

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY IN THE LSE COMMUNITY

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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?” The focus of this research is any form of unsafety and discomfort students feel and have felt in university, addressing any common factors. Whilst we actively decided to employ the term ‘safety in a wider sense, to include any feelings of discomfort, intimidation, and fear, the foundation of this research stems from the need to address ongoing and pressing issues such as sexual – and gender-based violence, harassment and the disadvantaging 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 outline our methodology and then position our research within the relevant literature. The subsequent report 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. We argue that the LSE is a leading institution researching violence, insecurity, and inequality. Thus, the institution must be cognizant that such issues are intimately connected to and replicated within the LSE community. The experiences summarized in this report form part of a ‘continuum of violence’ that requires further study both at the LSE and beyond (Cockburn, 2016; Hirsch and Khan, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This initial exploratory and limited study integrated survey methodology and participatory mapping methodology, using Qualtrics survey software. The survey had **14 largely open-ended questions to interrogate students' perceptions of safety**. Additionally, the survey asked respondents about how their identity shapes their understanding of safety. This approach methodologically and epistemologically aims for a reflexive and intersectional approach to research. 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. After completing an LSE ethical research approval process, we sent this survey out to a variety of campus listservs including the entire 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.

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. Before completing our primary research among students at the LSE we conducted a thorough review of the current literature surrounding student safety on university campuses in the UK. This brief literature review shall focus on three key themes found, firstly, the role of leadership in perceptions of safety, the prioritization of different types of safety, and finally reporting of potential unsafe spaces on campus.

Throughout the National Union of Students' research that leadership level acknowledgment of sexual violence and hate crimes on campus is crucial to active change. For instance, visible leadership and collaborative relationships between students and staff lead to more knowledge about safety on campuses (Consent Collective, Safe Campus Communities).

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, this literature report highlights the significant discrepancy between transparent signposting of policies, support, resources available to those experiencing unsafety (harm in any way), and the spaces there actually are for students. For example, there are LSE-specific resources, however, they are not easy to find. Sexual violence-specific support is largely outsourced to NGOs in London such as Rape Crisis and reporting rates are incredibly low with only 6%/ reported to university or police (Student Room). 29% of those did not report, because they didn't know how to make a report.

3 FINDINGS

As part of the survey, we included several sections to collect qualitative data to gain a deeper understanding of the participants but also allow for space to elaborate on their experiences of safety at LSE. **Regarding the demographic, we have found that all students who chose to indicate any parts of their identity that they found to be relevant to 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.** Further, some students said that their racial identity impacted their perception of safety. 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." Another student said "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 actively impacts and is experienced differently by students.**

Further, many students reported that their feelings of unsafety stemmed from a general fear of being women/LGBTQIA+ in a big city and having to navigate public transport alone at night.

Additionally, we collected data where students elaborated what factors made them feel safe or unsafe in certain 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, indicated in the maps to the right.**

A particularly salient factor was the building works currently ongoing in Portsmouth St, with **students stating that they were negatively impacted in their perception of safety by the construction site.** 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 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 at the "Zoo bar" were mentioned. These responses can be contextualized in the wider need to address the cultural embeddedness of harassment in UK universities and how alcohol impacts or obscures problematic behavior.

Lastly, positive feelings of safety were expressed by several students reporting that they felt generally safe at the LSE, due to the small size of the campus, large and open buildings such as the CBG.

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

Share Made with infogram

LSE Campus during the day



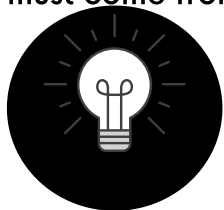
- Safe**
Less than 10% of respondents marked this area as unsafe
- Less safe**
Between 10 and 20% of respondents marked this area as unsafe
- Unsafe**
More than 20% of respondents marked this area as unsafe

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"(...) small lanes such as outside the St Clements building, especially the lane outside Pankhurst House (this route is my quickest direction home but I never go that way because it's too dark and feels unsafe!) also the streets around Lincoln's Inn Fields (esp. at the back entrance of 32L) are particularly dark at night. As you leave the square outside the SU, it's suddenly dark and feels unsafe. I definitely feel like more attention to lighting on and around campus would make life a lot safer and simpler."

RECOMMENDATIONS

From our findings, literature review, and experience as feminist activists, we have compiled five clear recommendations to improve the student body's perceptions of safety at the LSE. These recommendations must be grounded in intersectionality and must come from those in positions of leadership within the administration.



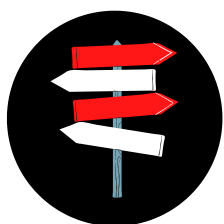
01 — Increase in lighting on campus

We recommend an increase in lighting on the identified areas on campus flagged as unsafe such as, small pathways and side roads.



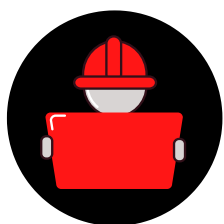
02 — Institution-led and comprehensive further research

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.



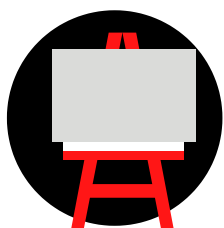
03 — Clearer signposting in physical spaces on campus of safe contacts.

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



04— Prioritize student safety during construction

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.



05— Mandatory consent workshops

LSE must implement mandatory consent workshops tailored to students' roles in the university (e.g. freshers, PhD students, society leaders)

LIMITATIONS

There were many aspects of this research that were limited by the current global pandemic. Our ability to connect with our target audience was greatly minimized by the student body's inability to be on campus. Asking students about their experiences on campus during a time where the majority were unable to attend campus did not garner high response rates.

This lower-than-expected response rate also presented itself with certain limitations. This could have been due to COVID and general engagement fatigue with online content by the student body. Despite this, the responses were comprehensive, compelling, and are informative of the student body's understanding of safety. The demographic of the respondents may also be viewed as a limitation with no self-identifying men completing the survey. Thus, our sample is in no way representative of the student body. Rather, it is illustrative data that piques curiosity for more comprehensive research. This however reveals more than a potentially small sample pool. Rather, the population who self-selected into the survey indicates who feels safety is worth talking about and who therefore feels unsafe on campus.

A significant obstacle we faced was the centrality of COVID safety in the minds of our participants. The prioritization of COVID security overshadowed the types of personal safety our research planned to focus on. COVID was therefore an unpredictable and shifting limitation to our research. The other, understandably, despite this the data we have extrapolated has been illuminating, there were some keynotes from students about their physical safety, perceptions of campus

Sign at the LSE that indicates "men working." Clearly, people of all genders are working at the LSE



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