



GLOBAL DRUG SURVEY

GDS2019: Intoxication, sexual assault and consent

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Another day, another powerful male accused of sexual misconduct. While celebrities, politicians (and even a supreme court nominee) have dominated headlines in recent months, high-profile cases like these represent only a fraction of the extent of sexual violence.

Alcohol and other drugs play a complicated role in how sexual violence is understood. Intoxication frequently impacts who we deem to be a 'credible' rape victim. Ongoing and complex questions provide plenty of ammunition for debate. [Can people consent to sex while intoxicated? Whose consent matters when both parties are intoxicated?](#) And just how intoxicated does a person have to be to render their consent invalid?

In 2013, the GDS began to explore the world of sex and drugs. We looked at how different drugs affected sexual function and pleasure. That same year, we asked whether people had been taken advantage of while they were under influence of alcohol or other drugs. 20% of 22,000 people reported that this had happened to them at some point in their lives. 5% said this had happened in the last year. In addition, 14% reported that they thought they had been given drugs of alcohol with the intention of being taken advantage of.

[As GDS expands in the age of #MeToo we believe it to be essential to revisit the topic of intoxication, sexual assault and consent.](#) We know that sexual assault and consent are sensitive topics. But as always, in GDS, people need only answer questions they are comfortable with.

We also know that sexual consent is a tricky topic, and that context matters. Sexual consent can take different forms depending on who is involved (one-night-stand, long-term relationship, group sex), where it takes place (sex club, house party, home), and other contextual factors. When alcohol and other drugs are thrown into the mix, consent becomes even more complex. Drugs can reduce inhibitions, making us more impulsive. They can enhance our ability to be 'in the moment', altering physical sensations and making sex more pleasurable. But they might also make us more vulnerable.

Although we've already learned a great deal, we need to know more. [This year, we want to find out about people's experiences of being taken advantage of while under the influence of alcohol and/or other drugs.](#) We'll ask about who was involved, who else was around, and where it happened. We'll also ask if the incident was reported to anyone else, including the police. If it wasn't, we'd like to know why.

At present, only a fraction of sexual assault incidents are reported at all and even fewer of these result in convictions. **We want to give a voice to those who have been unable to speak out.** We'll use our findings to help shape interventions that minimise risk and harm, and maximise help and support, ensuring that no one is held responsible for sexual assault other than the perpetrator.

Make sure your voice is heard and help us keep people safe
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