Safety in Taxis Study

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Introduction & Background to the Study

This project aimed to gain an understanding of how people in Lancashire feel about their safety when using taxi services.

Taxis provide an important role in local and regional transport networks, serving both day and nighttime economies, facilitating business and tourism, enhancing public transport connectivity, promoting accessibility and inclusivity for people with disabilities and people with no access to private transport (Linton and Bray 2017). During festivals, sporting events, and peak tourism periods, taxis also provide transport links, ensuring smooth operations and increased spending in local economies.

In 2024 Chorley Taxi Association (CTA) and the Connect Centre at the University of Central Lancashire identified that there is a research gap in the UK in relation to how safe people and especially women feel when they are travelling in taxis. Recent research (Saheen 2024; Fileborn et al 2022; and Martin 2022) and anecdotal evidence suggest that taxis (and rideshare services) can be sites of sexual harassment and violence. Whilst we are not aware of any research on this subject locally, we know of several initiatives to address the safety of people, especially women when they are out at night (Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner 2024).

Regulation and licencing of taxis

There are various regulatory requirements in place in relation to the safety of vehicles including an MoT certificate. Knowledge and competency tests, as well as medical assessments are required for the registration of drivers. Technologies available in taxis include CCTV, contactless payment, GPS dispatch and tracking systems which monitor and record passenger journeys, locations, and destinations of taxis (Pakusch et al. 2021). However, little is known about how these technologies are used and misused from passengers' perspectives and there is limited knowledge of taxi passengers' experiences of safety when using taxis.

Taxis in the UK can be either hailed in the street or be prebooked. Taxis which can be hailed are known as 'hackney carriages' and those which are 'private hire vehicles' or minicabs must be prebooked and cannot use taxi ranks. These types of taxis must have an operator licence (Department of Transport 2024) which is granted by a local authority, and it is illegal for them to be hailed in the street. There has been a growth in the number of operator-licensed taxi and private hire vehicles in England in recent years. The Department of transport notes a 10.5% increase in the amount of private hire vehicles overall. Most taxis (76%) in Lancashire are private hire vehicles, as Table 1 shows. However, some local authorities, notably Wolverhampton and Knowsley, have registered a much greater number of private hire vehicles. Legislation allows private hire drivers outside London to operate anywhere in England and Wales, prompting concerns about an erosion of the link between taxi companies and local regulation arrangements which as the Mayor of Greater Manchester noted, may have implications for public safety (BBC News 2023; 2024).

Table 1: Number of taxi /PHV licences in Lancashire by Local Authority area[1]

Local authority area	Taxi	PHV	Total
Blackburn with Darwen	53	821	874
Blackpool	252	384	636
Burnley	22	253	276
Chorley	36	120	156
Fylde	97	163	260
Hyndburn	55	359	414
Lancaster	108	215	323
Pendle	71	592	663
Preston	187	541	728
Ribble Valley	49	59	108
Rossendale	121	56	177
South Ribble	105	117	222
West Lancashire	24	377	401
Wyre	160	88	248
Total	**1340**	**4145**	**5486**

Lancashire

Lancashire is a large county area in the northwest of England with an estimated population of 1,270,162. Governance consists of a two-tier county/borough council and two unitary authorities. Currently in Lancashire all taxis are licenced by either the local borough council or unitary authority.

Methods

An anonymous online survey was designed to ask respondents about their experience of using taxis and explored what makes them feel safe and unsafe when using taxis in Lancashire (see appendix 1). The survey was co-designed with CTA and included closed questions with options for respondents to provide qualitative information about their experiences of safety when using taxis in open text boxes. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the University of Central Lancashire Ethics committee (reference number BAHSS2 01207).

The online survey was launched at the beginning of November 2024 and was live for one month. The link to the survey was distributed via social media networks across Lancashire, and via the University's public relations team. Information about the survey was also shared with radio stations and news media across Lancashire.

