Evaluation of the implementation of Operation Empower across Merseyside Police Force

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LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

MERSEYSIDE POLICE

MERSEYSIDE Violence Reduction Partnership

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Introduction

Globally, sexual violence is an important public health issue, placing large burdens on individuals' health and well-being, local communities, and services [1]. The impacts of sexual violence can be detrimental to individual's physical and mental health, and can affect their behaviours and relationships amongst other things [2]. Efforts to understand and prevent sexual violence have increased in recent decades. Vitally, studies have started to emerge highlighting nightlife environments as key locations for sexual violence, and crucially the importance of developing and implementing prevention strategies in these settings [3-6]. Whilst prevention strategies that explicitly aim to address nightlife related sexual violence are emerging, few have been formally evaluated [7].

Operation Empower

In April 2021, Merseyside Police launched a proactive policing response, Operation Empower, to prevent incidents of sexual violence by targeting people behaving in a predatory way. This involved covert policing in and around nightlife settings and other public spaces, where dedicated officers were tasked with identifying potential perpetrators who were displaying signs of predatory behaviours and to disrupt those who presented a potential risk. Further, officers were tasked with identifying anyone who may be vulnerable to ensure any immediate safeguarding concerns were met. In addition, a sexual violence bystander training programme (i.e., the Empower Training Programme) was delivered to police officers who regularly work in nightlife settings across Merseyside.

Evaluation aims

To inform the development, and future continuation of Operation Empower, an evaluation was implemented by the Public Health Institute, Liverpool John Moores University. The evaluation objectives were to:

1. Describe the development and implementation of Operation Empower.
2. Assess police officer and community perceptions, and perceived and actual impacts of Operation Empower.
3. Inform future prevention activity, through exploring police officers and nightlife user's views on prevention and response approaches to sexual violence across Merseyside, as well as nightlife user's knowledge, attitudes, and experiences of sexual violence.

Evaluation methods

Police pre and post training surveys: A series of pre and post training surveys were implemented with police officers who participated in the Empower training sessions (n=52). The surveys asked questions relating to participant's awareness and knowledge of sexual violence in the night-time environment. Additionally, a range of questions measured participant's attitudes and confidence relating to intervening in sexual violence. The post training survey also explored officers own experience of sexual violence as well as their views on the training itself.

Interviews/focus group: Semi-structured telephone/online/face-to-face interviews were conducted with police officers (n=7). Four, one-to-one interview (2 online, 2 face-to-face), and one face-to-face focus group with three officers, were undertaken across April and May 2022. These interviews explored the processes of implementation, outcomes, and impacts of Operation Empower. Interviews also explored the impact of the training on sexual violence myth acceptance, and readiness and confidence to intervene in incidents of sexual violence and harassment, and critically changes to policing practice because of training participation and implementation of Operation Empower.

Nightlife user survey: Surveys were conducted with 356 nightlife users on a night out in Liverpool City Centre. The survey explored participant's awareness and views of Operation Empower (and other prevention approaches). Further, it provided insight into participant's knowledge, attitudes, and experiences of sexual violence in the nightlife environment.

Key findings
Police interviews and pre/post training surveys

The extent and impacts of sexual violence

Interview participants highlighted that there is increased awareness of sexual violence across society in recent years, which in turn has increased the level of reporting of incidents. Sexual violence was viewed as an issue in nightlife with interviewees reporting that it is both prevalent and more accepted in nightlife compared to other settings. It was felt that there were clear impacts of sexual violence related to victims as well as perpetrators of sexual violence and their families and wider social networks. Most participants agreed that it was predominantly a male to female crime however acknowledged that sexual violence could happen to anyone. Perceived consequences of sexual violence victimisation were: it could change people's perceptions of others, affect their mental health and behaviours (e.g., avoidance of areas where they may have had a bad experience); and, that it impacts relationships. Interviewees also considered the impacts on health services and other organisations who support those who have experienced sexual violence.

> *There's more public coming forward to say to you, that's happened a few times. It's like, just watch that fella over there. He's being approaching groups and he's a bit of a letch or, things like that. So, I'd like to think that everyone's awareness is increased. (P1)*

> *The opportunities are greater because of the volume of people, because of reduced inhibition, because of the sexual environments of the night-time economy, and that you're going out socialising and drinking and a big drive is still sexual, is you know people, looking to meet people and so, when you bring together a lot of people who are, either looking for sexual encounters or possibilities, or, are excited by that, then it will increase the opportunity for offending. (P2)*

Risk factors for sexual violence

The sexualisation of women, behavioural norms, and impulse control: Participants spoke about the sexualisation of women and the experiences of individuals as they are growing up (e.g., adverse childhood experiences) as risk factors for sexual violence (for those who have experienced sexual

violence as well as perpetrators). In addition, the role of brain maturation and 'impulse control' was also discussed as a risk factor.

Substance use: Alcohol and drug use were seen as catalysts for inappropriate sexual behaviours, and also as an inhibitor that can increase levels of vulnerability, with alcohol seen as *'the main fuel factor that increases vulnerability'*.

Poor planning: Poor planning was identified as a risk factor. For example, individuals not taking note of where they are staying (particularly when in large groups such as stag and hen weekends) or having no battery on their phone were highlighted as increasing risks of vulnerability. It was felt in these instances, the police still have a responsibility to look after individuals even when it may not necessarily be needed and that it does not necessarily mean that someone is vulnerable to sexual violence or other public health concerns.

Operation Empower

Development

Operation Empower was developed as part of a broader suite of work to prevent and respond to sexual violence in nightlife settings; both local and national work to prevent and respond to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) was seen to be a strong driver for the strategic and political will for Operation Empower.

Targeted operations

The Operation involves officers (including plain clothes and uniform) working together at night on weekends in Liverpool City Centre's (LCC's) nightlife environment. The plain-clothes officers look for predatory behaviours, for example, from those who may

> *Operation Empower, that came about because we'd had an agenda as part of the sexual violence in the night-time economy working group, and one of them was to look at how the frontline officer's awareness around the bystander approach, which had been put out to all the licensed premises at the time. So, I took that on to develop, to deliver to our frontline officers, but also in addition to that, I'd seen some work which Newcastle had done. Which was they had officers in plain clothes which were deployed as part of their night-time economy, and they were actually looking specifically for predatory behaviour. (P1)*

be approaching groups of females or giving individuals/groups unwanted attention. The uniformed officer would use this intelligence to intervene by asking the individual for information on what they are doing in that area, why are they displaying certain behaviours, take their details, check those details on police systems, and when relevant save those details so other officers are aware they were a person of interest for displaying certain predatory behaviours.

Initially, the intention was to deliver Operation Empower across each of the boroughs of Merseyside (i.e., Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton, Knowsley, and the Wirral); however, with the majority of nightlife activity taking place in Liverpool City Centre, the operation was targeted towards the city centre. Whilst the aim was to have a team of officers working each weekend, the nature of policing has meant that officers dedicated to working on the operation are working overtime, and thus a range of officers have been involved in implementing the operation. This was noted as causing some practical issues in implementing the operation, with amongst other things, officers having varying experience of working the NTE and understanding of the aim and core activities of the operation. For example, in the early stages of delivery, Operation Empower was felt to focus more on the potential victims rather than

targeted perpetrators with one participant stating that it is important to ensure that the right people work on Operation Empower, because not everyone has 'got it'.

Despite this, those leading the operation and engaged in the targeted operations noted examples of identifying predatory individuals and diverting them from the area, including perpetrators of previous incidents of sexual violence.

> *The first week we did it, we had a really good example of a male that was stopped. He was seen approaching females and when the officers checked his details, he was currently on Crown Court bail for [sexual violence], which was in the night-time economy where they'd taken a [person to a location] and [sexually assaulted them]. And so, you know, straight away we never saw him again in the city. He was disrupted that night, and we never saw him again. (P1)*

Empower training

The 2-hour Empower training covers several topics including; a policing perspective of sexual violence in the night-time economy (NTE); what is meant by harassment and assault, myths and realities; predatory behaviour in the NTE and what to look out for; appropriate and inappropriate responses with case studies including scenarios; potential barriers to implementing the operation as well as perceived impacts the operation could have. The training was delivered to police officers by Liverpool Local Authority and RASA (Rape and Sexual Abuse Support). Whilst it was anticipated that 300 police officers would receive the training across four training sessions in summer 2021, due to restrictions relating to COVID-19, only one training session was delivered to around 100 officers. Interviewees felt that there needed to be renewed emphasis on the importance of the training both in terms of 1) providing refreshers for staff where it had been some time since they attended the training, or where the message had not 'landed as well as it should with all people', and 2) additional training to officers yet to receive the training, because it has been put on hold due to COVID and had yet to be restarted (at the time of interviews).

