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What Women Want

Capturing women's diverse experiences and perspectives across Greater Manchester

Rosalind Shorrocks and Anna Sanders

FOREWORD

What are women's experiences in Greater Manchester? How do they engage politically? How safe do they feel? What are their views about access to transport? What is their situation in terms of employment? What are their views on access to childcare?

Rosalind Shorrocks (University of Manchester) and Anna Sanders (University of York) explored these questions thanks to ESRC Impact Acceleration Account funding in 2022 as part of their research on women's attitudes and behaviours. The result is this important report. The value of the study lies primarily in the findings themselves and the realities around women's experiences in Greater Manchester that they elucidate. In Greater Manchester, women across all ages continue to undertake the bulk of unpaid care. The findings reveal the extent to which this gendered burden of care impacts their daily lives – ranging from accessing employment to how they travel around the region. The findings also highlight women's concerns about the cost-of-living crisis, which is felt more harshly by some groups of women than others.

In this brief preface, I would also highlight two other points.

Firstly, the way the questions were developed and their focus was agreed through a co-creation process with GM4Women2028, a coalition and charity dedicated to improving the situation for women and girls in Greater Manchester through research, dialogue and connections. Connecting academia to a civil society organisation linked to a range of practitioners in the design of the questions was a powerful statement about intent and the value of research embedded in communities rather than abstracted from and extractive of them.

The second point following on from this is that the hope is that this data will be used by policy makers. The intent of the data is for it to be useful and used beyond academic circles. My hope is also that it will be a springboard for more research and more dialogue between researchers, citizens and policy makers.

GM4Women2028's expanding motto is 'Data, Dialogue, Deeds and Determination. It is also 'We can do better'. Please read this report, share it with others and reflect on how we can continue to use data to make Greater Manchester a better place for girls and women, in all their diversity, to live, work and prosper.

Helen Pankhurst CBE

Convenor and Trustee of GM4Women2028.

INTRODUCTION

This report is a collaboration between academics at the University of Manchester and campaigners at GM4Women2028.¹ Our aim was to measure women's experiences and preferences – in their diversity – across Greater Manchester. Regionally-disaggregated quantitative data on women's perspectives, responding to regional-specific policy challenges and priorities, is rarely collected. We argue such data is crucial to ensure women's voices are part of policymaking conversations.

Our approach builds on previous work led by the 'Participation' theme of GM4Women2028, and the 'Mind the Gap: Getting Women's Voices into Policymaking' project in 2019² which called for a varied set of techniques and tools to ensure women's perspectives are included in policymaking.³ We use survey data to build a picture of the experiences and preferences of women in Greater Manchester. Using quantitative data in this way enables us to both examine broad trends in how women experience life across the region, as well as make comparisons between different groups of women and capture a diverse range of perspectives.

We worked with campaigners within GM4Women2028 to identify the key policy priorities and problems facing women in the region, and where data of this kind would add value. This led us to focus on five key themes in the survey: Care, Employment, Transport and Active Travel, Safety, and Participation. YouGov delivered the survey to a representative sample of 1622 women in Greater Manchester in September 2022.⁴

The main results of the survey are detailed in this report. Two major themes emerge. Firstly, women's caring responsibilities impact their employment, how they travel, and their ability to participate in civic and political affairs. In 2022, GM4Women2028 made ten 'Care Asks'; the survey data here further highlights the extent to which the gendered burden of care has consequences for women's lives that need to be taken seriously by policymakers. Secondly, women across Greater Manchester are very concerned about the cost-of-living crisis, but some groups of women are more impacted than others. The cost-of-living crisis interacts with other issues women are contending with; for example, the cost of childcare and transport, and how safe they feel in their local area.

We also found that women's civic participation varied. A substantial proportion of women did not participate in community or political affairs, and many women were not interested in getting more involved or faced barriers to doing so. To us, this shows the importance of the data. The survey tells us about women's preferences and experiences that we might not find out through other means, and provides a route to identifying and communicating women's interests with a view to ensuring they are fully represented. This is even more crucial given women's under-representation within the region's political institutions; in Greater Manchester, only 2 of the local authority leaders, and 41% of councillors, are women.

The findings in this report provide an evidence-base for policy conversations that impact women and pose questions for future research into women's experiences and preferences at the regional level. Whilst we prioritised collecting responses from a large sample of women to highlight variation between different groups of women, future work could usefully compare men and women in the region. We were also unable to measure fine-grained data by ethnicity (our measure here is restricted to white versus non-white ethnic background, which we appreciate does not adequately capture the region's ethnic diversity), or to survey women and girls younger than 18. We thus present this data as sitting alongside a host of other approaches and methods for hearing women's voices.

¹ This collaboration is supported by a University of Manchester Economic and Social Research Council Impact Acceleration Account award: Surveying Women in Greater Manchester: Political Engagement, Preferences, and Behaviour, May 2022-Jan 2023. Grant Reference ES/T501979/1

² Gains, F., Culhane, L., Eseonu, T., and Sanders, A. (2020) Mind the Gap: Getting Women's Voices into Policy Making. University of Manchester, School of Social Sciences. <https://stories.manchester.ac.uk/womens-voices/index.html>

³ We have been especially influenced by the contributions from Professor Jackie Carter (University of Manchester) and Dr Anna Sanders (University of York) calling for more quantitative evidence and opinion data in this area.

⁴ See the Technical Information section at the end of the report for more details.

CARE

Use of childcare

Figure 1 shows the childcare arrangements used most by women in Greater Manchester.⁵ For all women with children under 12, the most common form of childcare used is child(ren)'s grandparents (72%); other relatives (43%) and after-school clubs (36%). Other relatively common forms of childcare for all women with children under 12 includes friends or neighbours (33%) and private nurseries (28%).

The type of childcare used by women varies according to the age of their child. Women with children under 5 are more likely than those with children aged 5-12 to be using child(ren)'s grandparents (82% versus 63%); private nurseries (51% versus 4%); state nurseries (22% versus 3%) and childminders (19% versus 6%). At the same time, women with children aged 5-12 are more likely than those with children under 5 to use after-school clubs (41% versus 32%).

