

Spring 2023

## Girls Just Want to be Safe: An Analysis of Drugged Drinking and Prevention Amongst Students at the University of South Carolina

C. Gray Forsberg  
*University of South Carolina - Columbia*

Director of Thesis: Mohammed Quasem

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### Recommended Citation

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## **ABSTRACT**

Drink-spiking has become a well-known phenomenon since the turn of the century, especially on college campuses in the United States. Drink-spiking or drugging can be defined as “adding alcohol or drugs into someone’s drink without their knowledge or permission” (Alcohol and Drug Foundation, 2006). Drink-spiking is not just relevant to the concern of an illicit substance being placed into an alcoholic drink, but adding additional alcohol to drinks or adding alcohol or drugs to non-alcoholic drinks is considered drugging as well. This study collected data through a survey sent to 250 current students at the University of South Carolina regarding the prevalence of drink-spiking on and around campus and perceived feelings of safety when using drink-spiking prevention devices. 22.0% of all respondents (n = 50) indicated they had been victims of drink-spiking while enrolled as a student at the University of South Carolina. Current use of drink-spiking prevention devices amongst participants was low, but 90.0% of participants had previous knowledge of drink-spiking prevention devices. Data revealed that 66.0% of participants would use disposable drink-spiking prevention devices if they were provided by the university. Open-ended comments regarding the use of drink-spiking prevention devices revealed the need for them within bars and restaurants in the Five Points district of Columbia, SC.

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## INTRODUCTION

Growing up as a girl, I was prepared to face adversities. I knew that I would be treated differently because of my gender, but I did not realize that being a woman made me an easy target in the eyes of the world. As I progressed through middle and high school, I began to see why my parents were always so worried about my safety. I always thought I could protect myself against a man if I needed to, but I never realized just how many things I would have to protect myself from. When I was about to begin my journey to the University of South Carolina, I was constantly reminded by family and other adults to never set my drink down or look away from it because someone could slip something into it. I was told to always keep an eye on my drink, whether it was a water bottle, a soda, or an alcoholic beverage. I was scared for my safety and the safety of all the women around me. I did not want to worry every time I went to an event, a house party, or to Five Points, but I had to in order to protect myself.

Drink-spiking can be defined as “adding alcohol or drugs into someone’s drink without their knowledge or permission” (Alcohol and Drug Foundation, 2006). Drink-spiking is not just relevant to the concern of an illicit substance being placed into an alcoholic drink, but adding additional alcohol to drinks or adding alcohol or drugs to non-alcoholic drinks is considered drugging as well. Compared to peers of the same age who are not attending university, college students reported higher levels of binge drinking. 4 out of 5 college students in the United States consume alcohol while 50% of college students engage in binge drinking activities (Recovery Worldwide LLC, 2022).

Depending on the substance used during drink-spiking, side effects and consequences can greatly vary. Slurring of words, tiredness, confusion, blurred vision, inability to speak, loss of balance, paranoia, and memory loss are only a few common symptoms of being drugged

(American Addiction Centers, n.d.). While there is some data available regarding drink-spiking in general, there is a general lack of research surrounding drink-spiking on college campuses in the United States. According to a study conducted by American Addiction Centers, women are 56% more likely than men to be drugged by a stranger (American Addiction Centers, n.d.).

Recent druggings around the Five-Points District of Columbia, South Carolina have left many female students at the University of South Carolina feeling unsafe and targeted. After many reports of druggings within Five Points bars, the co-owner of 4 bars in the area was arrested for the manufacturing, possession, and distribution of illegal drugs (Bozard, 2021). In the summer of 2021, 11 of the 15 bars located in Five Points were denied their liquor licenses after reapplication (Fedor, 2021). After the shutdown of these bars, a survey was conducted by the College of Education at the University of South Carolina that displayed self-reported druggings in Five Points. Of the 316 students who responded, 190 students reported that they had been drugged in Five Points and 213 students reported that they know someone who had been drugged in Five Points. Students also reported experiencing hospitalization, sexual assault, robbery, injury, and other disturbing consequences as a result of being drugged (Lako, 2021).

## **APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

Over the past two decades, the once taboo topic of drink-spiking has emerged as a well-known phenomenon. While drink-spiking seems to be a common topic of conversation surrounding college campuses in the United States and the United Kingdom, data and studies related to drink-spiking are limited and generally very vague. Providing true population-based estimates of the prevalence and incidence of drink-spiking has proven extremely difficult due the lack of witnesses and many other factors. Victim testimonies are more often than not deemed

unreliable due to the fact that victims had almost always consumed alcohol prior to the alleged drugging.

It is difficult to collect reliable data on alleged druggings because most substances used in drink-spiking are undetectable in the body after a short period of time. Toxicological reports on suspected druggings can also produce skewed results due to the differences in time it takes for a drug to be excreted from the body and how long after the drugging the victim was evaluated. Rohypnol becomes undetectable in the body after 72 hours, while GHB becomes undetectable after only 10 hours. Due to the diverse pharmacology of drugs used for drink-spiking, cases of drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA) and drink-spiking are particularly challenging for forensic toxicologists (Parkin & Brailsford, 2009). Druggings often go unreported for many reasons. Patients may be hesitant to tell physicians about their voluntary use of any illegal substances. In a study published by the US Department of Justice, it was discovered that only 40% of participants were honest about their illegal drug use and 60% did not disclose their illegal drug use when reporting a drugging (Negrusz et al., 2005).

When I began researching statistics and articles specifically about drink-spiking, I was shocked at how little data was available. I searched PubMed-Medline, JSTOR, PolicyMap, PsychINFO, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and numerous other databases for peer reviewed literature on the prevalence of drink-spiking in the United States. Even with broad search terms such as *drink-spiking*, *drugging*, and *roofies* I was only able to find a handful of peer reviewed articles. Throughout the research process, I found that there was a significantly larger portion of data related to *drug-facilitated sexual assault*, specifically on college campuses. After reviewing numerous publications, I was able to compile a variety of sources with data relating to drink-spiking on college campuses in the United States.

