

International Women's Day 2026

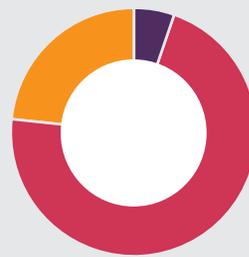
Survey on How Alcohol Impacts Women's Safety in Public Places



In Sri Lanka, alcohol, tobacco and other drug use causes significant economic, health and social issues with complex consequences that are felt at every social level. The detrimental effects of others' alcohol use specifically impacts women in numerous ways. The discomfort, insecurity, and harassment that women experience in public places and on public transport due to others' alcohol use is a growing concern that demands urgent attention. Alcohol is often used as an excuse for violence and harassment, allowing users to escape accountability in the guise of alcohol use. The absence of an effective framework to address this issue has created an environment in which many women are incapable of and reluctant to speak out. With the aim of identifying and exposing the impacts of others' alcohol use on women's perception of safety in public places, the Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC) conducted a survey in commemoration of International Women's Day 2026. **The survey was conducted with data collected from 1157 women over 15 years from all 25 districts in Sri Lanka.** The goal was to generate evidence to highlight the gravity of issues women experience in public spaces due to others' alcohol use and support the development of effective interventions to ensure the safety of women in such environments.

- 71% of women have felt unsafe in public places due to the presence of alcohol users
- 55.4% of women faced verbal abuse from alcohol users in public places
- 67.4% women report avoiding certain places to prevent encounters of harassment by alcohol users
- 66.3% of women are unwilling to confront or respond to alcohol users during instances of harassment due to fear.
- 62.2% of participants believe that alcohol is used as an excuse to commit harassment against women in public places.
- 98.4% of participants believe that the government should take action to protect women from the harassment that they face due to other's alcohol use in public places.

The study found that 71% of women surveyed have felt unsafe and uncomfortable in public places due to the presence of people who have used alcohol.



Have you ever felt unsafe in public places due to alcohol users?

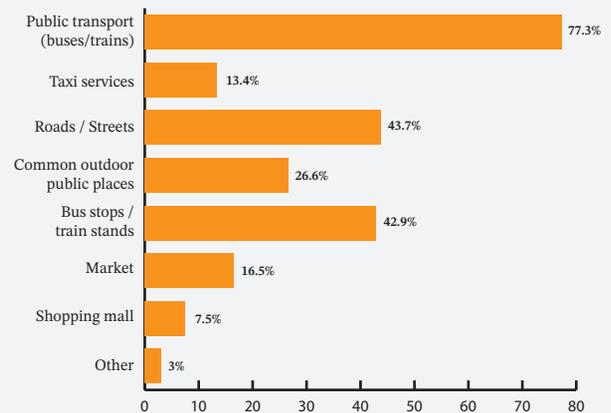
70.6% → Yes

5.5% → No

23.7% → Sometimes

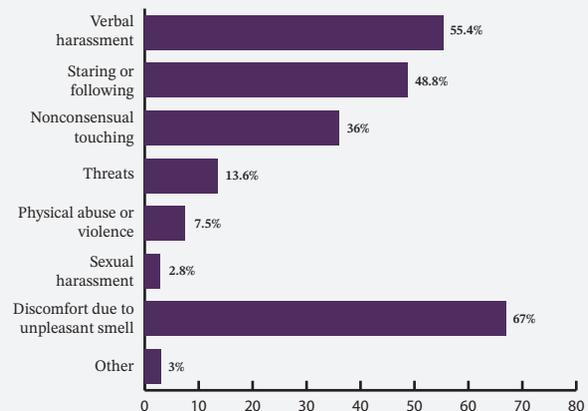
A 77% majority of respondents have felt unsafe mostly in public transport such as buses and trains, with a considerable proportion of women feeling unsafe in the streets (43.7%), bus & train stations (43%), and common outdoor public spaces such as parks (26.6%). 13.4% of women have also felt unsafe while using public taxi services.

Where have you felt unsafe the most?



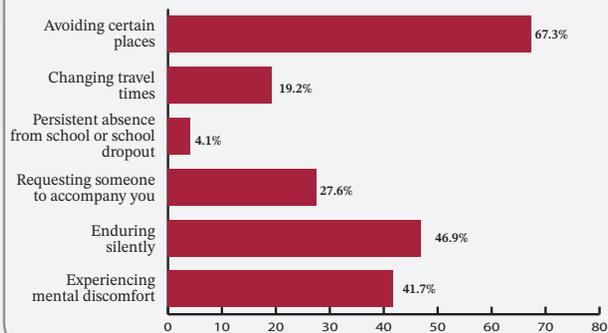
The survey found that 55.4% of women faced verbal abuse from alcohol users while 67% of participants reported experiencing discomfort due to unpleasant smells emanating from alcohol users. 48.8% of women report experiencing instances of being followed or being stared at in a way that made them feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Alarmingly, 36% of the participants report facing instances of nonconsensual touching and physical harassment.

What problems have you experienced because of alcohol users in public places?



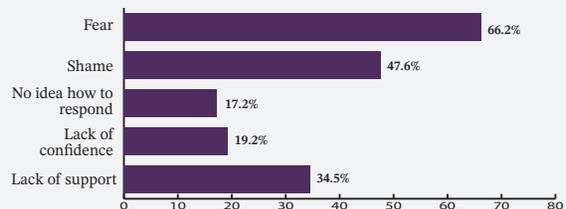
The study found that 67.3% women report avoiding certain places to prevent encounters of harassment by alcohol users and 19.2% have changed their travel schedules. Additionally, 47% of women report enduring the uncomfortable and unsafe conduct of alcohol users silently while 27.6% of participants report requesting another person to accompany them as an attempt to evade harassment. Most concerning, 41.7% of women report experiencing mental discomfort due to alcohol-related harassment.

