

Women Friendly Leeds Spiking Report



by Briony Burke

Introduction

Driven by Women and Girls and the Women Friendly Leeds (WFL) movement's mission to mobilise women and girls to have their voices heard, ensure that their needs are considered in all decision making and empower them to lead safer, healthier, equal and more fulfilled lives, this report was created and developed as a result of engaging with student communities, who were wishing to be involved in this movement.

Through conversations mainly in Universities and as part of further localised conversations it was apparent that a priority issue for women and more importantly female students was spiking.

As a member of the Violence Against Women & Girls City Centre Thematic Group, which consists of a range of Statutory, Business, Health and Third Sector partners, WFL knew that spiking was very topical and had been discussed at previous meetings. So, it was at this point that Spiking becoming a focus topic for WFL to research, in order to ascertain what women and girls in Leeds felt were the issues around spiking and what some potential solutions are for the city to consider.

Students were engaged through face to face consultations at the universities and colleges in Leeds, and through an online survey that aimed to also capture the diversity of those who had responded. All the data was collated, analysed and brought together with the quantitative survey results, that informed the full report. Through this research and consultation, 179 have been represented within this report.



This WFL summary report highlights the main concerns raised, and concludes with a recommendation to explore the listed “Three Asks”. The asks have been formulated directly from discussions with women and girls across Leeds on the issues of spiking.

These Three Asks are intended to call to action city decision makers such as the Council, Licensing, Business and Third Sector colleagues along with The West Yorkshire Combined Authority to implement change designed to alleviate fears around spiking, increase confidence and decrease incidents around spiking in Leeds. Due to the damaging lasting impact of bad experiences in the night time economy and previously feeling unheard on the issue of spiking, women and girls created ‘three asks’ as a tool to put forward their suggestions and views.

The following were specifically involved, but the list is not exhaustive: Vocal Girls/Getaway Girls; WFL Student Ambassadors; Leeds Beckett; University of Leeds; Leeds Arts University; Leeds Conservatoire; Leeds City College; SASHA (UoL) and The Right to Walk. The online survey was completed by communities such as WFL Culturally Diverse Hub, Leeds Feminist Book Club and Non-Binary Leeds.

WFL, through working with partners in Leeds is aware of the work currently being done that focusses on spiking and knows the range of spiking campaign materials that have been developed. However, it is felt that some of this work, could be delivered better in collaboration with others, developing a more holistic approach in addressing the issues and concerns around spiking. Awareness raising programmes for students need to be implemented annually to reach the turnover of our student population in Leeds.

This report recommends that a collaborative, holistic approach is taken to tackle issues relating to spiking, that understands consumers of the night-time economy are often also workers in the night-time economy, with a risk of spiking on or off shift. Particularly in mind that fear is a prominent impact and concern of spiking.



The Three Asks

Three Asks have been developed as a result of the research, are proposed for city decision makers to consider in order to tackle the fear and experiences around spiking in Leeds.

The Three Asks are:

1 An awareness, education, and anti-spiking campaign

- Education on what spiking is, signs, symptoms and whether you could be a perpetrator of spiking.
- “Know your rights” on spiking: Education around what support is available in Leeds such as the successful Women’s Night Safe Space (WNSS) and Ask for Angela. Self-advocacy is necessary in order to tackle the issue.
- How to advocate for your friends, how to spot the signs and symptoms someone else has been spiked, how to report and discuss spiking after the spiking incident.
- A “stop the spiking tagline” similar to THINK Gov Campaign that has a simple and straight-forward message. This is targeted at perpetrators and at women to empower them to speak up and change the narrative.

2 A Review of Licensing, Awareness Raising of Current Anti-Spiking Measures, Suggestions of Potential Steps.

- Licensed premises to remind staff of designated lead each shift for any safety concerns and aim to visually show this to customers for ease of identify Managers.
- Thorough, indiscriminate bag searches that act as a deterrent and publication that venues are zero tolerance on spiking
- Provision of safeguarding materials; testing strips, drink covers, etc. available for free
- Premises to support victims to report to the police and proactively preserve evidence. Take action on being up to date in regards to any known

- individuals who have been perpetrators of spiking, ensuring clear guidance and confidence for use of refusing entry to premises and give consideration to use of bans for a determined amount of time.

3 Welfare Above All

There is a consciousness within the asks that a victim blaming approach that centres actions of victims and potential victims is not appropriate.

This is more of a structural issue and needs a structural response. Individualistic solutions only work when the individuals can follow them absolutely. They alleviate danger but reinforces the onus of safety being on women.