The survey data was analysed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics. Bi-variate analysis using chi-square tests was undertaken subsequently to identify significant associations between variables where possible. Chi square tests are appropriate for assessing whether two categorical variables are associated. A categorical variable is a variable that has a finite (usually small) number of categories such as gender (e.g. men, women, non-binary). Open text answers generated qualitative data that was thematically analysed using excel.

Results

We received 655 survey responses during the fieldwork period. Data cleaning included exclusion of partially completed surveys, and ineligible surveys (respondents reported not living in Lancashire) and this resulted in 600 completed surveys for analysis.

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[1] Private Hire and Taxi Monthly 2025

Survey respondents' area of residence

Whilst the survey was distributed across Lancashire the vast majority (53%) of respondents were from Chorley. Other participants were from Preston (14%), Blackburn with Darwen (6%), Burnley (5%) and South Ribble (4%), and smaller numbers were from 8 other areas. Our collaboration with the CTA suggests that residents in Chorley were more aware of the study and survey than in other areas of the county which explains this result.

Demographic Characteristics

Appendix two provides the full tables.

Most respondents (66%) were female, and about a quarter male, with the remainder including those describing as trans woman, trans man, non-binary, self-describing or preferring not to say.

In terms of ethnicity the respondents in the sample were predominantly White, with just under a third reporting either Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, Asian/British/Welsh, and Black/Black British/Welsh. Table 3 shows that the proportion of respondents form an Asian background was broadly similar to county and national averages, however the survey had more respondents from a Black/Caribbean/African background and mixed backgrounds than in the overall Lancashire area (see Table 4).

Most respondents were aged under 40, with most aged 26-40 (42.8%) and 22.3% aged 18-25 Table 5 shows that comparison with figures for Lancashire show that this is almost double the proportion in the overall Lancashire population.

Most participants did not have a disability, with only 8% (48/600) stating they had a disability, which was described as: 'having (or would have without treatment) a long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out one or more day to day activities'.

Frequency of Travel by Taxi

Table 6 shows the frequency of travel by respondents: almost half (46%) reported using taxis a few times a week, 23% once a week, and 12% once a month. A small number (11%) said they used taxis on a daily basis, and the smallest group here (7%) reported only using taxis if there was no other travel option available.

Table 6: Frequency of Travel by Taxi

		Frequency	Percent
	Frequently e.g. going to work or school every day	66	11.0
	A few times a week	273	45.5
	Once a week	138	23.0
	Monthly or less often - e.g. going to the airport	75	12.5
	I don't travel in taxis unless there is no other option	43	7.2
	Missing	5	0.8
	Total	**600**	**100.0**

Timing of Taxi Use

The majority of survey respondents said they made taxi journeys in the evening (41%), with afternoon travel being the next most popular time (25%), 21% used taxis in the morning and 12% of respondents reported using taxis late at night. Figure 1 show the distribution of taxi travel across the day.

