The dark and desolate campus: what can be done to enhance students' perceptions of safety on-campus?

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Abstract

Purpose – Given their young age, students are at a heightened risk of violent victimisation. Yet few studies have considered students' perceptions of safety and the impact of these, on a British university campus. The purpose of this research was to close this gap.

Design/methodology/approach - From late 2019-2020, using an online university wide survey, data was gathered over a 3-month period from 550 students studying at a university in the north of England on 'city' campuses about their perceptions of safety and security on-campus.

Findings - Students, particularly women students felt unsafe on the university campuses because of poor lighting, limited CCTV, security patrols, and the presences of others. They felt unsafe in and around teaching buildings, moving around the campuses, and in transport locations.

Research limitations/implications – The response rate of the survey was 6%. Consequently, the findings are not representative of the wider student population on the campuses.

Practical implications – Campus Security should consider enhancing surveillance on the campuses.

Social implications – Students, particularly women, limited the time they spent on-campus studying because they felt unsafe. Their choices about when and how to engage in their university education were therefore restricted.

Originality – This study addresses the gap in research on students' perceptions of safety and the impact of these, on a British university campus. In doing so, it fore fronts the responsibility of Higher Education Institutions to enhance students' safety, including their perceptions of safety, on-campus.

Keywords – perceptions of safety, strategies to stay safe, surveillance, Campus Security, study on-campus, university campuses

Paper type – research paper

Introduction

On 19th March 2022, a young woman student, aged 19, was found murdered in her London university hall of residence (Daniel and Wright, 2022). The perpetrator was the man with whom she was having an intimate relationship (Khomami, 2022). The next day, *The Sunday Times* published an article about 'students' anger over lack of security' with some raising concerns for their own safety (Daniel and Wright, 2022, p.15), and with good reason because women are most at risk of being murdered by someone they know. Over the past decade, trends in the homicide statistics show an average of 1.5 women killed by an intimate partner or ex-partner *each week* (ONS, 2022). Due to their age,

women students are a heightened risk of domestic violence because women aged 16-24 are more likely to be victims than older women (ONS, 2019a, 2020). Despite this prevailing context of private spaces being the riskiest for women to experience serious and fatal violence, research (Vera-Gray, 2018) continues to show how women habitually adopt safety strategies in public places because they feel unsafe in these spaces. Yet, given the restrictive nature of these safety strategies for women's movement in public spaces (Vera-Gray, 2018) and to set the backdrop to the research presented in this paper, it is important to review this research on women's safety strategies, including research carried out on student populations because of the emergence of studies in the UK showing that women students experience sexual harassment and sexual assault, on *and* off-campus (NUS, 2011, 2018; Roberts *et al*., 2019, 2022; Stenning *et al*., 2003). Thereby showing that women's justifications for feeling unsafe in public places is because they *are* unsafe in public places. Yet despite this, and in light of the tragic case of the murdered student, there have been few British studies that research how safe students feel on their university campuses (NUS, 2011; Roberts *et al.,* 2022), including in their halls of residence. The few studies that have been carried out are reviewed because the aim of the research in this paper is to build-upon such research to address the gap in this field of study. It is important to do this because of Universities UK (2016, 2019) insistence that universities should be committed to enhancing students' safety, including their perceptions of safety. The methods of the research, which centred on an online survey asking university students about their perceptions of safety on-campus, are outlined. The findings present data from the survey about why and where students feel unsafe, the impact of this, as well as students' suggestions about how Campus Security can enhance their safety. The findings raise practical implications for the university to consider. These are discussed.

