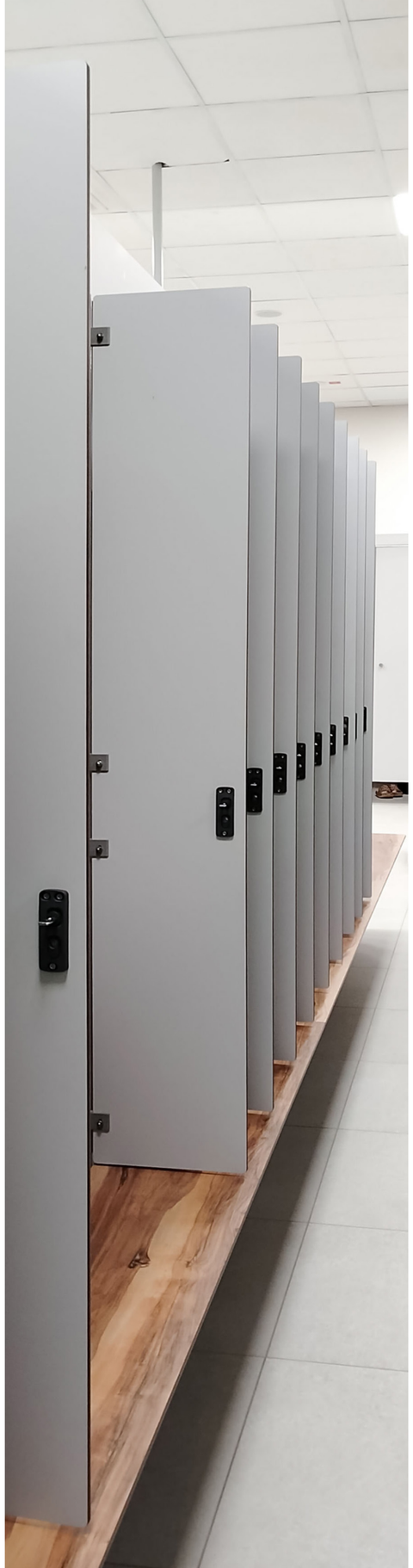
IT HAPPENS EVERY TIME

EXPERIENCES OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN STOPPED, QUESTIONED, OR HARASSED ACCESSING GENDERED SPACES

BY DR TRENT GRASSIAN

TRANSACTUAL



SUMMARY

Violence and harassment against trans people is nothing new in the UK. But since the 16 April 2025 Supreme Court judgment on the definition of sex in the Equality Act, and the subsequent publication of the EHRC's interim guidance and updated Code of Practice for Services, Public Functions, and Associations, trans people report growing levels of harassment, discrimination, and segregation. The concomitant impacts have been widely felt by all those who do not conform to societal gender norms.

To monitor these trends, TransActual collected the testimonies of people who have been stopped, questioned, or harassed when using (or trying to use) gendered spaces.[1] Between May 2025 and August 2026, we collected 338 stories, 260 of which are from the period following the Supreme Court judgment.

We heard from people who had been sexually assaulted after trying to access public toilets, who had been subjected to physical violence and unwanted contact at their local gym, and who experienced verbal harassment, threats, and intimidation simply for existing in a way that doesn't wholly conform to gendered norms in the UK.

These findings are deeply disturbing, yet reflective of the reality that, even before these new guidelines, 62-73% of trans people had experienced harassment or violence,[2] while being more than four times more likely than non-trans people to be victims of violent crime.[3] However, our findings demonstrate that it is not just trans people who are being affected by the new guidelines.

It is clear that the Supreme Court Judgment and EHRC guidance have empowered staff to scrutinise service users' and staff members' assigned birth sex and current anatomy. This widespread gender policing has, in turn, encouraged gender vigilantes to mete out violence and harassment against anyone they suspect of being trans.

Content warning: This report includes accounts of sexual and physical violence, transphobia and suicide.

1 Gendered spaces are places that are organised, designed, governed, or socially policed in ways that reflect gender norms—such as toilets, changing rooms, shelters, hospital wards, sports facilities, dormitories, and some faith or cultural spaces. This includes both formally sex-segregated facilities and mixed-gender settings that are nevertheless socially policed, including gyms or staff rooms.