Figure 1: Timing of taxi use

3. What time of day do you usually travel by taxi?
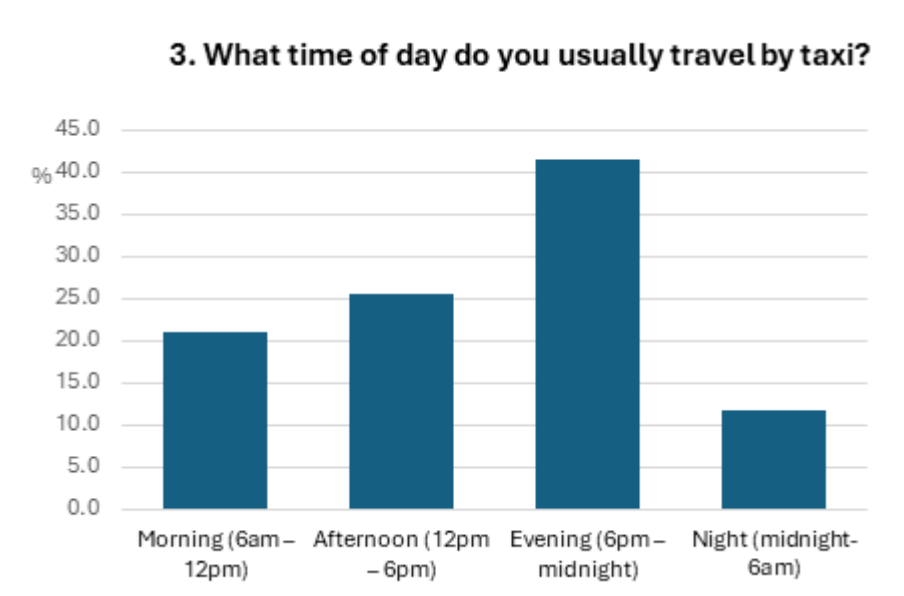
Reasons for using Taxis

Reasons for taxi use are shown in figure 2 below. In keeping with the time of day for taxi use, when asked why they use a taxi, a large number 287 of respondents said they used it for nights out. Other popular reasons included shopping, visiting friends or health appointments. In the 'other' category reasons included travel to the airport (N=12), to the train station (N=3), the car being in the garage (N=1).
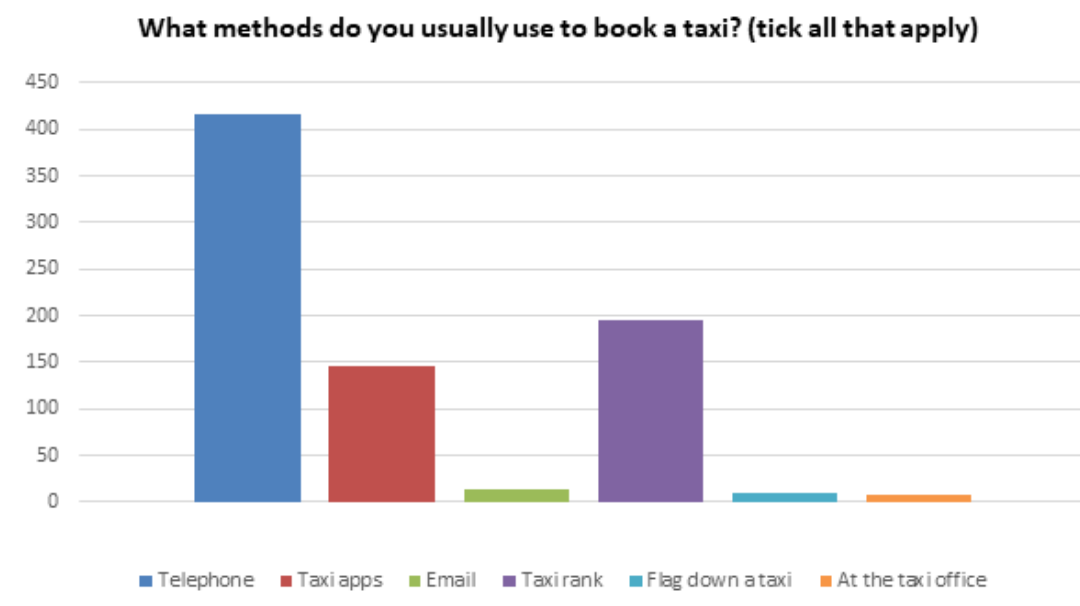
Figure 2: Reasons for Using Taxis