It has become increasingly apparent that there is a need for drugging prevention amongst college students at the University of South Carolina. According to a recent study that included the University of South Carolina, it was discovered that more than 1 in 13 students ( $n = 462$ ) reported being drugged unknowingly (Swan et al., 2017). In order to re-evaluate the prevalence and incidence of drugging incidents at the University of South Carolina I conducted a survey similar to the aforementioned study conducted by Swan et al., with the hopes of collecting additional data related to drink-spiking prevention devices. Drink-spiking prevention devices are typically drink covers that help to deter drugging perpetrators from having access to your beverage. These devices can be reusable or disposable and can generally be purchased online. The NightCap™ and StopTops™ (shown below) are examples of popular drink-spiking prevention devices.



(The original StopTops - because drink spiking stinks, n.d.)



(Nightcap scrinchie, n.d.)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

“Just a Dare or Unaware? Outcomes and Motives of Drugging (“Drink Spiking”) Among Students at Three College Campuses” is a one-of-a-kind study that was published in 2017.

Researchers from the University of South Carolina (USC), the University of Kentucky (UK), and

the University of Cincinnati (UC) collected data from students using surveys in hopes of uncovering the reality of drink-spiking on and around college campuses in the United States. This study specifically aimed to answer questions regarding the motives behind drugging, the most common drugs used, and patterns amongst drugging incidents such as location and sex of the victim.

This study was conducted within a larger longitudinal study of dating violence and sexual assault among students at the same 3 universities. Online surveys were distributed to students through their university email addresses in 2012 and 2013. These surveys were sent to approximately 16,000 students with an overall combined response rate of 38.7%. Data was collected from students of all ages, but any responses recorded from students outside of the age range of 18-24 were discarded to accurately represent traditionally aged university students. The final data set contained 6,064 responses, 61.9% female and 36.8% male. 1.3% of participants did not report their gender. 57.6% of responses were from freshman, 23.3% from sophomores, 9.6% from juniors, and 8.0% from seniors.

Each survey contained questions that aimed to examine the prevalence of drugging within the student body. The survey began by examining drugging incidents from the victim's perspective. Students were first asked, "Since the beginning of [this academic year's] fall term, how many times do you suspect or know that someone put a drug into your drink without your knowledge?" Responses were collected on a scale, from 0 times to 6+ times, with options for 'this happened but not this year', and 'choose not to answer'. If the respondents answered yes, they were asked a series of questions related to the suspected drugging. The follow-up questions aimed to uncover the location of the drugging, the consequences of the drugging, and any suspected motives behind the drugging. It was revealed that 6.0% of students at USC, 7.2% of student at UK, and



10.2% of students at UC believed they had been drugged since the beginning of their fall academic term.

The validity of these results was further explored through an analysis of the correlation between binge drinking and drugging victimization. Students were asked questions about the frequency and amount of alcohol consumed over the past month. With responses ranging from ‘0 days’ to ‘20-31 days’, it was revealed that that the two were significantly correlated, with  $p < 0.01$  and  $r = 0.191$ .

This study also examined the perspective of the person committing the act of drugging; the druggier. In an attempt to collect data on druggers, participants were asked “Since the beginning of [this academic year’s] fall term, have you or someone you know put drugs in someone else’s drink on purpose?” If the respondent answered yes, they were asked a series of questions about motives being drugging someone and what types of drugs were used. 83 students (1.4%) responded that they or someone they know put a drug in someone’s drink without them knowing. Of these 83 students, 51 chose to respond to the follow-up question related to motives behind the drugging. The two most common answers were related to having fun ( $n=14$ ) and to have sex with or sexually assault someone ( $n=12$ ). Other motives indicated by respondents were to make someone calm down or go to sleep, to get revenge on someone, or to observe the effects of a drug on someone.

When examining the most common drugs used in drink-spiking in the 2012 survey, researchers asked the question “What drug or drugs were used? (check all that apply).” Answer choices included *Rohypnol (roofies)*, *GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyric acid)*, *cocaine*, *ecstasy*, and *methamphetamines*, along with options for *I don’t now* and *Other, please specify*. In 2013, researchers added answer choices for *Xanax*, *Benadryl*, and *ketamine* based on comments from

the results from the 2012 survey. Additional questions regarding the location of the drugging(s) and any sexual engagement that may have occurred were examined as well.

Results from this portion of the study revealed that 31.8% ( $n = 88$ ) of participants who knew what substance had been used to drug them identified it as Rohypnol or *roofies*. 30.7% did not know what substance was used, while 11.4%, 9.1%, and 6.8% identified Xanax, ecstasy, and cocaine as the substances used, respectively. Other drugs that participants claimed were used during a drugging incident were ketamine, GHB, methamphetamines, Benadryl, Adderall, LSD, and even laxatives.

The responses for drugging perpetration and knowing a drugger were deemed reliable due to the stark consistencies observed across all universities during both years when the survey was conducted. The percentage of students who responded *yes* to the question “[H]ave you or someone you know put drugs in someone else’s drink on purpose?” from each University is as follows: 1.3% from USC, 1.9% from UK, and 1.2% from UC, with an average of 1.4% in year 1 and 1.6% in year 2 of the study.

The validity of these results was assessed by examining the correlation between individuals who drug others and sexual and physical dating aggression. Using adapted versions of questions from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence survey and the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale, the researchers were able to establish a correlation between drugging perpetration or knowing the drugger and sexual aggression ( $r=0.206$ ,  $p,0.01$ ) A correlation was also established between drugging perpetration or knowing the drugger and physical dating aggression, with  $p < 0.01$  and  $r = 0.219$ .