52 (72.5% male) police officers took part in the pre and post training surveys. Post training most participants agreed/strongly agreed that the training had provided them with a better understanding of the nature and extent of sexual violence in the nightlife environment (76.9%), how to respond to sexual violence in the nightlife environment (71.2%), and of where to go for help and support in cases of sexual violence (90.4%). Five out of the eight statements relating to perceptions of sexual violence showed significant improvements from pre to post training. There were also increases in the proportion of participants

> *It was something I probably would have already done to be perfectly honest with you, but again with the training it's something that I would have in mind. You know if it's just an argument between a male female to look like they were a couple, I maybe would have viewed it as some kind of drunken argument rather than maybe somebody being taken advantage of? So maybe it does put a different spin on things, I suppose once you've had the training but having refreshers would come in handy, I think as well. (P4)*

who reported increased confidence across several variables relating to intervening in sexual violence incidences, however these were not significant. In the post survey participants were asked about their

own experiences of sexual violence with 52.2% reporting any experience of sexual abuse in nightlife (47.8% when on a night out and 17.4% whilst working).

All interview participants had completed the Operation Empower training and considered that the training was informative, insightful and raised awareness and highlighted specific behaviours to be aware of. It was seen to support police officers to look at sexual violence from a different viewpoint, changing mind-sets and looking at sexual violence in a way they may not have done before for example, recognising cat calling or low-level harassment that makes people feel uncomfortable.

Future delivery of Operation Empower

When looking at the future delivery of Operation Empower it was felt that there needed to be a culture shift, with a proactive approach to the delivery of the operation with officers having belief and confidence in what they were doing / trying to do. It was acknowledged that the police were trying to do more with less resource. As part of the NTE focussed work, police working in Liverpool City Centre for only one weekend in every eight was seen by a number of the participants to be challenging. This was because it was not one set of police who were always policing the area, and officers were not able to 'get to know' people in the way that they do when they are in their own local policing areas where they have 'more local knowledge of the area'. Therefore having a core team who work on Operation Empower was seen as crucial to its continuation. In addition to this, continuing with the Operation Empower police training was also seen as critical to keep up the momentum of the operation and improving buy-in by not only training Liverpool based police officers but officers from other forces across Merseyside that may work the LCC's NTE. Having a consistent approach to sexual violence prevention, commitment from officers and continued funding support was viewed as critical to making Operation Empower sustainable.

Other areas for enhancing the prevention and response to sexual violence

Education and awareness raising and reporting

It was perceived that everyone has a role to play in preventing and responding to sexual violence and a responsibility in educating and raising awareness to prevent sexual violence from happening in the first place. This includes local authorities, education settings (schools, colleges, and universities), social services, police, ambulance service, licensed premises etc.

Mistrust in reporting

It was highlighted that individuals need to 'feel confident in the police' when reporting crimes of this nature and that the first contact they have with police is very important but can also be a challenge. Reporting in the media around cases such as Sarah Everard were seen to create mistrust in the police, which made the job of the police challenging. One of the participants spoke about being 'wary' of approaching a vulnerable person and the practicalities of trying to increase trust/feelings of safety in the police through using the City Watch CCTV system and increasing the availability of a female officer.

Role of the wider criminal justice system

One of the officers suggested that courts have an element of responsibility, in that those perpetrators or 'people of concern' who are on bail may have been told not to come into LCC, but that it is very difficult to police this. It was suggested that a tag or monitor for individuals would at least alert officers to the fact that perpetrators were not where they should be.

Environment and infrastructure

A number of practical aspects relating to the environment (e.g., CCTV and lighting) and transport networks were seen to be beneficial in preventing and responding to sexual violence. Good CCTV was seen to be very important in helping to make positive identifications as they provide evidence to support or refute specific claims. A number of participants stated that there needed to be better lighting in certain areas of LCC.

Licensed premises staff

It was felt that the door staff from clubs and bars have a more positive relationship with the police with many

…we've certainly seen intervention from door staff and licensed premises who have switched on to a victim coming forward. And there was even an example where I was flagged down by staff from the venue who said, you know, we've got somebody here, we're just going to detain them... And it transpired it wasn't that in the end, but we were on hand… for me, it was that reassurance that the premises have done absolutely everything they could and had acted appropriately. And, you know, we dealt with it as quick as we could. And getting those sorts of, you know, we call it 'golden hour principals' where we could go and interview with the offender. (P1)

having also received education around safety in the NTE not only in terms of how to identify those who may be vulnerable, but also how to conduct themselves in a professional manner.

Nightlife user survey

356 people participated in the nightlife user survey. The majority of participants were female (72.2%), under the age of 30 (79.9%), heterosexual (78.1%), currently living in Liverpool (74.4%). 43.7% were students and 54.8% reported visiting Liverpool's NTE more than once a month.

General perceptions of and attitudes relating to sexual violence in nightlife

The majority of participants agreed/strongly agreed that: a women should be able to wear what she wants without being at risk of sexual violence (97.7%); sexual violence is a problem in nightlife (91.7%), consent can be taken back at any time (86.0%) and sexual violence is never the fault of the victim (78.8%). Less than one in ten participants agree/strongly agree that if someone who is experiencing sexual violence is drunk, they are at least partly to blame (6.0%) and if the person committing sexual violence is drunk, it is not really their fault (5.4%).

Perceptions of sexual violence in Liverpool City Centre's nightlife

Participants were asked to identify how often they believed sexual violence happened to different groups of people on a night out in LCC. Nine in ten (88.9%) participants felt sexual violence occurred often/always to women, three quarters (74.1%) believed it happened often/always to LGTBQ+ groups and a third (33.8%) believed it happened often/always to men.

Respondents' experience of sexual violence in Liverpool City Centre's nightlife

Over half (59.1%) of participants had personally experienced sexual violence when on a night out in LCC (including on the way to, during and after a night). Of these, 41.8% had experienced this in the past 12 months, and 17.3% had experienced sexual violence but not in the past 12 months. The majority (51.6%) reported the sexual violence was both physical (e.g., unwanted sexual touching,

sexual assault) and verbal (e.g., harassment, cat calling, unsolicited requests for sexual favours). Those who had experienced sexual violence were asked where their most recent experience took place (they could select more than once answer). Most common areas were in a pub, bar, or nightclub (77.2%), followed by on a street or public setting (39.0%). Most (85.7%) identified the perpetrator as a male, and a stranger (85.3%). Three in five (62.4%) said that they didn't report the incident to anyone. Of those who did report, 24.2% told a friend or family member, 4.1% said the reported it to the police with the same number reporting the incident to door staff.

Confidence to seek support

The majority of participants agree/strongly agree that they had the confidence to ask someone who has experienced sexual violence if they are okay and if they would like further support (91.4%); and that they believed their peers would listen to them if they spoke out against sexual violence (87.1%).

Interventions to prevent sexual violence

Participants were also asked about their awareness of interventions to prevent sexual violence in LCC's NTE. When asked about Operation Empower, 15.7% of participants were aware of the intervention. Most participants had positive opinions of the intervention; however, some people acknowledged that it was impossible for police to be aware of every situation so more needs to be done to change the culture of sexual violence in nightlife.

> *Totally agree it is good to have someone there to watch out for those kind of behaviours.*
> **Nightlife user**
>
> *Crucial for a small number of incidences however sexual violence minor incidences and severe happens on a large scale in nightlife so officers would only intervene in a very small number of incidences. A bigger culture change is needed in the nightlife to prevent sexual violence on a bigger scale.* **Nightlife user**

Conclusion

Operation Empower has started to make a positive contribution to preventing and responding to sexual violence in nightlife, however further work is needed to review the implementation of the operation, ensuring where possible that a consistent team is available to implement the targeted operational activities, with staff adequately training and supported. Such interventions are critically given that findings from the nightlife user survey demonstrate high levels of sexual violence in nightlife, and critically low levels of reporting. Importantly, nightlife user attitudes towards sexual violence and confidence to support victims/survivors or seek support from peers/professional are likely to facilitate positive bystander intervention to prevent and respond to sexual violence in nightlife and other settings. Such findings could aid the development and continuation of wider sexual violence and nightlife safety interventions.

Operation Empower Recommendations:

- Ensure a wider team of officers attend the Empower training and are aware of Operation Empower, increasing the capacity and capability to support the operation in the future. Where required, provide refresher training for staff to embed knowledge, attitudes and skills.
- Incorporate body camera footage in the Empower Training to demonstrate to officer's best practice examples of engaging with perpetrators, victims and witnesses.
- Dedicate a core team of officers to work on Operation Empower in the NTE. Operation Empower officers could be paired with less experienced officers who are lacking in confidence or who have elected to work overtime and may not have the experience or knowledge of working in LCC's NTE.
- Ensure plain clothes officers have adequate discrete PPE to enable them to blend in more effectively therefore improving officer's safety and confidence to work covertly in plain clothes.

Recommendations for wider partners:

- Ensure the nightlife user survey findings are shared across relevant groups and multi-agency partnership meetings to inform sexual violence prevention and response activity.
- Support the continued delivery of sexual violence prevention training for nightlife workers and wider professionals (e.g., transport staff), and consider the delivery of such training to wider professionals/community members.
- Explore the development of campaigns to raise awareness of the unacceptability of sexual violence amongst nightlife users (and partners) and prevention activity, to support positive bystander intervention and reporting of sexual violence.
- Promote the support available to vulnerable patrons in addition to support of the police for example Street Pastors and or Guardians.
- Continue to support campaigns such as Safer Streets and Street Safe to further improve areas in the city where people are more vulnerable, for example making the environment safer with more CCTV and improved lighting.
- Ensure wider NTE activities to prevent harm continue to be implemented, including for example Drink Less Enjoy More and the Good Night Out Campaign amongst others.

