

# Women of Woodlands Community Survey: Results and Analysis

## Overview

Esther Brown was a beloved member of the Woodlands Community. In the wake of her murder in 2021, the group Women of Woodlands (WOW) worked to support each other in processing not only the loss of a neighbour, acquaintance, and friend, but also in honouring her legacy to address the blight of gender-based violence.

Dr Shaina Western, a member of the group and researcher at the University of Edinburgh, worked alongside the group to create and conduct a community-based survey on the impact of Esther's death and to identify pragmatic steps that could be undertaken to create pragmatic policies that would end gender-based violence.

The survey ran from mid-October to mid-November 2021. The survey was advertised by the Woodlands Community Development Trust (WCDDT) which initially created the group, via its social media and email newsletter. There were 250 people answered any survey questions. Not all respondents completed the survey and most questions have approximately 215 respondents. The analysis of the responses reflects the assessment of Dr Western and do not necessarily reflect the view of Women of Woodlands, Woodlands Community, or the University of Edinburgh.

The larger survey focused on the direct and indirect impacts of Esther's death, personal experiences with gender-based violence beyond Esther's death, and practical changes at the local, regional, and national level. This report focuses primarily on the policies and priorities of respondents to the survey. Respondents were provided with lists of policies that were discussed in the Women of Woodlands group. These lists are not exhaustive and individuals were allowed to list other policies that they would like to see enacted.

Because the survey is community-based, it does not reflect a random sampling method. For instance, the sample of the survey overwhelmingly identifies as female and is largely based in a handful of Glasgow postcodes.<sup>1</sup> As such it cannot make claims about the broader population, but it does highlight important concerns in the community. Moreover, the policies that are focused on here are echoed by other community-based organisations, highlighting the importance of progression on these issues.

This report begins with an overview of the impact of Esther's death on survey respondents and the existing sources of support that respondents used in the immediate aftermath of Esther's death. From there the report provides an overview of the support for different events, activities, and local and national policies to address gender-based violence<sup>2</sup> and to provide for greater safety in the community.

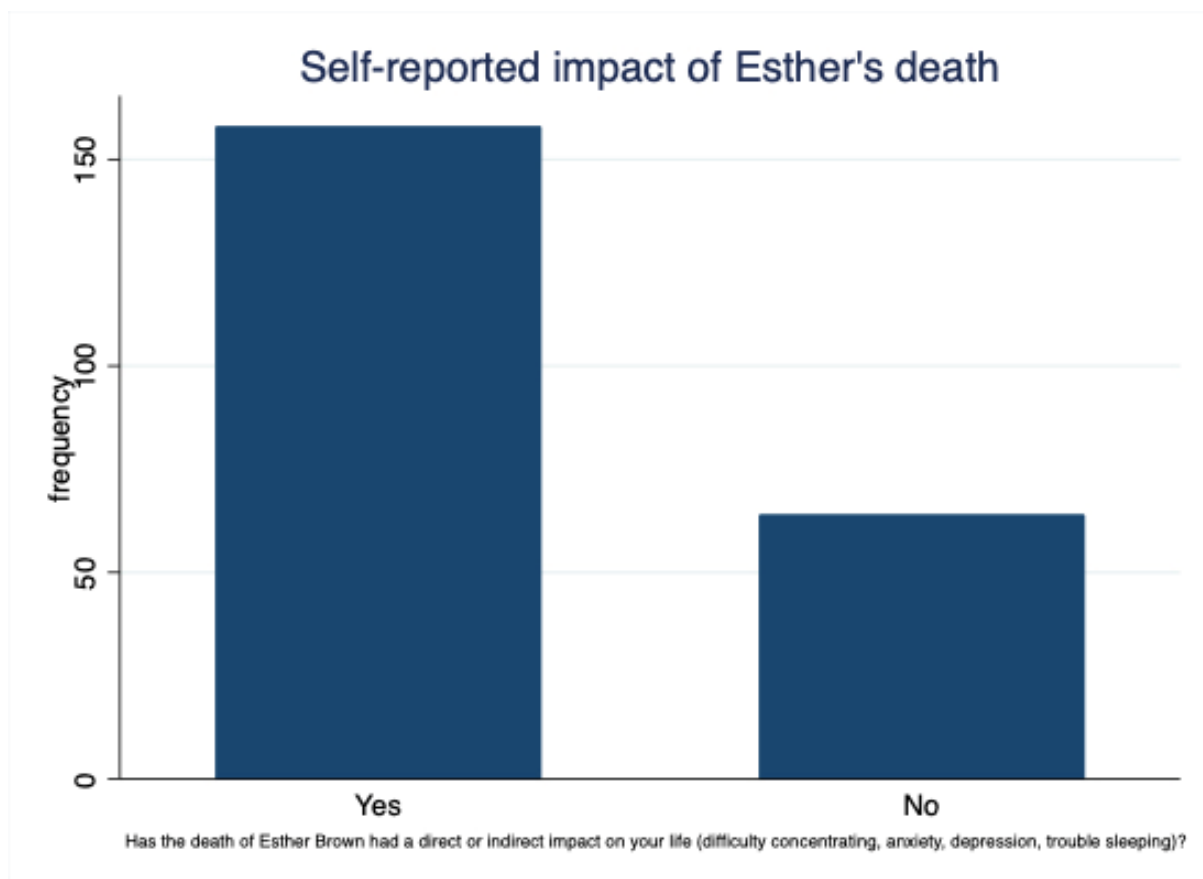
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<sup>1</sup> Post codes were not available for all respondents. The largest three post codes were G3 (18%), G4 (26%), and G20 (20%). 95% of respondents for whom post codes were available were based in the Glasgow or Greater Glasgow area.

<sup>2</sup> This survey drew from the United Nations definition of gender-based violence but expanded the definition to be inclusive of non-binary individuals.

## Impact

The primary focus of the survey was to understand the impact of Esther's death. As such, one of the initial questions respondents were asked was about this impact. 158 respondents stated that her death had a direct or indirect impact on their lives (see Figure 1). In contrast only 64 respondents stated that her death did not have an impact. This finding is not particularly surprising given that the survey was targeted to the Woodlands Community but highlights the magnitude of the impact of her death, particularly at the local level.



*Figure 1: Impact of Esther's Death on Survey Respondents*

Respondents were provided with additional space to discuss the ways in which Esther's death impacted them. Common themes from this section highlighted anxiety, work, and sadness alongside concerns regarding safety particularly at home but also when walking in the area (particularly at night). Some respondents highlighted avoiding Woodlands and Queen's Crescent as well. One respondent highlighted that they wanted to move away from Glasgow because of this event.

Quotes from the respondents highlight the direct and indirect impacts of her death.