## **PARTICIPANTS**

In order to reevaluate the reality of drink-spiking amongst students at the University of South Carolina, I created a survey to collect data on the prevalence of drink-spiking along with the use of drink-spiking prevention devices on and around campus. The first page of the survey included an overview of what this research focuses on, a warning about the discussion of drink-spiking and sexual assault, and a statement assuring confidentiality. The only requirement to participate in this survey was active enrollment at the University of South Carolina in an undergraduate or graduate program. The survey was administered through Google Forms and was sent to participants through their university email address. University email addresses were used to ensure active enrollment. The survey was sent to a total of 250 students with an overall response rate of 20.0% (n = 50). Of the 50 respondents, 88.0% (n = 44) identified as female, 10.0% (n = 5) identified as male, and 2.0% (n = 1) identified as gender non-conforming. 76.0% (n = 38) of participants were seniors, 16.0% (n = 8) were juniors, 6.0% (n = 3) were sophomores, and 2.0% (n = 1) were in a graduate program.

## **MEASURES**

In order to better understand the risk of being drugged while attending the University of South Carolina, the survey was divided into four sections: Drugging incidents Outside the University of South Carolina, Drugging Incidents at or Around the University of South Carolina, Drink-Spiking and Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault, and Feelings Surrounding Drink-Spiking.

### **Drugging Incidents Outside of the University of South Carolina - Measures**

Students were first asked “Do you know someone who has been drugged unknowingly while drinking?” The response scale included choices for *no*, *yes-1 person*, *yes-2 people*, *yes-3*

*people, yes-4 or more people, and other*, with a text box for participants to leave an alternate answer.

Personal drugging victimization was assessed with a single question: “Have you ever been drugged unknowingly while drinking while **not** enrolled as a student at UofSC?” Answer choices included *never, 1 occasion, 2 occasions, 3 or more occasions*, and *other*, with a text box for participants to leave an alternate answer. If students responded that they had been drugged, they were asked to write a brief description of when and where this incident occurred.

### **Drugging Incidents at or Around the University of South Carolina - Measures**

Personal drugging victimization while enrolled as a student at the University of South Carolina was assessed with a single question: “Have you ever been drugged unknowingly while drinking while enrolled as a student at UofSC?” Answer choices included *never, 1 occasion, 2 occasions*, and *3 or more occasions*. Students who answered “never” were sent to the next section of the survey, while students who indicated they had been drugged were asked a series of follow-up questions. The first follow-up question asked participants to “Please choose or describe where this incident occurred” with answer choices for *in a dorm on the UofSC campus, in off-campus student housing, bar or restaurant in Five Points, bar or restaurant outside of Five Points, off-campus house party*, and an option for *other, please describe*. Participants were then asked “How recently did this incident occur” with answer choices ranging from *Fall 2019* to *Spring semester 2023*. Lastly, participants were asked “Did you know the person who drugged you?” Participants either responded *yes* or *no*, and those who answered *yes* were asked to describe their relationship with the druggier.

### **Drink-Spiking and Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault - Measures**

Participants were asked a total of four questions regarding drink-spiking and drug facilitated sexual assault. Participants were first asked “Have you ever been sexually assaulted after being drugged unknowingly while drinking while enrolled as a student at UofSC?” The next question asked, “Have you ever been sexually assaulted after being drugged unknowingly while drinking while **not** enrolled as a student at UofSC?” Answer choices for both of these questions included *never*, *yes-1 occasion*, *yes-2 occasions*, and *yes-3 or more occasions*. Next, participants were asked, “Do you know someone who has been sexually assaulted after being drugged unknowingly while drinking while enrolled as a student at UofSC?” and “Do you know someone who has been sexually assaulted after being drugged unknowingly while drinking while **not** enrolled as a student at UofSC?” Answer choices for these questions included *never*, *yes-1 person*, *yes-2 people*, and *yes-3 or more people*.

### **Feelings Surrounding Drink-Spiking and Prevention Devices - Measures**

This portion of the survey focuses on anxieties surrounding drinking in public, and knowledge of drink-spiking prevention devices. Participants were first asked, “Do you ever worry about being drugged unknowingly while drinking?” Answer choices included, *always*, *most of the time*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, and *never*. Next, any prior knowledge of drink-spiking prevention devices was assessed using the question “Have you ever used any device to prevent drink-spiking?” An image of a drink spiking prevention device was included with this question for reference. In order to accurately assess participants levels of knowledge surrounding prevention devices, a detailed answer scale was used as follows:

*Yes – I own and frequently use a prevention device while drinking.*

*Yes – I own a prevention device, but don’t use it often.*

*Yes – I have used a prevention device in the past, but I don't own one.*

*Yes – I have used disposable prevention devices.*

*No – I have never used a prevention device, but I know they exist.*

*No – I have never used or heard of a drink-spiking prevention device.*

The next two questions aimed to evaluate participants' feelings of safety while drinking in public. Participants were asked, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe do you feel against being drugged unknowingly while drinking around others?" Answers were given using a sliding scale that labeled 1 as "extremely unsafe" and 10 as "extremely safe." Next, participants were asked, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe would you feel drinking around others while using a drink-spiking prevention device? Again, answers were given using a sliding scale that labeled 1 as "extremely unsafe" and 10 as "extremely safe."

Lastly, in order to evaluate the utilization of prevention devices, participants were asked, "If the University of South Carolina provided disposable drink covers in the Student Health Center, the same way they provide condoms, would you use them?" Answer choices included *definitely, occasionally, rarely, and never*. Before exiting the survey, all participants were required to briefly describe why they would or would not use prevention devices if they were provided by the University. Participants also had the option to leave any testimonies or personal anecdotes they wished to be shared.

