

## **Understanding the links between personal safety, mental health and well-being**

The topic of 'safety' is a broad and multi-dimensional concept with numerous factors which contribute to its prevalence. Such factors include physical; sexual, psychological, economic, and emotional safety. Much of the observed existing literature, which explores personal safety on university campuses can be broken down into two key sections. The first key section is UK based research exploring violence of a gendered and sexual nature (See Anitha & Lewis 2018; Phipps & Smith 2012). Personal safety on campus has also received attention from student activist groups such as the National Union of Students (NUS) who campaigned against the rise of sexual violence within campuses across the United Kingdom (Bovill et al; 2020). The second contribution towards understanding personal safety on university campuses largely sits with American research, exploring mass shootings which have taken place across American College campuses (See Sloan 2002; Muschert, 2007 & Borum et al; 2010). Additionally, the prevalence and scale of hate crime perpetrators who infiltrate campus spaces has also received academic attention (Downey & Stage 1999). From this brief examination of the existing literature in relation to personal safety on campus, there are two key points which have become clear. Firstly, there is a significant gap in the literature which integrates the role that personal safety has on enabling or hindering positive student mental health and wellbeing. Secondly, existing research on student personal safety has rarely expanded beyond the campus perimeter. For example, the impact of feeling and being safe within local communities and residential areas has been largely overlooked. Considering these gaps in the literature, it is therefore necessary to explore psychological; sociological and criminological frameworks whereby the necessity to explore personal safety as having an important role in student wellbeing becomes clear.

### **Utilising theory as a platform for future research**

Maslow's 1970 theory of motivation is a useful theoretical framework in which to begin understanding the basic human requirements to achieve self-actualisation and subsequent positive mental health. One of which includes safety and security (Mathes, 1981). Although the empirical validity of Maslow's theory of motivation has been challenged and tested through rigorous academic research (See Lester, 2002), it's argued that Maslow's framework has helped inspire further exploration studies on the links between personal safety and mental health. The research of Guite et al; (2006) indicates that there lies within the human psyche a link between the construction of the physical; built environment and how mental health is shaped. Guite et al (2006) argued the key factors influencing mental health that occur within the built environment are noise, space, overcrowding, facility access and a fear of crime. Building on these factors which were discovered through participant focus groups, Guite et al (2006) emphasised the necessity to implement interventions and safeguarding policies which enables occupants of residential areas to navigate the urban space safely and thus enabling a healthier experience of mental health and wellbeing.

Considering these studies, it is argued there lies a link between personal safety; mental health and well-being. However, personal safety is a multi-dimensional concept. The following section will decipher the five key strands of safety and suggest policies that HEI's can undertake to ensure the safety of their students. In doing so, their mental health and well being can be enabled to flourish.

The first key element of personal safety is safety in the city and ensuring students are aware of their surroundings and the methods of navigating urban spaces. It is recommended that HEI's organise and deliver workshop sessions as part of the enrolment process which advice students of key factors to consider when navigating a city. An example of how these workshops can be broken down is as follows:

**Keeping yourself safe in and around the city - Out and About**

- Through both day and night, ensure that you have a clear understanding of where you are going, carefully plan your route and try your best to stick to main roads, busy areas, and well-lit streets.
- If you have carefully planned your route before departure, you should feel less inclined to look at a map or a mobile device on the street- It is important to look as confident and aware as possible when walking around the city.
- A guide to walking with confidence. Displaying and reading body language.
- If on a night out, ensure that you stay in the group you have gone out with and return home with your group- Information can be provided on safer drinking practises.

**Using Cash machines**

- If possible use cash machines during the daytime.
- It is always best to use a cash point in a busy and well-lit area.
- Where possible, avoid areas with poor lighting and quiet areas.
- Ensure that when your cash is presented to you, you take it quickly along with your bank card, and put them back quickly in your purse, wallet, or bag. Never keep cash or bank cards on display for any longer than necessary.
- Never display or write down your personal identification number (PIN)

**Mobile Phones**

- Make all efforts to ensure that your mobile phone is out of sight in public places.
- Joining university is a period of social change and development, taking this into consideration it is advisable to only give your number to family and friends who you trust.
- Use security features embedded into your mobile device, such as additional security codes for access and ICE data services in case of emergency.

