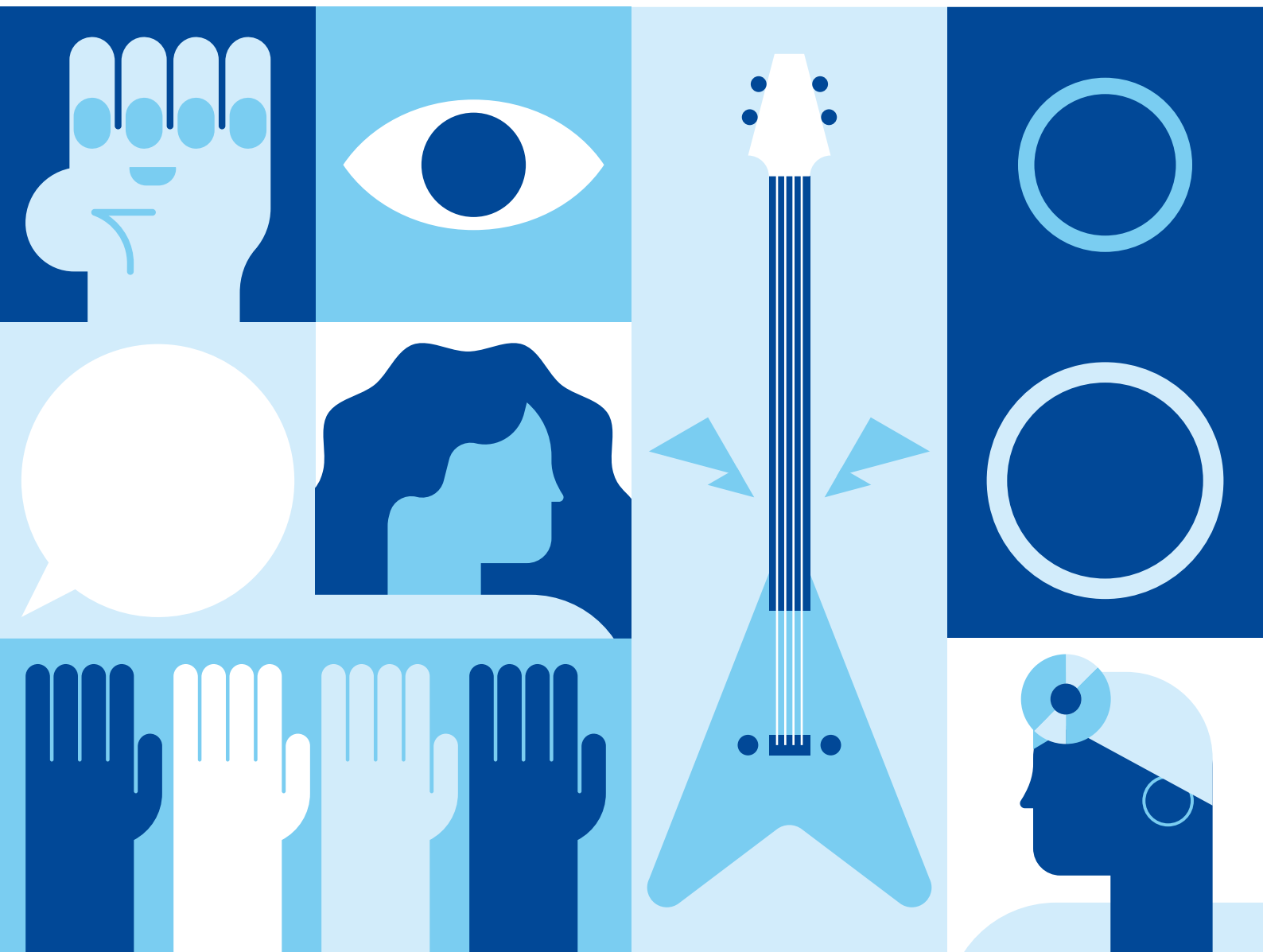


Healthy Music Audiences report

2019



Foreword

by Girl Gang Leeds

Enjoying public space without fearing for our safety is a privilege.

There are many nuances to this - but we've found that for gigs, shows and concerts, it's a gendered issue. It's a space where cis men dominate - they dominate the stage, and they dominate the crowd.

It's a space where women and people of marginalised genders are exactly that - marginalised. They're in the minority and they can't win. They're more likely to feel unsafe, and they're more likely to be harmed.

