



Women In Security And Policing

October 8, 2024

SUMMARY

This Trends Spotting Forum focused on recruiting and retaining women in male-dominated fields like law enforcement and venue security. A key barrier identified was that some women do not believe they would be ideal candidates for these fields due to their difference in physical strength and stature compared to men. However, data has proven that women are more skilled than men in de-escalation through communication. Further, interactions with women police officers lead to less use of excessive force, and therefore, lawsuits and potential injury or death of civilians. Peer support and mentorship were highlighted as critical for retention, as women who feel supported in their careers are more likely to encourage others to join in these professions. By fostering environments where women feel valued and supported, venue security organizations and law enforcement departments can build more inclusive teams to the greater benefit of their clientele and the community.

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN POLICING AND SECURITY

Women remain underrepresented in law enforcement and security roles, despite growing demand and recognition of their value. There has been an increase in requests from a venue security firm in Sacramento, California for women security officers, particularly for pat downs of female patrons. There is also recognition to “level up” existing women security so they can have training on physical de-escalation if needed. Systemic barriers, such as uniforms and safety equipment not designed for women’s bodies, can inhibit participation of the women in these positions.

PATRON SAFETY IN NIGHTLIFE SETTINGS

Safety concerns for women in social venues include drink spiking, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. Forum participants noted that intoxicated women may be at higher risk of being targeted by predators, particularly when they leave venues alone.

A police representative indicated that intoxicated men are anecdotally, more inclined to listen to women police officers in social districts. However, there is an alarming trend of female-on-female altercations in social districts. This complicates interventions, especially when male officers are involved, which may elicit concern from onlookers.

EMPLOYEE SAFETY AND MOBILITY

Women employees face unique safety risks when returning to their vehicles or using public transportation at night, as they often carry cash tips. While some establishments escort employees back to their cars, this procedure isn't institutionalized in all venues.

PARTICIPATION IN FREE, VOLUNTARY TRAININGS

It was identified as a challenge to motivate venue staff to take available training, even when they are free of charge. The Sacramento Office of Nighttime Economy has provided snacks, raffle prizes, scheduled trainings for 3-5pm, and has even offered training on-site at venues. However, it can still be difficult to encourage owners to pay staff to take training or for workers to voluntarily undertake training. It was suggested that venue owners be educated on the potential risks of not having staff trained e.g. loss of an entertainment permit, loss of an alcohol license, liability risk and insurance costs.

STRATEGIES AND PROMISING PRACTICES

RECRUITMENT AND REPRESENTATION EFFORTS

The city of Edmonton, Alberta has implemented targeted recruitment campaigns for female officers by engaging students at colleges and universities. Uniforms tailored to women's bodies were just introduced, and the city is about to promote the 30x30 campaign, which aims to increase female representation in police recruits by 30% by the year 2030. Currently, 56% of municipal enforcement officers are female in an unmarked unit and 46% are female in a marked unit.

Sacramento's female chief of police also champions gender diverse officer recruitment, emphasizing the benefits of gender representation when engaging with the community. Support systems and peer mentoring are key factors in retaining women in positions of security and law enforcement.

VENUE SAFETY PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

In the UK and Canada, there is a code word campaign called *Ask for Angela*, where venue patrons can discreetly ask their server for Angela (e.g., "Is Angela around?") to request help when they feel unsafe. In the U.S., the more common code word campaign is "Angel Shots," where a patron can ask for three different types of angel shots as a discreet request for help. Posters displayed in the bathrooms educate patrons about the campaigns.

Disclaimer from RHI: *While such campaigns can be helpful, they are not an end-all solution. Poster campaigns have been criticized for placing the impetus of asking for help on the person who feels unsafe, which is problematic for people whose trauma response may be to "flee" or "freeze." Further, the Ask for Angela campaign was recently found to be ineffective in some pubs in the UK due to lack of awareness and training by servers.*

A mapping initiative has been deployed in Edmonton so that patrons can report where they have felt unsafe when socializing to gather anecdotal data about perceptions of safety in venues and the streets and sidewalks.

Venue safety procedures are also critical to ensuring the safety of patrons. For example, escorting intoxicated patrons to an Uber or connecting them with a family member or friend who is not intoxicated. Some venue security firms are hired on an "as needed contract" so there is not a specific cut-off time; they are sent home when they are not needed anymore (instead of leaving right at closing time).

In Edmonton, there is a two-hour overlap for police officers deployed to the entertainment district to ensure continuous coverage. This overlap allows one team to assist employees in safely returning to their vehicles while the other team focuses on monitoring patrons' safety, providing a more seamless transition in security monitoring during peak times.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The City of Sacramento's Office of Nighttime Economy collaborates with the local non-profit organization, WEAVE, to provide regular "safe night out" training for hospitality staff. The training educates staff on how to identify warning signs of sexual harassment and assault, as well as how to implement bystander intervention techniques in a venue setting. One strategy suggested is to provide a receipt to patrons where they can mark whether they need help (when their aggressor is not watching).

Best Bar None is a UK-based accreditation scheme used in Edmonton to recognize venues for meeting baseline security standards, as well as going above and beyond to maintain a safe venue. Sexual assault prevention training is one of the trainings used to qualify for participation in the program. This incentive-based scheme recognizes participating venues and hosts a contest for the safest bar.

ProServe Liquor Staff Training is mandatory in the province of Alberta for not only owners, managers, and servers, but also security staff (directly employed or contracted by the licensee), and owners and managers of a company contracted to provide security. More info: <https://aglc.ca/training/proserve-liquor-staff-training>. In the U.S., training is only mandatory for servers in 17 states and most states do not have mandatory training requirements for security staff of venues.

DRINK TESTING KITS

California Assembly Bill 2402 (effective July 2024) mandates that all bars provide drink testing kits and post signage to inform patrons about their right to request one.

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Tools such as ID scanners are being used to prevent past offenders from entering venues and provide a "universal ban" option for all venues using the same ID scanner system.