- ‘I have been more wary going about my daily activities when I have to pass through areas where I would not be able to summon help readily were I to be concerned about someone following me.’
- ‘She was close to my good friend and it’s been awful to watch many suffer because of this event.’
- ‘I’m very angry and upset that this should happen in an area in which I lived for 20 years. It’s horrifying. And it could have been avoided if that man had not been let out.’
- ‘I have moved away (for work reasons) but hearing this news really affected me. It has caused me to seek treatment for the anxiety I am experiencing. This and other horrible events have caused me to constantly worry when I’m home alone or walking alone. I am now on medication and going through counselling. Every time I see a photo of her I feel so upset for her, what a horrible ordeal she must have went through. We shouldn’t have to worry about these types of things but we do.’
- ‘I have found myself having nightmares some nights, and vivid intrusive thought that I can’t shake from my mind.’
- ‘I think of her often despite not knowing her. Something about her death has stuck with me. I think it was the generosity of spirit that shines from the tributes and her photos that is incongruent with what happened to her. Also the fact she didn’t know him makes me feel vulnerable.’
- ‘Esther’s death has made a significant negative impact on my life, my family, my children, friends and colleagues. I no longer feel safe in my home, community or workplace. I have been signed off work until 2022 because of the impact it’s had on me.’

The survey also asked respondents whether they knew Esther and in what context. Esther’s acquaintances and friends were more likely to express being impacted by her death. Importantly, however, people who had never met Esther or who knew her by sight but did not consider themselves acquaintances also reported high levels of feeling impacted by her murder (Figure 2). Indeed, the most frequent category in the survey were individuals who did not know Esther but who self-reported being impacted by her death.

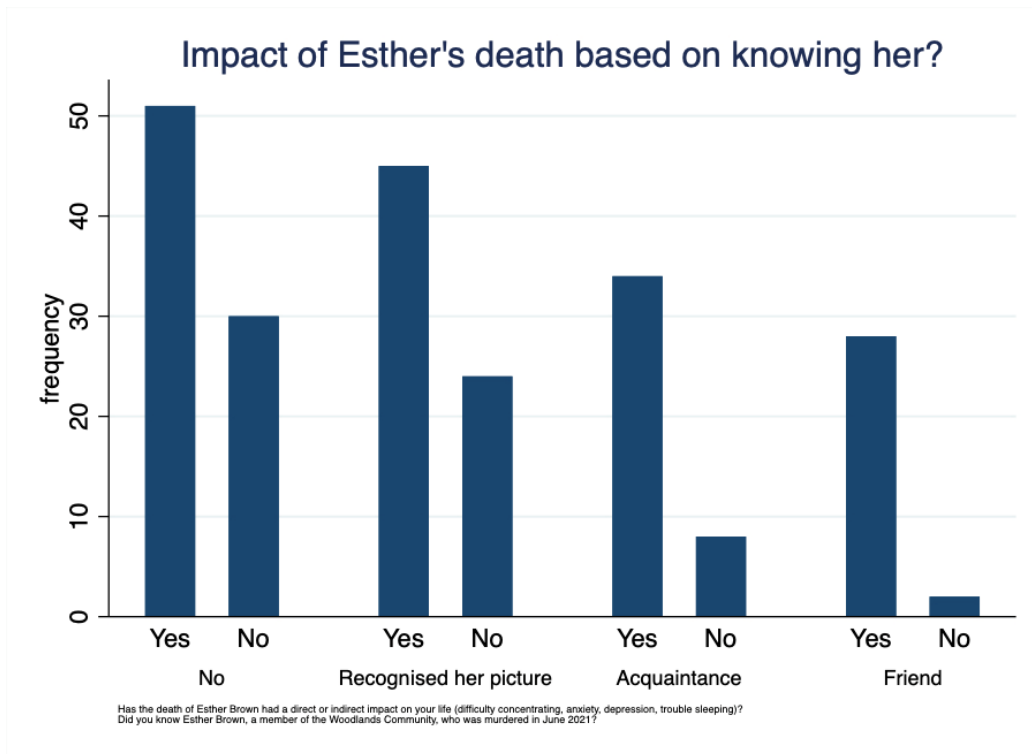
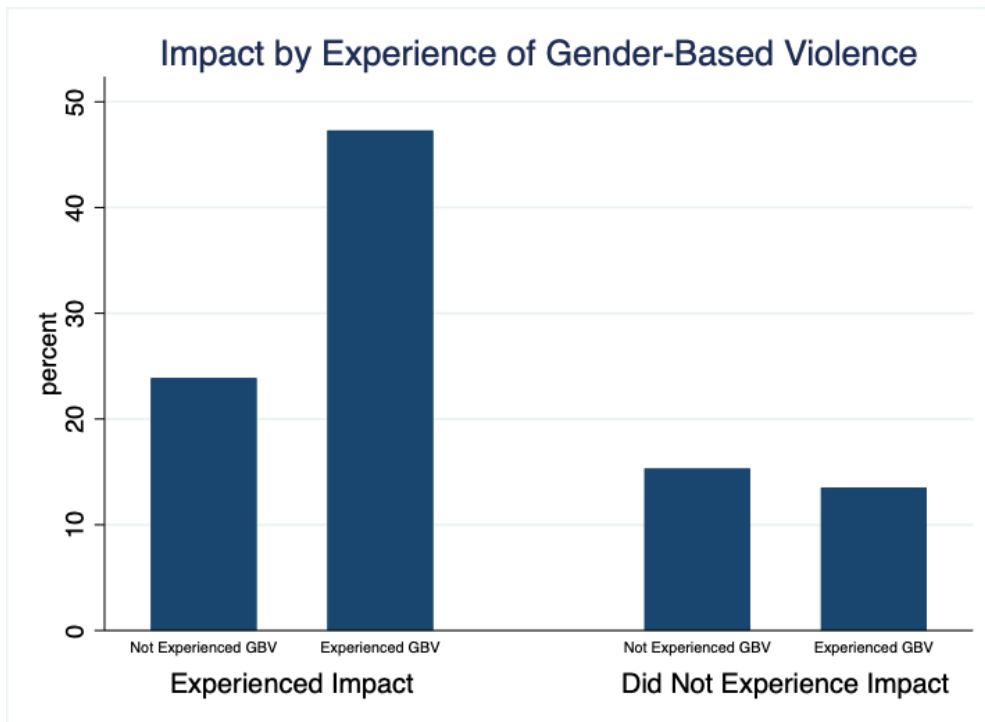


Figure 2: Impact of Esther's Death by Relationship with Esther

One concern from WOW was that Esther's death especially impacted survivors of gender-based violence. To assess this factor, respondents were asked whether they or someone they knew personally (other than Esther) had experienced an act of gender-based violence. The survey results are consistent with this concern. Over 60% of respondents, 133 people, answered yes to this question. When that figure is seen within the context about the impact of Esther's death, it is evident that those that answered yes were disproportionately reported being impacted by Esther's death (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3: Impact of Esther's Death by Experience with Gender-Based Violence*

Because the wording of this question is admittedly broad, one concern is that it is capturing more friends and acquaintances of survivors rather than survivors themselves. Respondents were asked several open-ended questions about their experience, from these open-ended questions, respondents were classified as survivors if their responses indicated that they themselves had experienced the act. This classification is an extremely conservative estimate of who is classified as a survivor and the findings are more stark indicating that those who discussed experience an act of GBV were much more likely to express being impacted by Esther's murder (see Figure 4).

