

Introducing the Nightlife Safety Project: Involving Bar Staff to Prevent Unwanted Sexual Aggression in Nightlife Environments

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Alcohol and sexual aggression

Sexual aggression against women by men is common in bars and clubs. Young women are the most susceptible to unwanted sexual aggression, in part because they are learning to navigate bar culture. Alcohol is commonly used in sexual assaults. Studies have found that 60% of perpetrators, and 40% of victims, had ingested alcohol before the assault. One study found that alcohol was the only drug used in 94% of drug-facilitated rapes and 98% of incapacitated rapes. One prospective study found that college women who drank were at higher risk for sexual assault, and women who drank more and had more problems with their drinking were at the highest risk.

In a November 2009 survey of women between the ages of 21-30 who frequent bars in the downtown Tucson area, 88% reported experiencing unwanted sexual aggression at bars in the previous year, and most were afraid of experiencing aggressive behavior by men when they went out. Staff at several of the bars frequented by these young women indicated a high level of awareness of unwanted advances against women by men.

Programs in Canada and the United Kingdom have been found to be effective in helping bar staff handle and reduce aggressive behavior. In discussions with Tucson bartenders and bouncers during development of the Nightlife Safety Project, staff recognized high levels of unwanted sexual aggression, and had already thought of some ways to reduce it.

By engaging bar staff as allies against alcohol-related sexual violence, the Nightlife Safety Project is one of the first of its kind in Arizona and is currently being piloted. The Southern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault receives funding for primary prevention of sexual violence through the Arizona Department of Health Services to implement the program. The program is entirely voluntary and entirely without cost to business owners and other participants.

We hope to involve a large segment of the community (including the University of Arizona, Tucson Police Department, and business owners) in creating a safer and more enjoyable nightlife experience for everyone who patronizes Tucson's lively 4th Avenue–Congress Street corridor.

Businesses who partner with us will be certified annually as Nightlife Safety participants. They will adopt and post zero tolerance policies in their establishments for unwanted sexual aggression by patrons, have their staff attend a 1-hour program training, and display Nightlife Safety Project materials.

The Southern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault will provide all program materials and training free of charge, and will spotlight participating bars in program brochures and publicity.

Goals of the program include increased patronization of participating bars and clubs by young women, public recognition of the business's efforts to improve patron safety, a more pleasant nightlife environment along the 4th Avenue – Downtown corridor, and increased involvement of the entire Tucson community in preventing unwanted sexual attention and sexual assault.

References

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