1. Introduction

Globally, sexual violence is a key public health issue, placing large burdens on individuals' health and well-being, local communities, and services [1]. The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as: "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work" [8]. Efforts to understand and prevent sexual violence have increased in recent decades.

In the UK the Violence Against Women and Girls' (VAWG) Strategy has several aims and objectives to nationally prevent VAWG by implementing a multifaceted and multi-agency approach to violence prevention. One such approach included £5 million in funding to improve women's safety when out at night-time [9]. Additional awareness and funding relating to the VAWG Strategy has been allocated due to the public outrage following the Sarah Everard murder with the government promising to double the funding allocated to the Safer Streets fund which enables local authorities to make public spaces safer for women through, for example improving street lighting [10]. The VAWG strategy has also funded a pilot for a new online tool, StreetSafe, launched by the Home Office, where individuals can anonymously report areas where they feel unsafe [9]. Despite the increase in awareness both internationally and nationally, the number of people affected by sexual violence is still exceptionally high. Findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates that in the year ending March 2020, 618,000 women and 155,000 men experienced sexual assault (including attempts) [11]. Studies have begun to emerge highlighting nightlife environments as key locations for sexual violence, and crucially the importance of developing and implementing prevention strategies in these settings [3]–[6]. Whilst prevention strategies that explicitly aim to address nightlife related sexual violence are emerging, few have been formally evaluated [7].

In response to growing concerns around sexual violence across the country, a new pan-Merseyside group in 2021 was established to work to combat sexual violence, encourage more victims/survivors to come forward, and improve the support they receive. The new Merseyside Sexual Violence Strategic Group brings together leaders from the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office, Merseyside Police, local authorities, the criminal justice system, health, education, support services, third sector, faith, and survivor groups to improve the region-wide response to sexual violence. Across the partnership, a range of approaches are being implemented to prevent and respond to sexual violence. In April 2021 Merseyside Police launched a proactive

> **Box 1: Examples of proactive policing responses across the UK**
>
> **Operation Vigilant (Thames Valley Police) 2021 [12].**
>
> - Between July and November 2021, 117 people across Oxford, Reading, Milton Keynes, and Windsor were stopped and ten arrests were made in relation to predatory behaviour.
> - Of those stopped that provided their details, 20% were found to have links to sexual or predatory offending and 21% had links to violent offending.
>
> **Operation Cloak (Northumbria Police) 2019 [13].**
>
> - Specially trained officers were deployed in Newcastle City Centre with the aim of spotting vulnerability, offering support and assistance to those in need as well as targeting offenders.
> - Reports of rape and sexual assault in the city centre reduced by 30% [17].
> - Since its inception, Operation Cloak has been rolled-out elsewhere in the region and other parts of the country.

policing response, Operation Empower, to prevent serious incidents of sexual violence by targeting people behaving in a predatory way. Similar interventions have been running across other areas in the UK [12], [13] (e.g. Box 1). Operation Empower uses a combination of uniformed and plain clothed officers to carry out patrols in areas outside nightclubs, bars, and pubs, to identify people who may be displaying signs of predatory behaviour, such as sexual harassment, inappropriate touching, and loitering. Alongside this, the officers aim to identify anyone who may be vulnerable and ensure any immediate safeguarding concerns are met. Operation Empower also includes a sexual violence bystander training programme for police officers who regularly work in the night-time economy. The training is based on a bystander prevention programme called the Good Night Out Campaign previous delivered to nightlife workers across Liverpool [7]. The training covers a number of topics including a policing perspective of sexual violence in the NTE, what is meant by harassment and assault, myths and realities, predatory behaviour in the NTE and what to look out for, barriers, impacts, appropriate and inappropriate responses and case studies including scenarios. The aim of Operation Empower is to make LCC's NTE safe for everyone.

1.1 Study aims and objectives

1. **To describe the development and implementation of Operation Empower.**
    a) To describe the implementation of Operation Empower, including police officer's experiences of identifying potential perpetrators and supporting vulnerable patrons.
    b) To elicit the facilitators and/or barriers to programme development and implementation; and,
    c) To identify areas for development and sustainability.

2. **To assess police officer and community perceptions' and perceived and actual impacts of Operation Empower.**
    a) To identify the impact of the training programme on police officers' sexual violence myth acceptance, and readiness and confidence to intervene.
    b) To explore police officer and nightlife user's views on Operation Empower.

3. **To inform future prevention activity the study also aimed to:**
    a) Explore police officers and nightlife user's views on prevention and response approaches to sexual violence across Merseyside.
    b) Explore nightlife user's knowledge, attitudes, and experiences of sexual violence.

2. Methodology

To meet study objectives, a range of methods were implemented with findings triangulated to inform the evaluation.

2.1 Police pre and post training surveys:

A series of pre and post training surveys were implemented with police officers who participated in the training sessions (n=52). Approximately 100 police officers took part in the training which resulted in an estimated response rate of 52%. To measure changes at an individual, as well as a sample level, on each survey the participants were asked to include their initials and station code. This allowed individual's surveys to be anonymously linked. The training facilitator (i.e., Liverpool ATU/RASA Merseyside) was trained by a member of LJMU research team to administer the surveys and were responsible for distributing the surveys to the trainees.

- Survey One (pre training) was provided for the trainee to complete at the start of the training. This survey collected baseline data to be compared with survey two. The survey asked questions about the participant's awareness and knowledge of sexual violence in the NTE. Additionally, there was a range of questions that measured the participant's attitudes and confidence relating to sexual violence (these questions have been adapted from validated measures [14]–[16].
- Survey Two (post training) was completed at the end of the training session. This survey reflected on participants experiences of the training. Additionally, the questions relating to the participants awareness of sexual violence in the night-time environment were repeated as well as the attitude and confidence questions. This meant changes in participant's awareness, attitudes and confidence following the training could be analysed. Further, the survey explore participants own previous experience of sexual violence.

2.2 Interviews/focus group

Semi-structured telephone/online/face-to-face interviews were conducted with police officers (n=7) exploring processes of implementation, and percieved impacts of Operation Empower. Four one-to-one interviews (2 online, 2 face-to-face), and one face-to-face focus group with three officers, were undertaken across April and May 2022. All the officers had attended the Operation Empower training and were currently or previously involved in targeted NTE operations across Liverpool City Centre. Interviews explored prevalence, perceptions and the police's role in sexual violence prevention in the NTE. The interviews also covered officers' views on Operation Empower, the impact of the training on sexual violence myth acceptance, and readiness and confidence to intervene in incidents of sexual violence and harassment, and critically changes to policing practice because of training participation. In addition, interviews covered barriers and facilitators to the implementation and the sustainability of Operation Empower in the NTE.

2.3 Nightlife user survey

A nightlife user survey was implemented in Liverpool City Centre over four nights (Fridays and Saturdays, 7.30-1.30am) during June 2022, with 310 adults (aged 18+ years) on a night out. An addition 15 participants who were unable to do a survey with the researchers at the time took a QR link to an online version of the survey and completed it in their own time. The online survey was also advertised via social media for two weeks, with an additional 31 participants completing it. This resulted in a total of 356 nightlife users completing the survey. The surveys explored participant's awareness and views of Operation Empower (and other prevention approaches). Further, it provided insight into nightlife user's knowledge, attitudes, and experiences of sexual violence in the nightlife environment.

2.4 Data analysis

Quantitative analyses were undertaken in SPSS (v27) using descriptive statistics. Chi-square for Independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) was used to identify associations between demographics and key measures. Where data was available to match police officers pre and post training surveys, Wilcoxon signed rank test were used to identify statistically significant changes from pre to post training on several measures (e.g., mean scores on perceptions of sexual violence and confidence in intervening). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews [11]. The analysis is presented with illustrative quotes where appropriate to highlight key findings.

2.5 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from Liverpool John Moores University (REC no. 22/PHI/008).

3. Findings

3.1 Operation Empower

3.1.1 Development

Part of the targeted remit of the police is conducting NTE operations in Liverpool City Centre under the overarching Operation Reddleman (now Operation Nightsafe) the primary purpose of which is to provide high visibility policing in the area, reduce the prevalence of offences, identify vulnerable individuals and challenge unusual behaviour. Operation Empower was developed as part of the work of wider multi-agency work to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls in Merseyside. The aim of Operation Empower is to provide a targeted response to identifying and intervening in predatory behaviours in nightlife, and to upskill all police officers working in the NTE to prevent and respond to sexual violence effectively. Practice from other police where the police were identifying potential perpetrators/those exhibiting predatory behaviour, as well as being there as a visible presence for individuals to report crime to, was looked at in terms of how this may be translated into the NTE across Liverpool City Centre. In addition, a locally implemented sexual violence bystander-training package [7] was adapted for use with police officers, to increase awareness of sexual violence, and readiness and confidence to prevent and respond to sexual violence.