A gendered analysis of students' perceptions of on-campus safety

Women students feel more unsafe than men students. This has been evidenced in American (Braaten *et al.*, 2020; Fisher and Nasar, 1992; Fox *et al.*, 2009; Maier and DePrince, 2020; Merianos *et al.*, 2017; Tomsich *et al.*, 2011, Woolnough, 2009), Australian (Cozens and Sun, 2019), Kenyan (Pryce *et al.*, 2018) and British (Roberts *et al.*, 2022) research. In the latter study, the stranger was perceived as a risk to women's safety, and other factors were inextricably linked to women's perception of feeling unsafe: being alone, desolate places/spaces, darkness, and stories/experiences of sexual attack. As women students moved away from the city campuses into the city, and as they moved from day to night, they were less likely to say they never felt unsafe. Yet not all women reported feeling unsafe as they moved into the city and into the night-time. Rather, as women traversed through the urban landscape, their feelings of unsafety fluctuated depending on the time of day, the space they were in, and the presence of others. Consequently, the interlinked factors that gave rise to women's safety led to the perception of perceived local hotspots causing alarm, such as underpasses, alleyways, unlit paths, and car parks (Roberts *et al.*, 2022). In other British research, the NUS (2011) survey of 2,058 women students found that more than one third reported they sometimes felt unsafe visiting their university/college buildings in the evening. They were most likely to feel unsafe because of harassment or intimidation. In a similar vein, in American research on students, physical locations on university campuses also generated feelings of fear particularly for women students, who were more fearful than men students, in particular buildings and open spaces. Enclosed walkways and parking lots particularly invoked fear (Steinmetz and Austin, 2014). Further support for this comes from Shariati

and Guerette's (2019) research. Drawing upon the key elements of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED): natural surveillance (being seen), controlling access, maintaining a well-kept area, marking territories with barriers, and activities enhancing community interaction, they analysed two on-campus residences in America. They found that the students who lived in the residence conforming to the key elements of CPTED had higher perceptions of safety compared to those students who lived in the residence with low conformity to elements of CPTED. In a similar vein, in a study of students on an Australian university campus, Cozens and Sun (2019, p.301) found that areas perceived as unsafe had 'low levels of surveillance'. Much research shows that by increasing security patrols (Braaten *et al.*, 2020; Cubbage and Smith, 2009; Doyle *et al.*, 2016; Maier and DePrince, 2020; Merianos *et al.*, 2017; Roberts *et al.*, 2022; Stenning *et al.*, 2003), lighting (Braaten *et al.*, 2020; Barberet *et al.*, 2004; Cubbage and Smith, 2009; Maier and DePrince, 2020; Merianos *et al.*, 2017; Roberts *et al.*, 2022; Stenning *et al.*, 2003) and CCTV (Cubbage and Smith, 2009), students' perceptions of safety are enhanced. The following section reviews more about why students feel unsafe and the ramifications of this.

The problem of 'responsibilising' students for their own safety

The national *Crime Surveys for England and Wales* show that women, particularly young women, are mostly at risk of serious physical and fatal harm from men they know (see for example ONS, 2022). Yet studies show that harassment, particularly of a sexual nature, of women in public spaces is common, perpetrated ordinarily by male strangers (Kelly, 1988; Pain, 1991; Vera-Gray, 2016, 2017, 2018). While such abuse reminds

women that any kind of violence can take place (Pain, 1991), it also forefronts the male stranger as a perceived risk to their safety. In Vera-Gray's (2018) research with 50 women who talked about and documented their experiences of unknown men in public spaces, she found all had experienced habitual harassment. Their experiences, as well as those of other women, led them to modify their behaviour, such as either avoiding public spaces or protecting themselves when they are in them. In doing this 'safety work' (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020, p. 265), women trade freedom for safety (Vera-Gray, 2018). In Vera-Gray's (2018) research, women found they were adopting more safety strategies and less harassment was happening to them, thereby indicating the usefulness of women's 'safety work' (see also Stanko, 1997).

Given this backdrop, it is not surprising to find that women students are more likely than men students to adopt avoidance and protective behaviours (Roberts, 2019; Tomsich *et al.*, 2011; Woolnough, 2009). Women students are more likely than men students to avoid poorly lit areas and where there is shrubbery on-campus, and being on their own day and night, on-campus (Woolnough, 2009). Consequently, underpasses, alleyways, unlit paths, and car parks serve as physical barriers preventing some women students from accessing the library because they avoided desolate and unlit areas of the campus (Roberts *et al.*, 2022). Other research has shown the protective behaviours students use, such as not walking alone in spaces with a restricted view (Fisher and Nasar, 1992). Women students are therefore showing agency when managing their perceived risks of danger (Roberts *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, women are expected to regulate their own behaviours to impose their own curfews to ensure their own safety (Vera-Gray, 2018; Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). Similarly, universities operate within a social-political backdrop of neoliberalism (see del