**Electrical Equipment-**

- Ensure you have suitable insurance for your possessions.
- Property marks your valuables and record their details, e.g., serial numbers, codes, makes and models as well as the IMEI number on your mobile phone. (To find your IMEI number, press **\*#06#** on the dialling pad, and your number IMEI number will appear on the screen.
- If you possess an item which is valuable, consider taking a photograph of it.

**Figure 1.** *Example of structuring workshop 1 "Safety in the city"*

The second key element of personal safety is ensuring that students are of an understanding of how to protect their homes and accommodation from burglary and fire. A workshop on offering resources and advice can be structured as follows:

- Try to ensure that you are displaying visible signs that someone is occupying the property. Many burglaries are targeted and occur if it's obvious the property is empty. Christmas, Easter, and the summer holidays are the key durations in which burglaries occur. Timer light switches could be useful here.
- It is important to ensure that all valuable; sentimental possessions are not left in the property if the property is empty for a long period of time.
- Try to ensure that valuables are not left by windows or in visible sight for anyone looking in from the street.
- If possible, it could be worth insuring possessions which couldn't be easily replaced.
- Be cautious as to who you are letting into your property. If you are living in shared student accommodation, try to ensure that entrance doors are locked after you. Also, try not to let anyone into the building who you don't know.

#### **What to do in the event of being burgled.**

If you encounter a burglar whilst in the property, ensure that you get into a room which can be locked from the inside. Do not engage with the burglar and immediately call the Police.

#### **What to do after a burglary.**

- It is very important to not touch anything! The house or building is now a crime scene, and if the police can conduct an investigation, they would likely be forensic residue left behind, which would significantly aid the investigation.
- Make a list of everything that you think has been damaged or stolen, if the items had been registered and insured it would be easier for the police to return the items to you, and to discover the burglars, and make the necessary arrests.
- Contact your landlord as soon as possible to notify them of what has happened, but also so they can make the changes to ensure the property is secure again, for example replacing a broken window, or broken-down door. These changes would need to be made as soon as possible, and your landlord should have an out of hour's emergency number for these physical changes to be made.
- If items such as your bank cards have been stolen, it is very important to inform your bank immediately and let them know. They can block your cards to prevent someone from using them, as well as adding extra security measures to your bank account.
- When the Police respond to your 999 calls, they will provide a Crime Reference Number which will help you to track the process of your case investigation and for general reporting record purposes. The Crime Reference Number would also be submitted to your Insurance Company.

**Figure 2.** Example of structuring workshop 2 “Key tips to help avoid the risk of being burgled”

The third element of personal safety is safeguarding against bullying, discrimination, harassment, and violence. As part of the student enrolment programme, a workshop can be organised which should consist of two key parts. Firstly, ensuring students understand what bullying, discrimination, harassment, and violence is. Also, that they understand the variety of modalities in which they can occur and the short; long term consequences of such actions. For example, breaking down the physical, psychological, economic, emotional, and social causes and consequences. Secondly, to ensure all students understand the reporting process undertaken within their HEI and how to access such facilities. It is recommended that students are trained in identifying behaviours which consists of bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence. To take a unified approach whereby both students and staff work together to eradicate such behaviours on their campus.

The fourth personal safety element is emphasising safer drinking practices and ensuring students are aware of the legal; social and health risks contained within consuming alcohol and illicit substances. A workshop during enrolment can take the following structure:

- If drinking at home, ensure you pour small quantities of alcohol into your glass at varied periods throughout the event.
- If you pour alcohol to the rim of your glass, you tend to drink more than you realise, often in a bid to reduce the overspill of the alcohol from the glass
- Use measurements to pour your alcohol consumption, particularly for spirits
- Try to pour your own drinks, to keep up to dates with your own measurements

**What does 1 unit of alcohol look like?**

Standard 4.5% cider 218ml    Standard 13% wine 76ml    Standard 40% whiskey 25ml    Standard 4% beer 250ml    Standard 4% alcopop (275ml) 250ml