We're working to foster environments where this is less and less likely to happen - to create spaces where all genders feel safe and comfortable - and where enjoyment isn't compromised by the fear of assault.

We can't do this alone.

This research reinforces that our fears are not unsubstantiated, and that there's work to be done. It shows the impact sexual violence has on survivors, and shows that there's a tangible problem in our music scene.

We'd like to see more investment in training resources to empower venues and promoters to improve the safety of their environments - giving them the ability to intervene when necessary.

We truly believe that this work will help to create safer spaces for everyone - and that audience behaviour will follow if our infrastructure sets a new standard of behaviour.

Everybody deserves to enjoy themselves in a public space. What could you do to make our music scene safe?

Kaz Scattergood
Girl Gang Leeds



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Introduction

Live music has vital economic and cultural value in the UK and significant benefits for participants¹. It 'enhances social bonding, is mood-enhancing, provides health and well-being benefits, is inspiring, and forms part of people's identity'². Enjoyment of the music and feelings of transcendence that come with it are important in live music attendance. Feeling part of a community of fellow audience members is also highly valued^{3,4}. We should not, therefore, neglect what happens between audience members when considering the meaning of live music participation.

Recent media reporting^{5,6,7} and work by campaigning organisations such as Girls Against Gig Groping and Safe Gigs for Women have highlighted the frequency of incidents of sexual violence at live music events. Sexual violence has significant impacts on the physical and mental health of those who experience it⁸. Campaigning and the #metoo movement have created a climate in which sexual harassment and violence at gigs are more likely to be recognised as problematic by concert goers and those in the music industry. As evidence from Venues Day 2017 shows, the music industry is increasingly recognising that sexual violence at live music events is a problem⁹. However, the UK Live Music Census found that only a third of music venues have policies in place to counter such behaviour².

There is very little research into the impacts on victim/survivors' everyday engagements with music, or what venues and promoters might do to prevent and respond to incidents. Unwanted sexual attention, harassment and touching are all too commonplace in urban nightlives¹⁰, but this does not mean that such behaviours – usually, but not always, perpetrated by men against women – should be accepted as normal. Sexual violence limits women's ability to live freely in the world¹¹. It impacts on concert goers by pulling victim/survivors' attention out of the flow of their own thoughts, making them aware of their bodily vulnerability, including, for women, fear of rape¹¹. Eliminating sexual violence is an important goal in itself. Everyone should be able to go to concerts without fear of being touched without permission in the crowd or mentally preparing against such actions.

Healthy Music Audiences is a small research project that aims to understand sexual harassment, groping and assault at live music events. Beginning in February 2018, researchers from the Universities of Huddersfield and Leeds interviewed concert-goers, venue staff and promoters in Leeds, alongside nationwide campaigning organisations, and observed audience interactions at concerts. The focus was on the independent small venue music scene. Small venues are the primary site at which people access live music². The project aims to:

1. Understand experiences of sexual violence and their impacts on victim/survivors
2. Uncover the different responses of venues and promoters to such incidents
3. Assess what might be done to prevent and improve responses to sexual violence
4. Provide guidance for venues and promoters

The project is small in scale and we do not draw quantitative conclusions about the prevalence of sexual violence. Due to constraints of resources, we have been unable to cover all forms of music-making, genre or venue types. This means that we do not make comparisons about sexual violence across genres or venue types. We were unable to speak to perpetrators of sexual violence – none came forward to be interviewed – and so we cannot comment on motivations from first-hand accounts. However, as the report shows, common themes arose across the interviews, which reveal that more can be done to aid fuller musical participation, where it is hindered by sexual violence.

In this report we present findings from the project and recommendations to help prevent and respond to incidents of sexual harassment, groping and assault at gigs and concerts.

Headline findings

Sexual violence is happening at live music events, and it is an equality issue. Most perpetrators are male and most victim/survivors are women. Sexual violence at gigs significantly impacts on (primarily) women's ability to participate fully in the musical life of the city.

Sexual harassment, groping and assault at gigs can result in feelings of fear, loss of dignity, shock, anger and powerlessness which can last for many years. It causes a loss of enjoyment in the music at the event and impacts on future gig going. It results in women avoiding particular venues where they have had bad experiences. In some cases women stop going to live music events entirely.

Few victim/survivors report sexual violence, often because there is a lack of trust that venue staff will respond appropriately. Misconceptions about sexual violence ('rape myths') shape venue staff and promoters' responses when incidents occur.