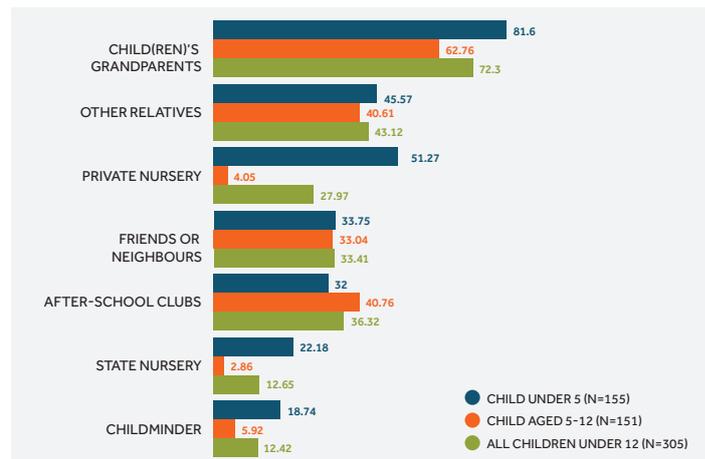


Figure 1: Childcare arrangements used most

Changes in childcare due to Covid-19

29% of women with children under 12 in Greater Manchester said that they experienced changes in their current childcare arrangements due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The most common changes that women experienced was a reduction in the childcare hours that they used (13%) and a difficulty in accessing childcare (10%). 8% of women with children under 12 said that they changed their current childcare arrangements in some other way due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

How can childcare be improved?

Women with children under 12 in Greater Manchester were asked what would most improve their childcare arrangements.⁶ Figure 2 shows that women with children under 12 are most likely to cite reducing the cost of childcare (45%) and flexibility to vary hours and days of childcare (20%). 35% of women with children under 12 said that they are completely satisfied with their childcare arrangements.

The improvements that women would like to make to their childcare arrangements also varies according to the age of their child. Figure 2 shows that the percentage of those who would like to see a reduced cost of childcare increases to 59% among women with children under 5 (versus 31% for women with children aged between 5-12). The percentage of women who would like to see more flexibility to vary hours and days of childcare also increases for women with children under 5, to 28% (versus 12% for women with children aged 5-12). Meanwhile, satisfaction with childcare arrangements drops for women with children under 5: 21% of women with children under 5 say that they are completely satisfied with their childcare arrangements, compared to 50% of women with children aged 5-12.

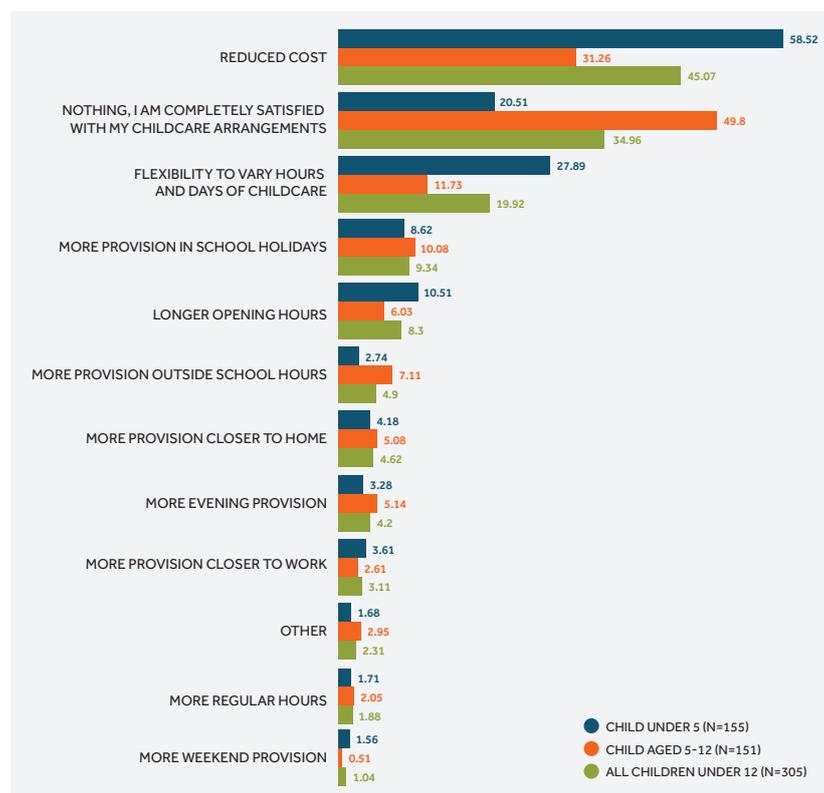


Figure 2: What would most improve your childcare arrangements?

Provision of unpaid care

Overall, 27% of women in Greater Manchester care for children they live with. Notably, 17% of women in Greater Manchester care for children they don't currently live with, and it is older women who are disproportionately likely to do so. Among women aged over 65+, 25% spend 0-19 hours per week providing unpaid care for children they don't live with. This reflects our earlier finding that grandparents are often used as a form of childcare, and indicates older women are often filling gaps in caring provision.

⁵ Figure 1 is based on the age of the youngest child. For example, if a respondent has children who are 3 and 8 respectively, the respondent is counted in the 'child under 5' category.

⁶ We asked women to select the two most important improvements they would like to see.

Impact of unpaid care on paid working arrangements

Women were asked whether they had made any changes to their paid working arrangements due to undertaking unpaid care. 17% of women said they had either reduced their hours or gone part-time due to caring for children they currently live with. This rises to 36% for women with children under 12. 9% of women also said that they had avoided taking a job with more responsibility due to caring for children they currently live with. Again, this rises to 19% for women with children under 12.

We also find that there are changes to paid work arrangements among women who care for children that they do not currently live with, although these changes are less common. 7% of women said that they had reduced their hours or gone part-time to care for children they do not currently live with. This increases to 8% among women over 65.