2 Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Context and characteristics of hostility towards sexual orientation and transgender identity, Crown Prosecution Service, [online], available at: https://www.cps.gov.uk/types-crime/hate-crime/context-and-characteristics-hostility-towards-sexual-orientation-and-transgender-identity.

3 Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, Transgender people over four times more likely than cisgender people to be victims of violent crime, 23 March 2021, available at: https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/ncvs-trans-press-release/.



KEY FINDINGS

Of the 260 incidents reported to us following the Supreme Court judgment on 16 April 2025:

- **Nearly one in ten (9%, 22)** involved **physical or sexual violence**;
- **One in four (25%, 64)** involved **verbal harassment, threat, or intimidation**;
- **Nearly one in three (31%, 81)** of those reporting an incident were aggressively **misgendered**, often involving use of derogatory language and/or attempts to publicly humiliate someone;
- **Members of the public** (including **work colleagues**) perpetrated more than **one in four incidents (28%, 72)**, with many cases involving those claiming they are trying to uphold "the law" as they openly harass and assault those whose gender or biological history they are questioning;
- **Bouncers and security** were involved **in 10% (25)** of incidents, with individuals reporting having been expelled from venues simply for trying to use the bathroom;
- **18% (47) of incidents** had **witnesses**, who often stood by and did nothing to help;
- **One in five incidents (20%, 51)** involved someone being told they **can only use the disabled bathroom**.
- **More than one in six incidents (17%, 45)** involved someone **being stopped while attempting to comply with the EHRC guidelines**, e.g. by using the toilet intended for their sex assigned at birth;
- **One in ten (10%, 26)** affected individuals **self-identified as cis** (not trans), including women who have facial hair due to polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), women with short hair, and men with long hair and/or wearing makeup;
- **Trans women were the most likely to be targeted (43%, 113)**, followed by **trans men (20%, 53)**, and **nonbinary people (14%, 36)**; and
- **Nearly one in four incidents (24%, 63) happened at work**, with many saying they now have no toilets they can use or are having to walk 15 minutes or more to access their 'designated' toilets.

RESULTS

Unprecedented levels of harassment and violence

Going to the loo, gym, social clubs, or work should be a safe, routine occurrence for everyone in the UK. This research demonstrates that, for many people, these experiences are becoming increasingly dangerous.

Staff and vigilantes alike, empowered by the recent Supreme Court judgment and EHRC guidance, are openly harassing and targeting people of all gender identities in the name of 'following the law.'

With 28% (72) of incidents perpetrated by members of the public or work colleagues, it is clear that, despite the EHRC's assurances that bystanders should not challenge individuals in gendered spaces, many people misunderstand the nature of these guidelines and how they are to be enforced.

We received many testimonies of men aggressively entering women's restrooms – often in groups – banging and even breaking down stall doors, shouting abuse, filming people, and blocking exits, often while shouting that they were trying to stop others from breaking the law.

In total: 9% (22) of reported incidents involved physical or sexual violence; one in four (25%, 64) involved verbal harassment, threat, or intimidation; and nearly one in three (31%, 81) involved someone being aggressively misgendered, including use of derogatory and intimidating language and/or attempts to publicly humiliate someone.

> I FEEL LIKE I AM FRAZZLED ALL THE TIME. I AM CONSTANTLY ANXIOUS. THIS INCIDENT THOUGH MADE ME FEEL REALLY VIOLATED.

This includes a trans man who was accosted while washing his hands in the men's bathroom at his local train station, where he was asked if he was *"one of them … someone who thinks they're better than the law"*, before being told to *"f*ck off out of here and kill yourself, why don't you. You've got a vagina, so you're a woman. I could rape you, you know."* The affected party described *"genuinely fear[ing] for [his] life."*

Trying to follow the new guidance does not guarantee safety

Whether people are following the new EHRC guidance or not, they are still experiencing harassment and violence, with **17% (45) of incidents involving someone using facilities that matched the guidance's recommendations (i.e., a facility that aligns with their sex assigned at birth).** This includes a transmasculine person attempting to follow the code by using a women's dressing room, only to have another shopper aggressively shout at them and bang on their cubicle door. They were then confronted by two staff members and six shoppers, before being told to leave while multiple shoppers followed them out of the shop, filming the entire time.

