

Student perceptions of safety in the LSE Community

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See this project presented by the researchers: https://youtu.be/SxH_HVGuDjY
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Introduction

Paying attention to the relationship between safety and space is invaluable for creating a comfortable and empowering learning environment. This report asks the research question “How do LSE students perceive their safety in LSE university spaces, including campus, halls of residences, common transport links as well as other often visited spaces by LSE students?” We used the word ‘safety’ in a wider sense, to include any feelings of discomfort, intimidation, and fear. The background of this research stems from the need to address ongoing and pressing issues such as sexual – and gender-based violence, harassment and the disadvantage of minority students when accessing university spaces. Further, we acknowledge the importance the pandemic has had on students’ learning experiences due to Covid-19 and the subsequent impact this has had on their perceptions of safety, even if this is not our primary focus. This report will firstly position our research within relevant literature followed by an outline of our methodology. The subsequent section will deal with our findings and the analyses we concluded from the data, divided into qualitative and quantitative findings. Lastly, we will elaborate on our recommendations, that we suggest the university executes as a response to the issues we identified.

Literature Review

LSE is highly ranked for its teaching, however its reputation is significantly lower in areas such as students' perception of their safety, where the LSE ranks [83 out of 116 UK universities](#). The three key themes this literature review highlights are: the role of leadership in perceptions of safety, the prioritization of different types of safety, and finally reporting of potential unsafe spaces on campus.

Firstly, it was found throughout the [National Union of Students' research](#) that leadership level acknowledgment of sexual violence and hate crimes on campus is crucial to active change, leading to more knowledge about safety on campuses ([Consent Collective, Safe Campus Communities](#)).

Secondly, by far the largest safety issue to emerge in recent years is the pervasiveness of sexual misconduct on university campuses. Of a [Student Room Study](#), 42% of students in the UK agree that actions constituting sexual assault and harassment had become normalized at UK universities. Crucially, the most common locations on campus, where students experienced sexual assault are: 28% Halls, 24% social events, 23% university social space. This led us to focus our research on different locations on campus to determine the varying levels of safety felt by students based on location.

Finally, there is a significant discrepancy between transparent signposting of policies, support, resources available to those experiencing unsafety (harm in any way), and available spaces of support for students. For example, existing LSE-specific resources are not easy to find and sexual violence-specific support is largely outsourced to NGOs in London such as Rape Crisis. Further, reporting rates are incredibly low with only 6% reported to university or police ([Student Room](#)) and 29% not reporting, because they didn't know how to make a report. Further, it proved challenging to find LSE-specific research and information about student safety outside the frame of Covid-19.

Methodology

This initial exploratory and limited study integrated survey methodology and participatory mapping methodology, using Qualtrics survey software. The survey centered on four participatory maps depicting the LSE campus, halls of residences as well as central London locations during the day and at night. Respondents could interact with these maps and rate areas of campus as safe, unsafe, or neutral. Further, the survey included 4 largely open-ended questions that aimed to understand the background of the students' perceptions of safety on campus. After completing an LSE ethical research approval process, we sent this survey out to a variety of campus listservs including the Gender Department, the Anthropology Department, the Student Union Newsletter, the Instagram of multiple graduate and undergraduate students organizations, and the SU Sports newsletter. **We encouraged all recipients of the link to take the survey and after two months of dispersal, we received 47 complete or semi-complete responses.** We then qualitatively coded the responses and quantified the interactive map by the percentage of respondents in each safety categorization. Below, we summarize the findings.

Findings

LSE Campus at night

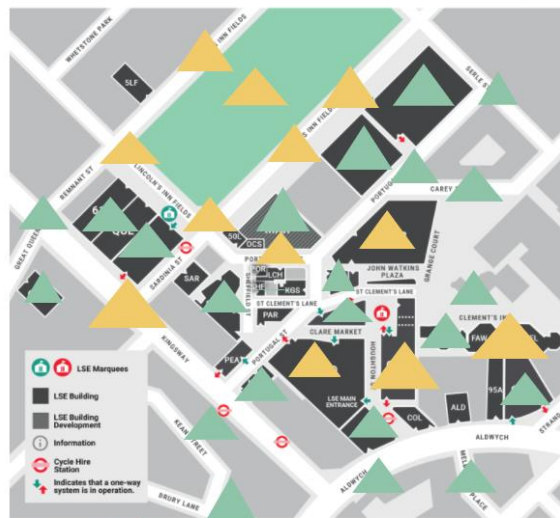


- ▲ **Safe**
Less than 10% of respondents marked this area as unsafe
- ▲ **Less safe**
Between 10 and 20% of respondents marked this area as unsafe
- ▲ **Unsafe**
More than 20% of respondents marked this area as unsafe