> *Operation Empower was set up to deal with, to address sexual violence in the night-time economy, with a strong focus on perpetrators so that those people who were attending the NTE with a view to commit offences or finding people other than through consent…there was some work which really focused our attention on it and then we looked at the work in [another police force]. When they had carried out the work, particularly around [area] to identify the people coming from, you know, travelling good distances…to offend. And so that was it to really see who was out and about with the ulterior motives and to prevent any offences going on to the, the focus is very much on prevention because, we want to stop things happening. So as far as you're detecting offences as well. You know which we try to stop anything happening. (P2)*

It was felt that there was a necessity for this NTE activity undertaken by the police to be implemented in a timely manner, particularly in light of the Sarah Everard case.

> *I'd begun work on that and then we have the sad incident of Sarah Everard, so it was the VAWG [violence against women and girls] [agenda] was totally then pushed, obviously to the top of everyone's agendas and so, we have this in place to then look at how we could operationally deliver that in the night-time economy. So that was the essentially the start of Operation Empower. (P1)*

3.1.2 Targeted Operation

Initially, the intention was to deliver Operation Empower across each of the boroughs of Merseyside (i.e. Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton, Knowsley, and the Wirral), however, with the majority of nightlife activity taking place in Liverpool City Centre, this was identified as a *'hot spot in terms of the force in terms of those night time economy related sexual violence, assaults, you know more predominantly sexual touching, and you know that that that degree of offence really' (P1).* Thus, to maximise the use

of available funding (from the Home Office Serious Violence funding), Operation Empower was focussed on the Liverpool City Centre area.

> *One of the things I noticed when we started doing Empower staff were across all areas of Merseyside looking for predatory behaviour, looking, stopping, checking people, disrupting that particular behaviour. Those behaviours were much more prevalent in Liverpool City Centre than in the outer lying areas such as Wirral, Southport, and other towns. That's definitely something we've noticed, Liverpool City Centre is a hotspot for the force in terms of those night-time economy related sexual violence, assaults, you know more predominantly sexual touching, and you know that that that degree of offense really. (P1)*

Operationally, there are four officers (two plain clothes and two uniform) working together. The plain clothes officers look for predatory behaviours, for example, from those who may be approaching groups of females or giving individuals/groups unwanted attention, with a view that the uniformed officer would intervene with *'words of advice or intelligence gathering for us and obviously taking their details, checking them out on our systems, but keeping those details as well in terms of making staff aware that this person was a person of interest to us and that they'd exerted this behaviour' (P1).* This information is also fed into officer briefings, with further intelligence gathering taking place at a later point in time to identify if individuals were cause for concern including any further action that may be needed.

> *The first week we did it, we had a really good example of a male that was stopped. He was seen approaching females and when the officers checked his details, he was currently on Crown Court bail for rape, which was in the night-time economy where he'd taken a female down an alleyway and had raped her. Straight away we never saw him again in the city. He was disrupted that night, and we never saw him again. (P1)*

Within their remit, police officers are able to enforce a 'stop and account', which is a conversation with people about what they are doing, especially in circumstances that may be considered 'suspect'.

> *So what we're going to be looking out for is things like if you see a drunk female being carried along pretty much by a male, challenge them, and say, you know, do you know each other. We would also have a list of offenders; the offenders were graded from basically nothing to worry about to people to look out for. So, we can't stop and search everyone without grounds but what we can do is what's called a stop and account. So, we can just say, 'Hello, mate, who are you? What are you doing in the area?' You know, because you will find there's a lot of people that will just stand in Liverpool on a Friday and Saturday night and just watch. Straight away that raises red flags. Why are they watching? What are they watching for? So, we just go and speak to them (P2)*

Operation Empower has been implemented over Friday and Saturday nights as these were the key times that need to be patrolled. It was felt that whilst 'the idea is right', there was a need to revisit the resourcing model (specifically related to the use of overtime to staff Operation Empower) around the practical implementation of the operation and getting the right staff at the right time. This was seen as a challenge experienced by other police forces.

The operation would ideally have some dedicate people where that is their job. But having a dedicated team on Friday and Saturday nights isn't really feasible, so it's the practicalities that make it difficult. So, I've got to review the best way to keep this going. I don't want it to just limp along, I want it to be effective because it needs to be effective. We don't want people to thinking that they can get away with commit offences in Liverpool and Merseyside? (P2)

One of the participants spoke about a challenge with the officers on the targeted teams at one point all being new and that this had created safety concerns.

We went through a phase where a lot of the staff on the targeted teams were new. So we had a problem where we were putting quite inexperienced officers into a night-time economy situation in plain clothes and they weren't used to dealing with conflict and it did become a safety issue as well and a worry for the supervisors and officers of having that confidence really as well, which is why we've had to sort of withdraw how we approach it a little bit. (P1)

In the early stages of delivery, Operation Empower was felt to focus more on the potential victims than perpetrators with one participant stating that it is important to ensure that the right people working on Operation Empower, because not everyone has 'got it' in terms of the awareness and understanding or what the purpose of the operation was.

And that was, you know, seeing an upset girl or, or a girl who's on her own in distress or no fit condition. Then to be making arrangements to get them home, which is good, you know, keeping people safe. But it became almost a taxi service for women who weren't really in a fit state to get themselves home otherwise. And so, we would have people just calling them saying, oh, can we have the Empower officer, you know pick this person up and take them back to Bootle or wherever it was. And that became a real challenge for us...we need to have some way of having a core group of people who really understand what they're doing, really buy into it, and can progress that work. (P2)

The same participant highlighted that the NTE in Liverpool City Centre is challenging at the best of times and that this has been further exacerbated since the lifting of restrictions, with increased aggression seen particularly in those younger individuals. Because of this it was considered even more necessary to ensure there are officers to work on Empower and 'buy in' and that their overall feeling was that they 'could do a lot better'.

It's difficult and it is a challenging environment we're facing. Following the lifting of restrictions…everyone found a change around the city centre. More aggressive [younger men], and we thought this would be a short spell, but it carried on… So that's presented challenges for how we are policing the night-time economy since December, we've put, really increased, what we're doing in general around the output of a lot more staff to focus on that one. (P2)

3.1.3 Operation Empower Training

The 2-hour Empower training covers several topics including a policing perspective of sexual violence in the night-time economy (NTE), what is meant by harassment and assault, myths and realities, predatory behaviour in the NTE and what to look out for, appropriate and inappropriate responses with case studies including scenarios. The training was delivered to police officers by Liverpool Local Authority and RASA (Rape and Sexual Abuse Support). Whilst it was anticipated that 300 police officers would receive the training across four training sessions in summer 2021, due to restrictions relating to COVID-19, only one training session was delivered to around 100 officers. Interviewees felt that there needed to be renewed emphasis on the importance of the training in terms of 1) providing refreshers for staff where it had been some time since they attended the training, or where the message had not 'landed as well as it should with all people', and 2) additional training because it has been put on hold due to COVID and had yet to be restarted (at the time of interviews). It was felt that they were some internal issues relating to coordination of the training and the numbers of officers needing to be trained (due to the way in which Operation Empower was staffed), but that it was important to keep the momentum going.

> *I think that if we'd have covered more officers…we would have still got a bit more buy in about it. But it's a fresh start for us to know to look at what we've also done over the last couple of months is enhanced the numbers of officers that we put out for the night-time economy. So, there is a bit more resilience now. We've also allowed that period of time where we've got officers more confident. So hopefully we're in a much better position…So actually, almost do a bit more of a relaunch, and get that buy in and get officers each week identified that can work it and it just needs that little bit more sort of planning. (P1)*

It was discussed that there were a lot of aspects covered in the training that are actually common sense and part of the day-to-day job or 'core-duty' of an officer to keep people safe and identify those people who present a risk, but the training brings this to the forefront of people's minds.

> *It was something I probably would have already done to be perfectly honest with you, but again with the training it's something that I would have in mind. You know if it's just an argument between a male female and they look like they were a couple, I maybe would have just viewed it as some kind of drunken argument rather than maybe somebody being taken advantage of? So maybe it does put a different spin on things, I suppose once you've had the training but having refreshers would come in handy, I think as well. (P4)*

It was felt that the training needed to continue and that whilst it was currently targeted to officers who work in the NTE, many of the participants also felt that it would be useful for the training to be rolled out to all police.

> *I would even be keen that we'd do it further afield, and not just our police officers and our police staff, and so we've got PCSO's, and you know it's not just necessarily that you know, night-time economy now is it starts particularly on a Saturday in mid-afternoon and it's not just around the city centres, it's around our routes home…there's lots of other links to night-time economy, not just within, outside pubs and clubs. so yeah, I would like it rolled out further. (P1)*

3.1.4 Police and nightlife user views on Operation Empower

Across police interviewees, Operation Empower was seen to have a positive impact upon members of the public feeling reassured knowing that the police are actively looking for and disrupting these types of behaviours and 'safeguarding people from further harm'. It was acknowledged, however, that it is difficult to quantify the success of Operation Empower.

