

Third of young women assaulted while drunk

- Increased risk of accident, arrest and unplanned sex
- More likely than men to get into fight, says survey

James Meikle, health correspondent for The Guardian
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More than one in three young women say they have been sexually assaulted after getting drunk, according to a survey which also suggests that excess alcohol makes them more likely than men to be involved in fights, be arrested or be cautioned by the police. More women also say they have been injured in an accident, ended up in hospital, got into an argument, or been robbed or lost property after excessive drinking. More than a third also report having unplanned or unprotected sex, according to a survey of 1,000 18- to 30-year-olds commissioned by the Portman Group, an industry-funded body devoted to promoting "responsible drinking".

The picture that emerges will reinforce concerns that young people are increasingly putting their health and safety at risk, and possibly stoke demands on politicians to counter problems of noise and disorder near pubs, including those seeking extended opening hours.

Jean Coussins, the chief executive of the Portman Group, said: "These findings are disturbing. Alcohol affects your judgment and the fact that so many young women are being sexually assaulted after getting drunk is shocking.

"What is most alarming of all is the fact that young women seem to be risking more than young men."

The questionnaire used by LM Research for the survey did not specify what might constitute a sexual assault. The Metropolitan police said it did not collect figures in a way that might easily show gender differences in drink-related incidents. However seven forces are engaged in Operation Matisse, a study into the incidence of alcohol and drugs in rape cases.

The survey, conducted this month, suggested that 2% of men had been sexually assaulted after drinking too much, compared with 36% of women. More women than men, 34% to 24%, said they had unplanned or unprotected sex, ended up in hospital (17% to 13%), were injured (19% to 14%), got into an argument (59% to 45%), got into a fight (11% to 9%) or were arrested or cautioned by police (27% to 16%). Just 15% of men said they had lost or had stolen property such as a bag, wallet or mobile phone. Among women, the figure was 24%.

Nearly seven in 10 women, 69%, said they had phoned in sick for work or study after a night out, compared with 57% of men. Nearly one in four men and one in five women consider themselves regular binge drinkers.

Professor Robin Touquet, consultant in accident and emergency medicine at St Mary's hospital, London, said: "Women must not put themselves in vulnerable situations. Most cases of 'date-rape' are just that - on a date - when two people know each other, often well."

Chief Inspector Jon Donnelly, coordinator of the National Police Licensing Forum, said the number of young women involved in drink-related disorder had increased significantly in recent years. The Home Office said the government was "committed to assessing the role of alcohol in sexual violence".

A report by the Forensic Science Service, an agency of the Home Office, on "drug facilitated" sexual assault last month suggested that 46% of people who complained of assault had had alcohol, and in a third of those cases, both alcohol and an illegal drug were taken.

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