4. Why do you use taxis (tick all that apply)
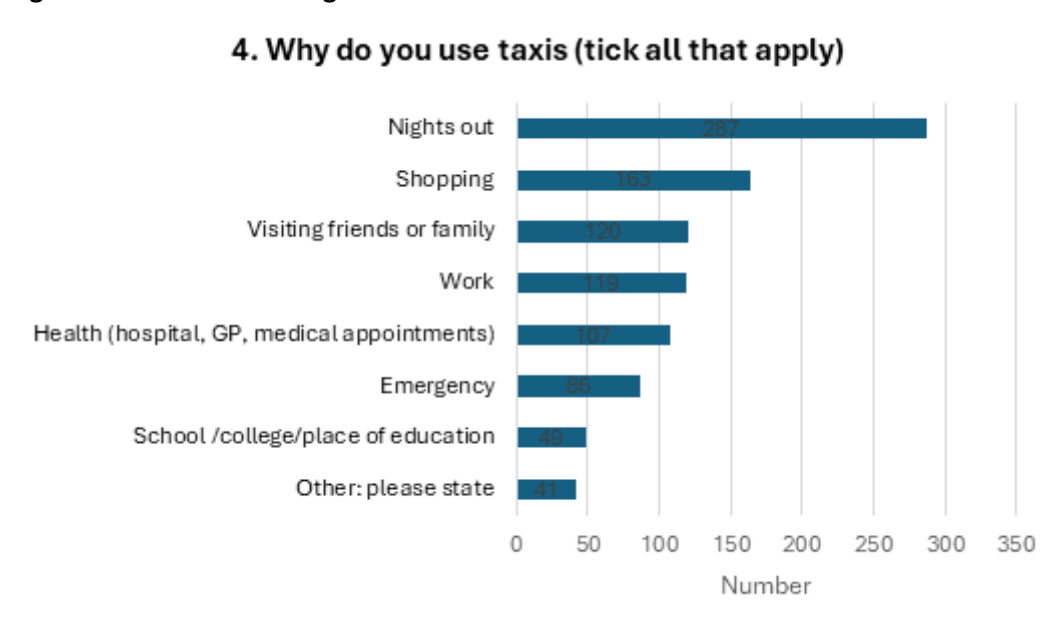
Methods for booking taxis

The majority of respondents reported that telephone was the most common methods for booking taxis with 69% of people stating this, and a taxi rank being the next most frequent method 33% and 24% had used a taxi app (this is shown in figure 3 below). Further analysis showed that 40% of respondents reported using more than one method to book taxis.

Figure 3: Methods for booking taxis

What methods do you usually use to book a taxi? (tick all that apply)

■ Telephone ■ Taxi apps ■ Email ■ Taxi rank ■ Flag down a taxi ■ At the taxi office

Reasons for Feeling Unsafe in Taxis

We asked survey respondents 'have you ever felt unsafe in a taxi?' and over a third (N=207/35%) of respondents reported that this was the case. Respondents could select as many options as applied from a list and the most frequently reported were that the driver asked personal questions (47% of responses) and the driver speaking a different language to them (35% of responses). A range of other reasons for feeling unsafe were also reported, including issues with drivers making inappropriate comments, having telephone conversations, driving behaviour, including texting whilst driving, "road rage", being alone in the taxi, driver diverting from the route/not knowing the area, as well as concern about the driver knowing where they lived, timing of the journey, condition of the taxi, and doors being locked. Gender was significantly associated with respondents' feelings of safety in taxis: 40.4% of women and non-binary respondents said they had felt unsafe compared to 20.6% of men (p =<.001). Analysis by other demographic characteristics such as age was undertaken but did not reveal any other significant associations.

Table 7: Reasons for feeling unsafe in taxis

	Frequency	% of responses 207
Driver asking personal questions	98	47.3
Driver speaking a different language	73	35.3
Listening to the driver's phone conversations to others (e.g. on speaker phone)	64	30.9
Driving style	60	29.0
I was alone	60	29.0
Driver making inappropriate comments during or after the journey	59	28.5
Not taking the usual route	51	24.6
Driver texting whilst driving	43	20.8
Driver's badge number was not visible/on display	42	20.3
Condition of the car	33	15.9
Driving style: road rage / shouting at other drivers	29	14.0
The driver knowing where I lived	24	11.6
Pulling over in unknown area	18	8.7
The time of day of the journey	18	8.7
Doors locked	16	7.7
Sitting in the front	14	6.8
Don't know the taxi firm	11	5.3

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Disagreement with taxi drivers

Just over a quarter (27.3%) of respondents reported that they had disagreed with a taxi driver. This was most commonly due to harassment (N=48/164, 29.3%), the fare (N=39/164, 23.8%) or their driving style (N=38/164,23.2%).