> *There are, you know, sex offenders who we have stopped and intervened with... the fact that we've identified someone looks a little bit iffy. The behaviour gives us concern. You speak to them and actually they are a sex offender, or they have no valid reason for being for being there. Well, that shows it's successful. So, any one of those occasions you know could be beneficial…it's difficult to claim the, we can't quantify how successful it's been. (P2)*

When looking at the safety of those officers working on Operation Empower, it was highlighted that there may be some further work needed for those officers in plain clothes. One participant commented that when in plain clothes, when people are drunk and inebriated, *'your warrant cards not the first thing they'll focus on if you are intervening in maybe a volatile situation or approaching somebody…the first thought is always to lash out'.* The same participant also commented upon the need for 'proper PPE'

> *…we've had a few issues with resourcing over the last few months and how we actually build this into part of our night-time economy plan, some officer safety issues, particularly with plain clothes. So, we do need to do some work around that. (P1)*

> *We're not given proper body armour to wear… You can imagine you're trying to blend in a little bit in the crowd and spot things that are obvious…But you're still expected to wear body armour, which, although it is plain, it doesn't fit under any t-shirts and stuff so. (P4)*

Amongst those interviewed in the nightlife user survey, 15.7% were aware of Operation Empower. Most participants had positive opinions of the intervention (see 3.3 for further information).

3.1.5 Impacts of the training (police views)

All of the interview participants had completed the Operation Empower training and considered that the training is informative, insightful and raises awareness and highlights specific behaviours to be aware of. It was seen to get officers to look at sexual violence from a different viewpoint, changing mindsets, looking at sexual violence in a way they may not have done before *'put[ting] a different spin on things and prevent things before they happen'*. For example highlighting that cat calling or low-level harassment makes people feel uncomfortable.

> *There's things I wouldn't have thought of previously that I was looking out for. You know, like I said, people loitering around people that didn't fit in approaching groups of girls. And even like arguments between current partners you'd be in*

more of a mind to intervene in that now and analyse what was actually going on and not to sort of take things on face value. (P4)

The training was also felt to benefit the local authority areas in which the officers usually policed.

Our other local authorities will have different sort of, ways in which that they will tackle these issues, but the bonus for the other authorities is that the targeted team staff cover all of the areas so everyone who comes into Liverpool City Centre will either be coming from Liverpool, or they come from other areas so the other areas will benefit anyway because our staff is getting the training. (P1)

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…we've had a few issues with resourcing over the last few months and how we actually build this into part of our night-time economy plan, some officer safety issues, particularly with plain clothes. So, we do need to do some work around that. (P1)

We're not given proper body armour to wear… You can imagine you're trying to blend in a little bit in the crowd and spot things that are obvious…But you're still expected to wear body armour, which, although it is plain, it doesn't fit under any t-shirts and stuff so. (P4)

3.1.4 Pre-post training surveys

Sample characteristics

52 Merseyside police officers completed the pre and post training survey. Demographic characteristics of the sample are available in Table 1. The majority of participants were male (72.5%) and, four in ten (40.4%) were aged 30 years or under. Over half (52.0%) of the participants reported working[1] in

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[1] Participants could select more than one area.

Liverpool, 28.0% Knowsley, 28.0% Sefton, 20.0% St Helens, and 4.0% Sefton (Table 1). Most staff (86.0%) were Constable rank[2].

Perceptions of sexual violence in nightlife

Eight items assessed participant's attitudes and perceptions of sexual violence in nightlife pre and post training (see Figure 1). Prior to training the majority (80.8%) strongly agreed/agreed; sexual violence is a problem in nightlife, unwanted sexual advances are a normal part of a night out (54.9%), they can do something about sexual violence in nightlife (78.8%), sexual violence is never the fault of the victim (67.3%), and consent can be taken back at any time (92.3%). A small minority agreed/strongly agreed if someone who is experiencing sexual violence is drunk or wasted and they are at least partly to blame (2.0%), and if the person committing sexual violence is drunk it is not really their fault (3.8%). No participants agreed that when people wear provocative clothes, they are asking for trouble (0.0%). To compare changes in pre and post training scales were coded from one (strongly agree) to five (strongly disagree), and mean scores were compared[3]. There was a significant difference from pre to post survey in average level of agreement for the following statements:

Table 1: Operation Empower training survey sample characteristics (n=52)

		n	%
Gender	Male	37	72.5
	Female	14	27.5
Age group (years)	30 and under	21	40.4
	31+	31	59.6
Years of service in current role	2 years or less	16	33.3
	More than 2 years	32	66.7
Rank	Constable	43	86.0
	Above Constable	7	14.0
Area work in	Liverpool	26	52.0
	Knowsley	14	28.0
	Sefton	14	28.0
	Wirral	2	4.0
	St Helens	10	20.0

- I think sexual violence is a problem in nightlife (mean score, pre 2.1 and post 1.8; $p<0.001$).
- Unwanted sexual advances are a normal part of a night out (mean score, pre 2.7 and post 3.1; $p<0.01$).
- I think I can do something about sexual violence in nightlife (mean score, pre 2.3 and post 2.0; $p<0.01$).
- If someone who is experiencing sexual violence is drunk or wasted, they are at least partly to blame (mean score, pre 4.4 and post 4.5; $p<0.05$).
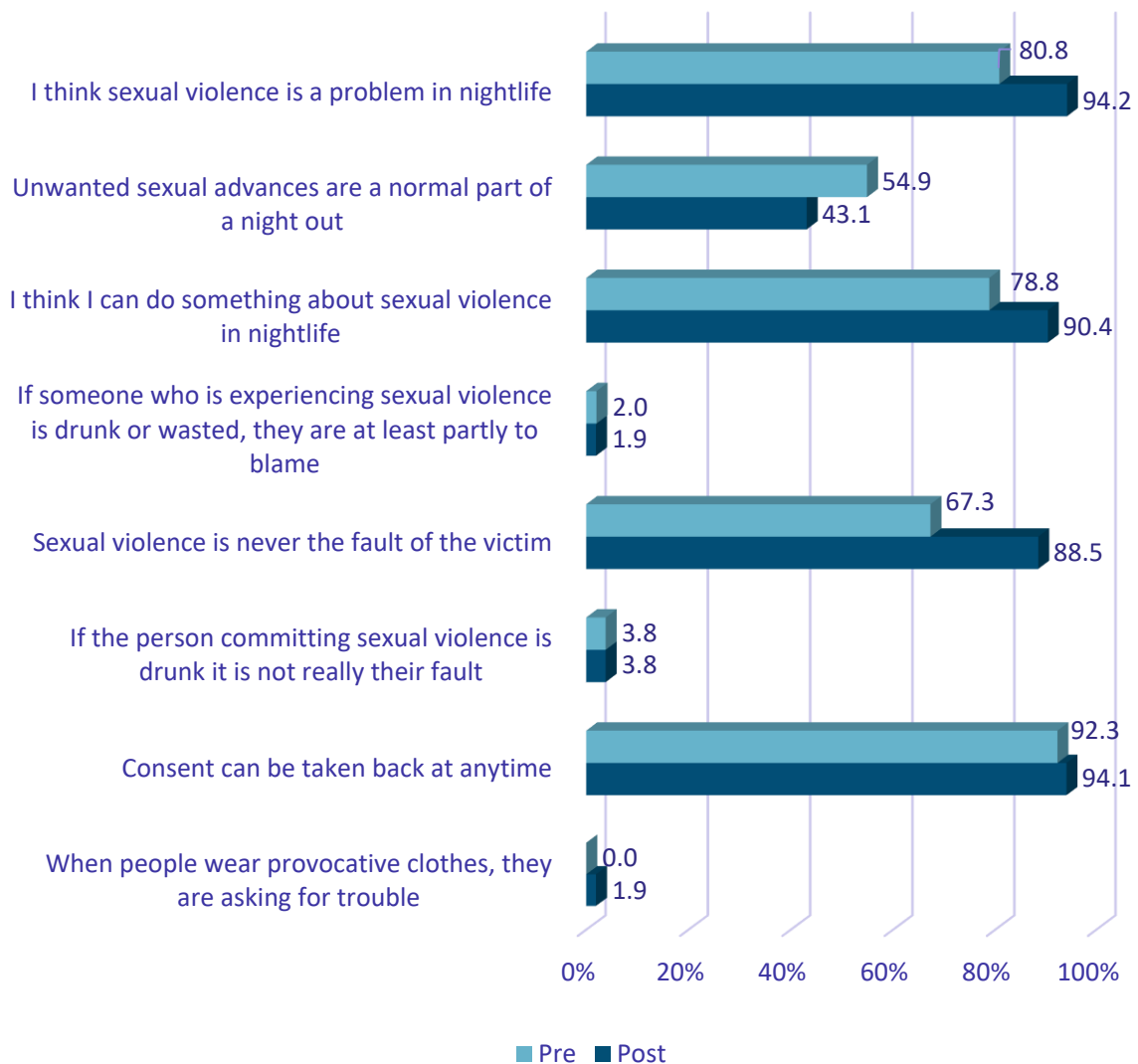- Sexual violence is never the fault of the victim (mean score, pre 2.2 and post 1.6; $p<0.001$).

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[2] Ranks included Constable, Sergeant and Inspector.
[3] Using Wilcoxon signed rank test. Sexual violence is never the fault of the victim scores were reserved prior to inclusion in combined scores (to match the direction of other measures in the combined score).