Summary

Providing unpaid care has an impact on women's employment, with many women in Greater Manchester reducing their hours or going part-time. This is especially the case for women with children under 5, who are also more likely to cite the cost of childcare as a concern. As it stands, the UK currently has some of the highest childcare costs in the world.⁷ Government-subsidised childcare for working parents does not cover children of all ages, can only be used at certain times of year, and does not cover additional costs, such as food and nappies. Perhaps as a result, we find that a significant proportion of older women are reporting caring for children who they do not live with, suggesting that older women are filling in the gaps created by expensive and inflexible formal childcare options.

Our findings suggest that there is a greater need for affordable and flexible childcare in Greater Manchester to ensure that women can access employment, especially for women with children under 5. Providing affordable childcare is especially important given the current cost-of-living crisis, which will likely mean that women will have less disposable income each month for childcare.

EMPLOYMENT

Changes to employment due to Covid-19

Over half of women in Greater Manchester (52%) experienced changes to their employment due to Covid-19. The most common changes to employment that women in Greater Manchester said they have experienced are working a greater proportion of hours from home (23%) and working more hours overall (11%). Other changes that women said they experienced were changing their work pattern (for example, working on different days/times of day) (9%); working fewer hours overall (8%); and changing jobs (8%). Less common, although still notable, is that 7% of women in Greater Manchester said that they lost their job due to the pandemic.

Women in Tameside (30%); Stockport (28%) and Manchester (28%) were most likely to experience working a greater proportion of their hours from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Those aged 25-44 were also more likely to work a greater proportion of their hours from home (29%), compared to women of other age groups.

Perceptions of pay

A plurality of women in Greater Manchester do not feel their pay reflects their skill level, experience, and qualifications. Figure 3 shows the extent to which women in Greater Manchester agree or disagree with the statement, 'Considering my qualifications, experience and skill level, I feel I get paid appropriately'. Overall, 34% of women in Greater Manchester agreed that they were paid appropriately, while 46% disagreed. There are no significant differences across local authority. However, there is variation among women based on their age, whether they have children, and their ethnicity.

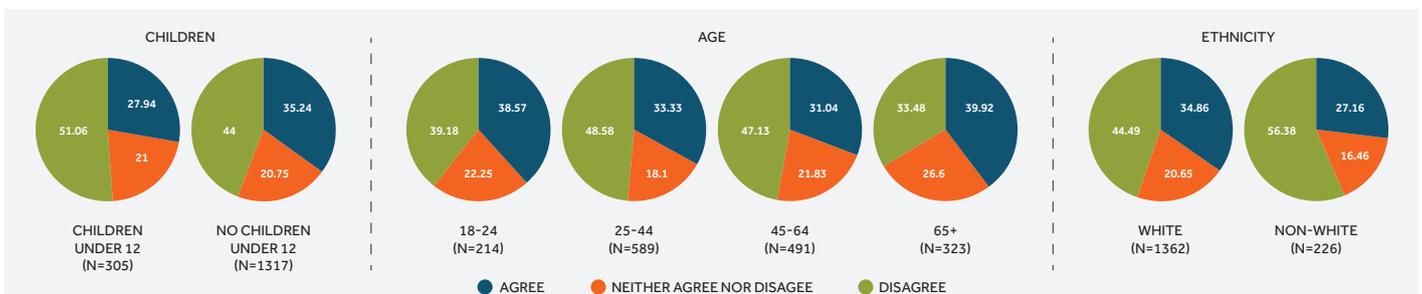


Figure 3: Agreement and disagreement with 'Considering my qualifications, experience and skill level, I feel I get paid appropriately'

Those aged 25-44 and 45-64 are more likely than other age groups to disagree that they are paid appropriately, with 49% and 47% of these groups disagreeing respectively. This suggests that those aged 25-64 are generally less satisfied with their wages compared to other age groups, given their skills, experience and qualifications. One possible explanation for this finding is that women of these ages may have taken time out the labour market in recent years to undertake unpaid care.

⁷ OECD (n.d.) 'Net childcare costs' <https://data.oecd.org/benwage/net-childcare-costs.htm>

28% of women with children under 12 in Greater Manchester agreed that they are paid appropriately, compared to 35% of women without children under 12. Similarly, 51% of women with children under 12 in Greater Manchester disagreed that they are paid appropriately, compared to 44% of women without children under 12. In other words, women with children under 12 appeared to be less satisfied with their pay compared to women without children under 12. Again, these differences may be due to women taking time out of the labour market to care for children.

Non-white women were less likely to think they are paid appropriately given their skills, experience and qualifications. 35% of white women agreed that they are paid appropriately, compared to 27% of non-white women. Moreover, 45% of white women disagreed that they are paid appropriately, compared to 56% of non-white women. These differences are likely due to the structural inequality and discrimination that women of colour face in the labour market.⁸

Summary

Greater Manchester's Good Employment Charter commits to developing "diverse, equal and truly inclusive working conditions across Greater Manchester"⁹. The results here suggest that efforts are needed to ensure women's experiences of employment are improved.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed women's working lives in Greater Manchester. Our findings show that most women experienced changes to their employment, with a substantive proportion of women now working more hours from home. This highlights that there is a need for employers in Greater Manchester to adapt to these changes and new ways of working.

Our findings also show that a significant proportion of women in Greater Manchester do not think they are paid appropriately given their skill level and experience. This is especially the case for women of colour and women with children. However, examining perceptions of pay by 'white'/non-white categories likely masks variation among women of different ethnicities. Analysis shows that, at the national level, pay gaps vary by ethnicity, with Black African women experiencing the lowest pay on average.¹⁰ Further research using regionally-disaggregated data should make efforts not only to explore women's pay in relation to men's, but to examine intersectional differences among women.

Underemployment and low pay has an impact on women's lives. Those experiencing low pay are likely to feel the impacts of a rising cost-of-living more acutely. Women's concentration in low paid jobs also means their contributions are overlooked. Productivity statistics often assume that women's salaries are equivalent to their skills. As a result, this means that women's skills often go unrecognised and that their economic contributions are undervalued.¹¹ As GMCA develops its comprehensive workforce programme, taking a gendered (and intersectional) lens is essential to ensure that women's pay reflects the value of their work.