Table 8: Have you ever had a disagreement with a taxi driver?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	164	27.3
No	409	68.2
Not sure	21	3.5
Missing	6	1.0
Total	**600**	**100**

What would make you feel safe in a taxi?

Respondents were asked to choose from pre-selected options about what would make them feel safe in a taxi. This is detailed in table 9 below. Checking and confirming licensing was the most frequently reported suggestion, along with being able to contact someone or report an incident during the journey. CCTV was the third most frequently reported suggestion. The majority of those who said that a female-only taxi service were female (90%). Other suggestions and comments included: speed limiters, having LGQBTQ+ friendly taxi firms, apps or GPS tracking, clearer signage within the taxi and communicating details about the driver. Some comments were made by respondents who wanted to share details of negative experiences such as drivers not driving within the law (drinking, speeding, going through red lights), texting or watching television whilst driving, being racist and one person contacting the police after being taken to a different town.

Table 9: What would make you feel safe in a taxi?

	Frequency	% of 600
CCTV	224	37.3
Being able to check the drivers' licence number on a website	432	72.0
Having a number to ring during the journey	305	50.8
Having a female only taxi company	98	16
Other	17	2.8

NB: multiple response question respondents could give more than one answer

Additional comments about safety in taxis

Survey respondents highlighted several safety concerns regarding taxi and private hire services in the free text boxes. Key issues included the need for full driver details at booking, app-based safety tracking, and the ability to share journey details. Many emphasised the importance of licensed, clearly marked vehicles and local authority oversight rather than licensing from other areas. Concerns were raised about fake driver profiles, poor driving standards, and language barriers. Respondents also mentioned uncomfortable or unsafe interactions, such as drivers making personal comments, using phones while driving, or taking longer routes to overcharge. A small number described of distressing personal experiences, including incidents of misconduct and a lack of police action, leading to a general distrust of taxi services. One person commented on their motivation for taking part in the study: "*I had an experience in a taxi 20 years ago when I was taking my son to school. It affected me so much that I have not been in a taxi since. This study is very important for the industry*".

Discussion

The majority of respondents to the survey were female, aged under 40 and living in the Chorley area.
A third of respondents said they had felt unsafe in taxis, with greater numbers of women feeling unsafe. Furthermore, many journeys took place in the evening and were associated with nights out. Initiatives to address safety of people out at night are found in many areas, including in Blackpool, Lancashire (Blackpool Council, 2025). Such schemes enable people out in town and city centres at night to safely access spaces and call taxis. However, these findings suggests that such schemes may also need to work more with taxi companies to provide greater reassurance to their users about their safety. Further research might explore passengers' experiences in more depth through qualitative methods. The very small number of respondents reporting incidents in this study noted that they lacked a positive police response when incidents were reported.

One finding was that a minority of participants said they did not feel safe when drivers are speaking another language. Lancashire is a diverse multicultural area and yet this finding suggests low levels of tolerance from some taxi users. This raises further questions about attitudes and whether this is indicative of general intolerance and racism within some or a minority of Lancashire residents, or age group.

Taxi driving as an occupation is also fraught with safety concerns and further research could explore safety issues with taxi drivers, to determine how they manage their own safety, and how equipped they are to deal with disagreements and difficult passengers. Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) include taxi drivers in initiatives to identify and respond to safeguarding incidents such as violent crime or safeguarding concerns, that they might encounter, recognising taxi drivers' play a role in public safety. Some CSPs provide bystander training to raise awareness of safeguarding and support taxi drivers (and others within the nighttime economy) in their role. This survey's findings suggests that issues of safety and taxis are multifaceted: as some taxi users do not feel safe in taxis. Further work and research are needed to explore taxi drivers' experiences and competencies in responding to safety concerns either their own or of their passengers.