Figure 1: Proportion of participants who agree/strongly agree with selected statements related to perceptions of sexual violence in nightlife

I think sexual violence is a problem in nightlife — Pre: 80.8, Post: 94.2

Unwanted sexual advances are a normal part of a night out — Pre: 54.9, Post: 43.1

I think I can do something about sexual violence in nightlife — Pre: 78.8, Post: 90.4

If someone who is experiencing sexual violence is drunk or wasted, they are at least partly to blame — Pre: 2.0, Post: 1.9

Sexual violence is never the fault of the victim — Pre: 67.3, Post: 88.5

If the person committing sexual violence is drunk it is not really their fault — Pre: 3.8, Post: 3.8

Consent can be taken back at anytime — Pre: 92.3, Post: 94.1

When people wear provocative clothes, they are asking for trouble — Pre: 0.0, Post: 1.9
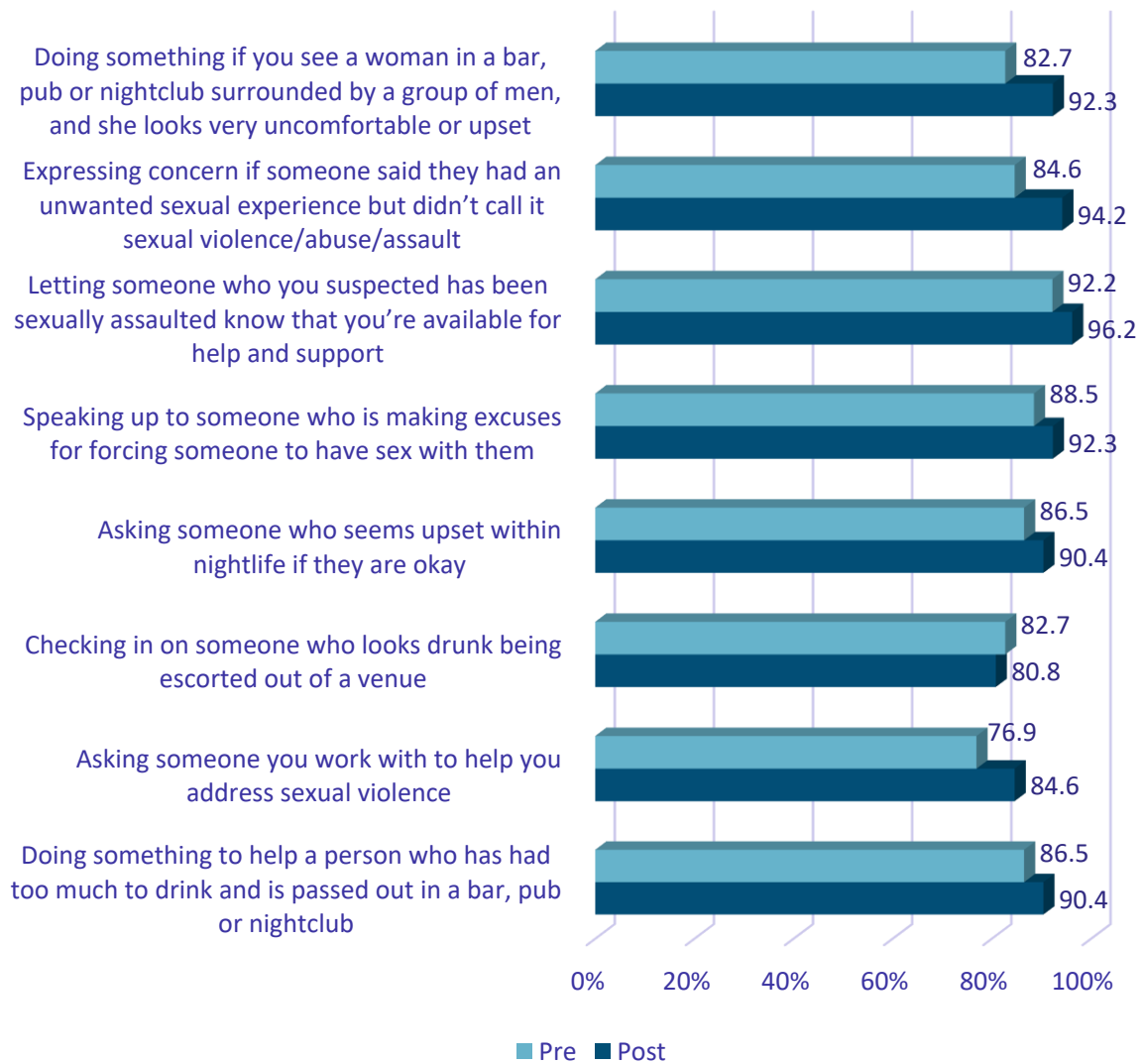
Legend: Pre, Post

Confidence to intervene in sexual violence

Eight items assessed participant's confidence to intervene in sexual violence pre and post training (see Figure 2). Prior to training, the majority (92.2%) of participants felt confident/really confident: letting someone who they suspected has been sexually assaulted know that they're available for help and support; speaking up to someone who is making excuses for forcing someone to have sex with them (88.5%); asking someone who seems upset within nightlife if they are okay (86.5%); doing something to help a person who has had too much to drink and is passed out in a bar, pub or nightclub (86.5%); expressing concern if someone said they had an unwanted sexual experience but didn't call it sexual violence/abuse/assault (84.6%); doing something if they saw a woman in a bar, pub or nightclub surrounded by a group of men, and she looks very uncomfortable or upset (82.7%); checking in on someone who looks drunk being escorted out of a venue (82.7%); and asking someone they work with to help them address sexual violence (76.9%). To compare changes pre and post training at an individual level, scales were coded from one (really not confident) to five (really confident), and mean

scores were compared. There were no significant differences between pre and post training surveys (likely due to the high levels of confidence at pre-training).

Figure 2: Proportion of participants who felt confident/really confident with selected statements related to intervening in sexual violence in nightlife

Statement	Pre	Post
Doing something if you see a woman in a bar, pub or nightclub surrounded by a group of men, and she looks very uncomfortable or upset	82.7	92.3
Expressing concern if someone said they had an unwanted sexual experience but didn't call it sexual violence/abuse/assault	84.6	94.2
Letting someone who you suspected has been sexually assaulted know that you're available for help and support	92.2	96.2
Speaking up to someone who is making excuses for forcing someone to have sex with them	88.5	92.3
Asking someone who seems upset within nightlife if they are okay	86.5	90.4
Checking in on someone who looks drunk being escorted out of a venue	82.7	80.8
Asking someone you work with to help you address sexual violence	76.9	84.6
Doing something to help a person who has had too much to drink and is passed out in a bar, pub or nightclub	86.5	90.4

Changes in knowledge around sexual violence

The majority of participants agree or strongly agree that the training had provided them with a better understanding of the nature and extent of sexual violence in the nightlife environment (76.9%) and, how to respond to sexual violence in the nightlife environment (71.2%). Nine in ten staff agreed that the training provided a greater understanding of where to go for help and support in cases of sexual violence (90.4%; Figure 3).

Figure 3: Proportion of participants who agree/strongly agree that the Empower training had provided them with a better understanding of three knowledge statements
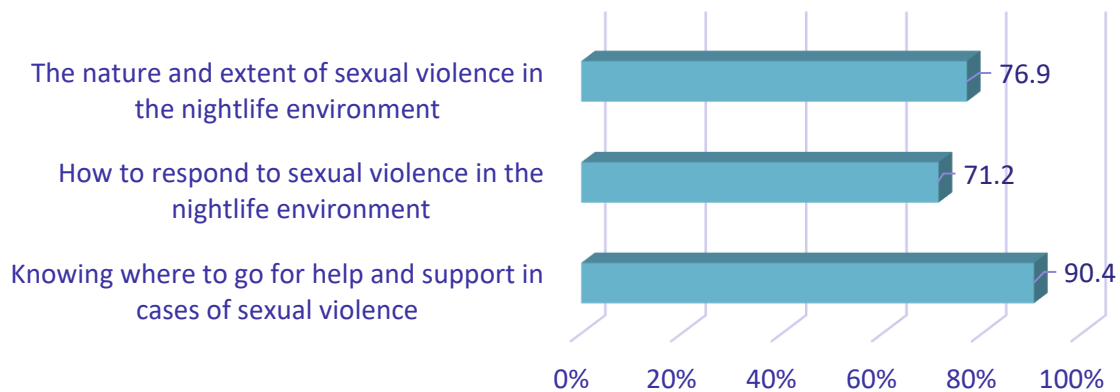
Own experience of sexual violence in the nightlife environment

Over half (52.2%) of participants reported that they had personally experienced sexual violence in nightlife, whilst 47.8% reported that they had experienced sexual violence whilst on a night out. Nearly one in five (17.4%) individuals reported that they had experienced sexual violence whilst working in the nightlife economy (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Proportion of trainees who reported personally experiencing sexual violence in nightlife
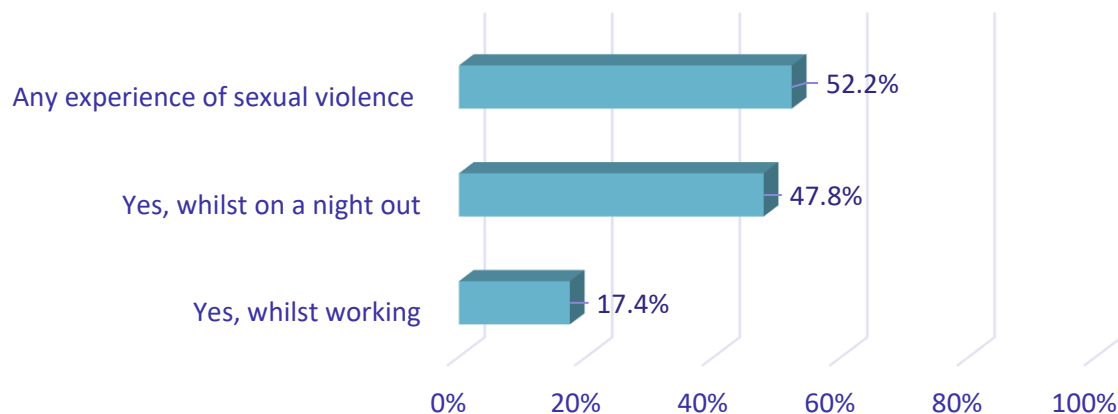
Over half (54.2%) of all those who experienced sexual violence did not report their experience to anyone. The most common source that individuals reported incidents of sexual violence to was friends or family (37.5%), followed by colleagues (4.2%) and other individuals (4.2%). Nobody who experienced sexual violence in this sample reported the incident(s) to the police or to health practitioners.

