

Where do you stand? Evaluation of Sexual Misconduct Policy at LSE

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Introduction

Sexual misconduct is a prevalent experience for many university students; a 2018 survey found that 62% of students and recent graduates in the UK had experienced sexual misconduct at some point during their time at university (Revolt Sexual Assault, 2018). The data also shows that only 6% of those who experienced sexual misconduct reported it to the university. With this in mind, universities should act on both the level of prevention and response when tackling sexual misconduct. The aim of this project is to explore the ways in which students perceive and experience LSE's sexual misconduct policies and programs. It thereby also aims to make suggestions to the university as to how to best create a safer environment.

Literature Review

Sexual victimization can have a range of adverse health effects, both physical and psychological; for students, this poses a threat to being able to reach their full potential at university (Towl, 2016). While universities are increasingly adopting policies to address this, they often focus primarily on reporting processes and bureaucratic structures rather than preventing the violence itself and healing survivors (Phipps, 2010; Richards et al., 2017). Following through with policies and changing practice is necessary to address the culture that allows sexual misconduct to continue (Ahmed, 2015). Interventions must address root causes of sexual misconduct by incorporating the larger social context in which it takes place and why it is institutionally accepted, moving beyond individual responses and basic definitions of consent (Jozkowski, 2015; Sundaram et al., 2019). Common recommendations for universities to address sexual misconduct include employing a highly trained staff member working solely on campus sexual misconduct, working with local Rape Crisis centres and relevant local stakeholders, providing mandatory trainings, and maintaining transparency about rates of violence (Jozkowski, 2015; Towl, 2016). Recent reports, including those commissioned by the LSE, show that more could be done to support survivors of sexual assault in the university by including mandatory face-to-face consent trainings and more safe contacts (Consent Champions, 2018; LSESU, 2019). Due to the prevalence of the problem and the severity of the effects, it is LSE's civic duty to actively prevent sexual misconduct and provide support for victims. Our study builds on this prior work and explores how students experience the LSE's support in the areas of prevention and response.

Methodology

The survey was designed to describe students' understanding and perceptions of LSE's policies and programmes on sexual misconduct. To achieve this, the questionnaire had three parts. The first was a series of demographic variables (LSE Department, gender, and sexual orientation, among others). The second part consisted of questions related to students' experiences with LSE's policies on

sexual misconduct. The third and final part was focused on awareness and evaluation of the policies. We conducted an online survey to collect the data, which took place from 9th March until late May. Due to the health crisis experienced worldwide, we had to move promulgation online. The survey had 101 valid answers of LSE students, from which 70 are women, 69 are younger than 25 years old, and 62 are Postgraduate students.

Findings

We found a wide-ranging lack of knowledge about LSE’s current policies on sexual misconduct, indicating a lack of clear communication about the existence of these policies, and the shape that these policies take. Most of the respondents (81%) expressed that they did not have an orientation that included training or information about sexual misconduct at LSE. Half of women respondents did not know they were able to take a course about sexual harassment through LSE. Moreover, nearly a quarter of men (24%) reported being ‘not interested’ in taking a course on sexual misconduct, which speaks to the need for courses to be mandatory. Those who had attended an activity about sexual misconduct mainly remembered learning about *where to look for official LSE information* and *what consent is*. Only a few remembered having learned about sexual assault and sexual harassment as well as where to ask for help if they experienced it. In that sense, 47% of respondents who attended at least one of these activities expressed that they had not learned much about sexual misconduct at the LSE, indicating the immediate need to improve these activities. Even though most sexual misconduct activities draw their attention on where to look for official LSE information, respondents conveyed having little knowledge about where to get LSE’s help (67%), and a high degree of uncertainty about how to report a situation of sexual misconduct (80%). In addition to this, 90% of the respondents expressed not knowing what disciplinary actions LSE could take after making a report.

Respondents were asked to read summaries of LSE’s relevant sexual misconduct policies and then rate their perceived effectiveness. Only a low proportion of students found them to be effective, particularly for the policies that outlined prevention and reporting processes.

Effectiveness	Prevention	Reporting Process	Disciplinary Action	Resources of Support
Very Ineffective or Ineffective	27%	13%	18%	25%
Neither	27%	14%	16%	16%
Effective or Very Effective	10%	20%	39%	32%
I don’t know	37%	53%	28%	28%

Similarly, at least 70% of students responded with ‘I don’t know’ as to whether LSE follows through with the four policies. This lack of awareness indicates a lack of transparency of LSE’s procedure, which can lead to a lack of trust.

Among the reasons given for those who said a policy was ineffective, lack of awareness and funding were the most often mentioned. These are the top three reasons given for each respective policy:

Prevention Policies	Reporting Process	Disciplinary Actions	Sources of Support
1. Workshops should be mandatory	1. Lack of clarity around the process itself	1. Should include legal reporting	1. Need for full-time, trained support staff
2. Lack of training for staff and professors	2. Reporting online is less preferable than in person	2. Lack of follow through with the process	2. Support is not comforting or welcoming enough
3. Not enough training for students	3. Lack of trust in the process	3. Not enough transparency	3. Lack of trust in sources of support

Respondents were presented with a set of potential policies and asked how important they think it is that LSE provides these services. A strong majority found each of the policies to be either very or extremely important, which was consistent across gender, level of education and region.

Level of Importance	One safe contact with advanced sexual violence training	Bystander training	Consent education for students and staff	Mandatory education on consent	Training on how to support survivors for all staff	An internal disciplinary process to avoid involving external parties
Not important at all or slightly important	4%	4%	7%	10%	5%	17%
Moderately important	9%	12%	12%	9%	17%	19%
Very or extremely important	87%	84%	81%	81%	78%	65%

Recommendations

The findings highlight the lack of awareness and satisfaction amongst students about LSE'S policies concerning sexual misconduct. Few students recalled sexual misconduct being covered in their orientation, and those who did reported not retaining much of what was covered. Students feel that more can be done to address sexual misconduct. Those policies that do exist are not communicated well to students, making them less effective. Because a large proportion of the student population consists of one-year masters' students, it is important that trainings and interventions are continuous and focus on long-term goals to ensure positive effects are not lost in the new academic year. Finally, the following policies were rated either very or extremely important by approximately 80% of respondents: one safe contact with advanced sexual violence training, bystander training, consent education for students and staff, mandatory education on consent, and training on how to support survivors for all staff. We recommend that the LSE initiates all of these measures. While the School has done much in recent years to work towards addressing sexual

misconduct, these efforts must move beyond bureaucratic processes and incorporate student outreach and awareness raising. By introducing a mandatory face-to-face course which explains consent, provides a bystander intervention training and covers the university's sexual misconduct policies, LSE will be able to create a standardised platform for students to be further educated on this matter.

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