Similarly, a trans woman was reported to security and made to leave her local pool after using the men's changing room. She reported that staff then questioned her *"medical background and genital configuration."* Describing the incident's impact, she said:

"The fact that this is happening to me regularly while I try to adhere to the ruling means that I am repeatedly and protractedly in fight or flight stress situations. I feel like I am frazzled all the time. I am constantly anxious. This incident though made me feel really violated. It made me feel vulnerable to another sexual or violent assault. It made me feel like I have no say over who gets to see my body and no bodily rights anymore. I feel violated. I feel degraded, mocked, worthless. Worse yet, I feel that this is the intention and I feel hopeless."

A lack of disabled and gender-neutral facilities

With huge reductions in public toilets – now just 1 for every 15,481 people in England,[1] finding accessible toilets can be particularly challenging for those who need them. Despite approximately 250,000 people needing accessible facilities, just 9,000 disabled toilets exist.[2] Add to this building regulations introduced in 2023 that actively sought to curb the construction of new gender-neutral bathrooms[3], and it is no surprise that there are many times when no gender-neutral toilet facilities are available.

Yet, 20% (51) of incidents involved someone being told these were their only options. This often meant individuals were left with no access to facilities at all.

One person described being told they can't use any gendered facilities in their workplace of 1,200 people and only one gender-neutral toilet, while another person told us they can no longer go to their local swimming pool after being banned from using gendered changing facilities in a building without a gender-neutral entrance to the pool.

1 Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH), 'Public toilet 'deserts' widespread across England, RSPH, 20 April 2026, available at: https:/www.rsph.org.uk/news/public-toilet-deserts-widespread-across-england/

2 ToiletNearMe, 'UK Public Toilet Statistics 2026 — Numbers, Decline & the Accessibility Gap', 26 March 2026, available at: https://toiletnearme.co.uk/guides/uk-public-toilet-statistics-2026

3 Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Governance (MHCLG), 'New building requirements for separate male and female toilets', 13 August 2023, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-building-requirements-for-separate-male-and-female-toilets

A disabled trans man was accosted by two men while using the disabled toilet, who shouted *"You freak"* and *"What the f*ck are you?"* at him. Citing the recent guidance, he explained: *"I was in the toilets you [the government] told me to be in."*

Many described feeling trapped when there were no gender-neutral options, with one trans woman being told she wasn't allowed to use any bathrooms in a nightclub because of this.

After avoiding using a public bathroom all day, another trans woman became so desperate that she had no choice but to go to a local Wetherspoons. As the venue had no key for her to access the disabled toilet, she was left having to use the women's, where a woman stood very close to her, saying, *"You better not dream of entering the female bathroom. The world has finally woken up to the deranged crossdressing man that you are. You can't rape us anymore."*

STAFF SUGGESTED SHE COULD INSTEAD GET CHANGED IN TREATMENT ROOMS OR TRAVEL TO A GYM WITH A UNISEX CHANGING ROOM ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN

A trans man described what seemed like a normal afternoon at the local pub he has been going to for over two years. Things changed dramatically when he was first refused entry to the men's bathroom, then the women's. With no gender-neutral option, the staff decided he had no right to use any bathroom or the pub itself. They forcibly removed him. He noted that this incident occurred *"within exactly 24 hours of the EHRC [interim] guidance being released"* and saw it as *"a wake-up call to how bad this will get."*

"Our hands are tied": Many organisations believe they have no choice

It is clear from the testimonies shared with us that many organisations do not understand the law or the new EHRC code, opting to take the most restrictive possible actions under the false belief that the law requires them to police gendered spaces, saying that *"they feel their hands are tied and they don't want to 'break the law,"* as one trans woman quoted her employer. There appears to be a lack of awareness around the ways organisations can remain inclusive and within the law.

For instance, after two years of using the women's changing room at her local gym, one trans woman was told that *"they couldn't find any way for [her] to continue using the female changing facilities,"* while not having the funding to convert facilities to be gender-neutral. The staff suggested she could instead get changed in treatment rooms (when and if they are available) or travel to a gym with a unisex changing room on the other side of town. This means that, unless she travels an unreasonable distance, she has no access to key facilities (i.e., lockers, showers, and the pool) – an increasingly common situation that the EHRC has claimed should only arise in exceptional cases.