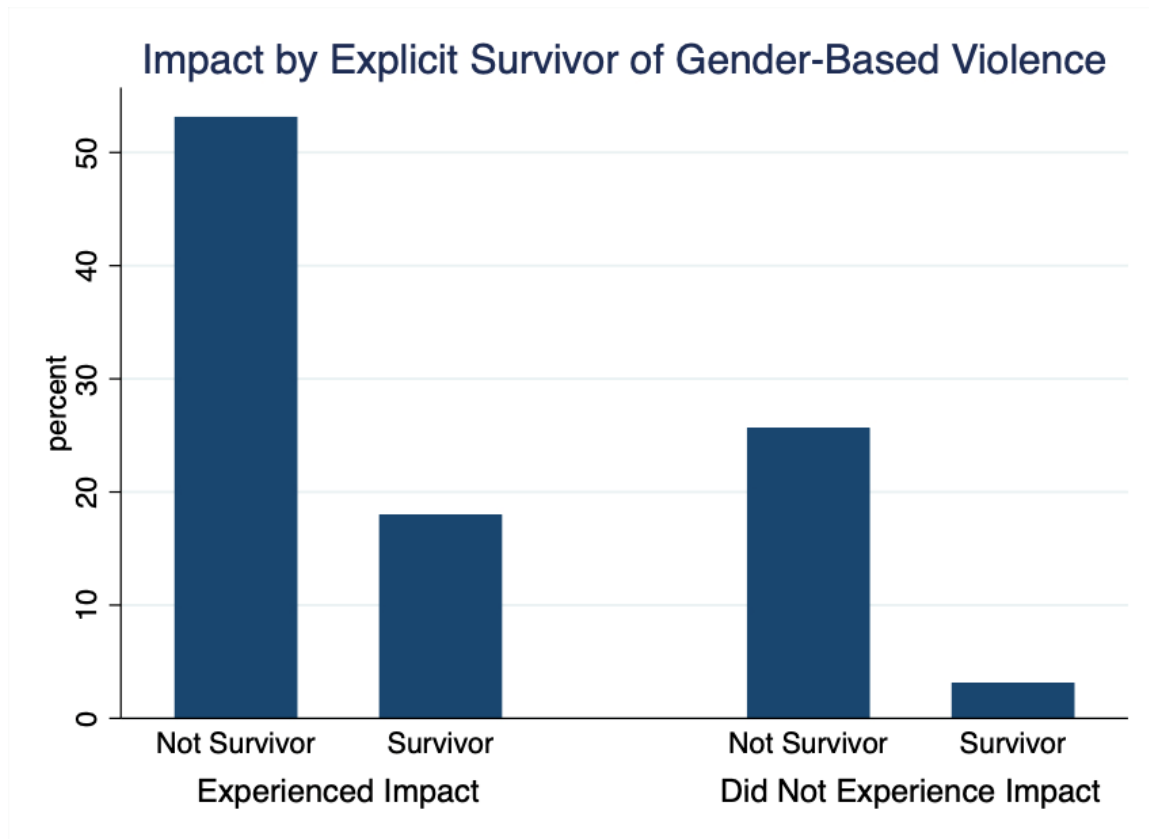


Figure 4: Impact of Esther's Death by Survivorship of GBV

Qualitative evidence from the survey highlights that this event brought up previous trauma among survey respondents, including previous assaults and other traumatic losses.<sup>3</sup>

Quotes:

- 'I think Esther's murder was preventable and shows the limitations of the current criminal legal system and how it responds to people who cause physical and sexual harm. I have PTSD from previous trauma and have experienced an increase in my trauma symptoms too.'
- 'Brought back memories of previous assaults on me.'

## Resources and Responses

Respondents were asked about the services that they accessed to get support in dealing with the impact of Esther's death (see Figure 5).<sup>4</sup> Of those who sought support, the most frequent source of support was friends and family by a wide margin. However, the second most common source of support, ahead of GPs and mental health providers was the Women of Woodlands Support group.

<sup>3</sup> Conservatively, a quarter of survey respondents indicated that they had experienced gender-based violence and nearly three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that they or someone they knew personally had experienced gender-based violence.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that most respondents had not accessed help to deal with Esther's death. These cases are omitted from Figure 5.

