

Written evidence submitted by Tara (SPI0023)

My statement:

1. I am a 23-year-old female and have been the victim of spiking. I feel it is necessary to voice my story so that others are aware of the risks, signs to look out for and to be more conscious of their surroundings which in turn is so unfortunate that many including myself feel it is necessary to do so. When attending nightclubs, I regularly go out and see countless amounts of women with their drinks uncovered making them an easy target of spiking which suggests that we need education on awareness and how to not become a victim.

2. I went to university at the age of 18 and studied for a total of 3 years. At high school I was made aware of what drugs were and why we shouldn't take them, however, was never made aware of what spiking was and how dangerous it can be. My parents would always say 'be careful with your drink, never leave it unattended' to which I would always reply 'don't worry I'm always careful'. You never think it will happen to you... and then it does. Neither of my parents know I have experienced this. On this particular night I knew I had been spiked, I had one occasion previous but this time I felt completely different. In my third year at university, myself and my female friend attended a nightclub. I am always careful of my drink, and I know my limits when I am drinking, however I could not tell you how this occurred. At around 3am we both started to feel slightly unwell and decided to call it a night and get a cab home (which was around 10 minutes). In the cab I started to feel the effects of this drug and simply lost sense of reality, I had no idea where I was and felt sick. We got home and by 3:30am we both were sat on the sofa unable to move. I was hallucinating, seeing people that were not there walking in and out of our living room unable to move for around an hour and a half. I had never taken drugs and had no idea what was happening to me, but we both were experiencing the same effects. I dread to think what would have happened to us if we stayed in the nightclub for even 5 more minutes. Having carried out research on what we experienced we concluded that the drug we were spiked with was Ketamine which is a commonly used date rape drug. I am also a victim of sexual assault and do believe that in this instance, the perpetrators end game was just that.

3. I would go as far to say that spiking occurs all the time, 7 days a week, not just at weekends, and not only at nightclubs, but bars and pubs too. I also believe that restaurants are an example too whereby they offer events like bottomless brunches. There is an assumption that only women get spiked for sexual assault, but this is wrong, I have peers who are male that have been spiked, not just nightclubs but more recently a work colleague in their 40s at a Christmas market. I also don't believe that spiking is carried out just for sexual assault purposes but also for theft.

4. Prevention of spiking has never been something I believe to be taken seriously. There was a well-known club at my university that would have high rates of spiking. When trying to get help from bouncers they would immediately assume the person had drunk too much and would throw them out. I had never heard a good experience from anyone concerning this. Until relatively recently regarding incidents of spiking via injection had I seen any

(SPI0023)

awareness or measures being taken by nightclubs bars etc. to prevent spiking. For example, clubs are providing covers for glasses and test strips. However, I don't think this is enough.

5. When attending nightclubs, the main measures I have experienced are ID scanners which are used e.g., if you have been found with drugs you can be banned from that club, but also it lets other venues know when they scan your ID if you have been banned by a club and what for. At some clubs they have metal detectors and provide a thorough search, however this is not all clubs and I understand not all can implement this. However, if a club is known to have high rates of spiking, thorough searches may help in preventing drugs coming into their club. I understand not every single drug will be found but it may act as a deterrent to perpetrators bringing drugs in. Clubs and bars could also have a higher security presence, I have attended a club where they regularly have undercover security in order to look for suspicious behaviour.

6. More education is needed from a younger age on the risks and not just what can happen when you've been spiked but the implications for someone who has carried it out. When I was 16, I don't think I even knew what spiking was, let alone the damage it can cause. Furthermore, it's important to educate from 16 onwards as this is the time that teenagers may start drinking, it would be silly to say teenagers don't drink underage. I had friends who were underage that would go out with fake IDs and get let into clubs. Obviously, this is a separate issue but it's something we need to accept that does happen. It's also essential as not everyone goes to university where further education can be implemented on this.

7. When I attended university, there was not a single email, lecture or advice on drink spiking that I can recall. Due to the nature of attending university, social life is important and with the likes of 'Fresher's week', going out to events at clubs is a big part of making new friends at university and joining social groups. I can't speak for all universities but if they were like mine then more needs to be done to educate students on the necessary steps on what to do if they find someone showing signs of being spiked. When I was 18, other than reporting to staff at a venue I wouldn't have a clue on what else to do with someone who has been spiked e.g., if I should dial 999 or if they needed to be put in the recovery position etc. For those who do go to university, this knowledge will then stay with them and will be able to educate others.

8. In my experience, I didn't report my incident. I didn't feel the need to because I had managed to get home, I didn't get sexually assaulted and for that reason didn't think it needed to be reported to the police as it wasn't important enough and would waste police time. I know that the NHS does not have the capabilities to send off every single blood test however I now know that the police can do so much more. They can carry out tests, as well as requesting CCTV and the removal of drinks believed to be tampered with as all of this can be used in evidence. I didn't know this. The information is online but there is no awareness of it, not even one of my peers would know this information. Perpetrators can get up to 10 years in prison for spiking which is clearly not a big enough deterrent as spiking hasn't dropped, the rates have increased.

9. In conclusion, I believe it's unfortunate that as a female I will always cover my drink with my hand every time I go out as I am worried about getting spiked. I shouldn't have to feel

(SPI0023)

this way due to the horrible nature of others, but it is a sad reality. Unfortunately, I don't believe we will ever stop spiking, however there are so many more measures that we can carry out to collectively educate ourselves and bring awareness from a young age.

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