Cerro Santamaria, 2020) that accentuates this individualisation and responsibilisation (Martinez and Garcia, 2000), where individuals are viewed as responsible for solving their own problems, including ensuring their own safety. This 'responsibilization strategy' to ensure safety (Garland, 1996, p.452) is problematic in the context of higher education, for the following interrelated reasons. Firstly, women students are more likely to feel unsafe in public places, and thus, are more likely to restrict their movements and time spent in such spaces. American (Maier and DePrince, 2020; Linder and Lacy, 2020; Woolnough, 2009) and British (Roberts *et al.,* 2022) research has shown how women students restrict their use of the campus, particularly at night. This impacts upon their ability to freely choose when and how to engage in their academic studies. Secondly, the messages emanating from Universities UK initial (2016) and follow-up (2019) reports about changing the culture of violence against women at British universities, *explicitly* places the responsibility for enhancing students' safety, including their perceptions of safety, with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), rather than with the students themselves. This responsibility extends to institutions preventing victimisation in its student population and in being sufficiently equipped to support students who have been victimised. This agenda raises the question of whether students need to adopt avoidance and protective strategies on-campus if it is the institution's responsibility to ensure students' safety. Yet there is little research on students' perceptions of safety on British university campuses. The following outlines the methods of research that aimed to plug this gap.

Methods

Site of Research

This research builds on previous research the author has carried out at the same university in the north of England (see Roberts, 2019; Roberts *et al.*, 2019, 2022). The research presented in this paper adds to these earlier findings by moving beyond a focus on students' experiences of interpersonal violence and upon students' perceptions of safety and security on-campus with the aim of Campus Security using the findings to enhance their practices to enhance students' safety and their perceptions of safety on-campus. This is particularly important in the context of Universities UK (2016, 2019) insistence that universities are responsible for ensuring the safety of students, which includes taking into account their perceptions of safety. The student population of the campuses, which are best described as 'city' campuses given their unmarked borders and the way university land bleeds into the city, is almost 10,000. It is this population who were sent an online survey between 6 November 2019 and 6 February 2020.

The Survey

The survey was designed with closed and open questions, which asked students about their perceptions of on-campus safety. Closed questions that were asked were: how safe do you feel on the campuses, including in university halls of residence (there was less data gathered about this context because only a fifth of the sample went into halls of residence); are there places on the campuses, including in university halls of residence, where you feel unsafe; and open questions explored the 'yes' responses to the latter question by asking which places, why, and what has been the impact of feeling unsafe. Students were also asked about incidents that made them feel unsafe - what incidents

were they concerned about happening on the campuses, what incidents had happened to them on the campuses, where had they happened, and what had been the impact, including questions about Campus Security involvement (there was less data gathered from these questions, see Roberts, 2022, for findings). A final open question asked for suggestions about how Campus Security could improve their services to enhance students' safety. In hindsight, asking students if there are places on the campuses where they feel safe, which places, why and the impact of this would have added to the data and the overall study. Further research should consider these questions as well as studying a larger sample of students and their perceptions of safety in university halls of residence.

The design of the survey was first tested in Qualtrics by several social science staff and students, as well as by some senior Campus Security staff. The latter needed to ensure that they would be able to use the findings to enhance students' safety and perceptions of safety on-campus. Some versions later, and with the agreement from the university that the survey was not going to clash with other important surveys sent out to students, and with the approval of the research ethics group, the communications team sent out the survey to all students', who were studying on the city campuses, e-mail addresses. During the three calendar months that the survey was open, two reminder e-mails to complete the survey, one a month after the survey opened and one just before the survey closed, were sent to students. These reminder prompts, from this and the previous research the author has been involved in, lead to increases in the survey responses around the time the reminders are sent. The survey was also promoted on the university website, university radio and by Campus Security at their two 'advertisement' stands: one in November and

one in January. In total, 550 useable responses were prepared for analysis in SPSS. This is a 6%[1] response rate from the university population, who were sent the survey.

