Is lighting the pavement important?

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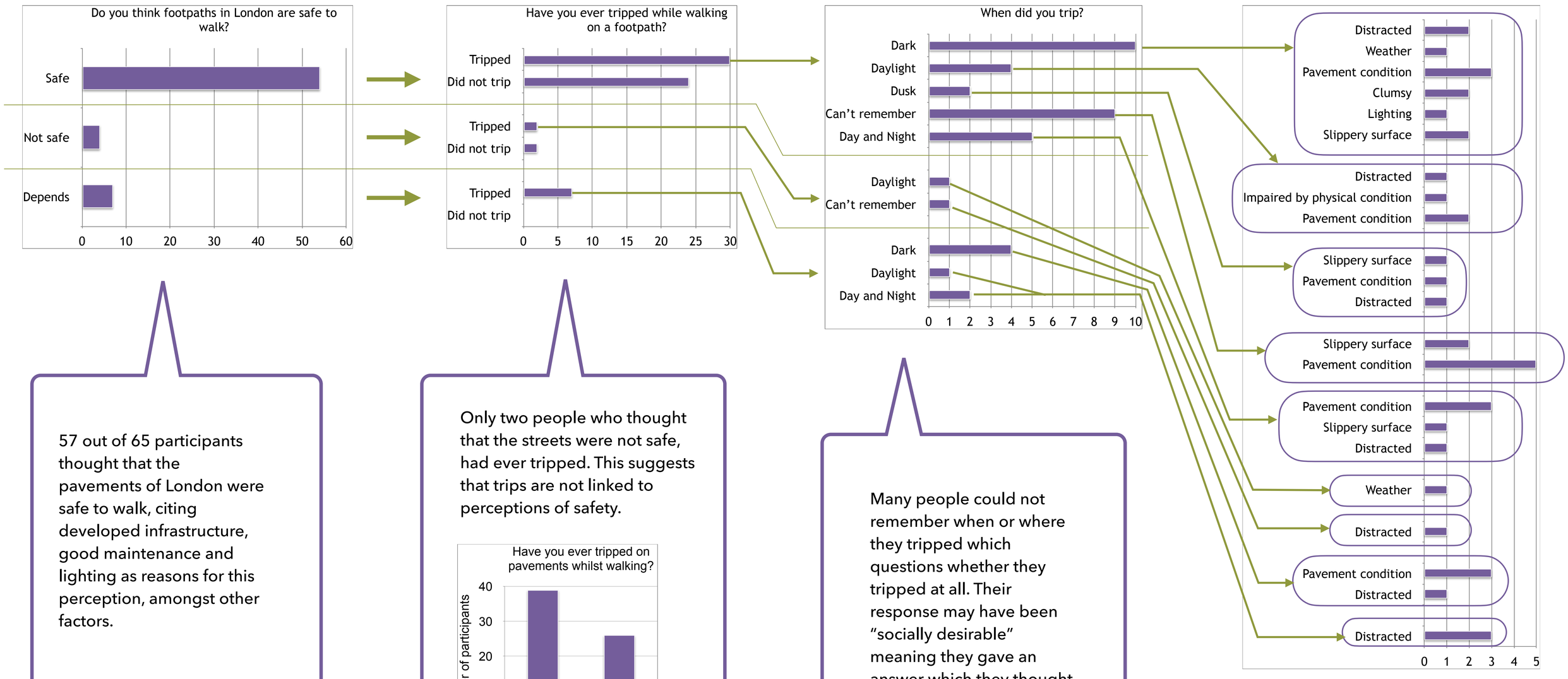
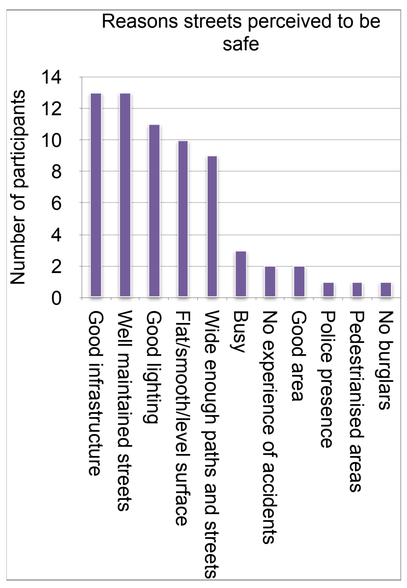
Energy may be wasted lighting the pavement. However, lighting enables us to see obstacles, which may cause people to trip.