You shouldn't regularly exceed 14 UNITS   
 drinkaware

- Use social media tools such as WhatsApp. Ensure you communicate with your friends and family, both who are out on the night with you, and those sitting at home. Message when you have arrived home safe, and make a social media group chat, so you can all keep in touch
- Prearrange a meeting point with your group, so if any of you get lost from the others, they or you would know where to meet, particularly if phone battery dies and you/they are unable to communicate. This leads onto the next important tip
- Before going out, ensure you have fully charged your phone to 100% battery
- Stick together and don't isolate others from the group

**Figure 3.** Example of structuring workshop 3 “Safer drinking practises”

The fifth and final key element of personal safety is coping with panic attacks, anxiety, and stress. Firstly, its important to ensure that students understand the complexities of mental health. Generally, mental health is a fluid process which can affect anybody, anytime and for any reason. One factor which

can impact student mental health is a feeling of personal safety. Ensuring they feel equipped and empowered to navigate the campus space and wider community is argued to be paramount. Additionally, there is lots of advice to help students cope with their mental health. Information could be structured as displayed below:

**Self-care tips for anxiety**

**Talking to someone-**

Approaching someone who you trust, this can be a family member, friend or support worker and just sitting down and discussing your fears and worries can often release the stress. If you are unable to open up to someone in a close circle, there are numerous external support networks which care and genuinely want to listen. Samaritans and Anxiety UK are just two of them. They operate a free helpline which you can access to talk to someone. **(Note- it is worth doing a scope to determine local support services within the community).**

**Try to manage and control your worries-**

The feeling of worry can be very hard to stop when you are suffering from anxiety. You might have worries which you are unable to control, or as mentioned earlier you may feel if you do not stop worrying then something bad will happen. Ways of managing worries and stress can be through-

Setting aside a specific time to focus on your worries. Some people like to set a timer, so that when this timer runs out, worrying must stop as it is beyond the designated time. This is a psychological process to help you think that you don't need to spend all of your time worrying.

Write down any worries, fears or concerns in a notebook, which you may keep in a particular place. Other methods can include writing on pieces of paper which you store in jars or envelopes.

**Look after your physical health-**

Try and maintain a consistent sleeping routine. The average adult needs up to 7 hours sleep a night minimum to fully function throughout the next day. Sleep gives you the physical and mental energies to cope with challenging feelings and experiences. Sleep deprivation can have major implications for the general state of mental health.

Think about your diet- Eating at least three nutritious meals a day can really play a positive impact on your mood and experiences. Blood sugar levels need to be maintained for general physical and mental stability.

Try and do some physical activity- It is important to remember that we all hold different capabilities in the physical exercise arena, some more so than others. Exercise can be very beneficial for your mental wellbeing through the aspects of consuming water, breathing fresh air, moving your body, and socialising with others also on the same mission.

**Develop breathing exercises-**

Developing breathing exercises can help someone to feel more in control of themselves and their situation as well as grounding them and keeping them mentally in the reality. Slow, gradual, and deep breathing exercises regularly and in preparation for a panic attack can really help in the long term.

**Keeping a diary-**

Keeping an active diary account is a very useful way to reduce feelings of anxiety and to restore calmness. It is down to the individual as to how they would structure the diary and the contents within it. A diary for many can be a space to write down the most personal, deep thinking and private thoughts, feelings, and actions. A space for many to vent and for these thoughts, feelings, and actions to be established, and for them to be left in the diary and to be removed from the mind of the individual. It is also important to make notes as to the positive thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Being kind to yourself and noticing the positives are key.

**Bringing together peer support-**

Peer support is a great method of bringing people together over shared issues. Many people like to get together and stay connected through face-to-face interactions or phone calls. See at the end of this document for external support networks for those suffering with anxiety, stress, and panic disorders.

**Figure 4.** Example of structuring workshop 4 “Coping with/ helping others with panic attacks, anxiety, and stress”

## Recommendations

Thinking forward, there are five key recommendations for HEIs to consider implementing. All of which are in the interests of ensuring students are as safe as possible on campus from a series of harms including physical; psychological and emotional. If students are safeguarded from these harms, it is strongly argued that their mental health and well being can be better preserved and enable to thrive.