The Respondents

As in the author's previous research (Roberts 2019; Roberts *et al.*, 2019, 2022), there are a higher proportion of women than men who respond to surveys of this sort: 71% (n=387) women and 29% (n=157) men in the current research[2]. The student population from which the respondents were drawn at the time comprised 61% women and 39% men: so, there is an underrepresentation of men students in the research. Sixty-one per cent of students (n=328) in the research are in the age range 18 – 24: the demographic most at risk of violent victimisation (ONS, 2019b). This is somewhat representative of the age of the student population from which the respondents were drawn as 67% of them were in the age range 17 – 24. In the research, women students were significantly statistically more likely to be White British (75%, n=290) than non-White British (25%, n=97). Men were 'equally' likely to be White British (50%, n=78) and non-White British (50%, n=79) ($p<.001$). Over half (56%, n=311) of the students were first and second-year undergraduate students, three-quarters (75%, n=407) were UK/home students, and the majority were full-time (93%, n=508).

Data Analysis

The focus of this paper is primarily on the qualitative data from the open questions about why students feel unsafe on the city campuses, the impact of this, and how to enhance their safety and perceptions of safety. These open responses were analysed thematically

in NVivo to find ‘meaningful patterns’ (Seal, 2016, p.451) in the data that highlighted what was important about students’ perceptions of safety on-campus. During this three-stage process, data was initially open coded, where codes are attached to the data to reflect ‘the literal essence of the data’ (Rivas, 2018, p.433), for example, some students feel unsafe in ‘a dark underpass’. In the second stage of coding, open codes are grouped together to form categories, which are still literal, for example, some students feel unsafe in a dark underpass because of ‘poor lighting’. In the final stage of coding, categories are grouped together to form ordinarily abstract themes, but themes can be literal if the categories which comprise them are dominant (Rivas, 2018). For example, some students feel unsafe in the underpass because it is dark and therefore it ‘lacks (natural) surveillance’.

Data is presented in the findings as students have written it. Accounts are presented from both women and men students although more accounts are presented from women because more women compared to men wrote about feeling unsafe. As stated above, men are under-presented in the survey and further research should consider generating a larger sample of men to explore their perceptions of safety. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain from this research if men’s responses about safety and security differed from women’s responses. Moreover, given the low response rate of 6% of students in this research, the findings cannot be generalised to the wider student population from which they were drawn. Further research should also consider generating larger samples of student populations to be able to ascertain the extent to which the views of the students in this paper are shared by the wider student population.

Findings

Aspects of unsafe campuses

Most students who completed the survey felt safe generally on the campuses: 81% (n=406) of respondents indicated 7 and above on a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 being not at all safe to 10 being completely safe. Just over one-fifth of students, 23% (n=116) of whom 74% (n=85) were women, said there were places on the city campuses where they felt unsafe: car parks, underpasses, bus-stops, train-station, buildings, and areas around particular buildings. Students, predominantly White British women, provided reasons about why they feel unsafe on the city campuses. The thematic analysis developed three overlapping themes: lack of surveillance, dangerous others, and porous borders. The latter two themes of 'dangerous others' (largely conceptualised as strangers) and 'porous borders' (unmarked boundaries of the campus which bleed into the city), are presented more so in another paper (Roberts, 2022), because the focus of this paper is to show why and where students feel unsafe, the impact of this, and what can be done to enhance students' safety and their perceptions of safety, in relation to the theme of 'lack of surveillance'.

Feeling unsafe: lack of surveillance

Surveillance, in terms of the findings presented here, is 'about seeing people' (Lyon, 2007, p.1). Thirty-two students (25 women, 5 men, 1 other gender identity)[3] wrote about

how poor lighting and darkness made them feel unsafe on the campuses. This student explains the difficulties of not being able to see in poorly lit areas:

> Not very well lit so difficult to see who is approaching. […] (Woman, White British).

Twenty-one students, mostly women (n=19)[4] and one man wrote about how isolated areas without many people about also made them feel unsafe, as this next student explains:

> The area isn't well lit and there isn't many people around during those hours, so I feel vulnerable sometimes (Woman, White British). [sic]

The student expects that unlit *and* isolated areas are risky spaces. As in previous research (Roberts *et al.,* 2022), factors converge in the urban environment to enhance women's feelings of unsafety. The limited number of people in the area, at that time, is concerning for the student because she implicitly alludes to relying on others seeing her to enhance her feelings of safety. Without the presence of others, coupled with the darkness, she feels vulnerable. As this next student says she feels unsafe when she is using the underpass and the paths surrounding the library on one of the campuses:

> Dark and out of the way of people that could witness an attack (Woman, White British).

