

Written evidence submitted by The Egalitarian (SPI0028)

Summary of Points

1. The Government must act to legally enforce accountability on venues, authorities and Police forces to mitigate the prevalence of spiking.
2. A society that degrades the accounts, experiences and reports of women and girls, and other marginalised groups, perpetuates entitled and predatory behaviour and preventative action from venues.
3. Punitive responses from Police forces are not enough to tackle the culture in the UK that accepts the subdued status of groups of society.

The Egalitarian

4. We are a social activist organisation committed to raising awareness of systemic injustice and inequality to empower individuals to engage in discussion and debate in an effort to contribute to activism that will promote progress. We are focussed on, but not limited to, gender inequality.
5. The Egalitarian acts as a news source with articles and opinion pieces from our following, has created a social media presence whereby an active community engages with discussion surrounding equality and other systemic problems and in October 2021 created Spike Report – the first publicly viewable spiking incident database in the UK.
6. We have created Spike Report to inform people who go on nights out about where, when and how spiking incidents are occurring. Its purpose is to be used as a tool by the public to assist in protecting themselves and friends from spiking.
7. Since creation, Spike Report has received 220 spiking submissions and our database has been viewed by 20,000 visitors.

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8. Spike Report also asks users to rate venues and the Police in terms of their response. We moderate all responses prior to them being published online. All submissions are published anonymously, with The Egalitarian storing the data and contact details of users for future reference including co-operating with venues.
9. The Egalitarian have also been collecting opinion from the general community regarding how venues can improve safety measures to prevent spiking incidents through a Questionnaire, and ran a webinar to discuss the issue. Our Questionnaire has received 274 responses from individuals from a range of backgrounds, genders, ethnicities, sexualities and age, in addition organisations have also responded. We will use the data collected from Spike Report, our Questionnaire and our webinar as the basis of our submission.
10. It is important to note that just because women and girls are the majority of victims of spiking, other genders are also victims. YouGov's research in November 2021 showed that 11% of women have been spiked whilst 6% of men have been.

Data from Spike Report

11. We have received 220 submissions since the launch of Spike Report in October 2021.
12. 69% of spiking incidents were via drink, 20% by injection, 7% by drugs and 4% other.
13. Spiking is more prevalent in larger cities. The city with the highest number of incidents is currently Leeds (40). This is followed by Manchester (34), Liverpool (28), Newcastle (13), Edinburgh (12), London (11) and Bristol (6). It is important to note that whilst Spike Report aims to be a national tool, we have disproportionately hit the North of the England given that is where The Egalitarian is based.
14. Out of the 220 submissions, 47 have reviewed the responses of venues and the police.
15. 62% of those who reviewed reported the incident to the venue. 55% of those who did report the incident to the venue rated their response as poor or very poor. Only 4% of those who reported to the venue thought that the venue's response was very good. Only 1 submitter had the perpetrator identified through CCTV.

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16. 36% of those who reviewed reported their incident to the Police. Of those who reported to the Police, 38% rated their investigation as very poor, 9% as poor, 26% as neither good nor bad, 4% as good and 13% as very good.
17. Submitters to Spike Report have informed us that the process of submitting a report to The Egalitarian has been empowering, whereby it was the first time they felt like they had been listened to. It is clear that victims of spiking are discouraged from reporting incidents due to initial reactions from venues replicating the general culture of our society that does not take spiking seriously.
18. We believe that our unique perspective as a women-centric model that looks to empower victims rather than pose doubt on their allegations encourages spiking victims to come forward. This perspective is currently not replicated, and will be difficult to replicate, in the Police force which has displayed systemic issues of misogyny and a lack of motivation to protect and safeguard marginalised groups.

Data from our Questionnaire

19. We have received 274 responses from the public regarding their opinion on how venues could be made safer.
20. 89% of respondents would feel comfortable or very comfortable if there were CCTV improvements inside venues and 92% would feel comfortable or very comfortable if there were CCTV improvements outside of venues.
21. 84% of respondents would feel safe to very safe if venues offered free drinks covers, 90% agree or strongly agree that background checks should be introduced into the hiring process of staff members in the night time economy and 97% agree to strongly agree that security staff in the night time economy should have background checks.
22. 82% of respondents agree to strongly agree that mandatory searches before entering venues should be introduced whilst 68% agree to strongly agree that random spot checks should be introduced on entry. 82% agree to strongly agree that mandatory searches would be more effective than spot checks in keeping people safe.

The New Era of Spiking

23. Spiking is not a new concept, however the method of spiking via injection came to our attention in October 2021 and our organisation believes that this is symptomatic to the Covid-19 lockdowns temporarily quashing the ability for predatory behaviour to be realised.
24. Albeit the increase in domestic violence seen during the lockdowns, we are aware that public harassment, assault and violence against women and girls has increased since the measures have been eased and society has re-opened. We submit that spiking via injection, whereby the victim will struggle to anticipate or prevent the attack, is a direct consequence of predatory behaviour being subdued by lockdown measures.
25. We encourage those who have been spiked to come forward with detailed explanations of their experiences. From these experiences, it is evident that whilst there is not a single profile of the perpetrators of spiking, there are clear motives to exercise control and create or exacerbate vulnerability. We are of course aware that many spiking incidents occur with the intention of sexual assault, violence or rape, there have been some reported incidences whereby the perpetrators make it evident to the person being spiked what they have done and find some level of entertainment from this.