Venues and promoters are uniquely placed to prevent and respond well to sexual violence at their events, and there are valuable reputational benefits in doing so. However, venues and promoters are typically unprepared and few have preventative or reactive policies and procedures or specially trained staff.

Training and policies such as safe spaces policies can provide venues with a preventative and responsive model to follow. Such policies can reduce the number of incidents. They can also reassure concert-goers and promote feelings of community between audience members, promoters, venue staff and musicians.

Campaigning and training organisations such as White Ribbon and Good Night Out can provide support to venues and promoters seeking to make changes. However, they rely on volunteers and scarce funding.

Methodology

The research generated and analysed four sets of empirical data:

- Interviews with seven concert-goers about their experiences of sexual violence at gigs
- Interviews with three promoters and three venue managers in Leeds
- Interviews with three organisations working to make gigs safer for women
- Ethnographic observation of audience interactions during gigs at three small venues

Interviews with concert-goers

Our concert goer participants answered a social media call for those who had experienced 'unwanted touching and sexual harassment' or 'sexual harassment or violence' at gigs and concerts in Leeds (although some of the events which were described had happened elsewhere). Some participants said they wished to take part in order to benefit others who had suffered sexual violence at live music events. The concert-goers who answered the call typically had experiences that they thought of as 'serious enough', i.e. there may be others who did experience groping but viewed it as a normal part of gig going and therefore not important to tell us about - evidence from our interviews suggests that sexual violence is often normalised by those around the victim/survivor. Five interviewees identified as female, one female/non-binary, one male; ages ranged from 21-43 with a mean of 30, four identified as heterosexual, two as bisexual and one as pansexual; all were white. Five described themselves as middle class, one as working class and one as 'bohemian'. All participants are anonymised below as 'Oona', 'Teresa' etc.

Interviews with venue staff and promoters

Promoters and venues were chosen for their diversity of clientele and approach to putting on gigs. Our aim was to get something like a comparative sample, whilst acknowledging that there are a great number of factors involved in assessing music venues, promotions organisations and gigs. We chose small venues which specialise in live music, rather than pubs which also put on gigs or the larger venues in the city (e.g. the arena or universities' venues). All venues were independent of the larger corporate venues in the city and venues typically held around 200 audience members in one gig room. The promoters worked across these venues and at others in the city and elsewhere. Two of our interviewees identified as women, one as trans and three as men. They are identified below as 'Venue 1', 'Promoter 2' etc.

Ethnographic observation of audience interactions during gigs at three small venues

The observations took place in three small venues in the city. We paid particular attention to what was happening in the audience, in different parts of the auditorium and what kind of atmosphere the venue had. As two women researchers, we spent parts of the evening separate from one another (looking like lone women) and parts together. The amount of time spent together and apart depended on our feelings of safety in the venues. Venues were selected to complement the interview material. Particular gigs were chosen to represent a diversity of musical styles (one funk, one post-punk and one classic rock covers). Gigs occurred on a Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings.

There is a wide diversity of live music events in Leeds and it was our aim to capture a snapshot of this diverse culture rather than to attempt to describe a 'typical' night out listening to live music.

Interviews with three organisations working to make gigs safer for women

There are four organisations in the UK which aim to make gigs safer for women: Good Night Out; White Ribbon; Girls Against Gig Groping and Safe Gigs for Women. The first of these, Good Night Out, focuses on working with venues and other nightlife organisations (pubs, clubs) to train staff about sexual harassment and violence. It operates an accreditation scheme. It is a feminist women-run organisation. White Ribbon has a wider remit of campaigning against men's violence against women. Their Safer Music and Venues campaign works with venues and also has an accreditation scheme. Girls Against Gig Groping and Safe Gigs for Women are awareness-raising campaigns working with the music industry. We interviewed representatives in West Yorkshire from the first three organisations. They told us about the work the organisations are engaged in and gave a sense of the prevalence of sexual violence at gigs.

Defining sexual violence

Legally, sexual assault occurs when someone intentionally touches another person sexually without a reasonable belief that they consent to the touching. In this report, and in undertaking the research, we use a broader definition of sexual violence drawn from premier researcher on the topic, Liz Kelly. She defines sexual violence as:

“any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact.”¹²

This emphasises the everyday experiences of sexual violence which can include a range of behaviours and intrusions. It is not about defining a hierarchy of particular behaviours or acts. Instead this definition aims to take full account of the experiences and reflections of victim/survivors. It is absolutely vital that those who suffer these incidents are taken seriously. Most incidents are not reported, in part because victims worry because they will not be believed or taken seriously. Note that the number of false rape accusations is no higher than false reports for other crimes (3%)¹³.