Excluded from work facilities

Despite the EHRC code not applying to workplace toilet facilities (which fall under separate regulations), **misguided attempts to implement the code have led to many trans people being excluded and segregated at work, where nearly one in four incidents occurred (24%, 63).**

Others described being forced to work from home, while their employer investigates whether they are able to build new gender-neutral toilets (at significant cost), or being made to use disabled toilets that are a 15-minute walk (or more) from their desk.

'Outing' trans people to follow the new guidelines

These types of situations have resulted in many trans people being outed at work and in their communities, often in ways that pose a real safety risk, while also threatening to violate the Gender Recognition Act Section 22 – which makes it a criminal offense to disclose protected information about someone with a Gender Recognition Certificate if received in an "official capacity" – and parts of the Equality Act 2010.

After one trans woman had her gender identity revealed to all senior leaders at the education trust where she works, she was then told she could no longer use any gendered spaces on site. As a result, she was left with no choice but to work fully remotely. The impact was so severe she was having to take time off work. She described herself as *"living in a state of despair"* and unable to look for another job because of the impact on her mental health.

When another trans woman's work told her she could now only use the disabled toilet, they also told her the names of two other trans people in the company – a breach of their privacy rights under GDPR and a potential criminal offence under the Gender Recognition Act.

Not just trans people are affected

However, trans people aren't the only ones affected. **One in ten (10%, 26) respondents were cis** (not trans), including one cis woman with short hair who was physically blocked from the women's bathroom at work by a colleague.

Hirsutism (excessive growth of dark, coarse hair) affects approximately 10% of women globally[4] and women with this condition, often due to PCOS, report being targeted as a result. One cis woman with PCOS was glared at and called *"disgusting"* for using the women's toilets in Victoria Station, while another cis woman with facial hair was physically barred from entering the women's bathroom and told to use the men's bathroom instead.

These testimonies demonstrate that *all* those who do not conform to societal gender norms now face being openly discriminated against and segregated at work, in the community, and when simply trying to go about their lives.

"Every time I use a public toilet": Repeated and regular harassment for many

These incidents and stories are not isolated. Many shared that the incident they reported was only the most recent of a series of negative encounters. One cis woman explained that, following the publication of the EHRC's interim guidance, she quickly went from *"never to 6 incidents"* of people trying to question or block her from using the women's bathroom.

Trans women are particularly likely to experience repeated harassment and accounted for 43% (113) of reported incidents, followed by trans men (20%, 53), and nonbinary people (14%, 36). One trans woman, trying to follow the EHRC guidance, described being harassed at her local shopping centre for trying to use the men's toilets before then being harassed in the men's changing room at her local gym just nine days later. As with many others we heard from, the staff asked her for information about her genitalia to try and assess which facilities she might be allowed to use.

A cisgender non-conforming woman was followed into the Tesco toilets by two men, who accused her of being in the wrong bathroom. She explained: *"I had to explain to them that I am a woman with short hair and it made me feel awful because I get this every time I use a public toilet. … It is starting to give me really bad anxiety around using public toilets."*

Another respondent described having been regularly and repeatedly tutted at, shouted at *"to leave"* and that they *"don't belong in public toilets,"* and even being pushed and chased. They shared:

"This has made me feel even more anxious than I used to be accessing these spaces but I feel like I would be attacked by going into the toilet of my assigned sex/gender. … I have never enjoyed using public toilets, even before transitioning, now I do whatever I can to not use them but sometimes you really just have to go!"

Children witnessing and experiencing discrimination

These incidents also affect some of the youngest, most vulnerable people, including children. One person shared a story of her 6-year-old trans daughter being too scared to use the bathroom while at an all-day gymnastics club. When her parent came to collect her, she discovered that she had wet herself to avoid using the facilities.

Others spoke of being harassed by people with children or while they were with their own children. After her 5-year-old son had had an accident at a local soft play, one trans woman was barred from the women's restroom by a staff member, who demanded she use the men's restroom instead. The impacted party shared:

"I felt humiliated to be stopped in a public environment in this way. My first concern at the time was the safety and comfort of my son, who would not understand what was happening if I argued or expressed a problem. As a 6'2' trans woman, it is difficult to pass in a cisgender space and I will always avoid accessing public toilets anyway – even if this means making myself uncomfortable. Equally, I was afraid if forced to access a men's toilet that I would have to defend myself and my son from threat or violence."