The presence of others is important to her because they 'could witness an attack', which she therefore expects. So does this next student who also signifies the importance of others to help her feel safe when using the enclosed space of the underpass:

> That's a public spot and these days when it gets dark by 3-4pm, it's really scary to walk along that route. There's no way anyone can see or help *if anything were to happen* on that route (Woman, Other Asian background, *my emphasis*).

The student says that others cannot see her in the dark in an enclosed space. Lighting can therefore enhance individual's feelings of safety in two related ways. Firstly, by increasing 'visibility and recognition over greater distance' individuals 'are less at risk of surprise attack' (Painter, 1996, p.200). Whilst lighting has been enhanced in this underpass, the space is still enclosed, which leads onto the second point. Lighting encourages greater use of the streets after-dark. This natural form of surveillance happens when more people are about and it makes individuals feel safer because they are being watched by others (Painter, 1996), what Jacobs (1993, p.45) called, the 'eyes upon the street'.

Surveillance, in the form of others watching, can also be provided through mechanical means, most notably CCTV, as this next student implicitly alludes to when writing about why she feels unsafe in one of the car parks on-campus:

> Very dark on a night time and not many cameras (Woman, White British).

Only two students, both women, wrote about the lack of CCTV making them feel unsafe. More students, eight of them (6 women and 2 men) wrote about how a lack of security personnel made them feel unsafe. The next student explains about the lack of security in the entrance to the library when it is dark:

> No presence or sense of security there (Man, Black or Black British – African).

Similarly, this next woman student expands upon the problem of a lack of security personnel and why that makes her feel unsafe:

> Everywhere, anyone could just walk onto the campus with a weapon for example and there's no security visible to stop them. Also, anyone could walk into the buildings on the campus (Woman, White British).

In this account, the 'lack of surveillance' theme is illustrated as connected to the other two themes arising from the analysis of the qualitative data of 'porous borders' and 'dangerous others'. The borders of the city campuses are porous - they bleed into the city because there are no fences, no gates, and no walls to demarcate the boundaries of the campuses. Moreover, most university buildings did not (still do not) require card access to enter them. The woman student above does not specifically name who the 'other' is, but they are dangerous by virtue of having a weapon. These two themes have been written about in another paper, and this evidences that 'dangerous others' who students said they felt unsafe from were largely conceptualised as strangers (Roberts, 2022). It is difficult to illustrate separately the themes given the convergence of factors that make students feel unsafe on the campuses. The next section shows the impact of students feeling unsafe.

Impact of feeling unsafe: 'responsibilising' students for their own safety

The impact of feeling unsafe 'responsibilises' students for their own safety. Consequently, they adopt avoidance and/or protective strategies when on the campuses. Women (n=40) wrote more about doing this than men (n=5):

> […] Avoid going to and from [name of teaching building] in the dark or alone (Woman, White British).

Given the respondents are writing their responses to the survey questions from early November to early February, during the British seasons of autumn and winter, where the

sun can set in the middle of the afternoon, some of the students' classes and lectures were scheduled when darkness had fallen. The student's account above, like many of the other students, is particularly salient against this backdrop, because she indicates that she only uses this main teaching building, which is connected by an underpass to the rest of the campus, during *daylight* and when she is *with others*. There are times then when she avoids attending her classes and lectures in that building when these two caveats are not present. Due to a lack of surveillance from natural, formal and mechanical sources, such as the presence of others, security personnel and cameras, respectively, in the underpass, she is taking responsibility for her own safety in the absence of others, particularly the institution, in taking responsibility for her safety. Another woman student similarly writes about the impact of feeling unsafe in dark car parks:

> I tend not to stay late or I have to use a light to walk to my car or ring someone so *if anything happens* they can hear it (Woman, White British, my emphasis).