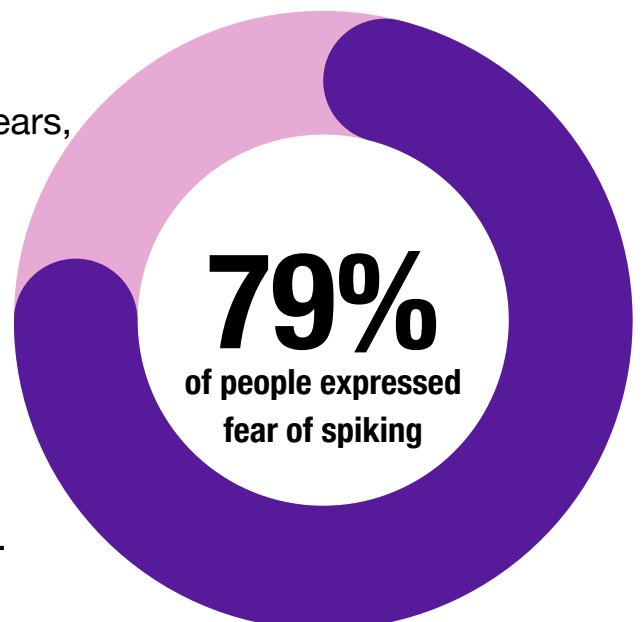
Prioritising welfare and well-being above all other considerations will help to de-stigmatise safety concerns, reduce feelings of fear, and empower women as they will feel listened to and safeguarded appropriately.

Research Detail

Two of the key findings from the research state that:

- 79% of people felt that spiking is something they're scared of:
- 68% of people demonstrated behaviours differently in night-time venues due to fear of spiking.

Behaviour change is when women and girls behave differently because of their fears, some of which, can put them in more danger. For example: Students 'downing' their drinks at the bar instead of sipping it on the dance floor to prevent someone putting something into their drink. This behaviour often reinforces fears and anxieties experienced due to spiking.



Respondents told us:

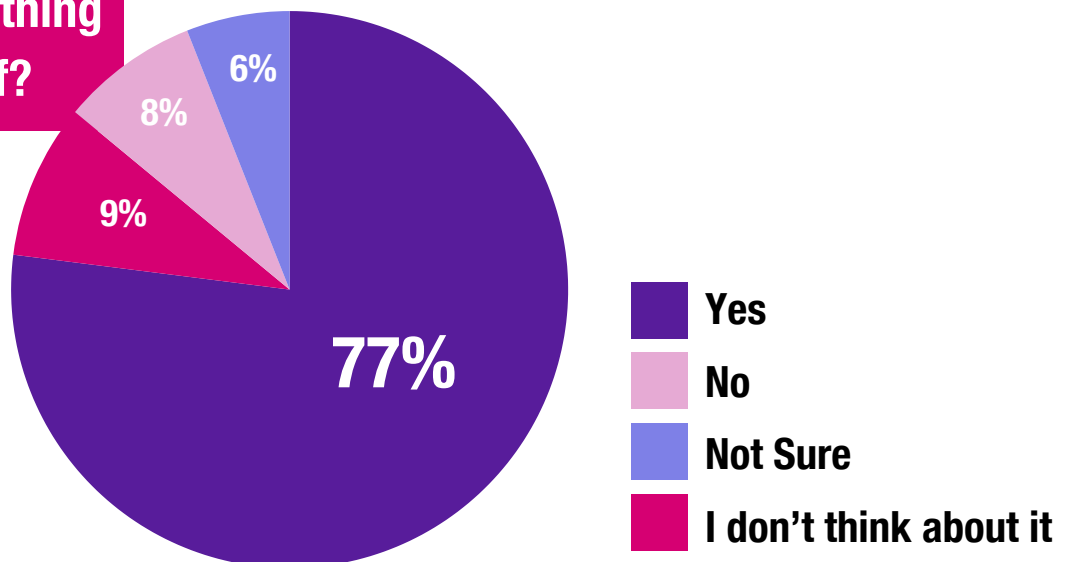
“I was spiked on a night out and now I’m scared to have fun and go out with my friends”

“Being paranoid that someone might spike my drink I immediately drink it on the spot.”