Conclusion

These testimonies reify what many trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming people already know: that the Supreme Court judgment set off an escalation of gender policing, harassment, and discrimination against trans and gender non-conforming people that the EHRC Code of Practice will only exacerbate. The EHRC code has already been condemned as unworkable, unsafe, and inherently discriminatory by many, including service providers[5], local councils[6], politicians[7], national advocacy organisations[8], and international human rights bodies[9].

Further, the results of our survey suggest that members of the public, service providers, and employers struggle to understand the law or the EHRC code and when or how to apply it. This has resulted in countless people being harassed and assaulted for simply trying to go about their day-to-day lives.

Trans people and many others are now facing exclusion from work, vital services, and social activities due to a lack of gender-neutral facilities and organisational and public indifference toward trans people's continued right to access services and facilities with privacy and dignity. Urgent action is needed to prevent further harassment, violence, and discrimination.

4 R. Azziz, M. Amiri, F. Bril, et al., 'Approach to the Patient: Hirsutism', The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism, 110(10), 2025, e3503–e3519, doi:10.1210/clinem/dgaf226.

5 e.g., Third Sector Against Transphobia, 'Supporting charities through solidarity, shared learning, and action', available at: https://www.thirdsectoragainsttransphobia.org/about-tsat

6 e.g., Lepone, Izzy, 'Six London councils warn new equality code risks excluding Trans+ people', 10 August 2026, available at: https://www.localgov.co.uk/Six-London-councils-warn-new-equality-code-risks-excluding-Trans-people/64800

7 Consortium, 'Stop the Code: Cross-Party Support for Early Day Motion Rejecting EHRC's Harmful Code of Practice', 12 June 2026, available at: https://www.consortium.lgbt/2026/06/12/stop-the-code-cross-party-support-for-early-day-motion-rejecting-ehrcs-harmful-code-of-practice/

8 e.g., Centre for Mental Health, 'Leading Mental Health Organisations Raise Concerns on EHRC Code of Practice', 29 May 2026, available at: https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/news/item/leading-mental-health-organisations-raise-concerns-on-ehrc-code-of-practice/

9 e.g., ILGA Europe, 'New UK Draft Code of Practice Intensifies Exclusion of Trans People', 1 June 2026, available at: https://www.ilga-europe.org/news/new-uk-draft-code-of-practice-intensifies-exclusion-of-trans-people/

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL STORIES OF EXCLUSION AND HARASSMENT

Constant harassment

A trans man working in community health spends his days visiting people in the community that need care in their homes. As a result, he is heavily reliant on public toilets, made worse by the fact that he has a health condition which means he has to stay hydrated. He explained:

"Over the last year, I have had way, way more issues. People 'politely checking' if I know which toilet I'm in. Teenagers giggling & pointing. People asking why I'm waiting for a cubicle (can't use a urinal for obv[iou]s reason!). People making jokes about whether or not I have a dick. People calling me a lesbian or a dyke. People asking if I'm trying to pick up guys. People asking if I'm selling sex."

As a result, he has been left feeling embarrassed, frustrated, and *"isolated from colleagues."* He said that he now feels *"socially awkward," "miserable,"* and *"scared for the future."*

Discrimination at work

A trans man received an all-staff email stating that *"it is now the law"* that people can only use facilities based on *"biological sex"* and encouraging trans people to use the disabled toilets. As many of these require a separate key or additional access permissions, he either has to out himself to his line manager and IT department or risk going against the new guidelines. He also stated: *"It is unfair to disabled colleagues to expect me to use their facilities."*

Discrimination at work 2

Within a week of the Supreme Court judgment, a trans woman was called into a meeting with another trans colleague at the supermarket where they work. They were told they may soon be excluded from the toilets and changing rooms.

She described herself as *"terrified,"* after having already lost a job two years before when she first started transitioning, explaining:

"My previous employer decided I should still use male changing rooms even after the effects of HRT [hormone replacement therapy] became impossible to hide, and promptly fired me when the obvious resulting issues arose. I thought I'd found a place that respected my identity and would look out for me, now I feel like it's only a matter of time before I'm forced into spaces that I don't feel safe in. That I'm terrified in, and will end up losing another job just because I'm trans."