## **RESULTS**

### **Drugging Incidents Outside of the University of South Carolina - Results**

70.0% of participants indicated that they know at least one person who has been a victim of drink-spiking. Within that 70.0%, 28.0% said they know one person who has been drugged,

18.0% said they know two people who have been drugged, 6.0% said they know three people who have been drugged, and a shocking 18.0% said they know four or more people who have been drugged.

98.0% of participants (n = 49) stated that they have never been drugged unknowingly while drinking while **not** enrolled as a student at the University of South Carolina. 1 participant indicated that they had been drugged unknowingly on one occasion. This participant further stated that the incident took place at “a club in Madrid, Spain.”

### **Drugging Incidents at or Around the University of South Carolina – Results**

22.0% of respondents (n = 11) indicated that they have been drugged unknowingly while drinking while enrolled as a student at the University of South Carolina. Of this 22.0%, 16.0% were drugged on one occasion and 6.0% were drugged on 2 occasions.

The 11 students who were victims of drink-spiking were prompted to choose or describe the location where the drugging(s) occurred as well as indicate when the incident(s) took place. 27.3% indicated the drugging took place at a bar or restaurant outside of the Five Points district in Columbia, SC, while 63.6% indicated the drugging took place at a bar or restaurant within the Five Points district. 1 participant (9.1%) stated that they had been drugged at bars inside and outside of Five Points. Figure 1 illustrates the array of responses given to the question “How recently did this incident occur?”

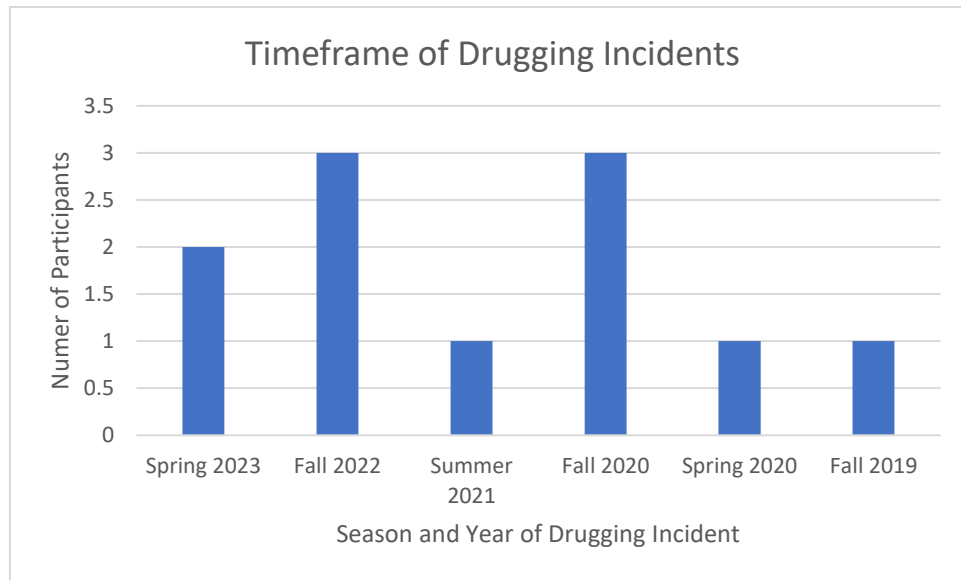


Figure 1: Timeframe of Drugging Incidents, graphical representation of responses to the question "How recently did this incident occur?"

Of the 11 students who have been drugged, only 1 student knew the druggier. This participant stated that a bartender at a well-known bar in Five Points placed a drug in their drink before it was served to them.

### Drink-Spiking and Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault – Results

While all 50 participants stated that they have never been a victim of drug facilitated sexual assault while **not** enrolled as a student at the University of South Carolina, 1 participant stated that they have been a victim of sexual assault as a result of being drugged unknowingly while drinking while enrolled as a student at the University of South Carolina. 26.0% of respondents claim to know one or more people who were victims of drug facilitated sexual assault while enrolled at the University of South Carolina, while only 18.0% of respondents



claim to know one or more people who were victims of drug facilitated sexual assault while not enrolled at the university.

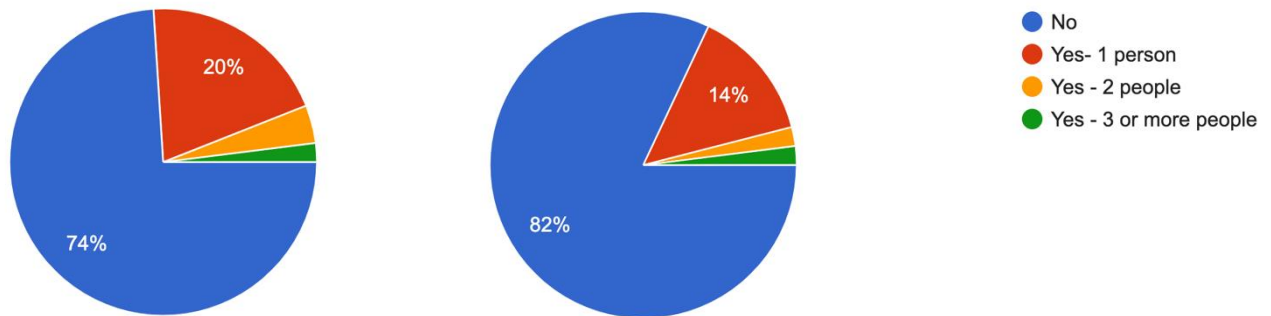


Figure 2: Graphical representation of responses to the question "Do you know someone who has been sexually assaulted after being drugged while drinking while enrolled as a student at UofSC?" n=50.

Figure 3: Graphical representation of responses to the question "Do you know someone who has been sexually assaulted after being drugged while drinking while **not** enrolled as a student at UofSC?" n=50.