Findings

01. Sexual violence is happening at gigs

Sexual violence at gigs is no small problem. Campaigners describe it as 'very widespread' (Good Night Out) and a 'long standing issue' (Girls Against Gig Groping). They also highlight the international nature of the problem. There is no statistical data, and the campaigners noted the inadequacy of police crime statistics due to low reporting rates. Incidents of sexual violence range from groping to rape and violent sexual assault. There is a gendered aspect to sexual violence: most perpetrators are men and most victim/survivors are women. All the campaigning groups spoke of the wider societal problem of sexual violence, misogyny and sexism, and patriarchal structures that shape our lives. Thus the gig environment is a microcosm of patriarchal society. This means that the question of which genre has the most sexual violence at gigs makes little sense: it happens in all genres. What makes a difference is the active work of venues to create a safe environment – and this is something which does not have to be genre-specific.

From venue managers, promoters, concert goers and campaigners, we heard of a range of incidents that fall under a broad definition of sexual violence. One concert goer estimated that at a quarter of gigs she had experienced groping (Thora), whilst another referred to a 'laundry list' of sexual harassment (Sinead). In our interviews, we heard from a woman who had experienced a man suddenly and without any prior contact put his hand down her underpants. Another woman felt a man place his penis in her hand. We heard from a man who was repeatedly groped over his clothes on the genitals by a woman who did not heed his 'no'. We heard from women whose roles as musicians had been exploited by male listeners who tried to touch or kiss them whilst on stage or during meet and greets. We heard from women of being groped on buttocks and breasts on numerous occasions.

These incidents take place within a broader live music context of everyday sexism that our participants described to us: bands singing objectifying or sexually violent lyrics (Venue 1, Campaigner 1); men in bands being the perpetrators of violence with fans (Fran); drink spiking (Venue 2); arguments between women and men over the use of space (Venue 2). During our observations we also witnessed men acting in controlling ways such as holding a female partner back from dancing nearer the stage; we overheard a seemingly un-ironic comment from a man to a woman about her enjoying herself too much; and Fran, a musician, reported comments made about her stage costume and performance being too sexual.

The responsibility for sexual violence lies in the hands of the perpetrators. Campaigners argued that sexual violence at gigs is 'a man's issue' to resolve (White Ribbon) and made links to problematic aspects of ideals of masculinity. Sexual violence is normalised as part of a culture of 'male entitlement' (Good Night Out) and the close quarters of the gig crowd can be seen as a chance for what White Ribbon described as a 'freebie', i.e. an opportunistic grope. Girls Against Gig Groping described men's feelings of a need to assert their masculine dominance, especially in genres like emo which are not seen as traditionally masculine. They also raised the issue of a lack of understanding of consent and the law around sexual violence (groping is illegal). Sexual violence when directed at LGBTQ people is cut through with homo- and transphobia. This reflects findings by researchers in the UK, US and Australia about harassment and unwanted sexual attention in public spaces, pubs and clubs^{10,11,14}.

02. Sexual violence impacts on musical participation and is an equality issue

What does this mean for those attending gigs and experiencing sexual violence? 'At the very least it is distracting' (Sinead). And more than distracting. For Teresa, a man progressing his unwanted stroking from her arm to her breast, apologising and claiming it to be accidental each time, 'ruined' the show. She was unable to enjoy the music because even when she was dancing she was vigilant as to where the man was, and aware that the stroking would start up again as soon as she returned to her seat. Oona was in a prime spot in front of the stage when a man assaulted her, suddenly and without any prior contact pushing his hand down the front of her trousers. She immediately left the auditorium and when she returned she moved to the back, away from the stage. Thora drank more to cope with what was happening; sometimes she left the venue altogether. Concert-goers felt anger at not being able to enjoy something they had paid for; some felt that what had happened was 'dehumanising' or 'objectifying' (Oona, Fran) and Fran felt unable to control her personal space. In the moment people felt emotions including fear, powerlessness and loss of dignity, anger, shock, annoyance and irritation (Fran). Some had violent reactions such as punching the perpetrator in the face. The emotional impacts lasted for many years.