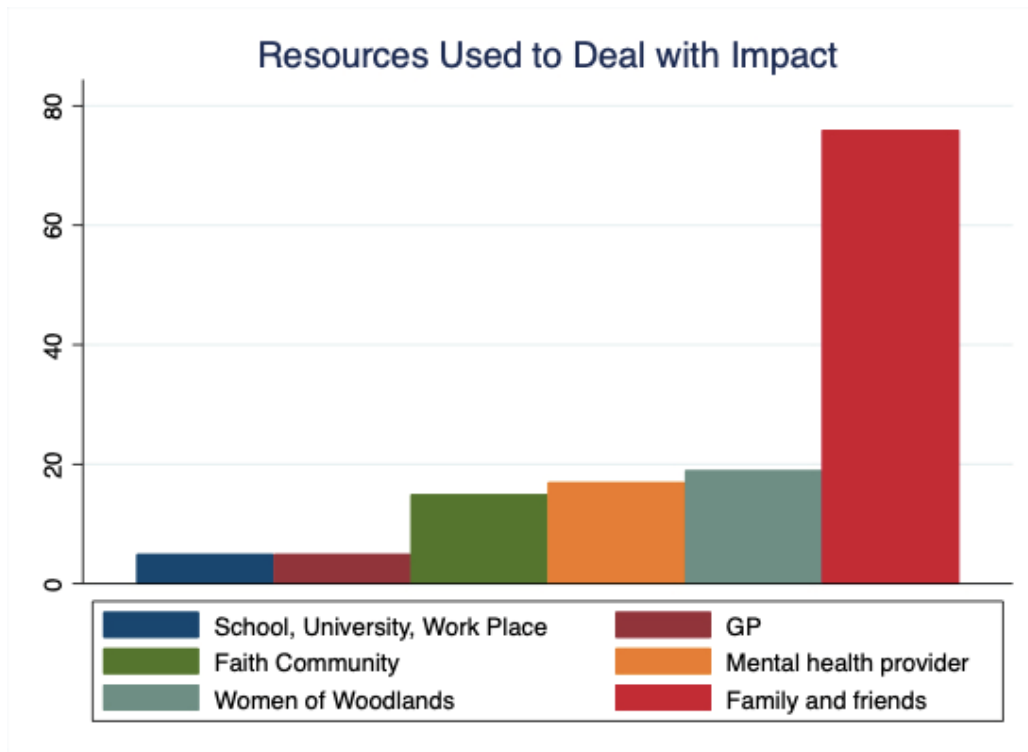


Figure 5: Resources Sought to Deal with the Impact of Esther's Death

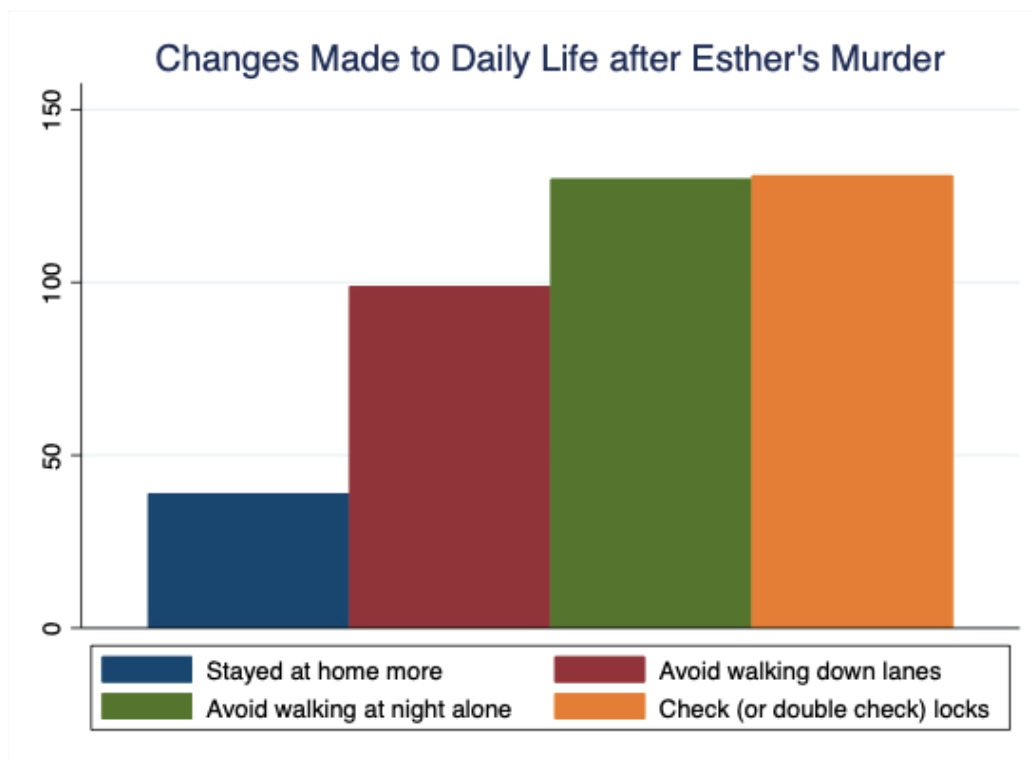


Figure 6: Changes made to daily life because of Esther's murder

To assess impact respondents were asked what changes had been made in their lives because of Esther's death (see Figure 6). The smallest category was staying in more, with approximately 40 people stating that they had made this change. Similarly, approximately 100 respondents selected that they avoid walking down lanes. The largest two categories



were checking (or double-checking locks) and avoiding walking alone at night, with approximately 130 people noting this change in their behaviour.

These concerns about walking especially alone and at night were further stressed in the text responses to the 'other' category for this question with respondents stating that they have changed their walking route, including avoiding Woodlands and Queen's Crescent specifically. Moreover, respondents reported being more aware, wary, or cautious when walking alone and particularly at night. Respondents also reported feeling less safe around men and avoiding passing men on the street.

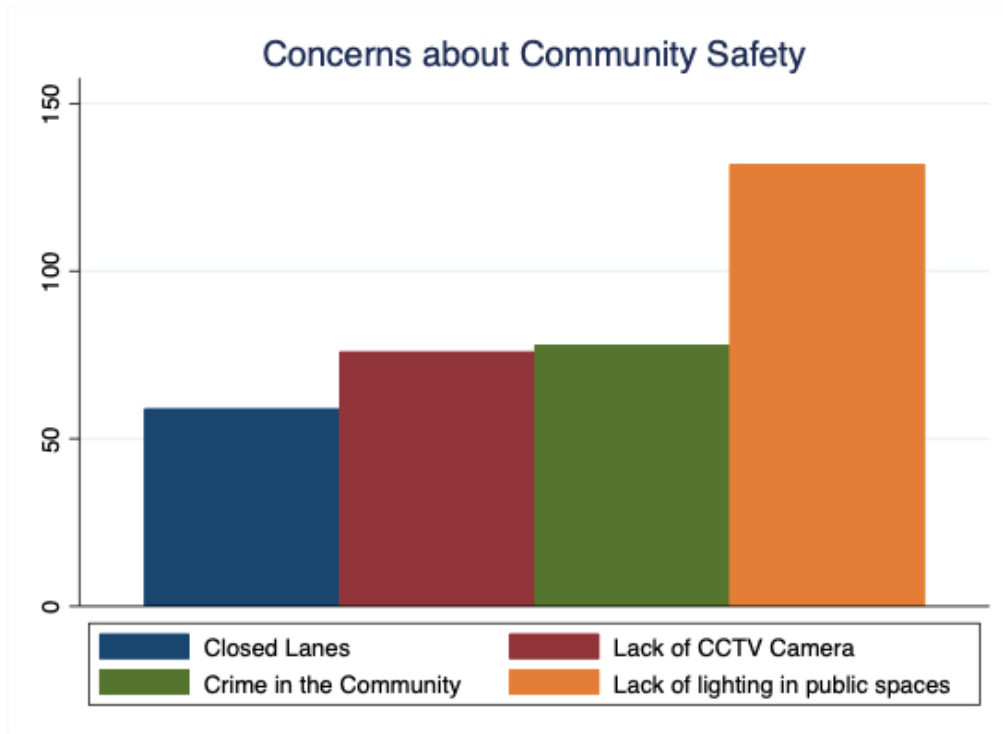
Quotes:

- 'I will not walk west princess street or Queens crescent myself at night'
- 'I don't answer my door.'
- 'I don't go out in the close shared garden to throw the rubbish out like I used to in the past.'
- 'I don't walk through Woodlands as much. Especially knowing how notorious it is for break ins, violence, rape, sexual assault and now murder.'
- 'I worry about family members / friends who live alone. I feel more vulnerable and less safe in my own home, more aware that something like that can happen to anyone anywhere and there's nothing you can do about it.'
- 'I generally feel more scared by men on the street.'
- 'Stopped running from Great Western Road onto Queens crescent since it has got dark in the evening- it didn't bother me before but now I think about what happened to Esther and there are no street lights in that section.'