## Feelings Surrounding Drink-Spiking and Prevention Devices - Results

In response to the question "Do you ever worry about being drugged unknowingly while drinking?" 6.0% responded *always*, 24.0% responded *most of the time*, 44.0% responded *sometimes*, 20.0% responded *rarely*, and 6.0% responded *never*. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of these responses along with a description of each answer choice.

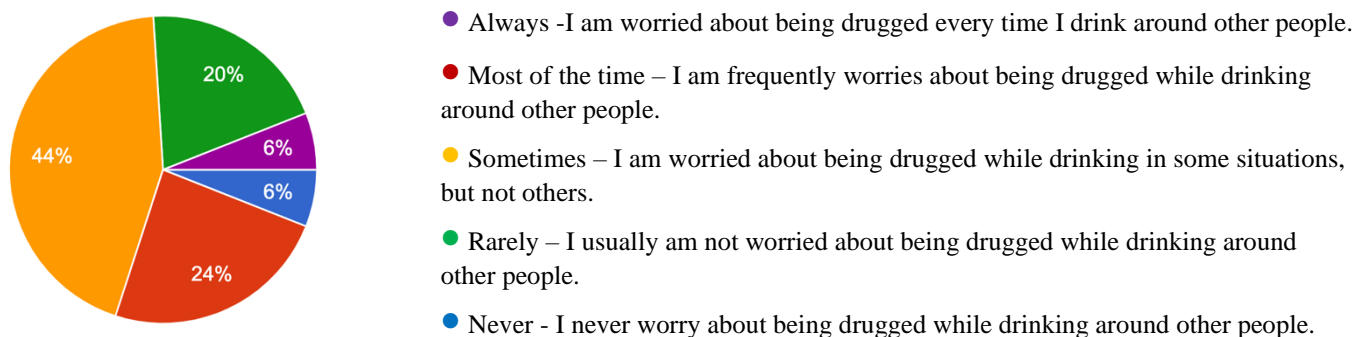


Figure 4: Graphical representation of feelings of anxiety surrounding the fear of being drugged while drinking around other people.

To further analyze feelings of safety surrounding drinking around others, participants were asked “On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe do you feel against being drugged unknowingly while drinking around others?” Answers were given using a sliding scale that labeled 1 as “extremely unsafe” and 10 as “extremely safe.” Responses to this question are shown below in Figure 5.

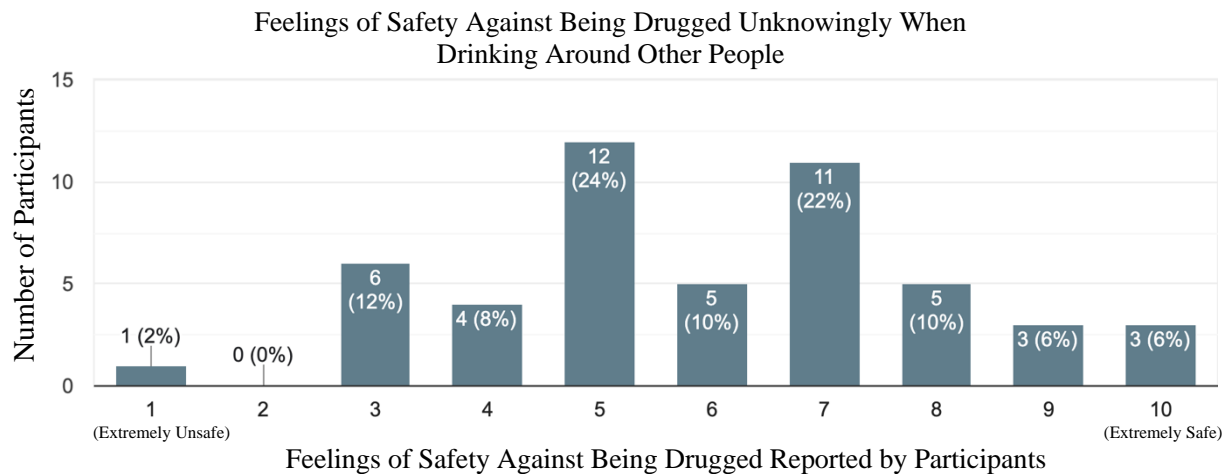


Figure 3: Graphical representation of responses to the question "On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe do you feel against being drugged unknowingly while drinking around others?"

84.0% of participants indicated that they never used a prevention device, but they know that they exist as a response to the question “Have you ever used any device to prevent drink spiking?” All of the responses to this question are shown below in Figure 6. Images of drink-spiking prevention devices were also shared with participants during this question.

