

New UK Data Suggest Drink Spiking is Not just a Nightclub Problem

A recent study examined self-reported suspected drink spiking and needling in the UK, [public awareness](#) and perception of these events, and their associated psychological and physical sequelae.



Study

The researchers analyzed data from the 2022 and 2023 Drinkaware Monitors, [annual surveys](#) conducted by the Drinkaware Charity. The analysis included responses from 6,318 UK participants in 2022 and 10,473 participants in 2023.

The findings highlighted important gaps in [public awareness](#) and understanding of spiking. In 2022, only 41% of participants understood the term "needling," compared with 91% for "drink spiking."

In the 2022 survey, self-reported lifetime [spiking experiences](#) outnumbered needling experiences by a factor of eight, at 710 versus 89, respectively. The authors note that this may partly reflect the fact that needling is a newer phenomenon.

In 2023, almost the same proportion of participants (approximately 2%) said they thought they had experienced [drink spiking](#) within the preceding year, as said they were not sure. However, there were twice as many "not sure" responses as "yes" responses for needling.

Past-year drink spiking experiences in 2023 were associated with age, ethnicity, and sexuality, but not with gender or [gender identity](#). In an intersectional analysis, LGBTQ+ women and men had lower odds of reporting drink spiking than heterosexual women. Separately, White LGB individuals were more likely to report such experiences than White heterosexual participants.

Reports of needling were not significantly different between [heterosexual women](#) and any other gender-sexuality subgroup, though the authors point out that the small sample sizes in these groups could have limited the ability to detect differences.

Both White LGB and Mixed/Multi-ethnic [heterosexual subgroups](#) had higher odds of reporting needling than White heterosexual participants in the ethnicity-sexuality analysis. No LGBTQ+ individuals were present in the Asian, Black, or Mixed/Multi-ethnic analytic subgroups, preventing reliable estimates for these groups.

Findings

In 2022 and 2023, most reported [spiking incidents](#) occurred in bars, followed by clubs, both overall and for White participants, accounting together for about 69%–80% of cases.

Among ethnic minority participants, in contrast, clubs were the most common location for drink spiking (40% of incidents), followed by [social events](#) at 20%, with bars and private homes each at approximately 17%. Workplaces were reported in about 13% of cases.

In 2022, needling events most often occurred in bars (~27%), followed by clubs, social events, [private homes](#), and universities, at ~12-14% each. For ethnic minority participants, private homes and bars accounted for approximately 19% each, with clubs being reported at ~15%. The authors note that needling was therefore not confined to night-time economy venues.

In 2023, clubs were the [leading location](#) for needling at 24%, with bars and family events at 21% each. Needling at universities and at work accounted for ~18% and ~17%, respectively.

Among men, needling occurred at [family events](#) in almost a third of cases (~30%). About 20% of women did not want to disclose the location, versus 6.5% of men.

In 55% of cases, respondents reported that no further incident occurred after the [suspected drugging](#). However, secondary offenses and harms were reported across demographic groups.

Men were more likely to report theft, pranks, and blackmail than females, following spiking. About 4.4% of men and 3.8% of women reported being raped after suspected spiking, while 6% of men and 10% of women, respectively, reported [sexual assault](#).

Among sexual minority participants, 23.5% of respondents reported post-spiking sexual assault versus 5.4% of heterosexuals. Among [transgender](#) participants, 16.7% reported sexual assault and 25% said they were harassed after spiking or needling.

Among ethnic minority participants, 9.5% reported sexual assault, 9.5% [rape](#), and 19% harassment, compared with 7.9%, 3.7%, and 2.5%, respectively, among White participants. The small numbers in some minority groups warrant cautious interpretation.

Conclusion

The findings support the common view that drink spiking is substantially under-reported by [victims](#). Without confirmatory testing, it is impossible to establish the true prevalence, but police reports relating to such cases increased substantially in the years preceding the surveys.

There were differences across ethnic and [sexual orientation](#) groups, but the psychological impact of suspected spiking could be substantial and persistent irrespective of the reported outcome of the incident.

“Greater awareness, improved reporting mechanisms, and accessible support services may help address existing barriers, while [future research](#) should seek to better understand the experiences of underrepresented groups and evaluate interventions designed to improve outcomes for victims.”

Source:

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20260817/Drink-spiking-is-not-just-a-nightclub-problem-new-UK-data-suggest.aspx>