## **Community Concerns**

As part of the survey, respondents were asked about their concerns in the community regarding safety. Respondents were able to select from four different issues: closed lanes, crime in the community, lack of CCTV cameras, and lack of lighting in public spaces. These factors were identified by the group to be salient concerns in the local environment

Of the four issues that were listed, the most common issue that respondents noted was a lack of lighting in public spaces With 132 people listing this as a concern (see Figure 7). Reports of crime in the community and a lack of CCTV cameras in the area were reported at similar levels, with approximately 75 individuals listing this as a concern. Slightly more than 50 people highlighted closed lanes as an area of concern, and in the 'other' text section one respondent noted that the concern was not just closed lanes but lanes in general.



*Figure 7: Safety Concerns in the Neighbourhood*

Additionally, respondents were offered the opportunity to write down other areas of concern that were not listed. The dominant theme from that discussion is a lack of a visible police presence and especially about crime in the area and lack of community policing.

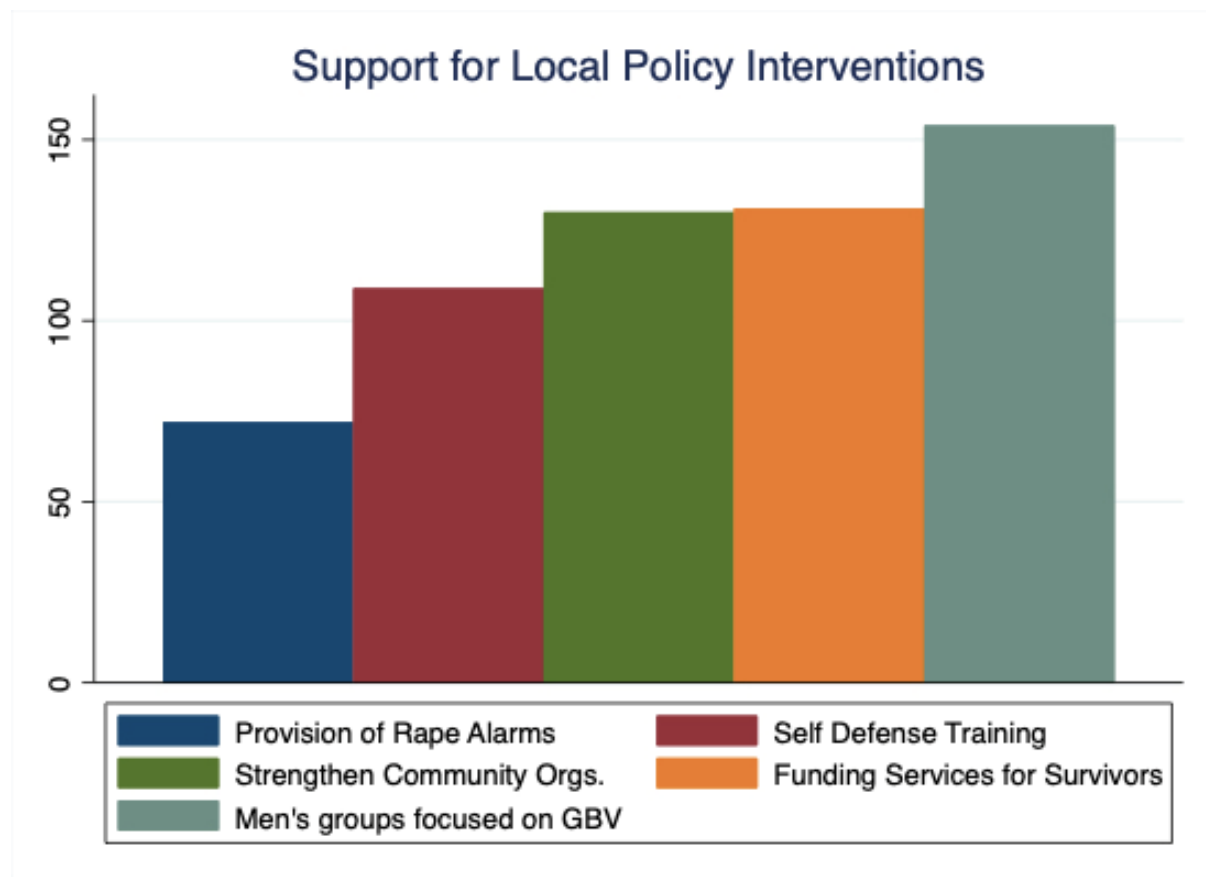
- ‘Drug use and dealing. Lock on main door has been repeatedly broken and glass smashed etc.’
- ‘Ex-prisoners and cash poor young men, victims of universal credit and dependent on foodbanks, attacking women.’
- ‘Lack of supportive and sensitive policing. No community spirit and looking after neighbours.’
- ‘Lack of visible police presence.’

### **Local Policies**

We asked respondents about the policies that they would like to see enacted at the local level. These are policies that Women of Woodlands may discuss with local politicians and third-sector organisations in Glasgow working on issues of gender-based violence.

All the policies listed had well over fifty individuals stating that they would support all policies listed. The two smallest categories focused on personal safety. The provision of rape alarms was the least popular intervention with 72 individuals stating that they would like to see this policy. In contrast, 109 respondents stating that they would like to see self-defence training offered locally.

Strengthening community organisations and funding for services for survivors received strong support, with approximately 130 people stated that such changes as vital local policy changes.



*Figure 8: Support for Local Policy Changes*

The most critical reform that over 150 respondents cited was support for men's groups focused on gender-based violence. It should be noted that men are not well represented in the sample and so this figure reflects to a large degree a reflection from women that changing men's behaviour is critical to addressing the issue of gender-based violence more systematically.

This question, similar to others in the survey, had an 'other' section where respondents could write their own suggestions. The suggested policies followed a similar theme highlighting that more work was necessary to provide men and boys with education around gender-based violence. Additionally, it was highlighted that men and boys need support so that they do not become offenders. Respondents note that boys and men can be victims of sexual assault. As such these findings underline the need for services for men to address the trauma and stigma around sexual assault.

Respondents were also asked about changes to the built environment that could make the community feel safer. For this question only two responses were provided with respondents also being able to provide their own response. Both changes proposed in the survey (CCTV cameras and better lighting) received considerable support.

