run to if things go south)
- Always have an escape plan, go over it in your head while you run
- Scan the area for other people, avoid men
- Alter posture to look more intimidating
- Cross the road if you see someone behind you/coming towards you



Don't accept friend requests on running apps (so that no one sees routes)



Change running gear

- Cover up more
- Wear different clothing to appear less attractive
- Wear clothing that looks less expensive



Don't run with a baby/toddler (because you can't protect them)



When you encounter men on the road

- Run faster while going past them
- Cross the street
- Turn around and run in the opposite direction



Stop running outside

- Switched to the gym
- Bought a treadmill ▶

What can I do? What can we do? How do we change this?

Growing knowledge and understanding of this issue is important, and it's ok if that's as much as you can contribute right now.

If reading this has brought up any feelings for you, please reach out to someone.

1800RESPECT is an amazing service, and you can contact them by calling **1800RESPECT** or texting **0458 737 732**.

But for those who can do more and for those who SHOULD do more (policymakers, I'm looking at you) I want this to be a call to action.

Some of my most respected co-commentators on this topic have made a good point.

@Teachusconsent reminded me that in 2014, after a string of men fatally coward punched other men, the government made changes to laws and imposed tougher penalties for offenders.

We saw marketing campaigns around it. We saw lockout laws in Sydney. We changed our language around it, from 'king hit' to 'coward punched'. Our cultural attitudes changed as well.

I'm not sure whether violence against women is completely solvable. But I do believe it can be reduced dramatically. And I know that we must do something with **URGENCY** to protect women and children from men who use violence in our homes, our communities and lives.

Thanks for reading.

Aroha nui (big love)

Turia xx