



GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION
CAMPAGNE MONDIALE POUR LA PREVENTION DE LA VIOLENCE

Youth Violence, Alcohol and Nightlife

Violence Prevention Alliance Working Group on Youth Violence, Alcohol and Nightlife

fact sheet 4

Preventing Sexual Violence in Nightlife Environments

Introduction

Nightlife environments are common scenes of sexual violence, which can range from unwanted sexual attention to rape and commercial sexual exploitation. The often highly sexualised nature of bars and nightclubs, combined with widespread alcohol and drug use, can contribute to sexual violence, for example with intoxicated nightlife users perceived as easy targets for perpetrators (1-4). Despite the prevalence of sexual violence in and around nightlife settings (see below), such sexual assaults are frequently not reported to police, particularly if the victim has been drinking or using drugs and fears that they will not be believed or may even be blamed (1,2,4). However, the impact of sexual violence on both physical and psychological health can be devastating, long lasting and even fatal (1,5).

In order to prevent sexual violence in nightlife environments, a range of measures have been implemented in nightlife and other settings to raise awareness of the risks of sexual assault, develop protective skills and attitudes, and create night time environments less conducive to sexual violence. This fact sheet outlines the key issues surrounding sexual violence in nightlife environments and discusses measures that are being developed and used to prevent it.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual violence as: “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work” (5).

Sexual violence in nightlife environments

- The Australian Women’s Safety Survey 1996 found that 21% of sexual assaults against women in the previous year had occurred in or around premises licensed to sell alcohol (6).
- Research in Liverpool, England, found that 14% of women and 4% of men (aged 18-35) interviewed in bars and nightclubs reported having been sexually molested (groped) during a night out in the last 12 months (7).
- A study of sexual violence associated with party drinking games amongst US college students found that 19% of men and 2% of women, at some time during their lifetime, had slept with someone who was too drunk to give consent (8).

- A different US study of college students found that 23% of women and 7% of men had experienced one or more incidents of unwanted sexual intercourse while at university, 32% of whom stated they were “taken advantage of whilst wasted” (extremely intoxicated); however only 3% of students who experienced unwanted sexual behaviour reported the experience to the university (9).
- Research in South Africa has shown that some men expect sexual favours in return for providing a woman with an alcoholic drink in a shebeen (illegal bar or club), with a debt of ownership attached to the purchase and acceptance (10).
- Research into violence against female bar drinkers in the US found that 32% were sexual incidents (11).
- Reports of drink spiking and drug-facilitated sexual assault have increased in recent years in several countries, with many incidents occurring in nightlife settings (see Box 1).
- Research in the UK has suggested that intoxicated women, due to their vulnerability and inability to defend themselves, are specifically being targeted in nightlife settings by would-be rapists (4).
- An estimated 600,000-800,000 people are trafficked annually across international borders, 70-80% of whom are female and 50% children; 70% of all females are trafficked for sexual exploitation (see Box 2) (12). Some, for example, may be sold to nightclubs, strip clubs, or erotic bars, where forced prostitution and abuse takes place (13).

Risk factors and the role of alcohol

Research shows that young women who visit bars frequently are at greatest risk of being victims of sexual aggression in nightlife environments, whereas men are more likely to initiate acts of sexual violence (14). However the risk of being victimised increases for both sexes following heavy alcohol consumption (15), which can reduce people’s ability to interpret warning signs, make them less able to defend themselves, and reduce their risk perception and consequently safety behaviours. Around half of sexual assaults are thought to be related to alcohol and in most alcohol-related cases both the victim and perpetrator have been drinking (1). Expectancies surrounding the effects of alcohol on sexual desire, inhibitions and confidence can mean alcohol is used as part of a strategy to get someone drunk specifically to increase their receptivity to sexual advances (8,16). However, research has shown that men are more likely to misinterpret negative sexual cues from women after drinking, whilst alcohol can also reduce normal inhibitions against committing a sexually violent act, and increase aggression in general (17). Socio-cultural gender bias

surrounding nightlife and alcohol use can also mean women who drink heavily are stigmatised as promiscuous (1,2): a survey in the UK by Amnesty International found over 20% of adults believed women were at least partially responsible for rape if they were drunk or wearing revealing clothing (18). Alcohol use shows a negative correlation to the closeness of the perpetrator-victim relationship, meaning that sexual assaults between strangers are more likely to involve alcohol (2). While much research on sexual violence has focused on alcohol use, many recreational drugs also have sexual effects, including increased libido and reduced inhibitions (19). Consequently drug use in nightlife can also contribute to sexual assault and exploitation.

Other personal or socio-cultural risk factors for sexual violence include: prior history of sexual abuse; socio-economic status; educational attainment; pornography use; risk-taking personality; having multiple sexual partners; peer pressure; strength of law and policies; self efficacy and self esteem; and psychological difficulties (5, 16, 20, 21).