“Don’t feel safe in certain bars because of spiking which wasn’t reported because it wasn’t “bad enough”

Developing a campaign that targets the perpetrators of spiking, but also includes education around what spiking is, and what venues could do, which is backed up by case studies could be one way of helping to address fear and behavior change. Demonstrating to students and women that use and work in the Night Time Economy that they are being listened to, leading to more understanding about how to empower themselves and each other, with the hope that perpetrators of spiking would be deterred through greater preventative measures and a clear culture of zero

Is spiking something you’re scared of?





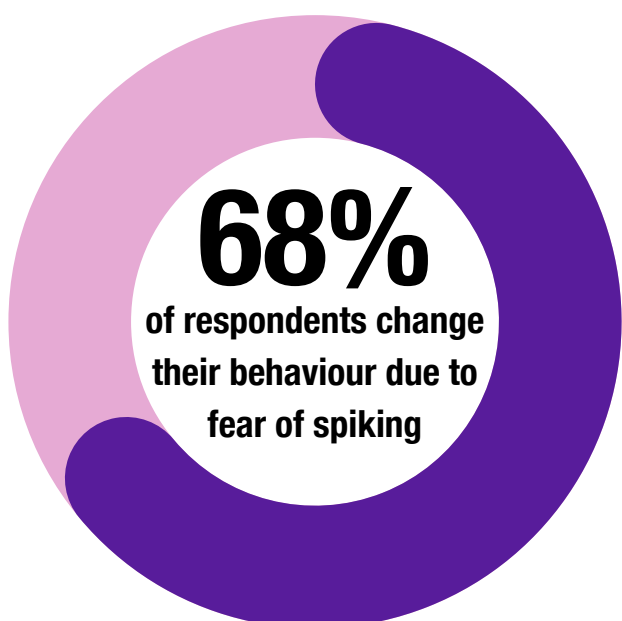
Other comments made during the research include:

“It’s just always in the back of your mind when you’re out like you can’t enjoy your drinks so sometimes it feels like there’s no point”


“I’m constantly checking my drink when I’m out, I’m always so aware of how many of my friends have been spiked”

Another key finding of this research was that 76% of the survey respondents didn’t know of any services that they could access support from after a spiking incident.

It also highlighted that when asked about solutions, the respondents top suggestions were; bag checks, and more responsive bar staff. This demonstrates that students feel that there isn’t enough support and anti-spiking measures in place. But, if there are, then more needs to be done to publicise these more widely.

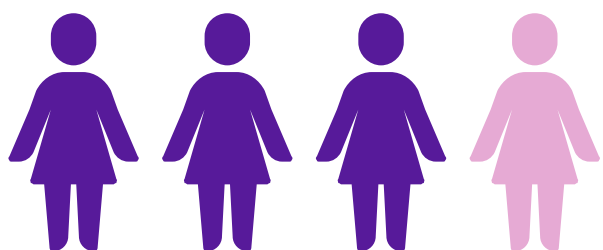


It is proposed that a review of current measures is undertaken and an awareness campaign is delivered to publicise those and future measures. If there are current measures in place, then the proposal is to work with partners to communicate current measure more widely and promote more widely using existing platforms such as websites, newsletters and social media



Other known initiatives like placing drink covers over bottles or glasses, having more educational and promotional materials available and visible bag checks, will empower students, women and girls to feel more control and supported over their safety as this is what they have asked for. It will reduce the fear of spiking.

Furthermore, communicating to customers the designated lead for safety concerns would tangibly increase being and feeling safer.



3 out of 4 respondents have experienced spiking or know someone who has.

75% of survey respondents expressed that they, or someone they know has been spiked. Two case studies included in this report demonstrate how different outcomes can be, depending on what is prioritised, when dealing with incidents of potential spiking.

In case study 1 on page 9, the student felt disempowered when reporting her incident of spiking with the venue staff, who further endangered her because they didn't prioritise her welfare. This completely disempowered her to speak about it afterwards to others, contributing to the stigma of being spiked this report highlights.