The Culture of Spiking

26. Spiking via drink is a continuation of the harassment, assault and violence that occurs within the night time economy. Whilst it is an unfortunate reality that those who may be victim to spiking have been asked to take steps to avoid this in the past, such as covering their drinks, staying with friends and being aware of unusual or predatory behaviour, the acceptance of the onus on the individual feeds into the culture of victim blaming prevalent across the UK.
27. Spiking by injection has triggered a new debate on how incidents of spiking can be stopped given the inherent difficulties in prevention. The night out community seeks to amplify previous voices throughout generations in calling for higher levels of safety in the night out economy to which everybody should be entitled. It is impossible to prevent further incidents without active involvement, engagement and participation of venues, authorities, Police and the Government.

28. Previous responses from state authorities have been negligent to rape culture and emanated from a society that subjugates marginalised groups to unacceptable behaviours involving coercion, exploitation, harassment, assault and violence. The subjection of marginalised groups to these transgressions must end.
29. The Egalitarian submits that when the Government seeks punitive measures to act on those who have perpetrated spiking, this deflects from addressing the fundamental conditions of our society that accepts entitled and predatory behaviour. Punitive measures may assist in criminalising those who perpetrate spiking, albeit prosecution rates are concerningly low, but will not aid a culture that looks to protect vulnerable groups.
30. Rape culture is prevalent from the beginning of secondary schools in the UK, and the curriculum must improve to cover issues surrounding gender equality. This is including the improvement of sex education which currently subdues and degrades women and girls' sexuality, and it is partly because of this imbalance that the behaviours discussed in this report are normalised. Society is plagued with inequality and only when this is tackled at the systemic level can predatory behaviour adequately be stamped out.

The Onus on Venues

31. Our data displays clear problems with the response of venues in dealing with spiking incidents. Venues must take spiking incidents seriously.
32. The culture of removing inebriated individuals from a venue as a way to maintain the integrity of the venue demonstrates the economic mindset of the night time economy that prioritises image and profit over the safety of customers, mitigating responsibility and dismissing the frequency of intoxicated behaviour in the night time economy.
33. Forcing individuals to leave premises represents a distinct lack of duty of care to those who have become intoxicated at the hands of the venue. It is irrelevant whether an individual is voluntarily intoxicated or has been spiked; both are vulnerable to harassment, assault and violence on the street.
34. There is a strong opinion from our respondents that staff in the night time economy, from venue staff to security staff, should receive background checks before working in venues.

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The Egalitarian is highly concerned over the Spike Reports submitted that suspect their perpetrator to be a member of staff at the venue.

35. Further, our respondents categorically agree with the introduction of mandatory searches before entering venues. We concur with this, but strongly argue that this is on the precondition that security staff in the night time economy are background-checked and trained vigorously on well-being, welfare and diversity and inclusion as there is a concern that increasing the powers of security staff may allow them to exercise prejudice and bias.
36. Given the clear support for the introduction of mandatory searches in nightclubs from our Questionnaire, as further evidenced by the petition to make it a legal requirement for nightclubs to thoroughly search guests on entry receiving 174, 077 signatures, the Government has evidenced both being out of touch with public opinion and negligent to the issue of spiking. Our community were incredibly discouraged when the Government responded to the petition on 4 November 2021 expressing the view that licensing authorities are permitted to impose conditions such as searches already and therefore no further action will be taken.
37. Licencing authorities are currently permitted to impose conditions such as searches, yet they do not. This kind of response can only occur in a society that does not seriously consider the complaints of women and other marginalised groups in formulating policy and is happy to ignore both their fears and welfare. The refusal of the Government to mandate these rules has exacerbated distrust in their ability to protect vulnerable individuals and is consistent in the general lack of action to tackle violence against women and girls.
38. We must note that we encourage any products that may be used to assist those in protecting themselves from being spiked, such as drinks covers, to be made from sustainable products to avoid contributing further to the unacceptable consumption of single use plastic in the UK.

The Onus on Police

39. A high proportion of those who submitted their spiking incident to Spike Report did not report their incident to the Police. In discussions with our community, there is an evident

lack of trust in the Police in dealing with spiking incidents. We suggest that there could be a number of reasons.

40. When venues do not take the spiking incident seriously, this discourages a report to the Police given that the victim does not feel as though their incident has been taken seriously.
41. It is acknowledged that spiking is an inherently difficult crime to prosecute. With the lack of evidence normally available (the most being CCTV which is usually of poor quality) and a victim unlikely to have much information regarding the circumstances of the crime, the burden of proof required for a prosecution of spiking hinders the ability of criminal proceedings to succeed in prosecution.
42. The investigation process is lengthy and with little confidence in successful prosecution, it is not deemed an effective use of time and effort for a lot of spiking victims.
43. With the recent abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard and subsequent charges against a number of Police Officers with sexual offences, systemic misogyny and negligence to violence against women and girls has been exposed within the Police force. Our community has shown an evident lack of trust with the Police in the UK to deal appropriately with violence against women and girls.

Conclusions

44. There must be accountability to all parties involved in the crime other than the victim.
45. There are numerous parties involved in the materialisation of a spiking incident and the reporting process afterwards. There is work to be done on all levels, from quashing predatory and entitled behaviour through the encouragement of a better society that values equality, to venues whereby spiking incidents occur but currently enjoy little accountability, to Police forces who need to actively engage in the issue of spiking and the protection, safeguarding and empowerment of victims.
46. Using the data collected from the going out community, the Government must enforce accountability at all levels to adequately tackle the issue of spiking as just a small feature of the prevalence of violence against women and girls in the UK. Legal impositions of

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responsibility on venues are imperative and the Police must engage in adequate safeguarding measures and victim support as well as prosecution activity.

47. A wider societal perspective of the degradation of the roles and capacities of women and girls, as well as marginalised groups, must be changed in order to eradicate a culture that deems certain groups as second-class citizens thus unworthy of protection.

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