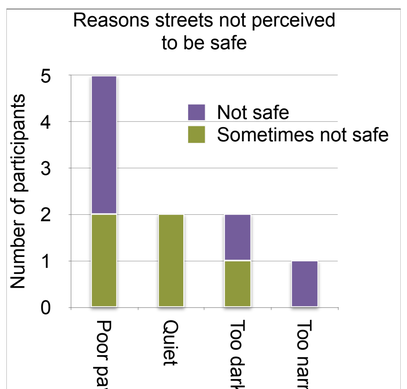
This study explores the perception of streets, walking habits and trip occurrence amongst a sample of 65 participants with the aim of finding out whether obstacle detection is a relevant visual task. The findings suggest that it is not an important task during at night or during the day. This implies that environments should be lit in a way which provides reassurance, which may be more closely related to vertical rather than horizontal illumination. **Local authorities should consider lighting vertical surfaces.**

Only 3 participants who tripped after dark, could remember where. One thought that the trip was due to insufficient illumination, the other a slippery surface and the other due to distraction.



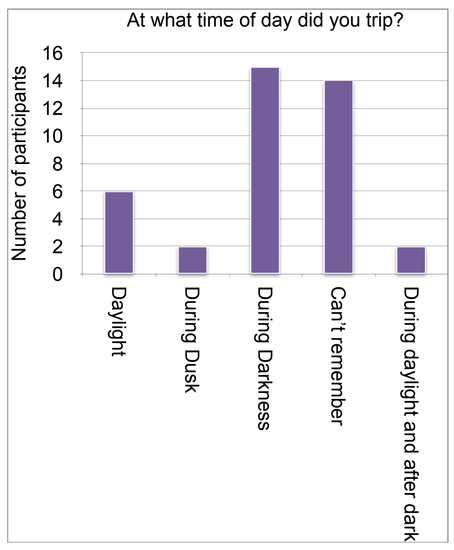
57 out of 65 participants thought that the pavements of London were safe to walk, citing developed infrastructure, good maintenance and lighting as reasons for this perception, amongst other factors.

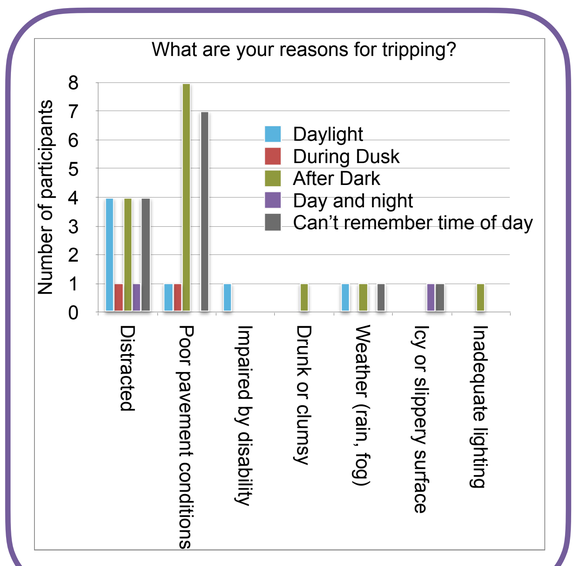




Only two people who thought that the streets were not safe, had ever tripped. This suggests that trips are not linked to perceptions of safety.

Many people could not remember when or where they tripped which questions whether they tripped at all. Their response may have been "socially desirable" meaning they gave an answer which they thought would be helpful to the researcher.





Although limited and not representative of the whole population, the findings question the emphasis that current guidelines place on lighting the horizontal surface of the pavement. Further research is required on the effect of lighting conditions on trip occurrence in the older population which only formed just under a quarter of this sample.