3.1.5 Future delivery of Operation Empower

When looking at the future delivery of Operation Empower it was felt that there needed to be a culture shift, with a proactive approach to the delivery of the operation with officers having belief and confidence in what they were doing / trying to do. It was acknowledged that the police were trying to do more with less resource.

As part of the NTE focussed work, working in Liverpool City Centre for only one weekend in every eight was seen by a number of the participants to be challenging. This was because it was not one set of police who were always policing the area, and also officers were not able to 'get to know' people in the sense that they do when they are in their own local policing areas where they have *'more local knowledge of the area'.* One participant felt it was a 'big thing' that there are areas outside Liverpool City Centre being brought in as they do not have the same level of local intelligence and knowledge as those who regularly police those areas.

> *We are kind of brought in, we'll only do a roto where every eight weeks we will come in. So, in a sense, we don't get to know the proper people. Whereas in our own area, we know all the bad people and I can walk down the street and go right, there's Joe Bloggs, that's them, that's them. When we come to the city, we have the briefings, but it doesn't have the same impact unless you meet them day in day out. So, a lot of time we could have a briefing, we could walk past them in the street and would probably not even recognise them. (FG)*

Policing around the NTE was considered to be reactive rather than proactive and preventative, with one participant commenting that *'you're not really putting a dent in it'*. Having more officers and also officers dedicated to Liverpool City Centre and that would have a variety of different roles (uniform and plain clothes) was seen to form an important part of the operation. The role of the plain clothes officers would be one of observation for them to then report any potential issues for which support was needed.

> *I do think it probably needs more of a plain clothes role because the problem is as soon as you put a uniform on you're a magnet for people …so in uniform, it's not practical. I think you probably need a plain clothes team. (FG)*

> *I don't think you'll ever get away from it because that's just the culture of a night out and you'll get people who get drunk men or female and just think they can do what they want. But I think you need dedicated teams, probably more officers. (FG)*

The role of a dedicated team was seen to be beneficial so that the officers would be 'really switched on to it, understand what we're trying to do, understand the tactic and they're there to focus on that and nothing else' (P1). Further these officers would be able to build up a body of local knowledge and intelligence so that it would be possible to start targeting the right locations.

> *For us, it's more of a resourcing issue, in getting the right people and having that flexibility with the officers we have on duty, although we do get some overtime money. You can't control the staff, so you don't know their capabilities. They don't know each other and it's the type of deployment where you really need to know the officers that you're working with to fully embrace it if that makes sense because you want to know that they've got your back if you're in plain clothes. So, you ideally need a team that regularly worked together that know the tactic and for me that would be key to being able to drive it further and get a lot more*

success out of it. I just don't feel we get as much success as we could, you know, in terms of that actual plain clothes, you know, prevention elements think we've increased our officer's awareness, but I think proactively we could still do more. (P1)

They're [a dedicated team] more likely to do the intelligence behind and start targeting the right locations. At the moment, we don't actually know where it's all happening. It's quite random. (FG)

Two participants spoke about possible future changes to the way in which officers are managed across Merseyside in relation to targeted operations. It was highlighted that previously, there were separate policing departments in Sefton, Knowsley, and Liverpool etc, but then the targeted (cross-police department) work was developed to incorporate officers from all these areas. Discussion focussed on potential changes that would see a dedicated Liverpool NTE team.

The structure, which is currently under review as well, the structure of our police force and how we operate. Five years ago, we had to save a substantial amount of money and they've done a couple of years' worth of work where they looked at how we operate. So, they'd really stripped back, we used to be controlled as an area. So, like we had a boss for Liverpool and then there'll be that hierarchy and investigations all came under that one boss. But what they did was they separated it, so the investigations team work separately under a different boss and so getting those links in and that buy in from people was a little bit different. So that's also under review as well in terms of our structure. And so, when you're trying to get the buy in of all these officers that come and work in the night-time economy, it's a little bit harder because of how we've now got this structure in place as well. (P1)

Comments were also made around the Operation Empower car, which patrols Liverpool City Centre and usually contains four male officers. This was felt to be a barrier with participants commenting around potential mistrust of male officers and reduced feelings of safety when engaging with vulnerable women and girls.

Every time I was on, the Operation Empower car was on but again, they had that I believe as overtime. What was being found was it was just male officers that were volunteering there... So then, of course you get…young drunk females, and they don't want two burly fellas to get out the car. (P3)

It was acknowledged that it is hard to sustain the momentum of Operation Empower and wider work around sexual violence, but that with the right will, commitment and consistency of approach it could support the prevention and response to sexual violence in Merseyside.

It's hard to sustain, but it's got to get there, hasn't it? It's got to get there and everyone's got to do their bit and I don't know what the legislation is, it is always supportive enough…it does need to be called out all the time. I think some of the public campaigns around it are very good around the said no mate, that's not OK, you can't do that. And it's yeah, consistency really. (P2)

3.2 Police views on sexual violence, prevention and response

3.2.1 The extent and nature of sexual violence in Merseyside

The extent and nature of sexual violence in Merseyside was considered 'a massive issue' and it was felt that there were differences within the NTE compared to other areas of policing.

The opportunities are greater because of the volume of people, because of reduced inhibition, because of the sexual environments of the night-time economy, and that you're going out socialising and drinking and a big drive is still sexual is you know people, looking to meet people and so, when you bring together a lot of people who are, either looking for sexual encounters or possibilities then it will increase the opportunity for offending. (P2)

It was felt that in terms of policing there had been a shift in focus on targeted crimes and locking people up, to one which focused upon protecting vulnerable individuals, and this was seen to be invaluable.

…whereas it was probably years ago, it was all about targeted crime and criminals. Now it's all about protecting vulnerable people and people in mental health [crisis] and a massive shift…It's just different. So, I think with the new chief con it's probably more focused on strategy. (FG)

Participants spoke about it being difficult to gauge how Liverpool compared to other cities across the country and what other police forces were doing around sexual violence and NTE operations. It was also commented upon that it was difficult to know the full extent and nature of sexual violence in Merseyside because of the nature of the Reddleman[4] NTE operations (which included Operation Empower) and officers working in this area only did so one weekend in eight.

So, it's hard to know…to compare it to it all the major cities, I don't know where we stand in relation to how bad it is here. I suspect it's probably very similar, but I'm not sure if it's something that we might be doing right or wrong or sort of places. I don't actually know what all the things are, the forces do, it's sometimes quite hard to compare how we're doing. (FG)

When exploring the prevalence of sexual violence across Liverpool and Merseyside, one participant believed it to be 'quite prevalent' but was unsure whether it would be worse than any other area. Participants commented that they perceived the prevalence to be reducing, but that there is increased awareness and reporting and that this is influenced by media reporting of news stories such as 'Me Too' and the Sarah Everard case as well as specific reporting around e.g., spiking. One participant stated that they did not think sexual assault 'gets reported enough'

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[4] Operation Reddleman (now called Operation Nightsafe) is the overarching NTE operation in Liverpool City Centre. Officers including several Sergeants and Constables are on duty and deployed into the city predominantly foot patrol at key NTE hotspots. The officers will focus on public safety, reassurance and the prevention of crime and disorder.

I believe that actual prevalence is reducing, but reporting is increasing, and I think that we see that the changes in reporting that we have following things which may get media coverage. So, whether that's the 'Me Too' movement or something else…When we have an increase in reporting, well, there's no way that's through things all suddenly happening. It's people saying, actually, no. This has happened to me. (P2)

Unfortunately, at the same time that this has happened, we have the Sarah Everard incident, which massively put the police on the backfoot because we had a lot of females that would come up to us in the night-time economy, especially just after it happened with very derogatory things to say about the police. 'I don't trust the police', 'I don't like the police'. (P3)

The media has an impact over what gets reported there because they just assume they've been spiked. (FG)

It was felt that there are the beginnings of a public movement (community advocacy) acknowledging that 'this is wrong' and that this is seen to be more impactful than prevention activity advocated by the police. When looking at the understanding and awareness of sexual violence and how it may present itself, (for example, verbal aggression and other issues around consent and touching) it was felt that this 'may have been ignored, laughed off or accepted as, normal or tolerable in the past'. Amongst bar staff and members of the public, awareness was seen to have increased along with the confidence to approach the police and report what was happening. It was considered that there have been visible changes in the approach of NTE venues and door staff, for example intervening in individual cases and working with the police. This increased understanding and awareness and was felt to show sexual violence as 'a bigger issue than may have been considered before'. It was highlighted, however, that generally the way in which this type of behaviour is perceived needs to change and that it is not just specific to the NTE but, for example, those who experience this kind of behaviour within their own personal relationships.