What have you done due to fear or harassment from alcohol users?



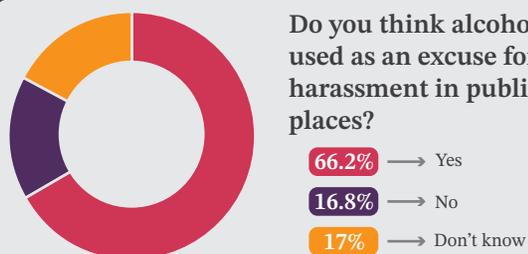
A significant proportion of respondents reported that they have not responded to harassment caused by alcohol users in public places. Among them, 66.2% of women expressed their unwillingness to confront alcohol users in such instances due to fear. 47.6% do not respond due to shame and embarrassment. 34.5% of women do not respond due to a lack of support from their surroundings and 19.2% seem to remain silent due to a lack of self confidence in addressing the situation.

Why did you refrain from responding to harassment caused by alcohol users?



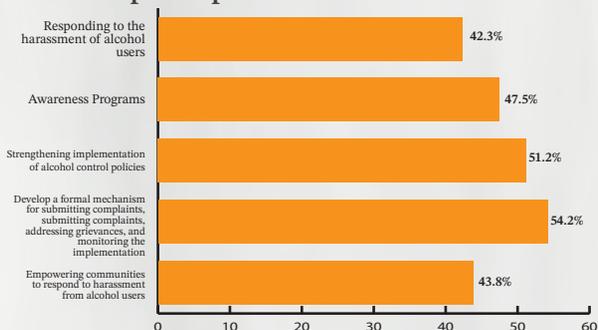
66% of participants believe that alcohol is used as an excuse to commit harassment against women in public places.

Do you think alcohol is used as an excuse for harassment in public places?



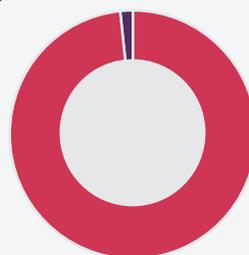
When inquired on their perception of how the situation should be addressed, 54.2% of women expressed the necessity for the development of a formal mechanism for submitting complaints, addressing grievances, and monitoring the implementation of legal actions. 51.2% of participants believe that the implementation of alcohol control policies in Sri Lanka should be strengthened and 47.5% believe that more awareness programs should exist to educate the public on the real effects of alcohol use. 44% of participants believe that empowering communities to address and respond to alcohol users in public places would assist in addressing the issue.

What do you think can be done to make public places safer for women?



An overwhelming 98.4% of participants believe that the government should take action to protect women in public places from the harassment that they face due to other's alcohol use.

Do you think the government and relevant authorities should take action to protect women from harassment in public spaces due to alcohol users?



harassment and misconduct committed after consuming alcohol is often excused or treated as acceptable. This idea has been ingrained in society from an early age. However, the reality is that alcohol does not make one unconscious or make him "forget" his actions. Due to longstanding industry interferences, alcohol is portrayed as a substance that makes a person less responsible and used as an excuse to justify inappropriate behavior. It is important to challenge this misconception and raise awareness in communities, especially among young girls and women, that alcohol consumption does not make one unconscious or justify abusive behavior. Efforts should begin from childhood to change these attitudes. At the same time, legal and social frameworks should be strengthened to ensure that alcohol consumption is never accepted as a justification or mitigating factor for harassment.

- **Ensure effective enforcement of alcohol control laws and policies:** Existing alcohol-control laws should be consistently and strictly implemented to reduce alcohol consumption in public spaces and improve public safety.
- **Strengthen the implementation of the National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) Act:** The proposed amendments to the NATA Act should be approved and implemented without delay to provide a stronger legal framework for addressing alcohol and other drug-related harms.
- **Strengthen community-level action:** While the current national campaign to eradicate the drug menace in Sri Lanka is commendable, similarly, large-scale awareness and action campaigns should be implemented at the national level to address the harms and consequences of alcohol use, aimed at protecting women and girls in public spaces.
- **Support women and girls and reduce stigma:** Targeted programmes should be developed to strengthen women's self-confidence, provide accessible support systems, and reduce the stigma, fear, and social pressure that often prevent or limit women from speaking out.

Women experience significant injustice due to men's alcohol use. According to the Non-Communicable Diseases Risk Factor Survey (STEPS 2021), alcohol consumption among women in Sri Lanka remains low, at 1.2%, and overall alcohol consumption in our country is comparatively low, at a percentage below 25%. Despite these relatively low levels, alcohol use continues to incur considerable economic, health, and social costs, affecting the wellbeing and productivity of individuals, families, and communities.

Women have had a prominent role in preventing and reducing alcohol consumption in our nation. However, increasingly the alcohol industry is targeting women through deceptive marketing and promotional activities in an attempt to ensnare them in the same cycle of alcohol that has trapped men. Therefore, ADIC emphasizes that everyone must take a stand to expose alcohol industry tactics, resist being deceived, and work toward controlling their influence in the effort to empowering and protecting women and girls in our country.