In their investigation into how people value live music, Behr et al.³ found that 'participants attach a value to becoming immersed in the live music event'³. This is through feelings of transcendence and immersion in music, and through a sense of belonging within the crowd. Sexual violence pulls victim/survivors' attention away from immersion in the music, and thereby has a significant impact on one of the fundamental ways in which music is felt as valuable. Meanwhile, the second kind of immersion, a feeling of being part of the crowd, is compromised when incidents of sexual violence occur, or are feared. The discomfort resulting from unwanted sexual attention means that people feel unwelcome in the space, that they do not belong¹⁰.

Sexual violence therefore changes the demographic constitution of the space, making women feel unwelcome. Concert goers told us of avoiding particular venues where things had happened to them (Thora) or where they knew of things happening to others (Sinead). People stopped going to gigs alone (Felix). Thora just about stopped going to gigs altogether: she had seen just two bands in three years, when previously she had seen a band every week. She described the mental health toll that resulted from an accumulation of incidents:

"Whenever I started going to gigs I felt very uneasy. I felt like I had to constantly look over my shoulder. And I started having panic attacks, suffering from claustrophobia". (Thora)

The incidents therefore had an impact on our participants' ability to enjoy music, to feel its immersive, transcendent and community forming values and to participate in musical life. The longer term impacts show that for some participants it meant losing out on the experience of live music altogether. It also impacted on women musicians. Oona was packing up after her first solo gig when a man walked up to her and kissed her on the mouth. She 'was so shook up for ages and I was certain I wasn't going to do another gig' (Oona). There is a real risk, then, that sexual violence can impede women's music-making as well as their attendance at live music events.

Sexual violence at gigs is an equality issue for women's musical participation. This raises questions of how men may be using groping, harassment and violence to maintain the male dominance of the gig space. Feminist theorists¹⁵ and riot grrrl analyses¹⁶ have previously argued that sexual violence is used to preserve male power. This is particularly obvious in reports from Northern Ireland's straight edge scene. Here, cries of 'no clit in the pit' and the sexual assault and rape of women who do enter the moshpit are how young men police the space and acceptable behaviour for women¹⁷.

03. Victim/survivors face barriers in reporting incidents to venues and promoters

Many concert goers felt unable to seek help from, or report what had happened to, venue staff or promoters. Bouncers were viewed as the first port of call, but typically were not trusted by victim/survivors. A willingness to report also depends on the attitudes of friends. Friends may step in to help and so 'reporting' may mean telling friends about what has happened rather than speaking to security or venue staff. Speaking to the band and making a complaint via social media were also means by which victim/survivors reported. That someone may feel more willing to tell a band member reveals that bands have an important role in campaigning against sexual violence, but also that venues have work to do to generate women's trust.

One of the biggest barriers to reporting to the venue for victim/survivors is that bouncers are perceived as inexperienced in dealing with sexual assault. This is compounded by the belief that they are invested in a 'macho' demeanour and more interested in holding down a job than in caring for the clientele of venues. Many concert goers had previously had bad experiences when they had reported what had happened to them. For example, security staff said victim/survivors should expect it or shrugged and took no action. In some cases it was the security staff who were perpetrating the violence. Venue staff misread an assault as consensual sexual activity and so took no action. Teresa expressed how she imagined venue staff to hold onto ideas about sexual violence that could be categorised as 'rape myths', for example that women lie about being assaulted or are partly responsible if drunk or wearing short skirts. Four participants said they felt they would not be believed and thought drunkenness would be used to discredit their side of the story. Linked to this, one woman feared that the perpetrator would claim that what had happened was 'an accident' and this would be given more credence. She described this as 'gaslighting'*.

A fear of unsuitable responses also prevented victim/survivors speaking out: they anticipated being taken out of the auditorium to explain what had happened,

which would mean missing more of the performance they had come to hear. Alternatively they worried that by drawing attention to themselves they would be removed from the venue altogether because they were very drunk or, in one case, underage for a licenced venue. One concert goer was concerned that the personal relationship of the perpetrator with the venue owner would result in problems for her business, i.e. she feared the ramifications of reporting. The campaigners mentioned fear that the perpetrator was still on the premises, and we also heard of fear of the physicality of the bouncers and concern that in telling friends, violence would escalate between men. The built environment of one particular venue made it difficult to contact any venue staff, and with no security staff on hand, audiences were expected to manage themselves.

Inevitably, distress and fear of further distress through reporting is also a barrier. The fear of further distress is directly related to the attitudes of security, venue and promotional staff. Where inappropriate action is taken, where perpetrators are felt to be seen as more credible than victim/survivors, and where there is a lack of understanding of the law, consent and the impacts of sexual violence, this compounds the distress of sexual violence.