This woman student has a few rehearsed strategies to protect herself in the event of danger, which she also expects. Using a light to walk to her car indicates poor lighting in the area, and as the students indicate in the above section, it is very difficult to see and be seen in the dark. Using a light likely makes the woman feel safer. This woman's other protective strategy of ringing someone so they can hear 'if anything happens' is so that she is watched over, and thus, also likely making her feel safer in the dark car parks. This student also uses an avoidance strategy of avoiding the area when it gets late due to the darkness. Like the student writing in the account above, she too is limiting her study time on-campus because she is compelled to ensure her own safety on the campuses in the absence of the institution providing brighter lighting on the campuses. This next woman

student's account tells of the small window she has to study on-campus because of feeling unsafe in the dark:

> I don't want to go to the library when it gets dark because you dont know whose around at that time, but it gets dark very quickly now so I feel I have to leave uni really early to get back before it is dark (Woman, White British) [sic]

The need for students to have others with them, as a form of natural surveillance to make them feel safer to use the campus, is also evident in the next two women's accounts. This student similarly indicates limiting her study-hours on-campus:

> It puts me off staying back late in the library unless I have someone there with me and puts me off attending late lectures (Woman, White British).

Furthermore, feeling unsafe on-campus can be physically exhausting by taking longer routes to a destination, and ironically unsafe by using 'crossings in the road' rather than an underpass:

> I will choose to go over all the crossings in the road rather than using the underpass, or I will have to take somebody with me (Woman, White British).

Some students wrote about being hypervigilant, constantly monitoring the environment for expected dangers:

> The impact of feeling unsafe is that sometimes I'll turn around just to make sure no one is following me (Woman, Other Ethnic Group).[5]

Consequently, students wrote about the impact of feeling unsafe upon their mental health and well-being. More women (n=12) wrote about this than men (n=7). Many wrote about feeling anxious:

> Causes anxiety and sometimes not wanting to come in which effects my study because if I know I'm there late and have to walk alone in the dark I would rather not come in (Woman, White British) [sic]

Like other women student's accounts presented in this section, lack of surveillance – better lighting and the presence of others is *partly* at the root of why she also limits her study hours on-campus. It is not surprising then that more women than men students provided suggestions about how Campus Security could improve their services to enhance students' safety on the campuses. These responses were broadly categorised as: raising awareness about Campus Security and increasing the quantity *and* visibility of *both* security staff and security measures. The next section presents the findings of these in relation to the lack of surveillance on the campuses. Another paper considers the security measures of controlling access to keep out 'dangerous others' (Roberts, 2022).

Enhancing on-campus safety: 'responsibilising' the institution to provide surveillance

Some students suggested enhancing mechanical surveillance such as CCTV (6 women and 3 men) and lighting (12 women and 2 men) to improve their safety on-campus:

> More CCTV around the outside of the buildings and in the car parks that do not have them. […] (Woman, White British).

> improve lighting in and on the way to car parks. […] (Man, White British).

This next woman student similarly writes about how Campus Security should provide mechanical surveillance after-dark via an app:

> Think there should be more security circling the campus when it gets dark and there should be an app to alert them for example if you are walking back to the car or the university halls of residence (Woman, Arab or Arab British).

The student also suggests providing natural 'formal' surveillance of more visible security personnel. This was the largest measure to be suggested by students of how Campus Security could improve their services to enhance students' safety on the campuses: seventy students (49 women and 21 men) suggested this.

> I think it would be best if campus security were present in areas on [name of campus] campus where there aren't as many students that walk as the potential for an incident happening could be greater when there aren't as many people around. I've only ever seen 2 campus security guards and they were both talking together in the same area, so I would recommend increasing the number of security guards on [name of] campus (Woman, Other Ethnic Group).

The account from this woman student echoes that of the students in the above section about expecting danger in desolate areas. So, students suggested Campus Security enhance lighting, CCTV and most notably security personnel to enhance their safety on-campus. The following section discusses the existing research evidence to support whether such security measures would enhance students' *perceptions of safety.*

Discussion

Some students, particularly women students said that they felt unsafe in places on the city campuses. These places – car parks, underpasses, bus-stops, train-station, buildings and areas around particular buildings - were all areas reported in the author's research carried

out in 2016 (Roberts *et al.*, 2022): more than 3 years before the data was collected for the study presented in this paper. This indicates that students' perceptions of unsafety are ongoing *and* that little has been done to address them. University campuses are microcosms of wider society so like the wider collective of women in society, some women students adopt avoidance and protective strategies on the campuses. Consequently, when they are alone in the dark, they will avoid the campuses, therefore, limiting their on-campus study hours. This research has found that few men adopt such safety strategies, yet further research is needed on larger populations of men students to ascertain the extent and nature of the strategies they adopt on university campuses as well as in wider public spaces.