TRANSPORT AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

How women travel around Greater Manchester

The way people in Greater Manchester get around is being transformed, with a refreshed active travel mission¹², bringing bus services into public control, and creating a joined-up transport system via the Bee Network.¹³ We asked questions to understand how women currently travel around the region.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of women in the survey who travel to a series of destinations, and what percentages use a car, public transport, or active travel to get to that destination. Car usage is highest for travel to the hospital (71%), to visit friends or relatives (68%) or to the shops (67%). Public transport use (bus, train, and tram) is highest for travelling to work (23%) and leisure venues (20%), although the car is still the most common form of transport here.

Active travel is highest for travelling to the doctor (44%) and children's school (46%). Active travel is also higher than public transport for going to the shops, travelling to school, college, or university, or to a childcare provider. A large proportion of highly local journeys are thus made via active travel, mostly walking. However, even for these local journeys car is used most commonly, with the exception of travel to children's school.

It is notable that the most commonly-visited destinations (friends/relatives and shops) are also those where car usage is very high. Public transport use is higher for the relatively less common destinations of leisure venues and work, perhaps because these trips more often involve travel in and out of a town or city centre. Women are less likely to use public transport for highly local trips or trips which might not be on key transport routes (i.e. friends and relatives).

⁸ Breach et al. (2017) 'Gender pay gap by ethnicity in Britain' <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=f31d6adc-9e0e-4bfe-a3df-3e85605ee4a9>

⁹ <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/the-charter/>

¹⁰ Women's Budget Group (2017), 'Intersecting inequalities: The impact of austerity on Black and Minority Ethnic women in the UK' <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Intersecting-Inequalities-October-2017-Full-Report.pdf>

¹¹ Rubery, J. (2022), 'Gender equality and the productivity agenda' On Productivity, Policy@Manchester <https://policyatmanchester.shorthandstories.com/on-productivity/>

¹² <https://beeactive.tfgm.com/greater-manchesters-active-travel-mission/>

¹³ <https://tfgm.com/destination-bee-network>

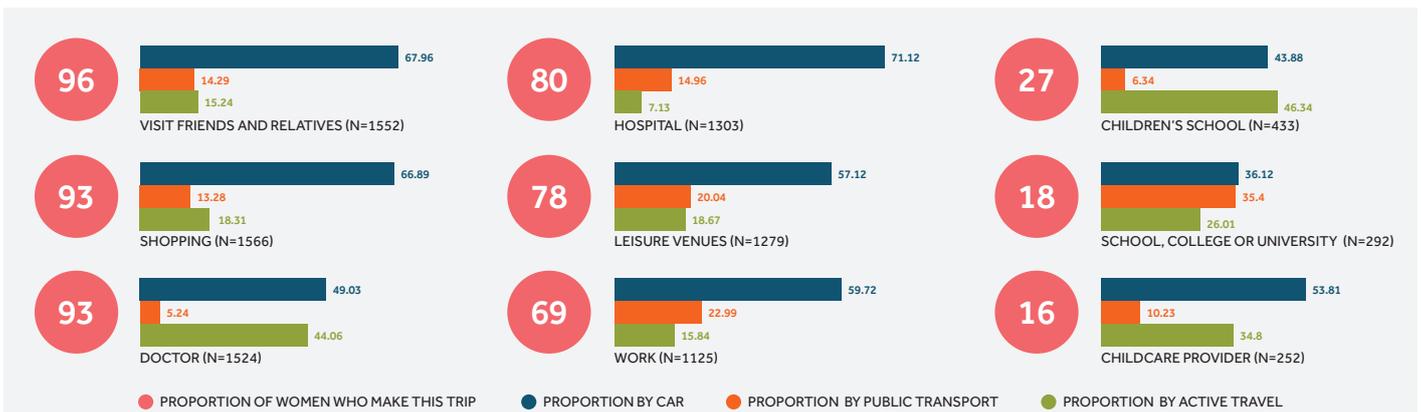


Figure 4: Transport modes

Barriers to active travel

The main barrier women gave when asked what stopped them walking more was that common distances they needed to travel to were too far (49%). This is consistent with our finding that many highly local journeys are made on foot; where they can, women often walk. We also found relatively high satisfaction with provision for walking in women's local area, with 56% saying they were satisfied with walking provision compared to 13% unsatisfied.

However, a sizeable proportion of women (28%) said safety concerns were a barrier to walking more, and of those who cited safety concerns, poor lighting and poor-quality pavements stood out as key issues.

On the other hand cycling is much less common than walking. For example, only 1% cycle to work, compared to 16% who walk. Safety concerns (32%), speed and volume of traffic (27%) and lack of confidence (27%) were cited as the main barriers. This is consistent with evidence from the Greater Manchester Walking and Cycling Index¹⁴, which shows women are much less likely to cycle than men in the region and that only a third of the region's residents think levels of cycling safety in their area are good.

Perceptions of public transport

52% of women in Greater Manchester express satisfaction with the tram, but 1/3 of women report having no access to tram services. Satisfaction drops to 39% for local buses and 32% for local trains.¹⁵ Satisfaction with bus services is highest in Manchester (54%), Tameside (45%) and Bury (44%), and lowest in Oldham (33%), Stockport (33%), Rochdale (34%), and Wigan (34%). Satisfaction with train services is highest in Tameside (46%), Stockport (39%) and Manchester (39%), and lowest in Bury (18%), Salford (21%), Oldham (22%), and Wigan (25%).

Transport cost

We asked women to give the main transport problems they experienced (see figure 5). The costs of petrol (56% of those who commute by car) and the cost of commuting on public transport (54% of those commuting using public transport) were two of the three most-cited difficulties women experienced when travelling to work (the other is traffic congestion and roadworks, selected by 49% of those who commute by car). These concerns are likely heightened due to the cost-of-living crisis.