Most respondents stated that they would like to be able to check and confirm licencing arrangement, suggesting that taxi companies and councils could improve current signage and provision. For example, providing a scannable QR code or website URL in taxis. The survey did not distinguish between taxis and private hire vehicles (PVH), we simply asked about safety in taxis, so it is likely that responses related to both taxis and other PHV, possibly including app-based services such as Uber. Further research could explore whether taxi users are fully aware of the differences between taxi types, ways to hail a taxi, and what potential implications this has for their feelings of safety.

Limitations of the study

This was a small-scale survey in one local authority area in England and not generalisable but does provide some indication of the safety issues passengers experience when using taxis. Although the sample size was large, the findings may not be generalisable to wider and other areas, and differences may be seen in other populations or age groups. Furthermore, statistical analysis of the data was limited by the size and self-selecting nature of the sample. Survey data from this small survey has provided largely quantitative data and therefore detail or full understanding of the safety issues that are reported is limited to the additional comments that some respondents chose to give.

Conclusions and next steps

This small-scale study has highlighted several safety concerns. Further research could explore:

- o Differences by hackney carriage or PHV
- o taxi drivers' experiences of ensuring passengers and their own safety
- o The suitability of methods to inform and support taxi passengers regarding safety
- o The experiences of public who use taxis and taxi drivers using qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews
- o The role of statutory agencies including local authorities and community safety partnerships in monitoring and supporting public safety
- o Comparison across different areas of the UK to explore what factors such as local geography demography, council areas influence safety in taxis
- o Survey or other searches to explore what is happening in other areas to promote safety of taxi passengers.

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Purple Leaf (no date) *Bystander Training packages for Nightime Economy* Safer Streets | Purple Leaf

Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

1. Which local authority area in Lancashire do you normally live in?	Blackburn with Darwen Blackpool Burnley Chorley Fylde Hyndburn Lancaster Pendle Preston Ribble Valley Rossendale South Ribble West Lancashire Wyre I don't live in Lancashire
2. How often do you travel by taxi?	Frequently e.g. going to work or school every day A few times a week Once a week Monthly or less often - e.g. going to the airport I don't travel in taxis unless there is no other option
3. What time of the day do you usually travel by taxi?	Morning (6am – 12pm) Afternoon (12pm – 6pm) Evening (6pm – midnight) Night (midnight -6am)
4. Please tell us why you use taxis (tick all that apply):	Work School /college/place of education Health (hospital, GP, medical appointments) Shopping Visiting friends or family Nights out Emergency Other please state
5. Which methods do you usually use to book a taxi?	Telephone Taxi apps Email Taxi rank Flag down a taxi At the taxi office
6. Have you ever felt unsafe in a taxi?	Yes No
6b. If yes, please tell us what made you feel unsafe (tick all that apply)	Asking personal questions Driver making inappropriate comments during or after the journey Pulling over in unknown area Driving style Listening to the driver's phone conversations to others (e.g.

	on speaker phone) Condition of the car Not taking the usual route Driver texting whilst driving Driving style: road rage / shouting at other drivers Driver speaking a different language Don't know the taxi firm Doors locked I was alone The time of day of the journey Driver's badge number was not visible/on display The driver knowing where I lived Sitting in the front
7. Have you ever had a disagreement with a taxi driver?	Yes No Not sure
7b. What was the disagreement about?	Fare charged or payment problems Route Their driving style Harassment Other
8. Would any of the following make you feel safer in a taxi?	CCTV Being able to check the drivers' licence number on a website Having a number to ring during the journey Female-only taxi company Other, please state
About you	
9. Which of the following best describes your current gender identity?	Man Woman Trans man Transwoman Non-binary I prefer to self-describe, please state I prefer not to say
10. What best describes your ethnic group?	Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups White Other ethnic group
11. Which best describes your age	18-25 26-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71-80 81 or over Prefer not to say
12. Disability/disabilities Do you consider yourself to have a disability that has (or would have without treatment) a long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out one or more day to day activities?	Yes No Prefer not to say