Women dealt with sexual violence in a range of ways, and this was related to who they were with and the levels of support offered. Two concert goers talked about wanting to keep the peace and not bring additional drama to what was supposed to be a fun evening. Such attitudes are related to women's socialisation to put others first. Similarly one concert goer talked about feeling that she could handle sexual violence, an attitude that was tied to her identity as 'one of the boys'. Sometimes, however, handling it meant persuading herself it was an accident so that she did not have to respond.

With these multiple barriers, reporting an incident is unlikely to be at the forefront of victim/survivors' minds.

*Gaslighting is a manipulation tactic used by abusers to discredit the victim/survivor's version of events. It challenges the victim/survivor's belief in their understanding of what is happening, thus undermining their sense of their own sanity.

04. Male venue staff and promoters are caught off guard when incidents occur

Cis male venue managers and promoters told us that they felt shocked and surprised when an incident had occurred. For Promoter 2, the incident was an eye opener which led him to reflect on his more privileged position amongst concert goers:

"I'm conscious that I'm a white man so I'm not on the receiving end of this sort of activity. But yeah if I'm honest I was just a bit surprised. I wasn't expecting to have to deal with this." (Promoter 2)

The majority of venues and promotion groups in the city are run by cis white men and, as Promoter 2's comments show, this group may not have personally experienced sexual harassment, violence or unwanted touching. Moreover, until recently we would suggest that the issue has been treated as a normal hazard of gig going for women and therefore not openly discussed. Thus cis male venue staff and promoters may not have sexual violence at gigs on their radar as a problem, or they may misunderstand what 'counts' as sexual violence.

Promoters and venue staff want to do something about sexual harassment and violence at their gigs, but are unsure what. Some promoters and venue managers do not have a sound understanding of the contexts and meanings of sexual violence. Their perceptions of incidents are marred by 'rape myths', as anticipated by Teresa. 'Rape myths' are part of the common discourse of sexual violence. They can be found in media reporting and judges' closing statements, amongst other places. It is therefore not surprising to find that they inform venue staff and promoters' views. It indicates that specialist training in understanding the contexts of sexual violence would be beneficial.

Only one venue we spoke to has policies and procedures for staff, audience and band members to follow (which we will come to below). In general there is a lack of reactive procedures as well as proactive policies. This lack causes problems for venues when an incident occurs. For instance, the manager at venue 3 told us that when a man had groped a female musician's buttocks whilst she was packing away equipment, he and his staff 'didn't know how to react to it as well as we should have done' (Venue 3).

A lack of awareness and understanding of sexual violence on the part of venue staff and promoters leads to poor responses for concert goers. Thus there is a vicious circle of victim/survivors not wanting to seek help from the venue and venue, staff and promoters therefore being unaware that sexual violence is occurring at their events.

05. Women take note of a venue's reputation for dealing with sexual violence

Poor responses to incidents of groping, sexual harassment and assault do not only impact on the victim/survivors' musical lives: the ripples reach other concert goers too. Our participants provided evidence of a significant reduction in trust in venues when things were handled inadequately. Rumours of incidents and their mishandling impacted on trust, with Thora arguing that venue managers 'turn a blind eye' to sexual violence in their premises. Furthermore, some participants said they would not go to venues where they knew the management to be supportive of known harassers or where they knew of incidents of sexual violence frequently occurring. Women, then, make choices about which gigs to go to depending on where the concert is being held. This means that potentially they may choose not to see a favourite artist because they feel at risk in a venue.

That women's 'whisper network' – through which women share safety information about who to evade being alone with, or which venues to avoid – is key in women's decision-making about gigs and should not be underestimated. Venues and promoters' reputations are at stake, particularly in the current climate of an increased willingness to talk about sexual violence, and to use social media to do so. We found that when women were uncomfortable speaking to venue staff, that making a statement via social media was an alternative reporting route. When sexual violence is reported on social media this has the potential to be highly damaging for a venue or promoter's reputations.

During the research an incident was reported online about a particular venue, with the impact that one concert-goer we spoke to said she would never return to the venue. One promoter also said that they would have to think very carefully about whether to put gigs on there in the future.

One venue in Leeds with a well-publicised safe spaces policy has a very good reputation and was cited by concert-goers as somewhere they felt safe. They believed that if something happened it would be dealt with appropriately. Venues and promoters have much to gain in developing a proactive well-publicised anti-violence stance. Doing so has the potential to significantly boost their reputation.