Box 1: Drug-facilitated sexual assault

Concerns around drink spiking and drug-facilitated sexual assault (DFSA) have increased in recent years, with drugs such as gammahydroxybutrate (GHB) and benzodiazepines often implicated. However, forensic analysis of alleged cases typically shows alcohol to be the most commonly detected drug, with incidents frequently occurring in nightlife settings where alcohol use is widespread. A study of alleged DFSA victims in Australia found 20% of cases had drugs in their system that they had not knowingly consumed, while a similar study in the UK found 2% of analysed cases involved substances that had been unknowingly or involuntarily consumed (22, 23). In both studies, many victims had knowingly used alcohol, illicit and/or prescription drugs prior to the incident. Thus, whilst both alcohol and drugs are administered surreptitiously for the purpose of sexual assault, research suggests that the incident of drink spiking is lower than is often reported, and that voluntary substance use is contributing to sexual violence by increasing vulnerability and inability to remember the circumstances of sexual activity. Research among GHB users in Amsterdam, for example, found that some users, in particular females, had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour and memory-loss following use of the drug (24). In the UK, calculations of blood urine alcohol concentrations in alleged victims of DFSA suggested that 60% had consumed enough alcohol to have been intoxicated at the time of the incident; the authors suggested that while victims may have been plied with alcohol, much is likely to have been knowingly consumed (25). Such findings raise important issues around sexual consent when one or more parties are intoxicated through voluntary alcohol or drug use.

Box 2: Sexual trafficking and sex workers

Over half a million people are estimated to be trafficked across international borders each year, predominantly women and children, with many sold for the purpose of sexual exploitation (12). Many of these individuals are seeking a better life and are recruited through seemingly legitimate advertisements for companies that offer employment; however the reality is sometimes very different (12). Over a five year period more than 286,000 Filipinos and 50,000 Thai women entered Japan to take a job as an “entertainer”, this typically refers to sex work (26). Sexual violence against sex workers is extremely high: 49% of female sex workers in Bangladesh have been raped by clients (27). Even those working voluntarily as bar hostesses can be subjected to unwanted sexual attention and rape, and strip club workers are sometimes expected by management or customers to provide sexual services to clients. Further, clients have been known to physically force contact with strippers and this can lead to sexual assault and rape in and around venues (28). Strategies to prevent sexual trafficking and exploitation include attempts to provide jobs for at risk people in their birth countries and raise public awareness of the dangers of working abroad. Managed Zones are specific zones within a conurbation where soliciting and loitering are de-criminalised allowing regulation and protection of sex workers. In Edinburgh, Scotland, such Zones helped reduce violence against women and increase convictions against perpetrators (29). In Cyprus, the Aliens and Immigration Department provide: information on women’s rights, abuse and exploitation; and procurement protection services for women entering the country to work in entertainment or domestic sectors (5). In Sweden, criminalisation of men who use sexual services from women appears to have helped reduce trafficking and applies to Swedish men anywhere in the world (30).

Impacts of sexual violence

Sexual violence has devastating consequences for victims and negative impacts on society. In addition to physical injury, psychological damage can include post traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, sleeping difficulties and even suicide, while victims can be rejected by their partners, become socially isolated, and struggle to trust future intimate partners (21,31). In a population-based study carried out in New Zealand, 33% of sexually abused adult women displayed symptoms of psychiatric disorder compared with 6% of non-abused women (32). The consequences of sexual assault can also include sexual health problems such as sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) and unwanted pregnancy. In Ethiopia and Mexico, 15-18% of reported rape victims became pregnant (33-35). Such rape victims can be forced to either seek abortion (which could be illegal) or have an unwanted child (5). Furthermore future harmful lifestyle choices may follow, such as substance abuse and multiple sexual

partners (1,5,31). Sexual violence can also affect education and employment prospects by preventing people from attending work or school. Further, particularly where voluntary substance use is involved in alleged sexual assault, ascertaining blame and consent can be difficult; wrongful accusations can cause significant damage to individuals through, for example, psychological and emotional harm, social stigmatisation and even loss of employment.

Interventions

Reducing the risk of sexual assault in nightlife settings can and should be approached from many different levels: targeting the nightlife environment, potential victims, perpetrators and society as a whole. Measures include: improving street lighting; providing a visible police or security presence; blocking entrances to areas that are isolated (e.g. alley ways) and may be used for sexual assault; installing closed circuit television camera (CCTV) systems to monitor streets; and improving the availability and safety of late night transport systems (see Fact Sheet 3). Within bars and nightclubs, measures such as adequate lighting, toilet attendants, display of personal safety information and house rules that do not tolerate anti-social behaviour can help create safer environments (36). Further, staff training can teach employees to be vigilant for signs of potential sexual violence, such as door staff enquiring if customers are safe when they leave. With alcohol and drugs playing a key role in sexual violence, limiting alcoholic drinks promotions and training staff to prevent the sale of alcohol to obviously intoxicated individuals must be a priority. Additionally, drug policies that deter individuals from using or carrying drugs in the premises can limit access to substances that can affect, for example, sexual desire and physical aggression.