Feeling unsafe at work

Within a month of the Supreme Court judgment, a transmasculine person received an all-staff email at work stating changes to who can access which bathrooms and changing areas. Describing the impact, he stated how disappointed and sad he felt about the situation:

"It has emboldened people to voice their transphobic views, creating a hostile environment. I don't talk about being trans at work but the way I speak about this topic with my colleagues may make some of them realise. Altogether, it has taken a huge toll on my mental health and willingness to show up to work."

Left with no options

A disabled nonbinary person was filmed and harassed while trying to use a women's restroom at a service station. About a month later, they attempted to use the single occupancy shower facilities at a motorway service station. The staff members forbade them from using the hot showers, despite having used them many times before, stating that they were now only for men. Describing the situation, they explained:

"I was deemed too feminine to access a hot shower in a lockable single occupancy room and too masculine to use the toilet the law says I should use. I already worried about lack of toilet access because of my disability and travelling a lot. Now there's also this barrier and safety issue."

Excluded for being trans

A trans woman was invited to attend a spa evening with fellow patients from her local NHS hospital. After the hospital directors said she could not be in a space for women, there was no way for her to attend. She reported feeling *"upset, alienated and othered. … The patients were upset and outraged on my behalf, they felt it was unjust. I felt like a hole had opened up, that I was a freak and not right for society."*

Trapped and terrified

A trans man told us that he usually *"tr[ies] to use gender neutral spaces for safety since the EHRC guidance came out."* After attending a hospital appointment, the only gender-neutral toilet (also the only disabled toilet) was occupied. Due to a disability, he can struggle to stand for long periods and felt he had no choice but to use a gendered toilet. After entering the men's toilet, another man left a cubicle and began laughing at him.

The trans man reported hearing him outside his cubicle *"grunting and what sounded like masturbation."* After waiting a few minutes, he tried to escape but the other man immediately blocked his exit. He eventually moved aside, but the affected individual told us:



"In the moment I was preparing to physically fight. I was in a confined space by myself and the person blocking the only exit probably weighed at least twice as much as me. The thought of having to fight terrified me but for a moment it seemed like the only option. … Since that incident I've not really known what to do when I need the toilet in public. I have been avoiding going to places that are not explicitly trans friendly for fear of a similar incident happening. I feel like I'm in an impossible situation; I get gendered as both male and female by members of the public so I feel like an incident like this could happen anywhere. The only solution is to not leave the house but that just isn't okay that other people have made me feel this way."

"Are you a boy or a girl?"

A cis woman was confronted by another member while using the changing facilities at her local gym, who asked "whether I was supposed to be in here and was I a boy or a girl." The affected individual told us that she was too stunned to reply, so the woman *"kept repeating the question,"* while *"coming closer and closer to me until she was standing over me and I was backed into the corner."*

After finally being able to muster enough courage to say a short reply, the woman backed down, saying, *"Oh good, I feel better now knowing what you are."* The affected woman, who described herself as having a masculine presentation, explained that the leisure centre has no gender-neutral spaces and finds that she *"often gets funny looks in female spaces but it's got much worse since everyone is on the lookout for people who don't conform to what they think a woman should look like."* Unfortunately, the result has been that she is now *"too anxious to go back"* to her gym.

Driven to suicidality

A trans woman described being *"abused and threatened by a bunch of guys after coming out of the toilet"* at her local pub. Afterwards, the manager told her she is no longer allowed to use the women's restroom. In describing the impact, she stated that she was left feeling *"suicidal"* and had *"overdosed that night."*

Harassed by security

A butch lesbian was queuing for the women's toilet with a friend at her local pub, when a security guard suddenly came over and started shouting at her, calling her *"sir"* and saying that she could not be in the women's queue.

The security guard continued to be aggressive, even after her friend also explained that she is a woman. It was only after three other women physically placed their bodies between the affected party and the security guard that she was able to use the toilet. After the incident, she spoke to the pub manager, who defended the security guard's actions, telling her that it is *"difficult to tell the gender of a person with short hair."*

After the incident, she was left feeling *"full of anxiety. … That event shook me up proper and I felt wrong in my skin more than I had in years. I'm still hesitating more than before going into public bathrooms."*



First published November 2026.
All rights reserved. TransActual UK © 2026
Use of this material is encouraged for legitimate campaigning, research and educational purposes.

Thank you to our donors and supporters, whose contributions made this report possible.