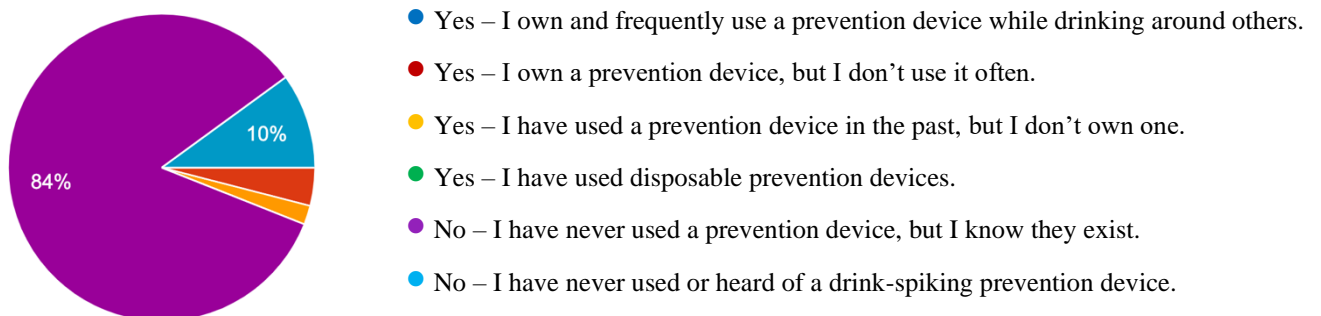
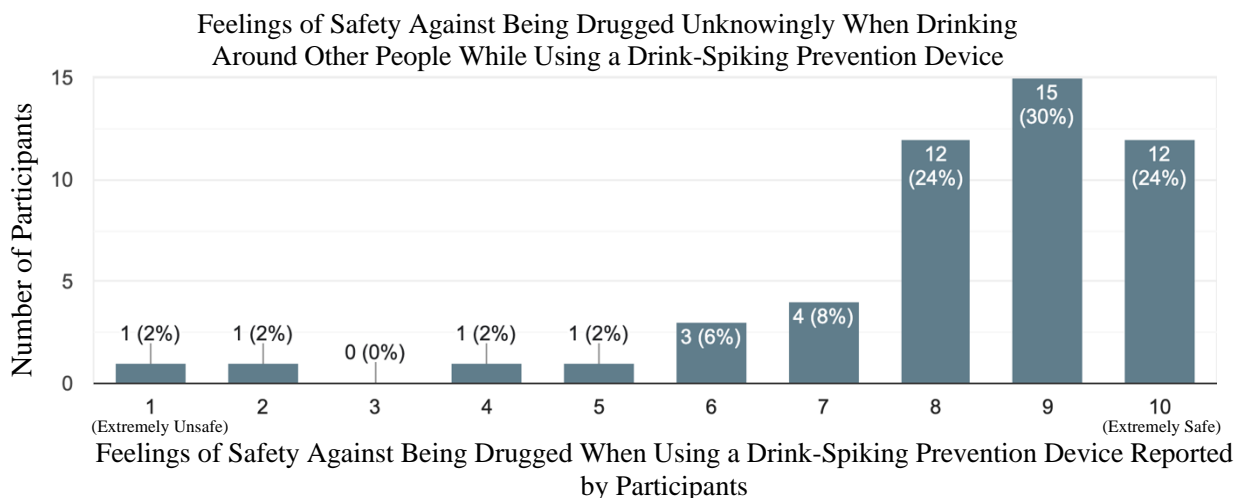


Figure 7: Graphical representation of participants’ responses about using drink-spiking prevention devices.

Students' feelings of safety against being drugged unknowingly while drinking around other people were further evaluated by the question "On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe would you feel drinking around others while using a drink-spiking prevention device?" The responses displayed in Figure 7 can be compared to the responses in Figure 5. Given these results, students' feelings of safety surrounding drinking around others seems to increase if they were to use a prevention device.



*Figure 7: Graphical representation of responses to the question "On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe would you feel against being drugged unknowingly while drinking around others while using a drink-spiking prevention device?"*

In response to the question "If the University of South Carolina provided disposable drink covers in the Student Health Center, the same way they provide condoms, would you use them?" 28.0 % stated they would definitely use them, 38.0% stated they would occasionally use them, 22.0% stated they would rarely use them, and 12.0% stated they would never use them. Responses such as "I don't drink" were coded within the 12.0% of participants who stated they would never use drink covers provided by the university.

Participants were then asked to briefly describe why they would or would not use a drink-spiking prevention device if they were provided by the university. These open-ended comments

were organized based on the participant's response to the previous question and are displayed in Table 1.

*Table 1: Open-Ended Comments Regarding the Use of Drink-Spiking Prevention Devices If They Were Provided by the University*

Response*	Frequency	Reason for Giving Response
Definitely	14	<p>It is a good idea and makes drinking safer. (F)</p> <p>The stigma around it would disappear if everyone had them. (F)</p> <p>Using a product like this would allow me to feel safer in party settings, especially after experiencing being drugged. (F)</p> <p>If they were easily accessible (and would fit in my pocket, purse, or phone case) I would have one and thus remember to use one. (F)</p> <p>It would just be safe. (M)</p> <p>I would because it is an easy preventative measure. I think a lot of people just don't want to buy them, so if they were provided many people would use them. (F)</p> <p>It's free safety. (F)</p> <p>It would make me feel better about drinking around other people, especially men. (F)</p> <p>Can easily be thrown away after use, don't have to wash and keep up with. (F)</p> <p>As a college student, I can be safe but also not have to worry about spending the money if the university provides them. (F)</p> <p>Even though I do not know anyone personally that has been drugged, I've heard many stories about bars in Five Points, so I would still rather be safe than sorry! (F)</p> <p>It makes me feel safer when going out to public places to know that I am capable of having control of who has access to my drink. (F)</p> <p>My hand is too small to cover my drink, so a StopTopp covers my drink better. (F)</p> <p>It seems effective and affordable. (F)</p>
Occasionally	19	<p>Would be helpful maybe but a bit inconvenient to remember. (F)</p> <p>I might forget to bring them out but if they're free I would pick some up to use sometimes if I remembered. (F)</p> <p>I'm not sure they're effective and they might not become popular. (F)</p> <p>Drunk and I forget. (F)</p> <p>I think this would prevent people from trying to drug me, because it would be more difficult. (F)</p> <p>I would because it protects my drink from having something slipped into it. (M)</p>

