

## **Written evidence submitted by Nikki Garnett (SPI0050)**

[Note: This evidence has been redacted by the Committee. Text in square brackets has been inserted where text has been redacted.]

### **Background**

1. My name is Nikki Garnett, I'm 54, I work as a Marketing Director and live near Lancaster in the north of England. I am writing to outline my experience of drink spiking in Newcastle Upon Tyne on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2022.
2. My husband and I own an apartment in Newcastle and were visiting for a weekend away. On the Friday evening we went to a few different bars and on our way back to our home we noticed that unusually, the [bar] had no queue outside. We decided to pop in for one last drink and perhaps a dance to the [music].
3. We left our drinks at our table and danced for a while. When we decided it was time to leave, we retrieved our coats, finished our drinks and left. As we were crossing the road outside the bar I collapsed; I was unable to either walk or talk and we realised that my drink had been spiked.

### **Answers to the questions raised by the Inquiry**

#### **Who is vulnerable to spiking?**

1. It is presumed to be a crime solely targeting young women. However since writing about it on my Instagram account which has 30k followers I have learned that it is increasingly happening to midlife women and men.

#### **Who commits spiking offences and why do they do it?**

2. From the many experiences that have been relayed to me it appears that rather than being targeted by sexual predators, this midlife segment is increasingly being chosen for 'sport' by people often in groups who go out to 'take people down,' enjoying the ensuing spectacle. I suspect this is what happened to me.

#### **How should spiking be prevented and addressed?**

3. There need to be severe and clearly publicised penalties in place to deter perpetrators - at the moment it is almost guaranteed that they will get away with it. There have been no prosecutions that I'm aware of. It is also a cheap crime to commit with these drugs being available to buy for pence on the dark web. There is no deterrent.

#### **How effective is partnership working between the police and others (such as local authorities, the health service, night-time industries, universities and third sector organisations) in safeguarding potential and actual victims of spiking?**

4. As far as I can see there is no partnership approach on this. I have been told of several occasions where hospital drug tests have shown the presence of spiking drugs and yet the police have refused to accept them because they are not 'their' tests.
5. In terms of my own experience, as my husband was more or less carrying me through the streets we were approached by a policeman and woman on the beat. They enquired about my welfare and my husband explained that my drink had ben spiked and that he was struggling to get me home. They simply smiled and shrugged then walked on. I was unable to speak to them so my husband could easily have been the perpetrator. They showed no interest in what was going on and gave no offer of help, advice or follow-up.

**How effective are the measures used to prevent spiking, including the advice and guidance that is used to train, educate and support those involved in handling this type of crime (such as police officers, nightclub security staff and A&E staff)?**

6. When I returned to [the bar] the following day to see if I could acquire any evidence I was told by the head of security firstly that it was probably my own fault – that I had drunk too much. When she realised that I was too well-informed to accept that she told me that I would need a police drug test and report before they would review the CCTV. It was, by then, too late for a blood test.
7. From the many accounts of spiking that I have heard over the last few weeks it appears that what is lacking is a joined-up approach between police, NHS and the night-time industries.

**What barriers do victims face in reporting spiking incidents and obtaining treatment and support?**

8. The biggest problem is that you are utterly incapacitated and so you are unable to take any action whatsoever. In that state, the immediate instinct is to return home to safety. There is also an immediate sense of shame because as these incidents mainly happen at night, it is very likely that it will be assumed that you have behaved irresponsibly and so are to blame for being in such a hopeless state.
9. If there was better education surrounding spiking people would have a clearer instinct of what to do. Currently it goes only as far as telling people not to leave their drinks unattended, it does not map out a clear path of action if this happens to you.
10. The outcome of spiking really should be owned jointly by the staff at the venue and the police. Particularly now, when the NHS is so overwhelmed by Covid – if you are unable to speak or walk you do not want to be left alone at A&E with an 8 hour wait ahead.

**Are the police doing enough to identify perpetrators and bring them to justice?**

11. Not at all. I understand that currently there isn't even a criminal offence code for the crime of spiking so how can cases be monitored?
12. There is no campaign to show perpetrators that they can be caught, prosecuted and what the penalty would be.

13. From the victim's perspective, spiking needs to be taken seriously by the police and treated in a similar way to rape or domestic abuse. Both women and men need to be told that they will be believed if they go to a police station in those very difficult circumstances and that they will be helped quickly – that there is a place where they will feel safe when they are in a very vulnerable position.

### **What role should Government play in tackling this crime?**

14. **Government** - clearly needs to take ownership of this for now, taking an overview and working out a way of implementing a joined-up approach between the services on the ground. My suggestion for that would be as follows:
15. **Perpetrators** – there should be a clear and serious penalty for spiking. This would immediately deter the growing number of people who are going out in groups treating it as a pastime. Surely these petty offenders can be stopped quite easily if they think they might be caught and punished which would free up resources to deal with the serious sexual predators.
16. **Venues** – there should be a penalty for venues if this crime is found to have happened in their managed location. In the same way that they fear losing their licence for underage drinkers, they should have the same worry about spiking offences. If they risk losing their licence or having it suspended they would put pressure on their security and serving staff to actively look out for it going on.
17. **Licensing Departments** – should be made more aware of this growing crime, monitoring it and communicating effectively with venues.
18. **Security staff** – are trained in looking after victims of spiking in order to attain their SIA licence. I'm told that the problem they face is that customers often claim they've been spiked when in fact they've taken drugs that they don't want to admit to. Now that spiking kits are starting to be made available to door staff it's becoming easier for them to distinguish between the two. However they are apparently in short supply, perhaps it could be made a legal requirement that security companies equip their teams with sufficient testing kits.
19. **The NHS** – should not assume that victims are to blame. There needs to be more education and emphasis on spiking as a growing crime in A&E departments. There should also be a clear and swift blood-testing process that can be sent through to police and used by them as evidence.
20. **The Police** – should have a clear criminal process in place from the moment a victim of spiking walks into a police station (or is found on the street) to the moment that the perpetrator is charged in court.
21. Police on the beat should be looking out for spiking and know exactly what to do if they come across somebody like me.
22. They should be targeted with identifying cases so that numbers can be tracked - and subsequently with stopping it happening. As the new entrants into the world of spiking

appear to be amateurs doing it for kicks, it should be an easy win for the Police to show that they've taken action and stamped it out.

23. **Summary** – at a time when this country feels besieged from all angles, this should be one of the easier problems to solve. If Government is looking for 'low hanging fruit', make people believe that their sons and daughters are safe when they're enjoying a night out. And show older citizens that they too are at risk – but that clear measures have swiftly been put in place to address it.

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