One student wrote:

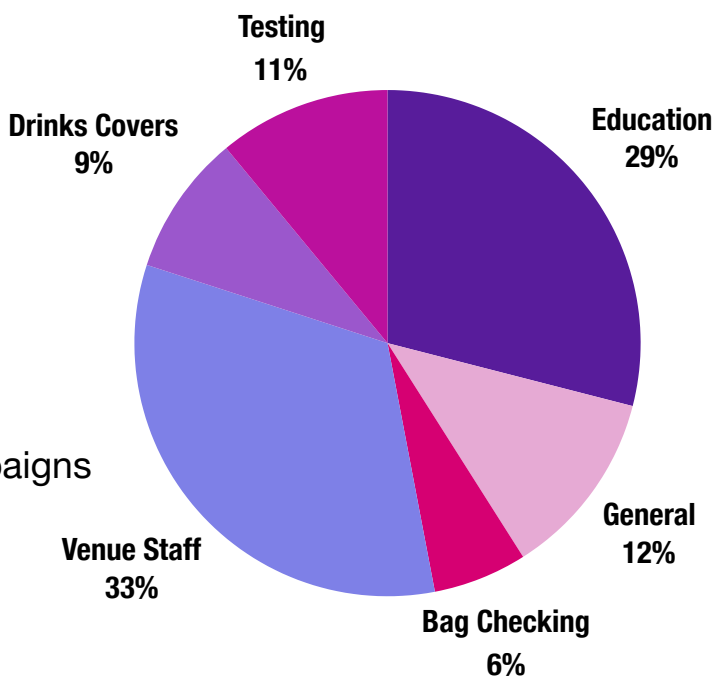
"My friend was spiked but everyone swept it under the carpet, the victim especially felt too embarrassed to ask for help. Bar staff and general awareness would help. Knowing signs, tells, and that it is not your fault."



Case Study 2 on page 10, from the Women’s Night Safe Space, clearly demonstrates that by putting welfare at the centre of all safety measures, whether to reduce fear or to actually provide additional access to safety, is empowering to the individual who is experiencing spiking.

Suggested Solutions from Respondents

-  Training for Venue Staff
-  Drinks Covers
-  More Bag Checking
-  General Change Needed
-  Educational Awareness Campaigns
-  Testing



Conclusion

The findings in this report demonstrate a need for an integrated approach to tackling spiking, tackling the fear of spiking and subsequent behaviour changes that women are taking which increases their vulnerability. It is an issue that must involve us all.

This report recommends three asks that have come from women we have consulted with, with it in mind that these asks can be measurably fulfilled through partnership working and that the women and girls be worked with as lived-experience experts.

Below are the recommendations. Based on the Three Asks detailed within this report.



Recommendations

It is recommended that the following “Three Asks” are discussed at both a city and region level through the existing mechanisms e.g. VAWG board, thematic groups and considered for collective action.


- 1. A Review and development of the awareness, education and anti-spiking campaign.**
- 2. A review of licensing, awareness raising of current anti-spiking measures, suggestions of potential next steps.**
- 3. Welfare and well-being above all.**

Case Study 1

Student from Leeds City College (18years old):

This student spoke to us at a stall we hosted at Leeds City College. She told us how she went to [a venue] and didn't have much to drink. She went to the bar and ordered a drink, maybe her third of that evening and then blacked out and is not really sure what happened. She woke up in the security office of [a venue] confused and scared. The security told her she had fallen asleep in the girl's toilets and so they had taken her into the security office. She felt as though the security staff were irritated with her, and they told her she needed to leave. She feels that she was spiked that night. She described herself as “being able to handle a drink and drink anyone under the table”.

She said that her behavior was out of the ordinary from her usual drinking behavior in those contexts. She has felt concerned and angry and not listened to because of this experience. She did not report either to the venue or the police because she felt that the security blamed her for her experience and was not offered any support. She didn't think anything of it,



feeling as though in the moment it must have been her fault. It was only when she was in a safe situation that she felt able to come to terms with her experience and consider that she was spiked.

She didn't want to report as she didn't want to face not being believed, particularly as she already experienced being perceived as the problem on the night she was spiked.

Case Study 2



Case Study: Amal (1)

Police came to seek help from WNSS (Women's Night Safe Space) for a woman they had found alone and unwell in the street. WNSS supported Amal to come to WNSS, and after healthcare had assessed her symptoms, Amal was able to talk, and said she doesn't remember what had happened.

She was working at a nearby licensed venue and was on her way to meet friends. She didn't have her phone, but did have her pay packet she just got at work and thought everything else was in her bag. WNSS contacted her place of work to get a next of kin/emergency contact, as she couldn't remember anyone's contact details. Her place of work gave the number of her brother and Amal asked to talk to him on the phone.

She didn't want to do a police report at the time, but just go home. She did then reach out to the WNSS coordinator the following week to gain information about what happened, to report the incident and to help her talk to her place of work.

WNSS staff thought there was a possibility she had been spiked at work, so shared the concern with the venue and talked through with Amal seeking further health care support. ”

(1) Gobey, S., Spiking Case Studies from WNSS”, 2023