



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Sexual harassment, groping and assault at gigs and concerts

What we can do about it

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Introduction

In the last few years there has been a lot of attention paid to sexual harassment, groping and assault at gigs and concerts. Reports of these kinds of incidents show that they can have a significant impact on gig goers.

We have been investigating sexual harassment, groping and assault at gigs as part of the Healthy Music Audiences project conducted by University of Leeds, Girl Gang Leeds and The Leeds Music Hub. More information about the project can be found on the back page.

In our research we found that 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. Those suffering such incidents experience a loss of enjoyment in the music they have come to listen to and they may change their behaviour as a result. For example they may move to the back of the venue, leave the gig, decide to stop attending gigs alone or stop going to gigs altogether.

In this short booklet we present recommendations for different groups to help prevent and respond to incidents of sexual harassment, groping and assault at gigs and concerts.

These recommendations are developed from the results of our research with venues, promoters, gig goers and anti-violence campaigners in Leeds, UK. They were written by the research team in consultation with White Ribbon, Good Night Out, Girls Against Gig Groping and Safe Gigs for Women.

Please note that this booklet is not about festivals. Separate research about sexual violence at festivals is being carried out at Durham University and University of New South Wales, Australia.

Support numbers

If you have been affected by anything in this booklet, the following numbers may be helpful:

Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds (SARSVL) is a support service for women and girls
<http://supportafterrapeleeds.org.uk/>. Freephone: 0808 802 3344.

Victim Support provide 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

Taking it seriously

Groping, harassment and assault must not be considered as hazards of live music participation about which the venue, promoter, bands and fans can do nothing. Something *can* be done.

The law says that sexual assault occurs when someone intentionally touches another person sexually without a reasonable belief that they consent to the touching. Unwanted sexual attention which intimidates and degrades the person, or creates a hostile environment is sexual harassment. It is illegal under the Equality Act 2010.

To move forward in preventing and responding well to incidents of sexual harassment, groping and assault, it is absolutely vital that those who suffer these incidents are taken seriously. Responses such as that it should be 'expected' or 'taken as a compliment' are damaging – some of our participants experienced these kinds of comments as a 'loss of dignity' or 'dehumanising'.

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%).

There is no single way in which people respond to sexual harassment, groping and assault. Expectations that people will respond in a particular way can lead venue staff and others disbelieving those reporting incidents.

The burden of proof should be placed on accused, not those reporting an incident.

The wishes of those who have suffered sexual harassment, groping and assault must be respected. This may involve removing perpetrators, banning them from venues and/or calling police. No-one wants to hang out in the same room as someone who has just groped them.

Inebriation – on either side – is not an excuse for perpetrating sexual violence or harassment, nor should it be considered in mitigation.

Perpetrators of sexual harassment, groping and assault tend to be men, and those on the receiving end tend to be women, although this is not always the case.

A sense of community between those running venues and the event and those attending them is really important in preventing and responding to incidents of sexual harassment, groping and assault. Gig goers want to feel their interests are being looked after. Generating a sense of shared responsibility and of people looking out for one another is crucial.

What can venues do?

Policies

The UK Live Music Census found that 2/3 of venues did not have policies on sexual harassment and assault.

Venues should have clear policies devoted to preventing and responding to sexual harassment, groping and assault. These policies should be developed in discussion with gig goers, promoters and bands, including women, ethnic minority and LGBTQ representatives. This will help those who come to the venue to feel invested in maintaining the standards set out in the policy.

The policy should state what is expected of all those using the venue and what will happen if gig goers, promoters, bands and staff deviate from expectations.

The policy should be regularly reviewed in discussion with gig goers, promoters and bands. It should be well-publicised and consistently enforced.

Good Night Out and White Ribbon can help in the development of policies.

Staff Training

All staff should be trained by specialists in dealing with sexual violence and harassment. Training should be regularly updated and mandatory for new staff.

Good Night Out and White Ribbon offer training and advice on accessing funding for training.

