



**FINDINGS FROM A SURVEY TO EXAMINE
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY
AND SECURITY ON AND OFF CAMPUS**

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Executive Summary

Most of the research on students' perceptions of safety and security has been carried out in the US. Very little research has been carried out in the UK on students' perceptions of safety and security on and off campus. Roberts et al.s' (2022) survey research in the UK has shown that as women students move from the campuses into the city and as they move from day to night, they were less likely to say they never felt unsafe. Several interconnecting factors constructed women's perceptions of safety. These were: darkness, desolate places/spaces, being alone, 'drunks', strangers, and stories/experiences of sexual attack. Consequently, local hotspots, such as underpasses, car parks, unlit paths, on and off campus caused alarm and were mostly avoided when alone. For example, some students said they avoided the library at night and when alone. In other survey research, Roberts' (2022) found that some students avoided staying late on campus after dark and when alone. Thus, perceptions of safety can impact upon the ways in which students' study. Consequently, students recommended that security personnel be increased on campus, lighting to be brighter and the visibility of CCTV to be enhanced.

Aims

This new survey research sought to build-on the gaps in the existing research:

- i) to focus on students' perceptions of localised areas on campus
- ii) to enhance responses from ethnic minority students and male students

Methods

In the spring of 2023, 69 students responded to our e-survey in Qualtrics. The survey contained closed and open questions asking them about their perceptions of safety and security on and

off campus. The survey data was downloaded into a power-point and a SPSS dataset. In SPSS, the data was cleaned, and descriptive tests were carried because the sample was too small to generate tests of statistical significance. The survey was approved by the research ethics group at the university.

Sample

Sixty-eight per cent (n=47) of the sample were women, 29% (n=20) were men and 3% (n=2) were non-binary. Fifty per cent (n=34) of the sample described themselves as English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British, 21% (n=14) as African, 7%¹ (n=5) as Bangladeshi, 4% (n=3) as Indian, 4% (n=3) as other Asian background, 4% (n=3) as any other White background. The remaining 6² sample described themselves as Irish, White and Asian, other mixed/multiple ethnic background, Pakistani, Chinese and Arab. Thus, there were a range of ethnic minority students responding to the survey. The respondents were aged between 18 and 55 with 70% of the sample aged between 18 – 24. Thus, most students were young with the modal age being 20 and the mean age 25. Ninety-six per cent (n=66) of students were full-time; 4% (n=3) were part-time. Twenty-eight per cent (n=19) of students were first year undergraduate, 26% (n=18) were post-graduate, 16% (n=11) were second-year undergraduate, 16% (n=11) were third-year undergraduate, 13% (n=9) were foundation year students and one student was 'other'. Students were from all the faculties at the university, to varying extents.

Key Findings

¹ Per cents are round to the nearest whole number.

² One response was missing.

The findings are consistent with research that has been carried out in the UK on students' perceptions of safety (see Roberts, 2022; Roberts, 2023; Roberts et al., 2022):

- most students (84%, n=58) feel safe on campus
- students feel safer in buildings (e.g., lecture halls, classrooms, libraries, café/food outlets) than outside them
- students feel less safe on paths/walkways and in car parks:
 - when the sun sets, and I have to get back from the university library to my accommodation, it can be a bit scary walking alone (Pakistani man).
- key factors enhancing feelings of unsafety are darkness, 'dangerous others' accessing campus, lack of security/CCTV, being alone/isolated, previous experience/prior incidents and stories about these:
 - Later at night - when it is dark, fewer people are around, more risk of drunks on the walk back to the accommodation, particularly on a Friday (English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British woman).
- many students (61%, n=41) thought that security was effective in keeping them safe – 28% (n=19) were not sure and 11% (n=7) said security was not effective³
- many students (n=76%, n=51) were aware of Campus Security – 18% (n=12) said they were not and 6% (n=4) were not sure⁴
- many students (59%, n=40) said they felt safe off campus – 19% (n=13) said no and 22% (n=15) were not sure⁵

³ There were 2 missing responses.

⁴ There were 2 missing responses.

⁵ There was 1 missing response.

- many students said there should be more of a security presence and transport provision when off campus:
 - Campus buses should get to different locations in the city to pick and drop students closer to their places of residence seeing that the university does not have enough accommodation for students and most students live far from the university, 90% of these students are international students who have travelled far and wide to come to [name of city] and have paid so much in their tuition. Campus buses should not stop at [name of Halls of Residence] but should go further into other parts of the city (African woman).

Recommendations

The findings in our survey are consistent with previous research that has been carried out at the same university over a period of 8 years (see Roberts et al., 2022; Roberts, 2022, 2023). Whilst most students feel safe on campus and many of them think that security is effective in keeping them safe, there are factors affecting some students' perceptions of safety that are ongoing and still need to be addressed by the university, including Campus Security. Roberts (2022) writes about how re-designing spaces on campus can enhance the use of space and in doing so enhance natural surveillance to ultimately enhance students' perception of safety. Roberts (2023) also writes about how a university can, through curricula, stretch its students out into the wider world so that they encounter various groups of people so that their perceptions of feeling unsafe are challenged. Therefore, reflective thought, time and financial resources are needed to plan and re-design:

- i) urban spaces of the campuses to increase their use by students

- ii) university curricula to facilitate students' encounters with others who are thought to be 'dangerous' to dispel myths about them

References

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