

# Fostering Campus Safety: Investigating the Impact of Consent.Ed and Campus Climate on Sexual Misconduct

Jenny Zeng, Hanying Yao, Christine Liu, Yvonne Yang

Watch the [Presentation](#) | Read the [Poster](#) and/or the [Full Report](#)

If this project has informed your practice, please let us know at [lse.changemakers@lse.ac.uk](mailto:lse.changemakers@lse.ac.uk)

## Introduction

The recent allegations of sexual misconduct by an educator at the LSE have brought to light the critical issue of underreported sexual misconduct incidents and the lack of adequate campus support for victims. This underscores the urgent need to ensure student safety on campus and to investigate institutional approaches in tackling this issue. By assessing the effectiveness of Consent.Ed in shaping attitudes towards sexual consent and examining perceptions of campus climate and behavioural norms, our project aims to examine LSE's current efforts in addressing and preventing sexual misconduct incidents through a survey of current students.

This project is driven by the personal experiences of two student researchers who encountered sexual harassment in October. Their experiences with the dismissive attitudes of the British Transport Police reveal the poor handling of such incidents both socially and legally, highlighting the importance of robust campus support systems for students.

## Literature Review

Sexual misconduct is a pervasive issue across many higher education institutions. Defined as a spectrum of behaviours that are sexual, inappropriate, and coercive in nature, sexual misconduct violates social, ethical, and legal standards (Abboud et al, 2018). Previous research into university sexual misconduct policies has highlighted several key issues in handling such incidents. It has been observed that sexual misconduct is often underreported due to psychological, cultural, and institutional barriers. These barriers include self-blame, cultural shame, helplessness, fear of reprisal from the perpetrator, and the perception of the reporting process as cumbersome (Tamborra & Narchet, 2011).

Past Change Makers projects of similar nature have focused on evaluating the consent knowledge and perceptions of safety in the student body. The launch of the mandatory LSE Consent.Ed programme in August 2021 and establishments of campus resources and institutional policies can be seen as steps taken by LSE to promote campus safety. However, the effectiveness of these measures in enhancing students' attitudes toward sexual consent and improving campus safety remains questionable. Additionally, many recommendations from past projects have not been addressed.

## Methodology

A self-report questionnaire was designed adapting the psychometrically-validated ARC3 (Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative) Survey (Swartout et al., 2019). It was distributed through multiple channels, including departmental emails, social media, posters around campus, and the Student Union. Utilising convenience sampling, data collection took place from May 1st to May 18th. All respondents provided informed consent and were fully informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Their responses were anonymised to ensure confidentiality. Given the sensitive nature of the study, LSE support resources were signposted at the beginning of the survey.

## **Findings**

Our survey targeted full-time LSE students, including both undergraduates and postgraduates, resulting in 111 valid responses. The responses reflected diverse backgrounds, providing a representative sample of the LSE student body.

While most students feel safe on campus, over 60% of the students at LSE believe that sexual misconduct is a prevalent issue on campus, underscoring the significant minority that feels unsafe. More than 70% of the respondents express concern about the current situation. Additionally, there is a notable sense of learned helplessness among the student body regarding how to address or respond to these issues. This indicates a need to empower students and improve campus safety.

### **1. Evaluation of the Consent.Ed Programme**

Most students became aware of Consent.Ed through emails, societies, university events during fresher's week, and student accommodations. These communication channels have proven to be very effective, and we recommend their continued use. Out of the 111 survey respondents, only 11 reported that they had not participated in Consent.Ed. Five of them stated that they had not heard of the programme, highlighting a need to ensure broader reach.

On a 9-point scale, most students rated the Consent.Ed programme as somewhat effective to effective. Thematic analysis revealed broad agreement that the programme was informative and can be seen as a platform that raised awareness and initiated dialogue about sexual consent. Several students mentioned that the existence of the program made them feel safer on campus. However, some respondents felt that Consent.Ed only reaffirmed their previous beliefs and did not offer new information. A few students expressed that the programme had little impact on actual campus behaviour and did not address the root problems within the institutional system.

