



Women's Safety in Social Venues and Public Spaces

June 13, 2023

OVERVIEW

Women experience going out at night differently from men. While sexual harassment and violence can occur amongst all genders, females are the majority of recipients with most perpetrators identifying as male. This Tuesday Forum convened two prominent researchers as well as practitioners from across the country to discuss how to make public spaces and social venues safer for female patrons and employees who work and play at night.

EXISTING APPROACHES

Current approaches to address gender-based violence against women in social settings include the following:

STAFF TRAINING (I.E. BYSTANDER INTERVENTION)

Training has been developed by national and international service providers, which then are hired to work with a community's venue staff. Locally based universities and sexual violence centers also develop and deploy programs within their communities. Bystander intervention strategies are taught.

- **Developed by:** universities or national/international training service providers
- **Directed to:** Venue staff
- **Focus:** How to identify cues of potential harm and intervene in at-risk situations observed among customers
- **Drawback:** Training is time and labor intensive
- **Effectiveness:** Staff report they are more likely to intervene due to having gained tools from training
- **Value:** Can lower the liability of venues in the case of a lawsuit

EDUCATIONAL AND MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Patron-directed educational campaigns have not been evaluated in effectiveness at addressing/stopping sexual violence towards women, but do have an important role to play in awareness raising and achieving buy-in.

- **Directed to:** patrons
- **Challenge:** Current precedent is for messaging to be directed solely at women, potentially victim-blaming.
- **Value:** Can help generate buy-in from venue operators and contribute to social changes in attitudes.

SUCCESS METRICS

Gauging the success of a campaign or initiative is typically not based on an outcome evaluation (i.e. less incidents of sexual violence). Under-reporting is a common challenge, making it difficult to gauge the number of incidents or monitor trends. Many women tolerate sexual harassment without officially reporting it.

Success metrics currently used:

- Level of perpetration by young men (whether it has increased or decreased)
- Increase in interventions taken by staff who have undergone staff training

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A synopsis of existing research findings in social venues was provided by Kathryn Graham, Ph.D., Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and Samantha Wells, Ph.D., Senior Director and Senior Scientist with the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at CAMH. Based on the participants of their study (via self-reporting), they found:

- The level of intoxication of a male does not correspond to their level of aggression towards females. (Refuting the idea that “he was too drunk to help himself.”)
- The more intoxicated a female and the lower in social status in her peer group, the more likely she was to be targeted by a male.
- Males believe that when males are intoxicated, they are not to blame for their behavior. They believe that if a female is intoxicated, she is to blame.
- Male participants reported comments like, “Women should have a plan to not get too intoxicated.”

Study findings revealed a disparity in perceived accountability related to intoxication. Men believe they are excused if intoxicated, thus reducing blame for the perpetrator. Meanwhile, they believe women are responsible for behavior while intoxicated, thus increasing blame for victims.

Alcohol policy is currently written in a “gender-blind/neutral” way despite the link between alcohol consumption and violence, as well as data that 90% of violence is committed by men.

ACHIEVING BUY-IN FROM VENUES

Achieving buy-in from venue operators is critical for implementation of campaigns, training and initiatives.

Participants shared the following suggestions:

- **House educational information and trainings about sexual violence prevention within a range of topics important to venue operators** (e.g. active shooters, harm reduction, etc.). This can help take the weight off any one subject and make it part of an awareness campaign about making social spaces safer from harm.
- **Quarterly meetings** between venues and police, where this is a regular subject.

FUTURE AREAS OF EXPLORATION

Current gaps that can be explored include:

- Male-directed educational messaging
- Alcohol policy that addresses or recognizes the role of men in alcohol-related violence and gender-based violence
- Consequences to the perpetrator of sexual harassment

RESOURCES

CITYWIDE INITIATIVES AND CAMPAIGNS

- **Women’s Safety Charter:** <https://www.bristolnights.co.uk/projects/womens-safety-charter> (an adoption of the London-based initiative)
- **Glow-in-the-dark murals to educate people about sexual harassment:** <https://www.bristolnights.co.uk/news/bristol-nights-unveils-uv-murals-to-shine-a-light-on-zero-harassment-of-women>
- **Women Dropped Pins about Places where they experienced sexual assault in public spaces:** <https://www.anovafuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Safe-Cities-London-Scoping-Study.pdf>
- **Party Safely Tips:**
 - https://www.nyc.gov/assets/mome/pdf/ONL_Party_Safely_Tips_2022.pdf
 - <https://www.nyc.gov/site/mome/nightlife/party-safely-pride.page>

VENUE INITIATIVES

Venues can implement the following initiatives:

- Post codes of conduct and behavioral expectations at the door, on the website and during ticket sales
- Designate staff that patrons can come to with any challenges e.g. “ambassadors” or “Consent Unicorns”

Sample Code of Conduct: <https://www.houseofyes.org/culture>

“**Yes means Yes:** Consent is everything, on and off the dance floor. Always ASK before a physical interaction and be sure to get a clear definite “yes” before getting intimate. It’s ok to say no at House of Yes. Consent is simple: the safer we feel, the sexier we are. If you’re not down with consent, we kindly ask that you party elsewhere or better yet... nowhere.”

TRAINING SERVICE PROVIDERS

- U.S.: <https://safebars.org/>
- International: <https://www.goodnightoutcampaign.org/>
- Pittsburgh, PA: <https://paar.net/education-prevention/plc/>
- Sacramento, CA: <https://www.weaveinc.org/>

ACADEMIC RESEARCH

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