		<p>I think if it was a norm on campus then I would definitely use it but I would feel weird being the only one using it. For a period Saloon [a bar in Five Points] gave out lids and I felt a lot more safe and used it. (F)</p> <p>I don't often drink in public/around people I am not close to so I would not need the device. However, if I did decide to go out I think the device would reduce my anxiety. (NB)</p> <p>I would use them if they were provided at the bar/restaurant. (F)</p> <p>They could be helpful in certain situations such as in extremely crowded places. (F)</p> <p>I think it is a great product to use but I would be concerned about the implementation in Columbia. Providing them at the SHS [Student Health Center] is convenient but students are not using them to drink on campus. They would be needed at the bars in 5 Points, the Vista, etc. which would require the bars to give them out given students would be very unlikely to bring them out with them. (F)</p> <p>I'm not sure the health center is the best place to provide them. (F)</p> <p>I would be likely to use these if they were easily accessible, however, as a senior I haven't recently been to the middle of campus/the student health center. It might be useful if these were available in a wider variety of locations or if you were to encourage bars throughout Five Points to have them available, as well. (F)</p> <p>Forget/inconvenient/lowkey wasteful trash wise. (F)</p> <p>I usually feel safe, but if I were in a situation where I felt like I needed one, I would get one. (F)</p> <p>I don't really drink, so it doesn't totally apply to me. However I think they are a great idea (even if someone is just drinking a nonalcoholic beverage spiking could still occur). (F)</p> <p>I usually drink beer from a can now instead of mixed drinks so I no longer really need a cover. (F)</p> <p>I would probably forget because it's not habit. (F)</p> <p>I rarely drink and don't do so around people I don't know and trust and it is usually not in public. However, this is a phenomenal idea for people who are out at parties or bars! (F)</p>
Rarely	11	<p>I would if it were given to me, but I wouldn't go out of my way to use it. (F)</p> <p>I would probably not remember to take it out with me or to put it on my drink. Maybe if the bars themselves provided them. (F)</p> <p>I would be concerned that it calls more attention to my drink. (F)</p> <p>I am not really concerned about having my drink spiked, and I mostly drink beer when drinking with a lot of people I don't know. (M)</p> <p>I wouldn't bring them to a bar but if a bar provided them I would use it. (F)</p> <p>I would not use a drink prevention device because I always carry my drink with me when I go out to the bar or have one of my friends watch it for me. (F)</p> <p>I probably wouldn't use it at the university because I feel so safe here, especially when drinking around my friends. My guy friends do not make</p>

		<p>me feel at risk and protect all of us girls when they notice an unsafe situation. (F)</p> <p>It would have to fit the cup exactly, and I'm worried someone could still lift the lid if they really wanted to. It's safer to just hold the cup or drink beer with the tiny opening. (F)</p> <p>I'd probably forget to bring it or not have space in my pocket. (F)</p> <p>I don't really enjoy disposable products, and I also don't drink frequently enough to need them. I'm not often in an environment that would allow me to be drugged. (F)</p> <p>I'm not really on campus, if they were provided at bars I would. (F)</p>
Never	6	<p>I feel safe without them. (M)</p> <p>I don't drink. (F)</p> <p>I probably wouldn't go out of my way to pick one up. (F)</p> <p>It would be easier if they were at bars (F)</p> <p>I would if everyone else used them but otherwise I feel like I would get made fun of for being the only one. (F)</p> <p>I don't drink alcohol, so I don't see a need for it. (M)</p>

\*Responses listed are from the question "If the University of South Carolina provided disposable drink covers in the Student Health Center, the same way they provide condoms, would you use them?"

Lastly, participants were given the option to leave any personal anecdotes or testimony regarding their experiences with drink-spiking. Below are comments from four participants:

"I choose not to drink in public setting unless I am in the home of a close friend or at a restaurant where my drink will not be left unattended." (F)

"I've been to [*bar in Five Points*] 3 times over the last 3 years. Twice I had less than 4 drinks in total and completely blacked out/experienced alcohol poisoning symptoms." (M)

"I remember when there were news articles about the bartenders at the [*bar in Five Points*] spiking drinks before they served them. Focus really needs to be put on drug spiking that is internal too. Drink covers are safe but not if the drink was spiked before it was even handed to the customer." (F)

"I was at a concert at a restaurant in the summer, before I knew it, I woke up in my own bed with no recollection of the evening, after checking my phone, I realized I was drugged and was found unconscious in the bathroom and carried home. I felt like my autonomy was robbed of me." (F)

## DISCUSSION

The data collected through this survey helps to uncover the reality of drink-spiking at and around the University of South Carolina. Before administering this survey, I expected roughly 5 to 10 percent of respondents would indicate they have been drugged in the past, so I was shocked to see that 22.0% ( $n = 11$ ) of participants indicated they had been drugged unknowingly while drinking on at least one occasion while enrolled as a student at the University of South Carolina. Of these 11 participants, 5 were victims of drink spiking within the 2022-2023 academic year. This means that 10.0% of all survey participants were drugged unknowingly while drinking since the beginning of this academic year's fall semester. Compared to the 6.0% of survey participants who were drugged unknowingly while drinking in the Swan et al. study, which took place in 2012-2013, it can be observed that the prevalence of drink spiking at the University of South Carolina has increased over the last decade.

This study revealed that 66.7% of drugging incidents occurred at a bar or restaurant within the Five Points district of Columbia, SC. I was shocked that none of the reported drugging incidents took place at an off-campus party or in student housing. 100.0% of drugging incidents reported through this survey took place at a bar or a restaurant. The shocking amount of incidents within the Five Points district was followed up with many comments about the need for disposable prevention devices in bars and restaurants in Five Points.

This study specifically inquired about whether or not students would use disposable prevention devices if they were provided by the Student Health Center on campus. 22.0% of students responded that they would definitely use them and 12.0% responded that they would never use them. Overall, the responses indicate that some students would use them if they were

provided on campus, but almost all students would use them if they were provided by bars or restaurants.

Although some students would use them, there are many limitations to providing drink-spiking prevention devices on campus. While numerous studies have uncovered the reality of underage drinking on college campuses, providing drink-spiking prevention devices directly through the university could be frowned upon. Some may argue that providing these devices could be viewed as the university supporting underage drinking, but I would argue that providing students with a way to protect any beverage from being drugged is more important. It is important to remember that drink spiking is not just putting drugs into an alcoholic beverage, it is the act of putting a drug or alcohol into someone's beverage without their consent. That beverage could be water, juice, soda, beer, wine, etcetera.