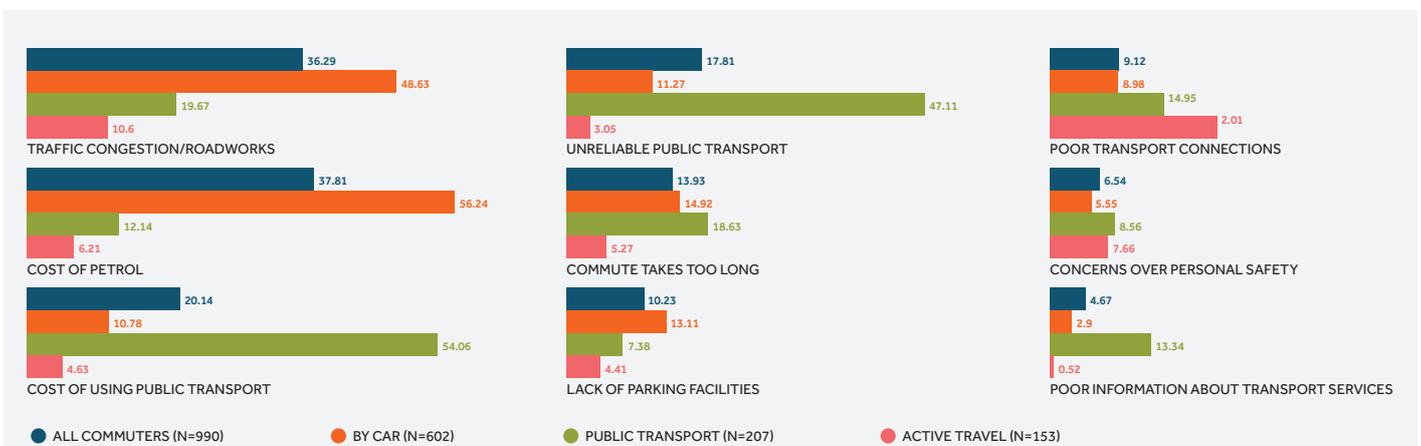


Figure 5: Problems with transport

¹⁴ <https://assets.ctfassets.net/xfhv954w443t/6EFUqHPgyKjPbf7gr5hbP/cfacc0c025f53e58a9c965db2f0afa56/greater-manchester-walking-and-cycling-index-2021.pdf>

¹⁵ Percentages calculated based on sub-sample of respondents who report access to each type of transport service.

“Trip-chaining”

Previous analysis has shown that women are more likely than men to make multi-stop trips, called ‘trip-chaining’, than men,¹⁶ due to their greater household and care responsibilities. We asked women in Greater Manchester about their trip-chaining habits specifically during their commute. 29% of women who commute in Manchester make one or more stops on their way to work. This rises to 55% of those with children under 12. A large proportion of trip-chained journeys are thus likely to be women taking children to a childcare provider or school on the way to work.

Women who trip-chain are more likely to take public transport to work than those who don’t trip-chain (36% versus 15%) and are less likely to drive (55% versus 63%). This indicates that further integrating Greater Manchester’s public transport network will particularly benefit those who make multiple stops as part of their daily commute.

Women who trip-chain are less likely to use active travel than those who do not trip-chain (8% versus 19%). Trip-chainers are more likely to cite family commitments as a barrier to walking more (14% versus 5% of those who do not trip-chain) and say that they are unable to walk children to school and continue to work (19% versus 3%). Similarly, 9% of trip-chainers said family commitments were a barrier to cycling more, compared to 2% of those who do not trip-chain. Having childcare responsibilities – and the complexity this adds to journeys – is thus a key barrier to women’s active travel.

Summary

The car remains the dominant mode of transport, especially for very common trips such as to the shops and to friends and relatives, and to hospital. This highlights that as Greater Manchester’s transport network is transformed, attention needs to be paid to how women travel to common destinations that create social benefits as well as economic benefits. We have also shown that women are more likely to be working from home – and thus commuting less – as a result of the pandemic. Ease and availability of travel to destinations other than workplaces is therefore even more important.

The cost of transport in the region is a significant concern for women; satisfaction with bus and train services is quite low and likely exacerbated by women’s concerns about the cost-of-living crisis, which we discuss later in this report. Affordability is therefore key to ensure public transport is widely accessible.

TfGM’s goal is to have 50% of daily journeys in the region to be made by walking, cycle, or public transport by 2040.¹⁷ Whilst walking is common for some journey types, women are particularly unlikely to cycle. Improving road safety for cyclists is key to increasing women’s ability to use active travel, especially for journeys that are too long to walk. Finally, women with children and who need to trip-chain as part of their commute are especially unable to use active travel for these journeys. Further research could usefully explore what would make it easier for this group to change how they travel.

SAFETY

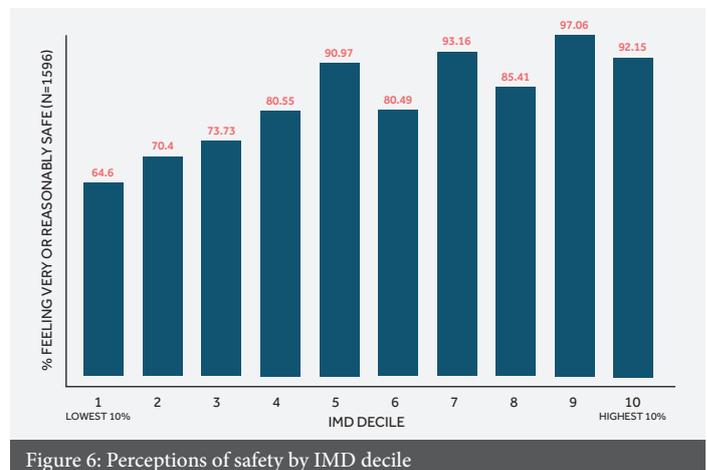
Areas where women feel safe

Across Greater Manchester, 84% of women said that they feel safe in culture and leisure venues, 75% feel safe on high streets in their local area, and 72% feel safe on residential streets in their local area. Women said that they feel less safe in night-time economy venues and local parks, with 63% and 62% of women saying that they feel safe in these areas respectively. There is little variation across local authority.

Safety in the local area

78% of women in Greater Manchester say that they feel safe in their local area. This did not significantly vary across local authority. This is likely because there are differences within local authorities by level of deprivation, which then masks variation. We therefore conducted a more granular analysis measuring perceptions of safety along with levels of deprivation. Figure 6 shows perceptions of safety at the MSOA level, against Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data. 65% of women in the ‘most deprived’ decile say that they feel ‘very safe’ or ‘reasonably safe’ compared to 92% of women in the ‘least deprived’ decile.