Of the two options, the strongest support was for better lighting. The discussion of lighting was also highlighted in the ‘other’ section with respondents specifically discussing having parks and areas around bike locks better lit, particularly Kelvingrove Park as it has many commuters that go through and is poorly lit. It should be noted that issues around lighting are not unique to Kelvingrove Park but is a larger issue in other city parks, such as Queens Park.

The other section also revealed more information about CCTV cameras. This discussion was somewhat mixed. Some respondents were supportive of CCTV cameras. However, others expressing concerns around a surveillance atmosphere that increased CCTV presence could create.

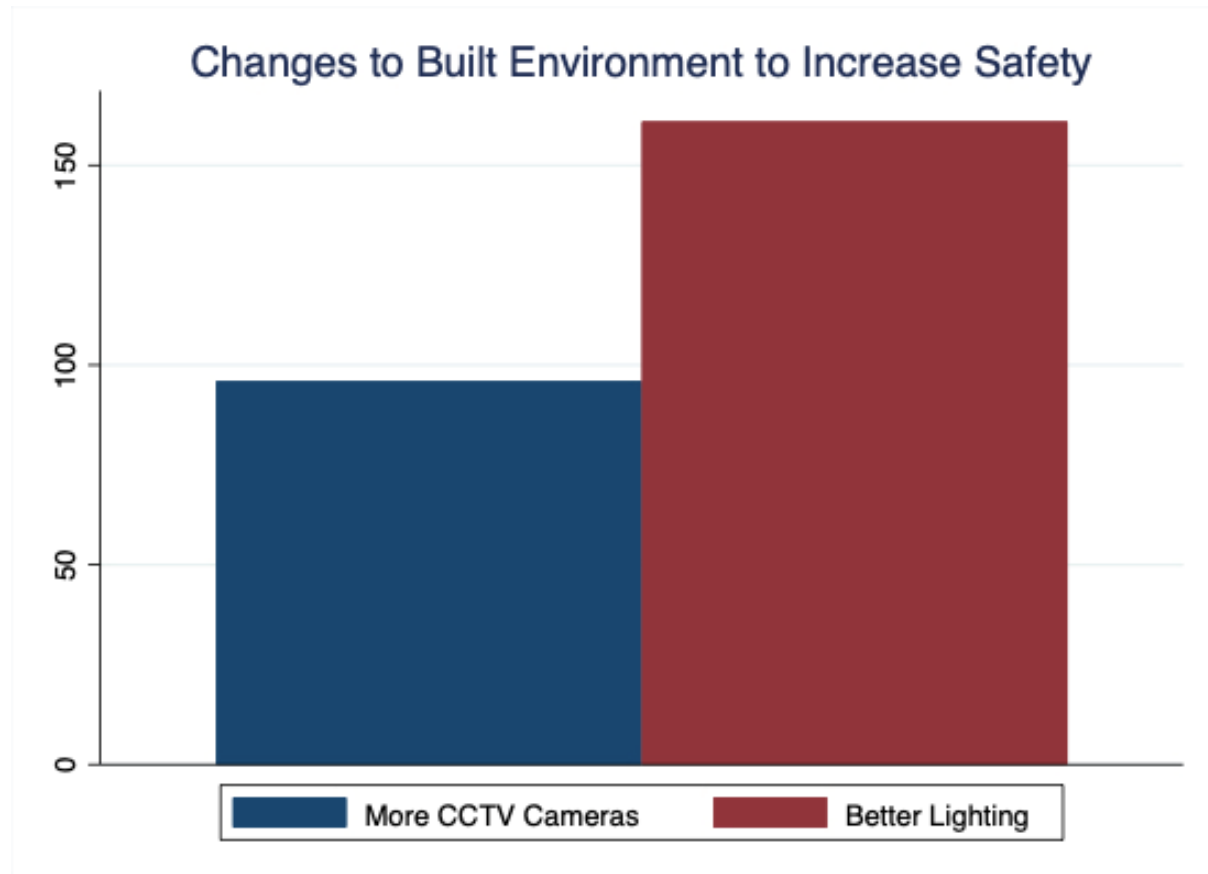


Figure 9: Changes to the Built Environment to Increase Feelings of Safety

The other category on the built environment also had three interesting themes emerged. Several respondents noted that having more people out and about would make them feel safer in the community. Ideas here focus on developing more of an outdoor community culture and creating stronger links within the community whereby neighbours can look out for each other and where people know they can turn to their neighbours for help. Similarly, respondents noted that keeping the community well-designed and cared for may be a deterrent to anti-social behaviour but also cultivate more of a sense of community, especially around Woodlands and the entrance to St George’s Cross station.

Quotes:

- ‘Narrow dimly lit pavements with multiple hedged pathways to close doors. Few people walking around after dark.’

- ‘Lack of investment in keeping the streets clean, and well lit. That seems to encourage antisocial behaviour in the back lanes and even near millennium park. Also seeing a police presence that isn’t just when terrible things happen would be nice.’
- ‘I don’t think either of these would make me feel safer, more surveillance creates a horrible environment. For me to feel safer would mean knowing my neighbours, knowing that if I needed to I could drop in / buzz someone and that they would not be afraid to answer. Having more regular woodlands gatherings and activities so people felt part of a close community who look out for one another’
- ‘More cycle lanes, because having other people around (bikes or walking) makes me feel safer than just cars on the road.’

Most critically, however, respondents here noted policing as an issue. Indeed, ‘police’ was the single most common word that the respondents noted for this category (see Figure 10). Indeed, several of the mentions of community focus on the concept of community police. Many people stated that they wanted more police and more police patrolling on foot or bike.



*Figure 10 Other changes to the built environment*

Quotes:

- ‘Seeing police on the streets again patrolling our city.’
- ‘More police.’

