

# More than a myth: Drink spiking happens

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Google the term "spiked drink," and you'll get more than 11 million hits, directing you to pages that describe being slipped a mickey, tips on how to avoid becoming a victim and even kits to test drinks for illicit drugs. So is drink spiking a growing problem or are these tales of people who just drank too much? Or is this phenomenon merely an urban legend?

A research team led by Suzanne C. Swan, PhD, of the University of South Carolina, sought to answer some of those questions. Their study, published by the American Psychological Association's journal *Psychology of Violence*, sought to determine the prevalence of drink spiking by looking at [survey data](#) from 6,064 students at three universities.

What the researchers found was 462 students (7.8 percent) reported 539 incidents in which they said they had been drugged, and 83 (1.4 percent) said either they had drugged someone, or they knew someone who had drugged another person.

"These data indicate that drugging is more than simply an urban legend," Swan said.

The study found significant gender differences. Women were more likely to be the victims of spiking and reported more negative consequences than men, the study found, although men comprised 21 percent of the victims. Women were also more likely to report sexual assault as a motive while men more often said the purpose was "to have fun." Other, less common reported motives included to calm someone

down or make someone go to sleep.

"Even if a person is drugging someone else simply 'for fun' with no intent of taking advantage of the drugged person, the drugger is still putting a drug in someone else's body without their consent - and this is coercive and controlling behavior," Swan said.

Given the nature of the subject, there were clear limitations to the study. "We have no way of knowing if the drugging victims were actually drugged or not, and many of the victims were not certain either," the researchers wrote. "It is possible that some respondents drank too much, or drank a more potent kind of alcohol than they were accustomed to." Additionally, many common drugs, including over-the-counter medications, can interact with alcohol. And victims often don't remember what happened when they were drugged, the authors noted.

There has been scant research into drugging, the researchers wrote. Two other studies looking at U.S. college students and young adults found anywhere from 6 percent to 8.5 percent reported having been drugged by someone else. One Australian study of 805 Australians age 18-35 found 25 percent had experienced drink spiking. Swan and her colleagues focused on college students because of the risky behaviors that are present on campuses, particularly binge drinking.

Given their findings, the researchers said interventions should be developed to target those doing the drugging, not just [victims](#). "Because many of those who drug others believe that the behavior is fun and minimize the risks, interventions could provide information about the dangers of overdosing," Swan said. "They could also target the issue of consent. Just as people have a fundamental right to consent to sexual activity, they also have the right to know and consent to the substances they ingest."

**More information:** "Just a Dare or Unaware? Outcomes and Motives of Drugging ('Drink Spiking') among Students at Three College Campuses," Suzanne C. Swan, PhD, University of South Carolina; Nicole V. Lasky, PhD, Northeastern State University; Bonnie S. Fisher, PhD, University of Cincinnati; V. Diane Woodbrown, MA, University of South Carolina; Janaé E. Bonsu, MA, University of Illinois at Chicago; Andrew T. Schramm, BA, University of South Carolina; Peter R. Warren, PhD, WJB Dorn Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Columbia, SC; Ann L. Coker, PhD, and Corrine M. Williams, ScD, University of Kentucky; *Psychology of Violence*, published online May 23, 2016. [www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rel/s/vio-vio0000060.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rel/s/vio-vio0000060.pdf)

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