Provision of information on personal safety measures and the risks of sexual assault, particularly after alcohol and drug use, can also enable nightlife users to protect themselves from violence. Such safety behaviours can include: not accepting drinks from strangers or leaving drinks unattended; remaining with friends throughout the course of a night out; arranging safe transport home prior to a night out; remaining in well lit areas; and limiting alcohol consumption to prevent intoxication. While such information should be targeted at all nightlife users, with students often being particularly at risk, universities and colleges are important outlets for safety information and services (37). At Sunderland University in England a Campus Watch scheme has been set up involving the allocation of two local police officers to the university and the development of a website which provides information on how to stay safe and what to do if you experience an act of sexual violence (38,39). In Australia, the University of Queensland set up the UniSafe awareness programme, the first of its kind in Australia. It provides students

with free campus buses at night, personal security escorts to public transport stops or cars available on request, and advice on how to avoid and deal with sexual violence (40).

Schools also provide a valuable arena for interventions to prevent sexual violence, through helping children to develop positive attitudes and behaviours towards relationships and personal safety before they begin using nightlife environments. In the US, a community and school based intervention was established to address dating violence norms, gender stereotyping and conflict management skills in children (average age 13.8 years) (41). The intervention involved the use of theatre productions, interactive activities, and poster campaigns, and was carried out by trained teachers and community researchers. Following the intervention sexual violence in participants was reduced by 60%, while positive attitudinal changes towards gender stereotyping and dating violence norms were also observed (41,42). Other programmes that can help reduce the risk of sexual violence include those focusing on self-protective skills, such as increasing self-esteem and confidence.

In Calderdale, England, nightlife and community interventions have been combined to reduce sexual violence related to increased alcohol use in town centre drinking venues. Led by a multi-agency community safety partnership, the scheme: encouraged local schools to include education on the links between alcohol and sexual violence in their curriculum; developed a poster campaign; negotiated higher drinks prices with local licensed premises; banned consumption of alcohol in public places in the town centre; and used information on the last drink location of victims to target resources at problem licensed premises. The combination of these measures was considered to have been successful in reducing sexual violence (38).

At a wider societal level, strategies to prevent sexual violence can focus on addressing societal attitudes towards sexual violence, promoting positive gender roles and mutually responsible relationships, and strengthening laws on rape and sexual exploitation. Although strategies that aim to reduce sexual violence through a societal approach can be difficult to assess, measures in South Africa appear to have had success. The Soul City campaign involved mass media health development and promotion addressing issues of sexual assault, rape and domestic violence, among others. Through the use of television programmes, booklets and radio programmes, Soul City reached millions throughout South Africa, and succeeded in increasing awareness about sexual violence and modifying attitudes and social norms about sexual violence and gender relations (43).

Some countries have far-reaching laws on sexual violence, with excellent support agencies and strong punishments for offenders. However, in other countries only some forms

of sexual violence will be punished. For example, some countries do not acknowledge forced sexual intercourse within a marriage as rape. Due to recent concerns around alcohol, drugs and sexual consent in the UK, the Sexual Offences Act (2003) has been changed to specifically remove any responsibility from a victim of sexual assault if they were administered, without knowledge, any substance which is capable of stupefying or overpowering them at the time of the sexual act, providing the victim can prove this occurred (44). However, despite this the issue of sexual consent following voluntary substance use remains contentious, and the decision of whether an offence has been committed or not in such circumstances (and where such cases reach court) typically falls to a jury. Here, a specific level of intoxication where consent becomes impossible cannot be defined, as this can be different for each individual (44). In New Zealand, a landmark case resulted in a restaurant owner being imprisoned for providing young men with recreational drugs (which they consumed voluntarily) specifically for the purpose of making them amenable to having sex with him (45). Conversely in a recent UK rape case a judge decided that where a complainant had voluntarily consumed substantial amounts of alcohol but remained capable of giving consent and had done so, this was not rape (46). Because of the complexities of consent an advertising campaign was set up in the UK which advised young men in particular to be aware that it is their responsibility to seek consent before any sexual act and that it was unacceptable to use drunkenness as an excuse (47).

Summary

Sexual violence ruins lives, yet sexual assault and exploitation occur in nightlife environments in many different forms. In particular, the high levels of alcohol and drug consumption occurring in bars and nightclubs mean nightlife users can be vulnerable to sexual assault, while would-be perpetrators can specifically target intoxicated victims in nightlife settings or believe nightlife users to be more receptive to sexual advances. Preventing sexual violence in nightlife requires measures to create night time environments that deter perpetrators and protect potential victims, both in bars and nightclubs and in the wider night time environment. However such measures alone will not prevent sexual violence, but should be combined with those that aim to develop healthy attitudes and behaviours towards relationships and sex, both in individuals and society. All such strategies should be backed up by strong and well-enforced laws that make sexual violence in any form a serious crime that will not be tolerated.

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