The data presented in Figures 5 and 7 show that students' feelings of safety against being drugged unknowingly while drinking around others would increase if they were to use a prevention device. The average of students' reported feelings of safety when drinking around others and not using a prevention device was 5.98 out of 10. The average of students' reported feelings of safety when drinking around others if they were using a prevention device was 8.81 out of 10. Based on this data, the majority of student would feel safer drinking around other people if they were using a drink-spiking prevention device.

Of the 50 students who participated in this survey, 13 students (26.0%) know at least one person who has been a victim of sexual assault as a consequence of drink-spiking while enrolled as a student at the University of South Carolina. Sexual assault was identified as one of the most common motives behind drink-spiking in the Swan et al. study. The data collected from this



study regarding sexual assault as a consequence of drink-spiking reflects the findings from the Swan et al. study. While that study focuses on motives behind drink-spiking, the study I conducted aimed to collect data regarding drink-spiking prevention devices and their perceived usefulness.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

Data collected through this study indicates that the phenomenon of drink-spiking is much more than urban legend. In relation to data collected from the Swan et al. study, these data suggest that the prevalence of drink-spiking at the University of South Carolina has increased over the last ten years. Based on student comments and data collected, I would implore bars and restaurants in the Five Points district to provide disposable drink-spiking prevention devices to customers in order to lower the number of drink-spiking victims in Columbia. While this may be difficult to implement across Five Points, bars should consider serving waters, sodas, and mixed drinks in cups with lids.

Overall, there is an insufficient amount of research that has been published regarding drink-spiking, and I believe this study helps to shed light on the not-so-taboo topic of drink-spiking at and around college campuses in the United States. It is important that data and studies of this nature are shared with students and faculty of the University of South Carolina. With the increasing prevalence and incidence of drink-spiking in Five Points, the university needs to take charge and provide students with more resources regarding drug and alcohol safety in order to ensure the student population is informed and protected. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), along with other universities across the United States, realized that arming students with information about drink-spiking and how to avoid it is an important and necessary

measure to ensure the safety of students on campus. MIT provides short educational courses regarding prescription drug abuse, drink-spiking, and even information on how to throw a safe house party (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, n.d.). While the University of South Carolina requires all incoming students to complete an AlcoholEdu course, which educates students on important safety measures to take when consuming alcohol. Adding a section about the dangers of drink-spiking and ways to prevent it to the AlcoholEdu course would be a simple way to share information with students at the University of South Carolina.

While the act of drink-spiking and drugging someone is illegal in many states, there are no laws regarding the act in the South Carolina Code of Laws. The act of putting a substance in someone's drink without their knowledge carries a felony criminal charge in the state of Ohio. Under Ohio law, anyone who drugs another individual with the intent of causing harm can be criminally charged with a felony ranging from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> degree. Drugging convictions in Ohio are followed by strict punishments including prison time, high fines, and even a 5-year driver's license suspension (Patituce & Associates, 2020).

As drink-spiking cases continue to increase, it has become clear that this is a public health problem. There is only so much universities can do to protect their students before law enforcement must step in. Lawmakers who represent the state of South Carolina must be encouraged to draft and implement legislation that criminalizes the act of drink-spiking. This study focuses on how potential victims of drink-spiking can protect themselves, but it has become clear that the drugging perpetrators must be held accountable by the law in order to reduce the incidence of drink-spiking in South Carolina and protect students at the university.

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American Addiction Centers. (n.d.). *Spiked Substances*. Alcohol.org. Retrieved February 18, 2022, from <https://www.alcohol.org/guides/spiked/>

The American Addiction Centers have provided an excellent array of written and visual statistics of drugging, or drink spiking, in the United States. Covering many aspects of drink spiking through surveys, the authors were able to provide information on the frequency of drink spiking, gender differences associated with drink spiking, and many more compelling statistics. This study is especially useful as it provides data on topics related to drink spiking that have not been recorded prior. These include the reported location of the druggings, the type of beverage or food the drug was placed into, as well as what symptoms are related to each type of drug used. In association with the other sources listed, the American Addiction Centers' data provides compelling evidence that the frequency of drink spiking has greatly increased over the last few decades. Overall, there is very little academic research about drink spiking and drugging, but this study provides a great amount of relevant and informative information.

Swan, S. C., Lasky, N. V., Fisher, B. S., Woodbrown, V. D., Bonsu, J. E., Schramm, A. T., Warren, P. R., Coker, A. L., & Williams, C. M. (2017). Just a Dare or Unaware? Outcomes and Motives of Drugging ("Drink Spiking") Among Students at Three College Campuses. *Psychology of Violence*, 7(2), 253–264. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000060>

The authors of this study thoughtfully designed a method of surveying students across three college campus in the United States in order to answer multiple questions regarding the

phenomenon of drugging. By collecting data on the prevalence and motives of drug perpetration and victimization, the authors were able to compile representative statistics on this under researched topic. The study revealed that a staggering 7.8% of participants suspected or knew someone that put a drug in their drink without their knowledge. The experience participants had after being drugged was also recorded along as any gender differences in the experience of being drugged. The study continues to explain outcomes of drugging such as sexual assault along with motives behind the drugging itself. Shocking statistics and testimonies are included in this study which add further emphasis to the even more shocking statistics presented by the American Addiction Centers. This study is also partially representative of the University of South Carolina, as 1/3 of the participants were students at this university.

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*The original StopTopps - because drink spiking stinks*. StopTopps. (n.d.). [https://www.stoptopps.com/#\\_](https://www.stoptopps.com/#_)