### **2. Campus Resources**

More than 60% of students are unaware of how to access help or make a report when they or someone they know encounters such incidents. Over 80% of students express that they do not understand the procedural details after a report is made, indicating a lack of understanding in the operation of campus resources. This underlines transparency issues, which could deter students from using the available support resources. Students generally are uninformed of what to do and where to seek help when encountered sexual misconduct incidents. Such underutilisation of campus resources further reflects lack of faith in the institution. Students who are familiar with

the procedures point out that follow-up processes are “not transparent, clear or convenient in any sort of way”, where the results are discouraging for victims in seeking further support.

### **3. Institutional Response and Students’ Perception**

While there is an overall slight positive perception regarding LSE’s potential response to sexual misconduct reports, a significant portion of the student population exhibit a lack of trust in the institution’s handling of such issues. For example, approximately 27% of the students express concern that LSE will not protect individuals making a report, indicating scepticism about the support measures in place. Further, over 40% believe that LSE will not take action to address factors leading to sexual misconduct on campus, reflecting doubts on LSE’s commitment to prevent such issues.

There is also a notable sense of perceived injustice in the system, where 35% of the students believe that LSE will not handle the reports fairly. Even more worrying is that 14% of the respondents believe that LSE will punish the person making the report. These trends reflect confounding factors which may discourage victims from coming forward to report incidents and reach out for support.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Make Consent.Ed Opt-Out for Both Staff and Students**

To ensure broader reach, we recommend automatically enrolling freshers into the programme on Moodle. Additionally, integrating departmental sessions as part of their welcoming events, rather than requiring students to sign up themselves, would likely increase participation. Students would still have the option to opt-out, maintaining the non-mandatory nature of the programme. Given LSE staff’s involvement with the student body, we recommend extending the requirement of Consent.Ed training to all staff members, ensuring they are equally informed and prepared to support a safe campus environment, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

### **2. Continue and Enhance Consent.Ed Communications Work**

Our findings demonstrated that the vast majority of students were aware of Consent.Ed’s existence, and participation rates have increased every year since its conception. This positive communications work could be extended by ensuring more LSE halls have their own dedicated sessions, for example Passfield Hall this year was not included, despite its proximity to campus and high proportion of first-year residents.

### **3. Increase Visibility of Campus Resources**

Despite the availability of various support resources, many students are unaware of how or when to access them. At the moment, resources are listed on a leaflet for every participant to take, but this has appeared ineffective. Promoting these opportunities e.g., information regarding LSE’s ISVA and SARCs by integrating the information into Consent.Ed more explicitly and creating ongoing promotion beyond fresher week would help keep the information accessible.

### **4. Develop transparency in the reporting procedure**

To enhance transparency and accountability, we recommend creating a webpage with clear, detailed information on the process for reporting sexual misconduct incidents. This webpage should outline potential outcomes, estimated timelines, and available support measures beyond counselling, such as legal advice and academic adjustments. It is essential to make information regarding Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) easily accessible. Additionally, increasing the number of Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) is vital to shorten response time. Maintaining close communication with the Student Union and HandsOff LSE can maximise the impact of the released information.

#### **5. Commission an Independent Review of Consent.Ed curriculum and Reporting Procedures**

To maintain the effectiveness and relevance of the Consent.Ed curriculum, an independent review should be conducted to assess the content, delivery methods and overall impact of the programme, as well as looking at the way that LSE handles reports. The low institutional trust in LSE's handling of reports could also be improved by implementing recommendations from an external, independent provider.

### **References**

Abboud, M. J., Wu, G., Pedneault, A., Stohr, M. K., & Hemmens, C. (2018). Educator Sexual Misconduct: A Statutory Analysis. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 31(1), 133–153.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403418806564>

EVAW. (2023, November 8). *New survey finds victims' confidence in the justice system remains worryingly low*. End Violence against Women.

<https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/new-survey-finds-victims-confidence-in-the-justice-system-remains-worryingly-low/#:~:text=71%25%20were%20dissatisfied%20with%20the>

Swartout, K. M., Flack Jr, W. F., Cook, S. L., Olson, L. N., Smith, P. H., & White, J. W. (2019). Measuring campus sexual misconduct and its context: The Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Consortium (ARC3) survey. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 11(5), 495. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000395>

Tamborra, T. L., & Narchet, F. M. (2011). A university sexual misconduct policy: Prioritizing student victims' voices. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 13(1), 16–33.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/cpcs.2010.17>

The Student Room. (2018). *STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE*.

<https://revoltsexualassault.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Report-Sexual-Violence-at-University-Revolt-Sexual-Assault-The-Student-Room-March-2018.pdf>