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LSE Campus during the day



- ▲ **Safe**
Less than 10% of respondents marked this area as unsafe
- ▲ **Less safe**
Between 10 and 20% of respondents marked this area as unsafe
- ▲ **Unsafe**
More than 20% of respondents marked this area as unsafe

Share

Made with **Infogram**

Alongside our quantitative findings from our participatory maps, we also included several questions for students to elaborate on their experiences of safety at LSE and student's identity. Regarding the demographic, we have found that all students who indicated that their identity impacts their perception of safety, were women, non-binary people, and or identified as LGBTQIA+. This finding is accompanied by the fact that the most commonly named factor to be impacting student's perception of safety was gender, followed by race. Other factors that students reported to be impacting their perceptions of safety occurred in intersection with these points raised: *"My gender is the only characteristic that might make me feel uncomfortable in certain situations, mainly at night, walking alone."*, *"I think as a queer woman, I definitely feel more sensitive to my environment, as it's more likely I'll be in danger."*, *"As a woman of color, I am always alert on the street to see if any man is following me. I feel most unsafe in deserted streets at night and try to avoid them when alone."*. This not only showcases the connection between safety, gender, sexuality, and race but also highlights the way space is experienced differently by students.

Additionally, we collected data where students elaborated what exactly made them feel safe or unsafe in LSE spaces. The most commonly stated factors were poorly lit spaces, especially small lanes, walking alone, and being on campus at night, which is also reflected in our quantitative findings. Another factor that came up several times was the building works currently ongoing in Portsmouth St. One student reported that *"[they] try to actively avoid walking near [the construction site]"*, whilst another student said that *"with all the construction and closed pathways, [they] feel less able to move freely"*.

When asked about other spaces frequently visited by LSE students and their wider experience of safety as a student, the AU “lad culture”, sexual harassment, especially during Freshers events and the “Zoo bar” were featured. These responses can be contextualized in the wider need to address the cultural embeddedness of sexual – and gender-based violence and harassment in UK universities.

Recommendations

1. We recommend an **increase in lighting on the identified areas on campus** flagged as unsafe such as, small pathways and side roads.
2. We recommend **institution-led and comprehensive further research** into student and staff members’ perceptions of safety during their time in the LSE community. Such research might look particularly into; financial insecurity, sexual misconduct, hate crimes, or discrimination based on potential minority characteristics; such as sexual orientation, immigration status, and ability.
3. **LSE should make clearer signposting in physical spaces on campus of safe contacts**, such as a particular banner or sign. More clearly marked trained staff that they can seek support from. For example, expand the safe contacts program including on campus make the locations and contact details of staff members have training. Appointment of an ISVA for students to discuss experiences of SGBV
4. We recommend that the institution **prioritizes student safety and accessibility on campus during construction**. For example, ensure pavements are accessible to pedestrian students when adjacent to work sites. Ongoing monitoring of student safety in relation to any major construction work is necessary.
5. **Mandatory consent workshops** tailored to students’ roles in the university (e.g. freshers, PhD students, society leaders)

Limitations

Some aspects of this research were limited due to the current global pandemic. For instance, the survey’s reach was greatly minimized by the student body’s inability to access campus as usual, leading to a lower number of respondents than we hoped. Despite this, the responses were comprehensive and are very telling of the student body’s understanding of safety through common themes in responses. The demographic of the respondents may also be viewed as a limitation with no self-identifying men completing the survey. However this is also very revealing, as it shows which population of the student body feel strongly about safety and which students are most likely to feel unsafe on campus.

Lastly, the centrality of COVID safety in the minds of our participants meant that COVID security overshadowed the types of personal safety our research planned to focus on.

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