Procedures

Venues should have clearly written procedures for what to do when an incident occurs. These should be accessible to all staff and regularly reviewed.

There should be clear lines of reporting amongst staff when things go wrong. All incidents should be recorded in the incident book.

Dedicated staff members should be available for gig goers to report incidents to. This should be someone non-male and separate from bar staff and security who should be adequately trained and have power to act.

A means of digital or phone reporting should be offered so that those affected can report after they have left the venue or if they cannot find the dedicated staff member.

Procedures should be victim-led. It is not always in the wishes of those who have suffered sexual harassment, groping and assault to get the police involved, for example. However, if this is what they want then the venue should support that.

Bands, staff and friends of the venue should be held to the same standards as other people at the venue. We heard of venues treating incidents of sexual assault perpetrated by friends of the venue owner being brushed off. The result was a significant lack of trust of the venue and a lowering of its reputation with gig going women.

What can promoters do?

Policies

As with venues, promoters should formulate and regularly review clear policies for preventing and responding to sexual harassment, groping and assault. As far as possible these policies should agree with those of the venues promoters work with. Good Night Out and White Ribbon can help in the development of such policies.

Promoters should work with the venues they use as they develop and implement clear policies, procedures and training for preventing and responding to sexual harassment, groping and assault.

Promoters should publicise their policies and those of the venue, so that gig goers and bands know what is expected of them.

Bands, staff and friends of the promoter should be held to the same standards as other people at the event.

Promoters should avoid using venues that are unwilling to develop clear policies, procedures and training.

Promoters should book bands who are known for speaking out against sexual violence, and avoid bands with histories of sexual violence or sexually violent lyrics.

Staff Training

All staff should be trained by specialists in dealing with sexual violence and harassment. Training should be regularly updated and mandatory for new staff.

Good Night Out and White Ribbon offer training, and advice on accessing funding for training.

Culture Change

Promoters play a vital role in setting the tone and creating the right atmosphere at their events. They therefore have a key role to play in creating safer, healthier gigs.

Working towards broader cultural shift, we recommend aiming for mixed gender bills and active support of women and LGBTQ musicians. Avoid all-male bills.

What can gig goers do?

Gig goers should not harass, grope or assault anyone. Gig goers should respect the autonomy and boundaries of other gig goers, bands and staff, regardless of their sex, sexuality, gender presentation or level of sobriety. Gig goers should bear in mind that only consent that is freely, actively and enthusiastically given counts. If consent is not given, then stop.

Gig goers should get involved in the development of policies, procedures and training for preventing and responding to unwanted sexual attention at the venues they attend. They should abide by the policies of the venue and promoter. If they have questions about the meanings of the policies they should ask.

When it is safe to do so, gig goers should call out their friends' and others' bad behaviour. If the person on the receiving end wishes it, contact should be made with the designated member of staff. Good Night Out and White Ribbon provide information about bystander intervention.

If someone looks to be in trouble, gig goers should either make contact with them to see how they can help, if it is safe to do so, or contact the designated member of staff.

Although we recognise it is not always easy to do so, gig goers should avoid events where known perpetrators of sexual violence are performing. Gig goers should also avoid gigs at venues or with promoters known to be poor at dealing with sexual harassment, groping and assault.

Working towards broader cultural shift, we recommend attending concerts with mixed gender bills and active support of women and LGBTQ musicians. Avoid all-male bills.

About the Healthy Music Audiences: Music, Gender and Health research project

Healthy Music Audiences is a small research project that aims to understand sexual harassment, groping and assault at live music events. It is conducted by popular music and gender scholars at the University of Leeds with Girl Gang Leeds and The Leeds Music Hub. The project is funded by Leeds Cultural Institute, part of University of Leeds. It was reviewed favourably by ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee, on 19/03/2018, reference AREA 17-098.

The research methods included interviews with concert-goers, anti-violence campaigners, music promoters and venue staff, as well as concert observation.

The research team comprises:

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Lead Researcher: Professor David Hesmondhalgh, School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds.

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