Students in this research made suggestions about how Campus Security could improve their services to enhance students' safety. It must be recognised that enhancing students' safety and enhancing perceptions of safety can be different. For example, more students suggested that security personnel be increased on the campuses to enhance students' safety than the numbers of students who said they felt unsafe by a lack of security personnel - albeit 27 students did not say why they felt unsafe. As the focus of this paper is on enhancing students' perceptions of safety, the following considers whether such security measures would enhance students' perception of safety.

Shariati and Guerette's (2019) research found on-campus residences confirming to elements of CPTED, such as enhancing natural surveillance and community interaction, enhanced students' perceptions of safety. Enhancing the 'eyes upon the street' (Jacobs,

1993, p.45) and thus natural surveillance (Painter, 1996) in what is ordinarily perceived as gendered space, particularly after-dark, for women (Fisher and Nasar, 1992; Koskela, 1999), may lead to women's increased collective use of that space, and thus enhance their perceptions of safety in that space. This is because 'a well-used city street is apt to be a safe street' (Jacobs, 1993, p.44) or give the perception of a safe street (Painter, 1996). Support for this is in the findings from the research in this paper that point to the importance of other students/friends in enhancing women's perceptions of safety in public places. Drawing on this collective body of students to enhance perceptions of safety is therefore important. Actively engaging in strategies that bring such a community together, such as holding events (Shariati and Guerette, 2019) after-dark in key locations, for example near to the library/s, should enhance community interaction in that space, and in doing so, enhance natural surveillance.

When community interaction is absent, another way of enhancing surveillance, is in a more formalised way, and which many students suggested Campus Security do, and which other research has found to enhance students' perceptions of safety, is to implement regular and targeted uniformed security patrols (Braaten *et al.*, 2020; Cubbage and Smith, 2009; Doyle *et al.*, 2016; Maier and DePrince, 2020; Merianos *et al.*, 2017; Roberts *et al.*, 2022; Stenning *et al.*, 2003). It is particularly important to do this after-dark, and where there is little footfall so students, particularly women, feel safe to walk in areas when they are without their fellow students/friends. Bicycle patrols might be useful in this context because they were highlighted in Cubbage and Smith's (2009) research as allowing security officers to engage more efficiently with the student community. If such strategies were implemented, women students may stay on-campus for lectures and

classes timed later in the day and use the library when it is dark, thereby possibly minimising the impact of their feelings of unsafety upon their academic study. Further research is needed to ascertain whether increasing surveillance on the campuses increases students' use of the campuses when it is dark, and whether this in turn impacts positively upon students' academic study. The implementation of regular and targeted uniformed security patrols may reduce students' anxiety because they may not have to be so vigilant, looking over their shoulder, to see who is following them, if they can see security patrols providing the vigilance for them. Further research is also needed to ascertain the impact of such a strategy upon students' mental health. Other strategies that may be worth implementing include, as one student suggested, Campus Security providing a 'chaperone' service, via an app, to women students after dark. Other research has found support for general 'chaperone' strategies (see Barberet *et al.*, 2004; Braaten *et al.*, 2020; Cubbage and Smith, 2009; Merianos *et al.*, 2017). Research has also found support for enhancing mechanical surveillance, which students suggested Campus Security do, such as lighting (Braaten *et al.*, 2020; Barberet *et al.*, 2004; Cubbage and Smith, 2009; Maier and DePrince, 2020; Merianos *et al.*, 2017; Roberts *et al.*, 2022; Stenning *et al.*, 2003) and CCTV (Cubbage and Smith, 2009), to enhance students' perceptions of safety. The importance for students, particularly women students who govern themselves in particular spaces at particular times, assessing and managing the perceived risks of danger, is seeing and being seen - both serve to enhance their perceptions of safety because they believe danger will not befall upon them if others are watching (Painter, 1996). Research has also shown that re-designing spaces on-campus to open-up enclosed walkways, such as cutting back shrubs, trees, hedges, and knocking down high walls (Barberet *et al.*, 2004; Cubbage and Smith, 2009; Fisher and Nasar, 1992), is also

important to enhance the natural surveillance of women seeing and being seen. Additionally, 'proper landscaping' that enhances gathering areas is a passive way of enhancing community interaction, and in doing so, enhancing natural surveillance, due to the number of individuals in the gathering areas (Shariati and Guerette, 2019, p.572).