There are also differences by age. Perceptions of feeling safe in the local area increases with age: 70% of women aged 18-24 said that they feel safe in their local area compared to 86% of women aged 65+.



¹⁶ See e.g. Motherwell (2018) Are we nearly there yet? Exploring gender and active travel, Sustrans (<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/2879/2879.pdf>) and the National Travel Survey (<file:///C:/Users/a15014rs/Dropbox/IAA%20Surveying%20GM%20Women/Report/nts-trip-chaining.pdf>).

¹⁷ <https://tfgm.com/2040-transport-strategy>

Of the women who felt safe in their local area, the most common reasons are that they had no experience of antisocial behaviour or crime in their local area (42%) and because the local area is quiet (40%). 38% of women said that they felt safe in their local area because there is a good community, while 27% of women said they feel safe because they know lots of people in their local area.

Of the women who do not feel safe in their local area, two-thirds (66%) said that it is because they are aware of, or have witnessed, antisocial behaviour. 63% of women said that they do not feel safe because the area feels unsafe at night/after dark, while 55% of women said that they do not feel safe because they are aware of, or have witnessed, crime. Only 7% of women said that they do not feel safe because they do not know their area well enough.

Actions taken due to safety concerns

Figure 7 shows the actions women in Greater Manchester take due to concerns about their safety. Notably, 68% of women in Greater Manchester said that they avoid walking home alone at night. Other common actions taken due to safety concerns are taking specific routes when travelling alone (41%), avoiding exercise in the evening/night (38%) and avoiding using transport at certain times (33%). These actions taken by women in Greater Manchester did not vary by age, ethnicity, having children, local authority, or deprivation. This suggests that the issue of safety is one that affects all women in Greater Manchester, regardless of demographic background.



Figure 7: Actions taken due to safety concerns

Summary

Greater Manchester wants to see an increase over time in the proportion of residents who feel safe in their local area.¹⁸ In some ways, our findings here are positive: the majority of women feel safe in their local area.

However, 1 in 4 women report feeling unsafe, and a high proportion of women make changes to their daily lives in order to feel safe, including avoiding walking alone, exercise, or transport at certain times. Of particular concern is the high proportion of women (68%) who avoid walking alone at night. This means an estimated three-quarters of a million women avoid walking alone at night across Greater Manchester.

While safety is an issue that affects all women, some groups of women experience safety concerns more than others. Younger women are less likely than older women to feel safe. Women in deprived areas are also less likely to feel safe in their local area. These may be areas where local authority budgets are already squeezed. It is important that cost-cutting measures, such as reduced street lighting or reduced community support officers to deal with antisocial behaviour, are not taken at the expense of women’s safety.

If Greater Manchester is to meet its target of an increase in the proportion of residents feeling safe in their local area, it is important that women’s concerns around safety are taken into consideration. GMCA’s Gender-based Violence Strategy commits to holding perpetrators to account.¹⁹ Additionally, GM4Women2028 has called for GM leaders to ensure the safety of women in the design of public spaces and streets.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Concerns and Priorities amongst GM Women

Women were asked what they thought the most important issue was facing the country, the Greater Manchester region, and their local borough. Figure 8 shows the issues that were mentioned by more than 3% of women. The cost-of-living crisis is seen as the most pressing issue at all three geographical levels. Other major issues cited were energy, the economy, the NHS/healthcare, and poverty, reflecting the central economic concerns of women in Greater Manchester.²⁰

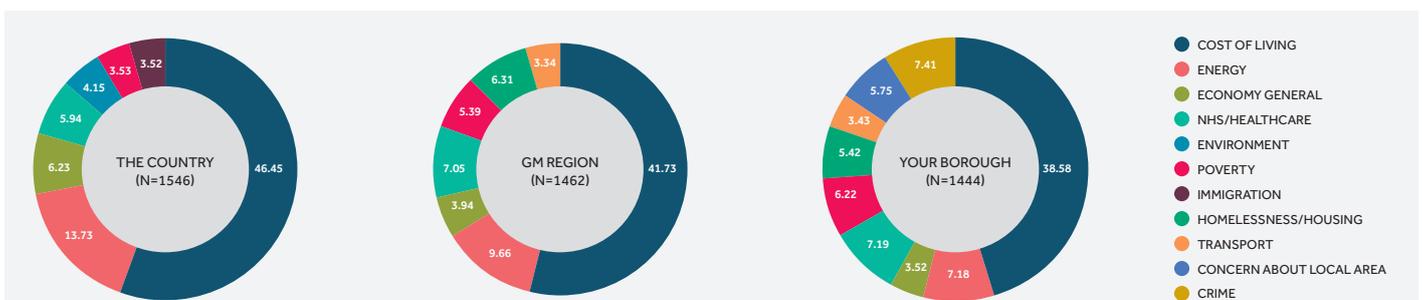


Figure 8: Most important issue facing...

¹⁸ <https://aboutgreatermanchester.com/media/jlslgbys/greater-manchester-strategy-our-plan.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/5288/gbv-accessible-versionv2.pdf>

²⁰ We asked this as an open-ended question, rather than asking respondents to select issues from a pre-determined list, and so it is hard to assess how this compares to concerns and priorities at the national level. However, the focus on the cost-of-living crisis amongst our respondents is consistent with polling (e.g. from YouGov) which shows that people in Britain are

The cost-of-living crisis was more likely to be seen as the most important issue amongst younger women (61% of 18-24 year olds and 55% of 25-44 year olds when asked about the national level) than amongst older women (35% of 65+). Only 21% of women aged 65 and over said the cost-of-living crisis was the most important issue facing their borough, compared to 56% of women aged 18-24 and 50% of those aged 25-44.

The environment and immigration are seen as more important when women were asked about the country. On the other hand, homelessness/housing and transport became more important when women were thinking about the region or their borough. The emergence of transport as a concern at the local level is consistent with the problems identified elsewhere in the data with certain types of public transport and the difficulties of commuting in the region.

