



Members of the Fulham Lillies supporters group. Image by Fulham Lillies.

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‘Safer Stadiums’ research shares women’s experiences at men’s football games

New research led by Northumbria University highlights the experiences of women who attend men’s football matches with the aim of making stadiums safer and more inclusive for all.

The ‘Safer Stadiums’ initiative – run in partnership with Loughborough University, the Football Supporters’ Association (FSA) and funded by the UK’s [Research and Development Missions Accelerator Programme](#) – has offered women an outlet to speak out about their match day experiences, including

dealing with gender-based violence.

[Dr Aarti Ratna](#), Associate Professor in the [School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Northumbria University](#), leads the project. She said: "Everyone involved in football needs to take ownership to make all fans feel safe and at home in stadiums, and on the way to a match. Creating safe spaces outside the stadium, particularly when using public transport, can help women fans feel like they belong and that their fandom is valued as a vital part of football culture."

While many supporters are at ease in raucous stadiums, having grown up going to games with their parents or friends, for some women match days can be a challenging time. Half of women at matches have [experienced](#) sexist language and behaviour, while that figure jumps up to eight out of ten among ethnic minority and LGBTQ+ women. The FSA believes that football should be for all, with the Safer Stadiums study exploring ways to make that a reality for women who may have had negative experiences.

The [FSA's](#) Women's Voice in the Men's Game (WVMG) Network, which supports and brings together women who are fans of the men's game, encourages clubs to take action against unacceptable behaviour and challenge any attempts to normalise sexism and misogyny as part of football culture. While reporting tools are a key part of this, resources are often focused on punishing perpetrators, leaving victims with limited support.



Members of the Bangla Bantams supporters group. Image by Bangla Bantams.

As part of the study, which began last year, the Safer Stadiums team have run a series of theatre-based workshops across the country including in Newcastle, Birmingham and London, involving more than 30 women from diverse backgrounds. Led by football fan, theatre-maker and movement director, Hannah Kumari, a supportive environment was created in the workshops to help women explore their embodied and emotional experiences of match days. Women fans were also invited to discuss possible solutions to the problems they have personally faced. From the sessions, a range of stories emerged that will be shared through an animated film due to premiere at an in-person event held in Manchester later this week.

Dr Ratna explained that this work follows on from an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project [exploring hate crime and football fandom](#). She added: “We’ve worked with an animator and illustrator called Stacy Bias to find a very beautiful way of bringing these stories to life. This has proven to be a very powerful qualitative inquiry into the violence and harm experienced by women across all settings related to the men’s game and quite a unique way to explore the issue beyond statistics.”

The film's core message to fans is that supporter behaviour impacts others attending the match, making fans feel excluded or even unsafe – with many women reporting markedly different experiences to men. The research team now hope to develop the findings into a policy briefing which can be shared with key stakeholders, including football governing bodies for the women's and men's game.

[Dr Mark Doidge](#), Loughborough University's researcher on the project, said: "This project highlighted the importance of listening to fan voices, and the importance of listening to women fans' voices. It was humbling to be part of and to reflect on the ways that the fan culture that I love does not always create a welcoming space for all. As fans, we can still have fun and support our teams, but we don't have to do this at the expense of other supporters."

The free Safer Stadiums screening event is open to all fans and will take place at HOME, an independent arts venue in Manchester city centre, on Saturday 28 March 2026. There's still time to register to attend at: www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/safer-stadiums-live-interactive-workshop-and-animation-screening-tickets-1984214084741

A short trailer for the animated film can be viewed below.



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

At Northumbria University, researchers combine academic insight with real-world practice to better understand and address [gendered violence and abuse](#) through interdisciplinary research.

Ends

Notes to editors

- This project was funded by a UKRI/ESRC R&D Mission Accelerator Programme Safer Streets VAWG (grant number UKRI3544).
- Quoted statistics are from 2024 [Kick It Out research](#).
- The FSA is the national, democratic, representative body for football supporters in England and Wales and the leading advocates for supporter ownership, better fan engagement, cheaper ticket prices, the choice to stand at the match, protecting fan rights, good governance, diversity, and all types of supporter empowerment.

Image captions:

- Members of the Fulham Lillies supporters group. Image by Fulham Lillies.
- Members of the Bangla Bantams supporters group. Image by Bangla Bantams.
- A still from the end of the animated film, created by Stacy Bias.

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