06. A strong sense of community can create an atmosphere in which sexual violence is deemed unacceptable, and can help gig goers feel safer

Venues and promoters are uniquely placed to take a role in preventing and responding to incidents of sexual violence. Concert goers' feelings about venues are an important factor in determining their enjoyment⁴, i.e. going to gigs is not just about the music. Venues and promoters must take into account how they manage the audience's interactions with one another. Where a strong sense of community exists between a venue and its clientele, feelings of safety increase¹⁰. Sense of community can also help to prevent sexual violence by providing an atmosphere in which other customers and staff are more likely to step in if they see someone harassing someone else. Concert goers want a sense that the venue cares about them, rather than being only interested in its bottom line. Fundamental to this is a sense of community through a shared responsibility of the people in the venue (staff and audience).

Policies on what forms of behaviour are acceptable and what happens if those lines are transgressed, drawn up in discussion with venue users, can be very useful in generating a sense of community. Through discussion, a shared responsibility for ensuring the safety of everyone in the venue is created. The venue we spoke to with a safe spaces agreement negotiated and reflected on it in discussion with those using the venue. Safe spaces policies originated in radical feminist groups¹⁸, but have been used by riot grrrl and LGBT music collectives to ensure environments free from oppression (misogyny, homophobia, transphobia and racism)¹⁹.

Safe spaces provide relative freedom from misogyny and other forms of oppression, and also freedom for self-expression²⁰. The concept of safe spaces is a useful tool to consider how gigs may be improved for concert goers, especially women. Safety and freedom from sexual violence should be a pre-requisite for enjoying the immersive and communal experiences of live music.

A safe space policy clarifies what kind of behaviour is un/acceptable (e.g. violence and intimidation; prejudicial treatment; and harassment) and details the procedures that the venue will follow in the event of the policy being transgressed. Core values are care and respect for others, listening to others' views and willingness to change. Audience members are encouraged to report any deviations from the policy and are assured that they will be taken seriously and the incident treated confidentially. Contravention of the policy may result in ejection or a ban from the premises and the possibility of police involvement. Believing the victim/survivor is a crucial component of the policy, reflecting the feminist principles in which safe spaces are grounded, as well as the fact that false allegations are rare.

Safe spaces policies do not prevent sexual violence altogether, but they are likely to act as a preventative. Such policies ensure that victim/survivors' distress is not compounded or worsened by poor reactions from venue staff. They also legitimate the experience of the harassed concert goer by believing them and providing a robust victim/survivor-centred response. In enabling people to feel believed and respected this provides an atmosphere that is friendlier to women in particular. The policy therefore provides a sense of community in which women are more likely to feel free to enjoy fuller musical participation.

07. Venues face barriers in preventing and responding to sexual violence

Safe spaces are not the only answer to preventing and responding to sexual violence, but the practical steps taken in safe space venues could well be taken into consideration by other venues. Such steps need not alienate particular groups within the audience, but rather encourage other groups (women, LGBTQ people) to feel comfortable and safe in the venue. Doing this kind of work would necessitate that policies be adapted to reflect the local community, which should be viewed as positive community work. We would not want to see policies watered down in this process, but rather for venues to view taking such action as a core part of their audience management strategy and caring for equal access to music.

Safe spaces policies work when they are acted on consistently¹⁰. However, a lack of consistency in their application means that for some the concept now has a bad reputation: Promoter 3 avoided using such policies since she had heard of situations in which they were not consistently acted upon. She preferred to rely on the self-policing of the close-knit audience instead. Yet, self-policing is not always as effective as it is hoped to be, especially if the perpetrator is friends with venue staff or other powerful members of the scene. The venue in the city with a safe spaces policy that we spoke to worked around this problem by actively and frequently reflecting on the policy and its implementation in discussion with the venue's users. On the other hand, the manager at venue 2 was concerned about the exclusion of men that he saw as a consequence of safe spaces policies. In doing so he misunderstood the purpose of such policies and failed to acknowledge the unequal environment of the gig space.

There are other, practical barriers which prevent venues and promoters from doing more to prevent sexual violence at their events, as highlighted in our interviews with campaigning organisations, venue staff and promoters. When it came to accessing training, some promoters and venue staff did not know that training was available or how to go about accessing it. Campaigners indicated that venues and promoters say they cannot afford training, but there was the suggestion that such training was not seen as a priority. As discussed above, some do not see the need to take action since they had no personal experience of harassment or violence and therefore did not recognise it as a problem.