Crime and concern about the local area became more mentioned when women were asked about their borough specifically. Concern about the local area covers an array of issues including the decline of local high streets, the levelling up agenda, and local government underfunding.

Women's concerns varied across boroughs. When asked about the most important issue for their local authority, women were particularly likely to say the cost-of-living crisis in Tameside (51%), Manchester (44%), Salford (42%), and Bolton (41%). The NHS/Healthcare was seen as especially important in Bury (18%), Stockport (14%), and Trafford (12%).

On 'local' issues, concern for the local area was particularly acute in Wigan (15%) and Bolton (9%); crime in Bury (12%) and Salford (12%); homelessness and housing in Manchester (14%); and transport in Trafford (9%), Stockport (6%), and Rochdale (6%).

Forms of participation

Figure 9 shows the proportion of women across Greater Manchester who reported doing various forms of political and civic engagement in the last 12 months.²¹ The most common form of participation was signing a petition on the internet, reported by 1/3 of women. Other relatively common forms of participation included boycotting products, posting or sharing about politics online, or contacting a politician or government official. By contrast, working for a party or action group, taking industrial action, attending meetings (online or in-person) and public demonstrations were quite uncommon.

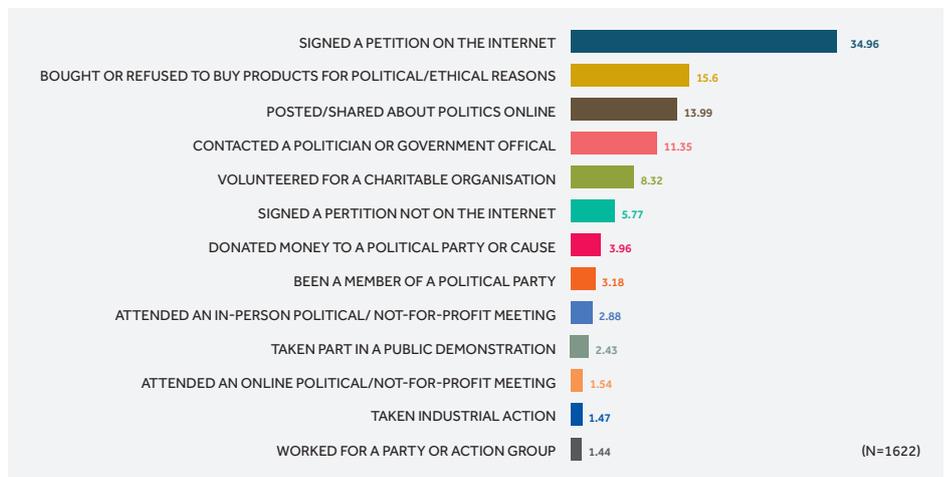


Figure 9: Participation

Who participates?

Figure 10 shows how participation varies across Greater Manchester's boroughs for the six most common forms of participation. Participation is consistently higher in Manchester, Salford, Stockport, and to a lesser extent Trafford. It is consistently lower in Oldham, Rochdale, and Tameside.

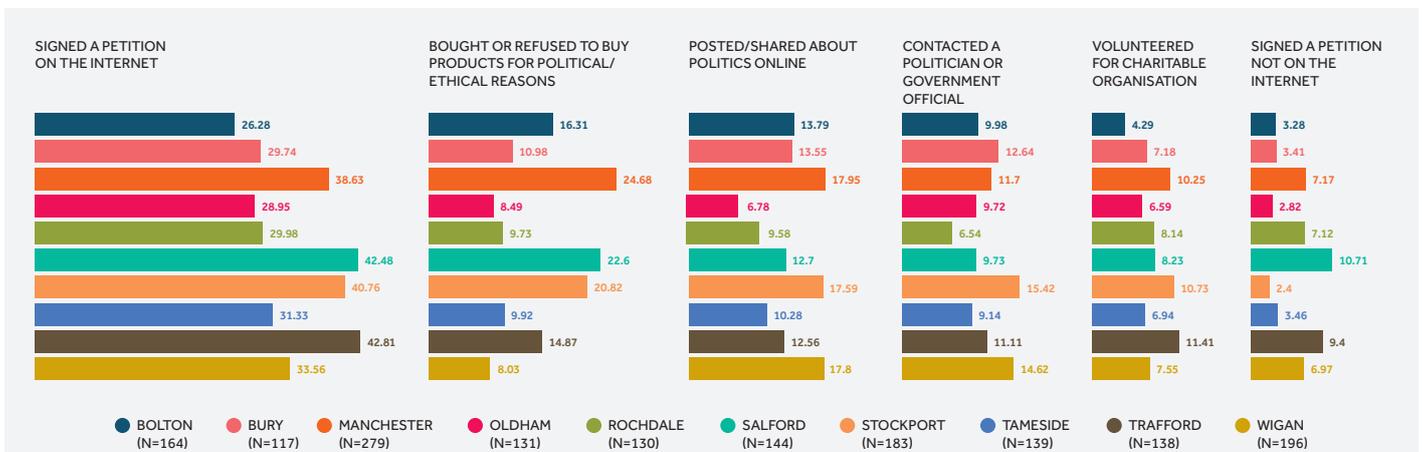


Figure 10: Participation GM boroughs

primarily concerned about the economy.

²¹ We compared this to the most recent available figures on this for the national level (British Election Study Random Probability Sample, January-June 2020 (Fieldhouse et al. 2022)).

Overall, women's political participation in Greater Manchester largely reflects that at the national level. Women in Greater Manchester are somewhat less likely than women (and men) in the country as a whole to donate money to a political party, take part in a public demonstration, or work for a political party or action group, but these are also fairly uncommon forms of participation and the differences here were small.

These differences across boroughs are largely due to differences in the educational profile of those boroughs. Participation was consistently higher amongst those with higher levels of education. 50% of women with a University degree signed a petition on the internet in the last 12 months, 33% bought or refused to buy products for political or ethical reasons, and 25% posted or shared about politics online. The equivalent percentages for women with less than GCSE or equivalent level of education are 20%, 4%, and 10% respectively.