1. Firstly, its recommended that HEIs undertake Anti bullying, discrimination, harassment, and violence safeguarding training for both staff and students. It is hoped this would establish a sense of collectivism, community and responsibility within the student body.
2. Secondly, its recommended that as part of the enrolment process for new and returning students, they receive a series of five workshops which emphasise key tips and resources to stay safe. As illustrated earlier, it is advised they consist of the following:
  - a. Safety in the city,
  - b. Safety in homes/accommodation,
  - c. Safeguarding against bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence,
  - d. Safer drinking practises/ consumption,
  - e. Coping/helping others with panic attacks, stress, and anxiety.
3. Thirdly, its recommended that HEIs offer a virtual/physical tour of their campuses, accommodations, and surrounding areas. It is hoped that If students are advised as to key zones which could be safer or not as safe, they can make informed decisions as to how they commute; navigate the campus and community, and more-so knowing where to access help facilities and local services.
4. Fourthly, its recommended that HEIs either establish or develop a tool kit to report crime; anti-social behaviour and incidents which occur on campus and within the community.
5. Fifth, its recommended that HEIs collaborate with local services/authorities such as the police and trusted taxi companies. HEIs should also seek to provide emergency financial support for students who cannot afford taxis/ safe options to commute. Such collaboration should be communicated to students and should involve their participation and feedback throughout.

### **Closing thought: the role played by the pandemic in shaping personal safety**

It is necessary to briefly explain the impact covid-19 has had on influencing personal safety within HEIs. On a global scale, many students are currently studying at home. This means that there are not as many students on campuses as once before. However, as the UK and parts of Europe look to end all lockdown precautions during the summer of 2021, its important to remember that as students are welcomed back to campus, there could be a new wave of risks to their safety, mental health and well-being. Such risks can be street crime, fear of contracting the virus and general anxieties related to being back out in public again. Therefore, in the interests of risk reduction and early intervention, the information and recommendations provided above is relevant and important to consider when students return to campus in September and onwards.

## References

- Anitha, S. and Lewis, R. (2018). *Gender based violence in University: Communities: Policy, prevention, and educational interventions in Britain*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Borum R., Cornell D.G., Modzeleski W., and Jimerson S.R (2010). What can be done about School shootings? A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), pp. 27-37 DOI: 10.3102/0013189X09357620.
- Bovill H., McMahan S., Demers J., Banyard V., Carrasco V., and Keep L (2020). How does Student activism drive Cultural Campus change in the UK and US regarding Sexual violence on Campus? *Critical Social Policy: SAGE*. DOI- 10.1177/0261018320913967. {Accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021}.
- Downey J.P. and Stage F.K (1999). Hate Crime and violence on College and University Campuses. *Journal of College Student Development*. 40, (1), p.3.. URL- [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Frances\\_Stage/publication/234646931\\_Hate\\_Crimes\\_and\\_Violence\\_on\\_College\\_and\\_University\\_Campuses/links/558c3bfb08ae591c19d9f61e.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Frances_Stage/publication/234646931_Hate_Crimes_and_Violence_on_College_and_University_Campuses/links/558c3bfb08ae591c19d9f61e.pdf). {Accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021}.
- Guite., H.F. Clark, C. and Ackrill, G. (2006). The impact of the physical and urban environment on mental well being. *Journal of Public Health*. 120 (12) P.p. 1117-1126. Available at URL: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0033350606003015> {Accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021}.
- Lester, D. (1990). Maslow's hierarchy of needs and personality. *Personality and individual differences* 11 (11). Available at URL: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/019188699090032M> {Accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021}.
- Mathes, E.W. (1981). Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a guide for living. *Journal of Humanistic psychology* 21 (4). Available at DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F002216788102100406>
- Muschert, G.W. (2007). Research in School Shootings. *Sociology compass- Wiley Online Library*. 1 (1) P.p. 60-80. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00008.x>
- Phipps., A. and Smith, G. (2012). Violence against women students in the UK: time to take action: *Journal of Gender and Education* 24 (4) P.p. 357-373. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2011.628928> {Accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021}.
- Sloan J.J (2002), the correlates of campus crime: An analysis of reported crimes on College and University Campuses. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. 22, (1) pp 51-61. Available at URL: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0047235294900485> Accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021}.