APPENDIX OF TABLES

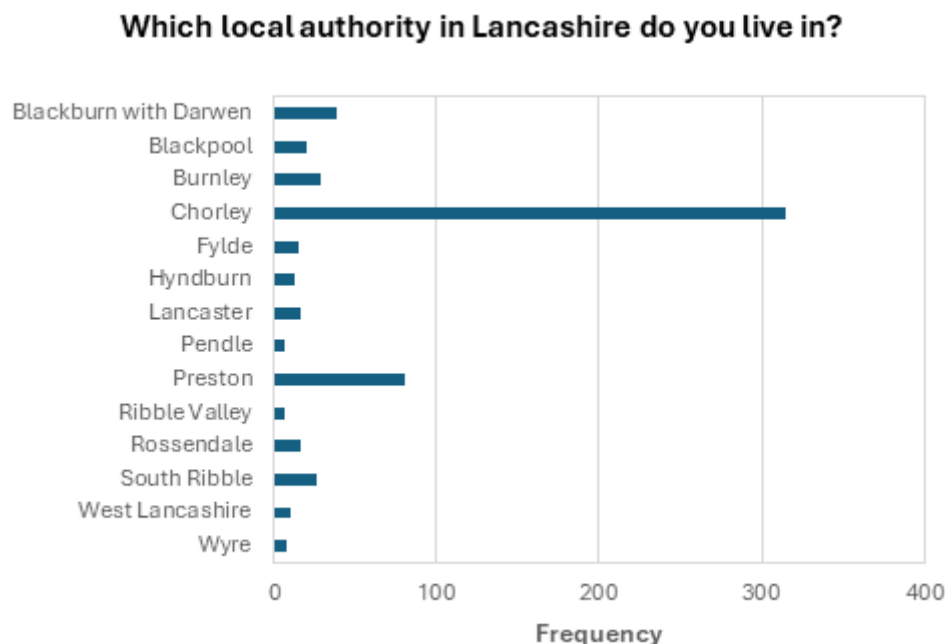**Table 1: Survey respondents Local Authority areas**

Which local authority in Lancashire do you live in?

Table2: Gender of respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Man	161	26.8
Woman	393	65.5
Trans Man	2	0.3
Trans Woman	11	1.8
Non-binary	8	1.3
I prefer to self-describe (please state)	1	0.2
I prefer not to say	10	1.7
Missing	14	2.3
Total	**600**	**100.0**

Table 3: Ethnicity of respondents

	Frequency	%
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	58	9.7
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	45	7.5
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	51	8.5
White	418	69.7
Other ethnic group	12	2.0
Missing	16	2.7
Total	**600**	**100**

Table 4: Comparison of Ethnicity with Lancashire and England

	Survey	Lancashire[1]	England[1]
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	9.7	10.4	9.6
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	7.5	0.7	4.2
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	8.5	1.6	3
White	69.7	86.6	81.0
Other ethnic group	2.0	0.8	2.2
Missing	2.7	-	-
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

[1]2021 Census (ONS)

Table 5: Age of Respondents

	Frequency	Survey %	Lancs %
18-25	134	22.3	11.9
26-40	257	42.8	22.8
41-50	109	18.2	15.1
51-60	52	8.7	17.9
61 -70	19	3.2	14.5
71-80	6	1.0	11.8
81 or over	3	0.5	6
Prefer not to say	1	0.2	
Missing	19	3.2	
Total	**600**	**100.0**	**100**