Once accounting for educational differences, we do not find any statistically significant differences in participation by age, ethnic background, or caring responsibilities. This highlights that the women who are most confident in engaging politically are those with extended periods of education, and that those who have not spent this time in education are less likely to express their demands and preferences through political and civic engagement.

What are the barriers to greater political participation amongst women in Greater Manchester?

When asked what factors stopped them from participating more in politics and community affairs, women in Greater Manchester were most likely to cite lack of interest (50%); lack of time (22%); and lack of knowledge about opportunities (15%). Smaller numbers said that opportunities were not at convenient times (7%) and that they did not always feel welcome (6%). 7% said they were already very involved in politics and community affairs. Whilst we found that the extent of women's political participation was mostly related to women's educational experience, the barriers to greater participation not only varied by education level but also age, childcare responsibilities, and ethnic background.

Those with less educational experience were more likely to say that they were not interested in getting involved, with 70% of women with education below GCSE level giving this as a reason compared to 37% of women with a University degree. Older women who are retired are also particularly likely to say they are uninterested in getting more involved (67%).

Full-time working women (28%), women with higher levels of education (34%), and those with children under the age of 12 (28%) were more likely than other groups to say they did not have time to participate more. They were also less likely to cite lack of interest than women out of work or in part-time work, women with lower levels of education, and those without children.

Younger women were in contrast particularly likely to say that they did not know about the opportunities available (28% of 18-24 year olds) or that they did not always feel welcome (12% of 18-24 year olds). Women from a minority ethnic background were more likely to say they didn't feel welcome compared to white women (11% versus 6%).

This suggests that varied strategies are required to engage with different groups of women. The provision of targeted information about ways to get involved could help engage younger women, whilst scheduling events and activities at family friendly times and/or providing childcare could help engage women with children. Further research is required into what would make spaces more welcoming to younger women and women from minority ethnic backgrounds, although this is still only mentioned by a small proportion of these groups.

Online versus in-person participation

A plurality of women (45%) said they had no preference over whether they participated in politics and community affairs online or in-person. A sizeable minority – 31% - said they preferred online only participation with 19% preferring a mix of online and in-person and only 6% preferring in-person activities.

Political interest amongst Greater Manchester's women

Lack of interest is a key factor cited by women in Greater Manchester as a reason for why they are not more involved in political and community affairs. Existing research shows that women generally are less politically interested and engaged than men in national politics, but the gap is non-existent or even in the opposite direction for local politics.²²

We found women were more interested in national (59% very or quite interested) than Greater Manchester (55%) or borough (54%) politics, although these differences are not large. Women with more educational experience were more interested in politics at all levels than those with less educational experience.

Older women were equally likely to express interest in politics at all geographic levels, with 59% of women aged 65+ being very or quite interested in national politics, 54% in Greater Manchester politics, and 55% in local authority politics. By contrast, 61% of women aged 18-24 said they were interested in national politics, compared to 50% who said they were interested in politics in Greater Manchester and 46% who were interested in politics in their local authority. Notably, older women were also more likely than younger women to cite concern for the local area when asked about the most important issue facing their local authority (12% of 65+).

Women with children under 12 were less interested in national politics than those with children (50% versus 61%) but these differences narrow for politics in Greater Manchester (53% versus 56%) and local authority politics (56% versus 54%). Women with children are thus actually more interested in local politics than national politics, and were also less likely to cite lack of interest as a barrier to greater political involvement. This indicates having children is a source of political engagement for women, especially at the local level. Notably, the cost-of-living crisis was

²² Coffe, H. (2013) Women Stay Local, Men Go National and Global? Gender Differences in Political Interest. *Sex Roles*, 69(5-6): 323-338.

overwhelmingly cited by those with children under 12 as the most important issue facing the country (63%), Greater Manchester (62%) and their local borough (59%). These figures were much lower for those without young children (43%, 37%, and 34% respectively).

Summary

A minority of women are politically active in the region and half of women said they were not interested in getting involved in politics and community action further, likely reflecting a desire for politics and government to work and the presence of many competing priorities in women's lives. At the same time, many women expressed interest in both national and local politics, and experienced barriers to being more involved politically. Women who have spent longer in education are the most interested and involved in politics and community affairs; strategies are needed to ensure the voices of those with less educational experience are heard within political and activist spaces.

Caring responsibilities impacted on political engagement: women with children expressed relatively high levels of interest in local politics, but also said they lacked the time to get more involved. GM4Women2028 have highlighted how caring responsibilities present a challenge for women councillors in the region, and our analysis shows that this extends to other forms of exercising political voice.²³ Addressing gendered care inequality is thus important to increase women's ability to be politically active.

²³ See the Annual Participation Report 2021 (<https://www.gm4women2028.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2021-annual-participation-report.pdf>) and 2022 (<https://www.gm4women2028.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/GM4Women2028-Participation-Briefing.pdf>)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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SURVEY: TECHNICAL INFORMATION

The survey was fielded to 1622 respondents between 5th-21st September 2022 by YouGov. The survey design used targets to achieve a sample that was closely representative to the demographics of women in the Greater Manchester; the targets were local authority, age, education, economic activity, and ethnicity, taken from the Annual Population Survey 2021. When analysed, the data were also weighted using a weight constructed from these variables. The table below show how the weighted sample is distributed on these key variables.

Local authority	Age	Education	Economic activity	Ethnic background
Bolton: 10.1%	18-24: 13.22%	Below GCSE: 6.85%	Full-time work: 45%	Minority ethnic: 14.24%
Bury: 7.2%	25-44: 36%	GCSE or equivalent: 34.9%	Part-time work: 26.1%	White: 85.76%
Manchester: 17.2%	45-64: 30.33%	A-level or equivalent: 13.93%	Retired: 14.86%	
Oldham: 8.1%	65+: 20.09%	Higher below degree: 5.03%	Other: 230 14.2%	
Rochdale: 8%		Degree: 27.1%		
Salford: 8.9%		Other: 12.19%		
Stockport: 11.3%				
Tameside: 8.6%				
Trafford: 8.5%				
Wigan: 12.1%				