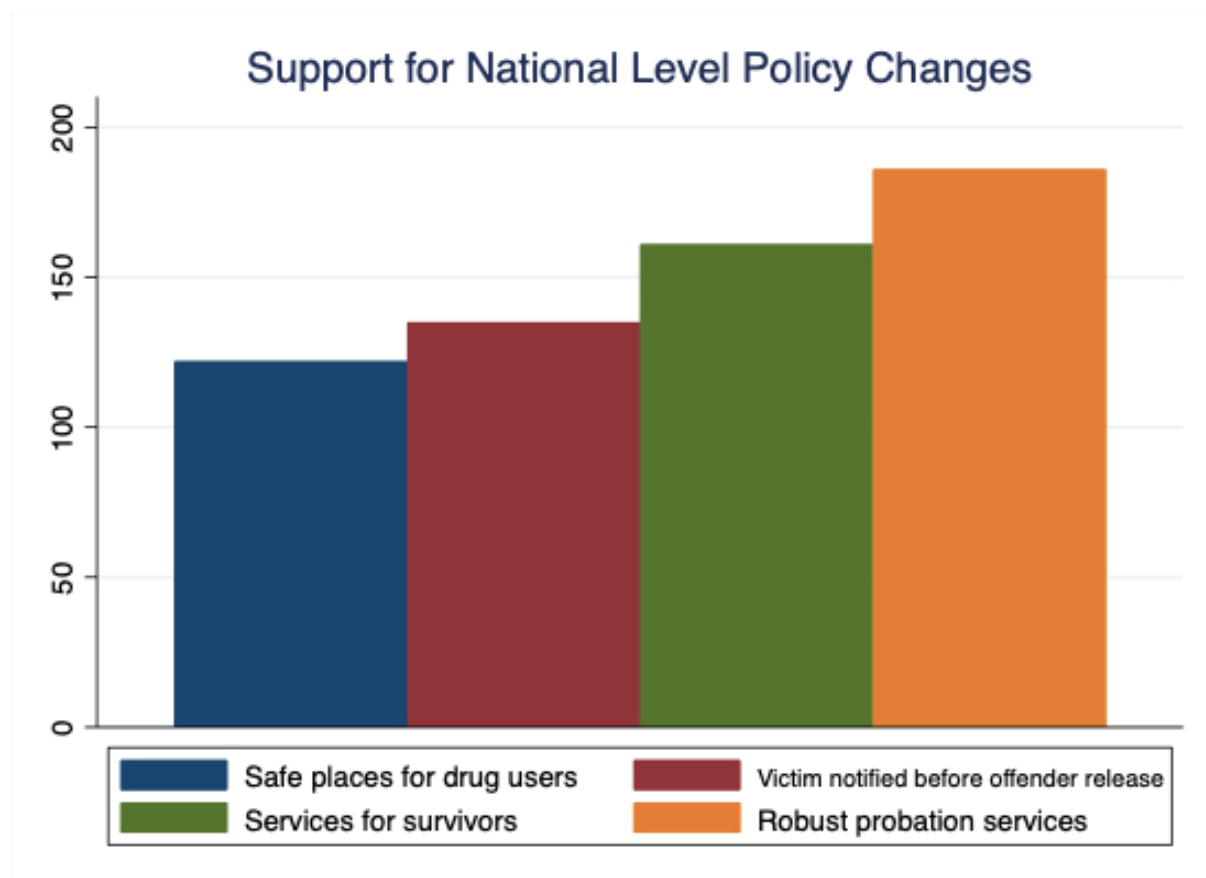
### **National Level Policies**

Finally, respondents were also asked about policies that could be enacted at the national (Scotland or UK-wide) level to address gender-based violence (and violence more broadly). Respondents again were given four different policy changes to choose from: safe places for individuals to use drugs, victim notification before offenders are released, more services for survivors, and robust probation services. All these policies received considerable support from the survey respondents.

Comparatively, ‘safe places for drug users’ and ‘victim notification before offenders are released’ received the least support, although these were supported by well over 100 respondents. Approximately 160 respondents wanted more services for survivors.

Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly given the circumstances around Esther’s murder, over 180 respondents stated that they would like more robust probation services when offenders are released (see Figure 11). **Of the policies listed in this survey this is the single policy with the most support among survey respondents.**

As with the other questions, respondents were allowed to suggest other policies that they would like to see. These responses echoed themes elsewhere in the survey. The predominant themes that come through are education, particularly for boys and in school, and for police to raise awareness about gender-based violence. Respondents also highlighted the need for better support for public services (criminal justice, rehabilitation and addiction, and mental health). Additionally, several respondents noted that they would like to see longer criminal sentences for sexually violent crimes.



*Figure 11: Support for national level policy changes*

### **Women of Woodlands Events and Campaigns**

In the initial meetings WOW members brainstormed events, campaigns, and programmes that would support the broader goals of addressing gender-based violence.

Survey respondents were asked about their participation in five different types of events: anti-gender violence library, reclaim the night, gender-based violence campaign, police personal safety event, and a white ribbon group (see Figure 12). Respondents are also allowed to select an ‘other’ category where they could indicate other types of events they would be interested in attending.

The support for these campaigns differed substantially across the five categories.

1. Anti-gender-based-violence library. This event received the least support, with just under 50 people expressing support. This amounts to less than a quarter of survey respondents.
2. Police personal security event. Approximately 80 respondents stated that they would be interested in attending a police security event. Although this event was not overwhelmingly popular, it does amount to over one-third of the sample. Moreover, police presence and the need for better police-community relations are stressed elsewhere in the survey.
3. White ribbon support group (men's anti-GBV group). Approximately 90 respondents stated they would be interested in supporting this type of group. There is a note of caution when discussing such a group: as women are overwhelmingly represented in the survey and this figure represents 5 men and 1 non-binary person indicating support for this group.
4. Reclaim the night. Slightly over one hundred respondents indicated support for a reclaim the night march. This figure represents approximately half of the sample. Further details in the open answer responses indicated that there may be reasons and ways to alter the format to be more inclusive.
5. Anti-GBV campaign. This category has the broadest support with approximately 120 people expressing support for such a campaign. What this campaign could entail is broad and could be of further discussion for WOW.