There is ample empirical evidence to indicate that better lighting, more CCTV and visible security personnel on the campuses would enhance students' perceptions of safety on the campuses. Whether such surveillance measures make the campuses safer, further research is needed to evidence this. Moreover, some students suggested Campus Security control access to the campuses to keep out 'dangerous others'. Another paper argues that such border controls are likely to exacerbate students' perceptions of safety (Roberts, 2022). It must also be recognised that students' perceptions of safety, particularly women's, do not solely emanate from the built-up environment: wider social and patriarchal processes are important (Koskela and Pain, 2000), such as media (mis)representations of men's violence against women (see Roberts 2019), accounts about women's experiences of harassment (Vera-Gray, 2018), and sexual violence in public places (Roberts et al. 2019, 2022), and experiences of previous victimisation (Sironi and Bonazzi, 2016). These wider factors should not absolve universities of their responsibility and role in enhancing students' safety, including their perceptions of safety (Universities UK, 2016, 2019). King (2009) argues that a community oriented 'policing' approach, particularly that focuses on problem-solving 'policing', should be adopted on university campuses. This involves garnering the opinions of students who use the campuses to inform policies and practices tailored to their needs (see also Kyle *et al.*, 2017; Schafer *et al.,* 2018), similar to what the research in this paper did. King (2009) advocates universities adopt the SARA

model devised by the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing of: scanning, analysis, response and assessment. In scanning, problems are identified, analysing collects more data about the problem, response brainstorms for solutions to the problem, and assessment evaluates whether the solution enacted to the problem works (www.popcenter.org cited in King, 2009, pp. 94-95). For these reasons, it is necessary that universities get into the habit of regularly asking students about their perceptions of safety (Universities UK, 2016, 2019) on-campus so that Campus Security can secure the campuses in ways that serve to enhance students' perceptions of safety so that students use the campus freely. Very little attention has been given to this area in British research. This is despite the annual *National Student Survey* (NSS) including 2 optional questions about student safety: 'I feel safe to be myself at university/college', 'My institution takes responsibility for my safety' (Office for Students, 2021, unpaginated), which are rarely used by HEIs and/or published. HEIs need to adopt these optional questions in their NSS in order to ascertain trends in students' perceptions of safety on-campus, and thereby, providing a benchmark in which to assess progress made in enhancing them (Universities UK, 2019).

Conclusion

This paper has presented data about students' perceptions of safety on-campus. Some students said there were places on-campus where they felt unsafe. Car parks, underpasses, bus-stops, train station, buildings and areas around particular buildings, were perceived unsafe, largely by women. This was because of the interplay of three overlapping themes of: lack of surveillance, dangerous others, and porous borders. Women students particularly adopted their own protective strategies, such as walking with someone so that

they can use the campuses with some perceived sense of safety. Women students also adopted avoidance strategies, avoiding the campuses in the dark, thereby limiting their study-hours on-campus. This paper has highlighted that further research is needed in this area particularly that focuses on the use and nature of safety strategies by men students. The findings in this paper are nonetheless important because of the two-fold related implications that: i) women students need others with them and/or watching them after-dark and ii) implementing brighter lighting, increasing CCTV and security personnel on the campuses may increase the time women students spend studying on the campuses given the existing research evidence that shows such surveillance measures can increase students' perceptions of safety. Moreover, universities should be responsible for enhancing students' safety, including their perceptions of safety, as outlined in the Universities UK (2016, 2019) reports, rather than the students being compelled to adopt their own safety strategies in the perceived absence of surveillance measures. Implementing such surveillance measures can create vibrant and populated campuses thereby signifying the perception of a safe urban environment. It is particularly important for the university to think about enhancing surveillance measures during the global pandemic and Covid-19 restrictions, which reduces the numbers of individuals in public spaces, and in doing so, creating desolate and dark places, ultimately signifying the perception of an unsafe environment.

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Further Readings

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[1] Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.
[2] Difference in figures are non-responses.
[3] There was 1 missing response for gender.
[4] There was 1 missing response for gender.
[5] This category of 'other ethnic group' does not denote those who are not white. Rather it comprises one of the self-selecting categories for the respondent to identify their ethnic group.