Raising awareness of the problem of sexual harassment, groping and assault at gigs should be paired with information about practical solutions and support on offer in order to breach some of these barriers.

08. Campaigning and training organisations have limited resources

Campaigning and training organisations are doing vital work in raising awareness of the problem of sexual violence at live music events. Their arguments have reached an international audience and increasingly the music industry is listening and taking action. High profile spokespeople such as Sam Carter of Architects play a key role in this. However, heightened awareness of the problem brings more requests for the services of training and accreditation organisations like White Ribbon and Good Night Out. Campaigning and training organisations have limited resources, relying on scarce funding and volunteer workers. For example, one campaigning organisation we spoke to was being partly funded by the 'tampon tax'^{**}, but this funding lasts only a year and then needs to be re-applied for. This lack of funding inhibits organisations' ability to work consistently or to sustain long-term actions. Staffing by volunteers means that there are always pressures of time and other responsibilities, such as paid work, to contend with. There is also a risk of volunteer burnout, as working in this area is emotionally hard. For example, volunteers from Good Night Out need to train around gender as well as rape myths in the face of sometimes unsympathetic trainees, which can be emotionally draining.

The UK Live Music Census² found that a strong music scene within a city depended on the success of numerous venues. It is therefore in the interests of venues and promoters to work together to share good practice and to support one another in becoming safer venues. Backing the campaigning and training organisations they work with, for example by putting on fundraising events and holding volunteer drives, would ease the work of campaigners. It would also raise awareness of their work whilst also boosting the venue and promoter's reputations.

^{**}The 'tampon tax' is the VAT paid on sanitary products. Feminists argue that sanitary products are a necessity and should not be subject to tax at all. In the UK, the money raised by the tax is now made available to charities.

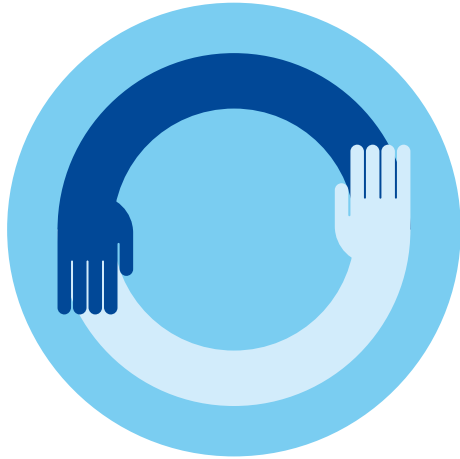
Conclusion and recommendations



Sexual violence is happening in small music venues. It is mostly, but not only, being perpetrated by men against women. It impacts on musical participation in a number of ways it causes immediate and long term harm to victim/survivors; it pulls the victim/survivor out of themselves so they are no longer immersed in the music; it disrupts feelings of community in the audience so that victim/survivors no longer feel comfortable; it polices the demographics of the space, promoting the male dominance of the area; and it causes victim/survivors to circumscribe their gig-going activities.



Venues and promoters are well placed to address these issues through audience management. However, most are typically unprepared to deal with incidents of sexual violence, nor are they immune to 'rape myths' which inform common discourses of sexual violence. Poor responses from venues result in low trust from victim/survivors and from women who are aware of the reputation of poorly responding venues.



There is an opportunity for venues and promoters to establish a strong sense of community amongst all those using the venue, boosting their reputation in the process. Such a sense of community can help to prevent sexual violence and increase access to live music for women.



Safe spaces policies present a means to rethink what venues and promoters can do to provide an environment which is free from sexual violence. Clear and rigorously implemented policies and procedures in relation to sexual violence, agreed with audience members and other stakeholders in the venue, represent the most likely way to combat sexual violence through their nurturing of a strong sense of community.



We have created guidelines for venues and promoters. Venues and promoters should work with one another across the city to promote awareness and share good practice. Such changes need to work in tandem with broader changes in the culture of live music and in society more generally. To gain a broader democratisation of music participation needs investment and practical action from men in the music industry, as well as women and LGBTQ groups.

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Support numbers

If you have been affected by anything in this report, the following organisations can offer support:

Rape Crisis

Rape Crisis support survivors of sexual violence

<https://rapecrisis.org.uk>

Freephone:

0808 802 3344

Victim Support

Victim Support provides support for survivors of sexual violence, including specialist support for male survivors

<https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/more-us/why-choose-us/specialist-services/sexual-violence-services>

Freephone:

0808 168 9111

This report was written by

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Published in Huddersfield, UK, 2019.

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