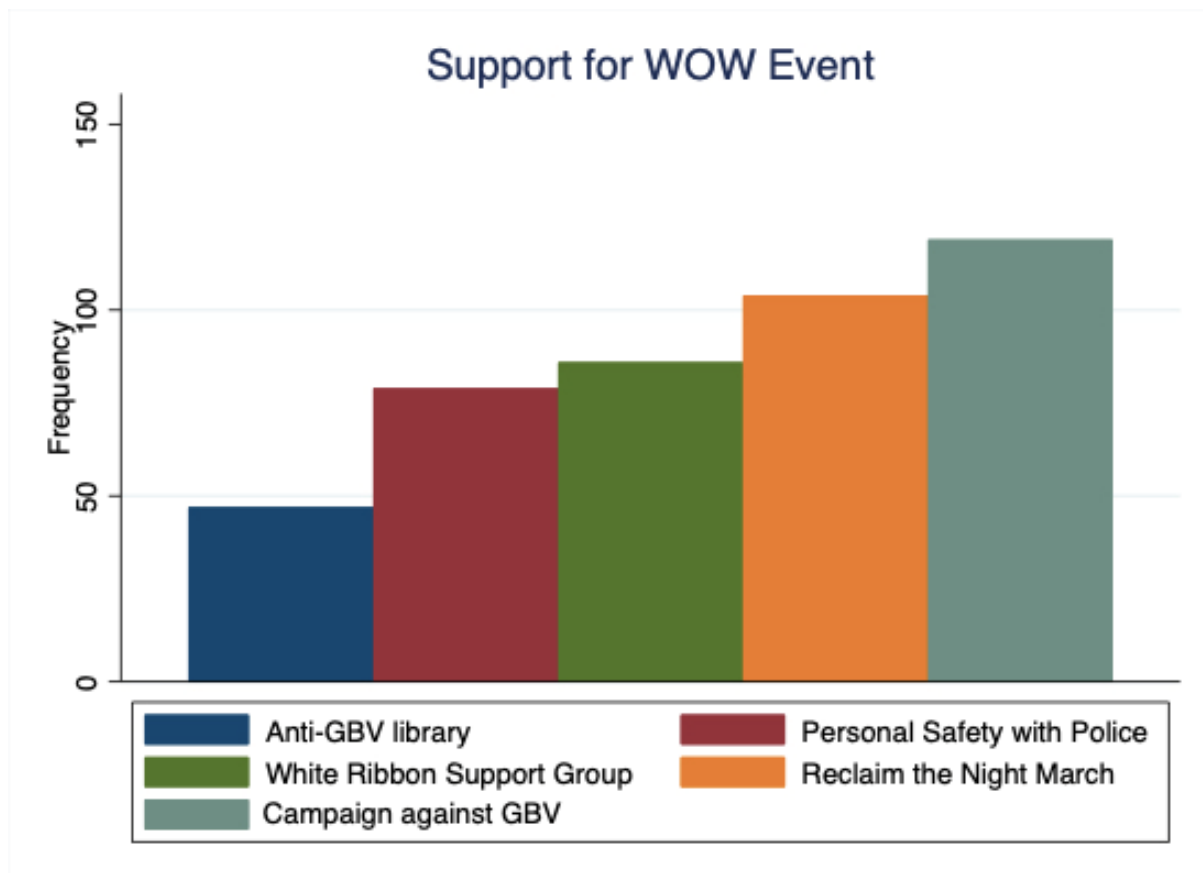


Figure 12: Support for Events Run By the Women of Woodlands

In addition to these categories there was an 'other' category where respondents could indicate support for other events. One important theme in these comments is that there is a desire to ensure that events are gender inclusive, especially for trans and non-binary persons. There were also comments that the format of a reclaim the night march could be different. One respondent suggested that there could be evening walks as an alternative.

Other important themes that came from this question:

- Violence needs to be addressed more broadly and especially other ways in which people are targeted for violence (LGBT, ethnicity, ableism, etc). In addressing GBV there is a desire to highlight that this is not a 'women's issue'. Men can also be victims of sexual violence. Men and boys are also key to addressing GBV; women cannot and should not be responsible for solving this issue.
- Local organisations, especially churches, also need to be aware of the issues of GBV.
- Community/police relations could be strengthened further. Police need to be seen as part of the community rather than just coming in when the weather is nice to address public drinking.
- Criminal justice campaign centred around changes to sentencing, probation, and monitoring. These issues are particularly salient but also not exclusive to gender-based violence. Better understanding from police about this specific case to provide better understanding of what happened, what safe-guards are in place, and how these safe-guards could be strengthened/improved considering Esther's murder.

Analysis:

- Based on the data the focus of events should be towards a broader campaign against gender-based/sexual/domestic violence that is inclusive in nature and ideally proactively engages with the criminal justice system.
- There seems to be significant support for a march/walk to raise awareness of the issue, what this would look like, however, is very much open and the comments from the open-ended questions should be considered during any planning process for such a campaign.
- The anti-GBV library does not have significant support. Given that it would be intensive to staff and resources, it is not viable as a programme.
- There is appetite for a men's group to address GBV and again given the gender imbalance in the survey, as such it is unknown if such a group is viable based on the evidence in the survey. Qualitative evidence from other questions in the survey further highlights men have a crucial role to play in solving this issue. If it can be started in a way that is not resource intensive, it is worth an attempt. Perhaps more research could be done about how to make such a group viable such as looking to groups in other communities as a model.
- Another idea among the group was to create a support network for people who have experienced GBV to be supportive through the reporting process.
- An event with police would address many of the themes that are addressed elsewhere in the survey. However, given findings elsewhere in the survey this event should be designed to foster better community-police relations and a greater understanding from the police about the concerns of the community. The specific issues raised with the police elsewhere in the survey are as follows:
  - Police were cited as barrier to reporting gender-based violence.
    - 'I do not feel that the police serve the best interests of marginalised genders.'



- ‘Not trusting the police.’
  - Lack of police presence was cited as impacting community safety.
  - Police were most frequently listed as necessary policy factor to change at the local and national level.
  - Respondents noted that there is a need for police to be better educated about issues around gender-based violence and larger community concerns.
- Respondents also noted larger issues with the criminal justice system as a barrier to reporting GBV and perhaps engagement events could focus on other areas of the criminal justice system.
  - ‘I was also terrified of having to go to court as I have heard stories of how judges talk to survivors...’
  - ‘On one occasion I reported and the matter was resolved but it was stressful and the multiple offender who was known and on the offenders list got a nominal sentence. The Police were okay but the court was terrible. The justice system is designed with bias towards leniency for offenders. After that I there have been incidents I did not report because they are unable to protect me and I don't believe anything gets done to prevent reoffending.’

## Conclusion

Esther Brown’s murder had a large impact on her community. This impact was felt not only by those that knew Esther personally. In doing so this survey highlights the impact of violence on the broader community, beyond immediate family. A significant implication of this survey is that violence has a broader impact on the communities it occurs in. The breadth of impact is likely not simply a function of Esther’s role in the community and more consideration should be given to providing support to communities experiencing these types of tragedies.

This survey highlights several changes at the local and national level that could be made to address gender-based violence in the broader community.

- 1) This survey highlights changes that can be made at the local level to generate a built and social environment that is more secure for all community members. A significant theme is a lack of a lighting in the city, particularly in parks. This policy would not have impacted Esther’s death, but it highlights the broader concerns around gender-based violence and concerns about personal safety in the community.
- 2) This survey highlights the role of men in addressing gender-based violence and sexual-based violence more broadly. Providing greater education for men and boys should be considered. At the very least gender-based violence and sexual violence should not be shoe-horned as women’s issues but as universal issues that society needs to address.
- 3) Community policing is another common theme. Respondents express a desire for more police on foot and bikes in the area. Simply adding more police is likely not as simple a solution as it might appear at first: police were the most cited factor as a barrier to reporting gender-based violence. Respondents noted that police need to be better educated and more sensitive to issues around gender-based violence themselves.
- 4) Community development more broadly is also a theme of the survey.
- 5) Finally, survey respondents would like to see more robust probation services.