

Journalism club is tackling important local issues

Spiking: A frightening new trend

By Abbey McKenna and Sophie Lacey, Year 13



A Spiking Epidemic is hitting our streets

Newcastle is quickly becoming a hotspot, with an increasing number of spikings being publicised within the media. According to The Egalitarian, Newcastle devastatingly places 4th in the number of cities with the highest number of spike reports in the past month. While spiking via drink was the most popular method at 81%, spiking via injections was on the rise at 17%. As young women, we are not only both angered and appalled that this is still an ongoing issue, but we are apprehensive about our safety when we go out.

In the past few months, there have been over 200 drink spikings reported to the police across the U.K, an already substantial number not even including those who haven't spoken out about their experience for various reasons. Numerous charities and campaigners have come forward expressing their annoyance over how the police and NHS often dismiss spiking incidents by not carrying out the necessary tests such as blood and urine samples. The same could be said for the leading politicians of this country, whose lack of initiative is apparent in their minimal use of authority and power to act. Despite there being a petition set up by Hannah Thomson, a 24 year old woman keen to stem the rising tide of spiking, which was even brought before parliament and debated, no further action was achieved. How can women feel safe and protected when they can't rely on authority figures to act when necessary?

Even though the government and other individuals in power have failed to take action in what could lead to become a life or death situation, many women in the Newcastle community have joined forces and launched a campaign, Women's Street Watch. This has been able to promote women's safety and gain popularity by using the social media platform of Instagram, with the username @womensstreetwatchncl. The growing campaign was recently launched on the 26th September 2021 in response to the terrible death of Sabina Nessa. Unfortunately, it has taken a young girl who had the rest of her life ahead of her being killed for people to realise that something has to be done in order to prevent this horrific event from occurring again. When creating women's street watch, they expressed that they had a vision of establishing a women-led women-focused safety groups to operate in the night time economy in order to reduce violence against women. It has been proven that the creation of this campaign has become effective and impactful in the city of Newcastle. In a survey of 3,220 women living in Newcastle, 3,124 of these women said that they feel safer knowing the group exists. It has also been able to grow in popularity, gaining a wide network by receiving 10K followers within 24 hours. This is an amazing start to what could continue to grow and raise awareness on maintaining the safety of women during the night and finally allowing them to enjoy their night without the threat or worry of being spiked.

Numerous bars in Newcastle are initiating change in order to combat the swell of spikings within the city. Market Shaker has introduced a wave of new measures such as additional CCTV, an increase of 50% in their security team, covers for drinks, increased staff vigilance along with welfare training, CYD testing kits to detect spiked drinks and a vulnerable person's area. Having a predominantly young customer base, these measures are vital in creating a safe environment for women to have fun without the burden of becoming victims to spiking resting on their shoulders. Other bars such as Powerhouse have implemented extra searches of customers on entry whereas Soho Rooms and Greenhouse have "plain clothed" staff members in operation to appear as though they are normal customers when in reality they are watching the behaviour exhibited by actual customers. While these measures are a progressive step forward, there are a number of popular bars who have not imposed the measures necessary for the immobilisation of spikers, some of them being Flares, Digital, Popworld and Perdu. Spiking is not an isolated event which only occurs in one single bar, it is a universal concern, and therefore, in order for change to ensue and for women to feel unequivocally protected, these measures must be widespread.

It is vital that both women and men in our community and across our country use their voices to raise awareness on this issue because the topic of women's safety should never be silenced.

Visit <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/staying-safe-while-drinking/drink-spiking-and-date-rape-drugs> for more information on the signs of spiking and what to do if you are ever in that situation.



Why we wrote this:

As two young women who have recently turned 18, the question of our safety on a night out should never be hanging over our heads. We are of an age where having fun is a big priority to us, something that we shouldn't be deprived of simply because some men think it is acceptable to harm women. We hope that our article can help women both young and old when it comes to spiking because although they may never fall victim to it, it is vital knowledge to ensure that everyone is safe and protected.