

Written evidence submitted by Judith Cummins MP, Bradford South (SPI0052)

Home Affairs Select Committee – Spiking Inquiry

I am writing to submit evidence to the select committee on spiking at outdoor music festivals. This is an area that is often overlooked and is more dangerous an environment than pubs or clubs for spiking given

1. the size and scale of these events
2. the geography of these events in so far as they are held in out-of-town areas where young people travel to away from their homes and away from normal support networks and easily accessible public services
3. the prevalence of drugs at these events
4. the lack of policing at these events
5. the lack of appropriate medical facilities at events; the lack of safeguarding at these events
6. the sleeping arrangements at these events
7. the age of participants at these events
8. lack of data of crimes

1. Pre-covid, music festivals were a growing industry with over 700 UK music festivals attended by 7.1million customers in 2018. Glastonbury is the largest outdoor music festival with an audience capacity of 210,000, Leeds Festival has an audience capacity of 75,000 people and Reading 100,000 capacity.

2. Given the scale of these events they are often held out of town in temporary venues where access to services for victims is difficult. Given the nature of spiking and rape or sexual assault this is a real problem for young people who are away from home, in unfamiliar surroundings and away from their usual support networks and family.

3. Drugs are widely available at festivals. There is little attempt to prevent illegal drugs been taken on site. The use of drugs is accepted and normalised on site. Drug use raises additional barriers to victims reporting crime to onsite police or security, particularly if use is seen as a possible contributing factor to the crime being reported.

4. Police presence at these events are kept to a minimum, and primarily concentrates on ingress and egress to the festival site. Security firms are employed by event organisers. These security guard's primary objective is to secure the site and protect revenue and not the safety of those people within the site.

5. Medical care is provided by private firms. This consists of medical tents where people are either taken to or attend. There is no medical follow-up to treatment or continuity of care. There is no automatic safeguarding for those who say they have been spiked with no process to triage these cases through to professional safeguarding officers or to the police. There are no on-site medical facilities where children subjected to spiking and rape, or sexual assault are processed and looked after. There is no duty of care where parents or guardians of those under 18 are informed of their child's condition.

6. Sleeping arrangements at festivals are typically camping areas, separated from the main festival area. Areas allocated for sleeping, and the walkways between these and the main festival area have

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reduced lighting, and lower presence of festival staff, security / police and are therefore more vulnerable areas for this type of crime.

7. 16- and 17-year-olds are allowed to attend outdoor festivals. Under 16s must be accompanied by someone over the age of 18 – this is checked only on entry to the site. There are no strategies for looking after these young people and children.

8. As supplied by The House of Commons Library

‘Data on reports of crimes committed at festivals is not collected centrally as part of official crime statistics... police forces will record the location of an offences (not generally published) but this would identify the site, not what the site was being used for at any given time. Some police forces collate and release data on crime rates at particular festivals/events, but this is not collected centrally.’ Additionally, reporting of physical or sexual harassment by festival-goers is very low, with only 1 in 5 reporting incidents to security services or other formal sources.

Outdoor music festivals are a huge business, which increasingly young people see as a rite of passage. Much of the current focus is on spiking at nightclubs and bars and the night-time economy. I would contend that music festivals currently present an environment much more favourable to sexual predator’s intent on harm to all but in particular to girls and women. Given the lax age restrictions at music festivals, the numbers of vulnerable young people under the age of 18 presents a huge issue in terms of safeguarding these young people. The combination of private security, private medical firms and the lack of services to help and protect young people is shocking, as is the lack of published data of crimes committed at these events.

A teenage girl can be unconscious in a medical tent through spiking and her parents or guardians are not routinely informed. This would not happen in a hospital setting. Many victims of spiking-rape scenario have no immediate recollection of their rape. There is currently no automatic process for when a girl regains consciousness and says she was spiked that automatically marks this as a potential for rape or sexual assault and that safeguarding processes should kick in. Whereas her age automatically makes her vulnerable, there is currently no process at festivals to ensure her well-being in a spiking – rape scenario. On regaining consciousness, this teenage girl would currently be sent out of the medical tent to go back to the festival. To be clear – she is a child, a victim of spiking and rape – alone away from home with nothing in place to support and protect her.

Outdoor music festivals offer a sexual predator a unique environment to spike and rape girls and women and to get away with it.

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