There's more public coming forward to say to you and that's happened a few times, just watch that fella over there, he's been approaching groups and he's a bit of a letch or, things like that. So, I'd like to think that everyone's awareness is increased. (P1)

The range or the level of violence will vary…sexual violence, which may be verbal through to the more extreme end of rape. And you have sexual violence within relationships…so it's part of society has been for a long time. I think we understand it as a society more. (P2)

We've certainly seen intervention from door staff and licensed premises who have [been] switched on to a victim coming forward. And there was even an example where I was flagged down by staff from the venue who said we've got somebody here; we're just going to detain them... And it transpired it wasn't that in the end, for me, it was that reassurance that the premises have done absolutely everything they could and had acted appropriately and we dealt with it as quick as we could. Getting those sorts of, you know, we call it 'golden hour principals'

3.2.2 The impacts of sexual violence

It was felt that there were clear impacts of sexual violence related to victims as well as perpetrators of sexual violence, and their families and wider social networks. It was seen to change people's perceptions of others, their mental health, behaviours (e.g., avoidance of areas where they may have had a bad experience) and impact upon relationships.

> *So, the impact on individuals can be huge… the more serious incidents they can be life changing in the decisions that people make about where they go, how they live their lives, how they dress, how they socialise. So even at the lower level or more common stuff, when people may get to a stage where they're fed up, they don't want to go out where chances are that their backside's going to get pinched, or they're going to face comments, or they can't relax. I think it changes people's perceptions of people and relationships. So, there's probably a cumulative effect, and for some, some things may become the norm, I think for, you know, for younger people, yeah probably the level of sexualisation. (P2)*

It was also considered to impact upon health services and other organisations who support those who have experienced sexual violence.

> *With other services, you know it does have a big knock-on impact, health services is a big one, the damage that can be done physically, mentally the damage and the harm that comes later. And we know with a lot of the mental health challenges we deal with there are elements of sexual abuse. It's a massive strain on society and the various organisations that try to support society. (P2)*

3.2.3 Risk factors for sexual violence

There were a number of risk factors that were identified by participants as well as discussion around how these risk factors may be reduced or mitigated against.

Substance use

All the interviewees acknowledged vulnerabilities of both females and males in the NTE. Alcohol and drug use were seen to be a catalyst for perpetration, but also an inhibitor that can leave individuals vulnerable. When looking at the different areas of Liverpool City Centre, it was felt that 'nightlife area A'[5] was where the younger people with a propensity towards drug taking would go, with nightlife area B' seen to be more of a tourist area. People who are vulnerable to sexual violence were felt to be equal across these two areas, and alcohol was seen as 'the main fuel factor that increases vulnerability'.

> *I do think there's probably an increase in, over the years since, I'm trying to remember when we used to go out it was mainly just alcohol. I found over the last*

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[5] All areas names have been removed to maintain anonymity.

20-30 years the use of cocaine now as a normal drug is having a massive impact on people. (FG)

I think if alcohol was discovered, today, it would be banned by Friday, it makes people do things they wouldn't normally do. Alcohol it seems is the catalyst for that…add in when working in the night-time economy, you deal with a lot more vulnerable females, to some extent, males, than we would do normally, when we go around the city centre. (P3)

One participant commented upon some licensed premises not necessarily wanting individuals who are very drunk on the premises and that after a certain time in Liverpool City Centre there is a change in the type of individuals who are walking around town in terms of those who are predators looking for those who are vulnerable whether it be for money or to steal from them etc.

The staff, in whichever licenced premises don't want them in there, so then they're just sat out on the pavement, it goes beyond a certain time maybe up until about two or three o'clock? You know, and then after that period, you get in a lot more different people walking around the city, I would say, people it's gone beyond drunks and happy people. (FG)

Poor planning

Other factors seen to potentially increase the risk of sexual violence included poor planning, with individuals, for example, not taking note of where they are staying (particularly when in large groups such as stag and hen weekends) or having no battery on their phone. It was felt in these instances the police still have a responsibility to look after individuals even when it may not necessarily be needed and that it does not necessarily mean that someone is vulnerable.

Poor planning is quite a big one. And what I mean by that is, they'll go out and they'll come up to the police and say my phone battery's dead or we have a lot of both stag and hen parties coming…what they'll do is they'll land wherever they're staying then at three o'clock in the morning, when we start on [nightlife area A], they come to us and say, 'where's my hotel?' (P3)

One participant spoke about the importance of planning before a night out and gave an example of hotels and Airbnb's providing residents with a card that provides contact details for where they are/where people are staying.

You know, even if it's small things like the Airbnb's and hotels could print a lot of cards with this is the hotel…they're going out the door, they pick it up, they put it in their purse, or whatever. (P3)

Prevention through education was seen to be very important. One participant highlighted, however, that for some, even after being educated and awareness raised on certain issues, they still exhibit the same behaviour 'because they think they're OK until it happens to them'. Here personal responsibility, such as having enough money to be able to get a taxi home, or knowing where their friends are, was seen to have a role to play.

You can tell people till they're blue in the face, look you shouldn't be doing this and they're still going to do it. But it's literally just having that education in place... I use [nightlife area A] because that's pretty much where we were. And it's

also like the hub of all things good and bad...You know, we've had people that come to us and said, 'Look, I've got no money. I'm going to walk home' to [area], for example, which is miles away, you know, through some pretty horrible areas. Little things like that. It's education, isn't it? No one likes to be told that they need to educate themselves. (P3)

Predatory behaviours

It was commented upon the people travel into the area and target specific areas where they perceive there are people who are vulnerable and they can target, but that briefings are given to officers before going out on patrol over the weekend that aim to raise awareness of individuals who may prove a risk intended by predatory behaviour.

Our briefing sheets are just full of like people who were like these, you know, on bail for rape or these have been locked up for sexual assault and they've being seen in the city. So, you're getting people out targeting young women or men to an extent. (FG)

The sexualisation of women, behavioural norms, and impulse control

Participants spoke about the sexualisation of women and the experiences of individuals as they are growing up (e.g., adverse childhood experiences) as risk factors for sexual violence (for those who have experienced sexual violence as well as the perpetrators).

The general sexualisation of women, in particular… I think that puts women in the public eye for women and for men. As a, first and foremost sexual entities. So, I think that has a big impact and people's backgrounds…However people are raised, their morals, their moral standards, what they see at home, what is acceptable at home. So the whole socialisation of people is the biggest thing. So, if your mother is treated in a certain way by her partner or others, well that will affect that woman's sons, daughters and what is acceptable, what is normal. So that will go all the way through. There are the right influencers as it can be put in, you know with the right people in the family environments. In that social groups, through schools, through education, there are those, those things it takes a while for people to grow up, and to understand themselves. (P2)

The role of brain maturation and 'impulse control' was also discussed by one participant as a risk factor.

So, brain maturation isn't complete until the mid-20s you've got people around the night-time economy of a certain age where naturally their impulse control is impaired. If you add alcohol and drugs to that to further impair them, that impulse control is reduced. So, it's a dangerous and difficult mix. (P2)

3.2.4 Considerations for preventing and responding to sexual violence

Education, awareness raising and reporting

Focussing upon prevention, challenging behaviours, and changing perceptions and mind-sets of what is acceptable was considered important. Educating from an early age and understanding what is happening across different services / sectors was seen to be important in terms of awareness raising in this area.

We're not here to victim blame because the risk is the offender, it is how we ensure particularly males, because it's predominantly a male versus female offence, so, for me, it's around that awareness and getting in at an early age and if we don't do that then we've got the risk of not being able to correct that with people. (P1)

One participant commented that perpetrators 'will be attracted to the places where you know their own kind of behaviours are tolerated or you know these things go on' (P2).

There was probably less work on prevention which is something nationally we're doing. The sexual violence and the night-time economy campaign has very much been around prevention, but everybody's got a part to play in that, not just the Police going out and spotting offenders, we've all got to challenge that behaviour, no matter what your profession is, it's around that societal and cultural issue around saying that things are wrong. (P1)

It was perceived that everyone has a role to play in preventing and responding to sexual violence and a responsibility in educating and raising awareness to 'stop [sexual violence] it from happening in the first place' (FG). This included local authorities, education settings (schools, colleges, universities), social services, police, ambulance service, licensed premises etc., and looked at, the role of the positive bystander in preventing sexual violence as well as for example, advertising on, billboards / in public places may also help to raise awareness.

The positive, influential factors of whether that's the bystanders so people saying, 'oh no you're out of order there', whether it's the people who have official roles or other roles, in society or in the night-time economy, whether police, whether it's bar staff, bar managers, whether it's taxi drivers… the positive influence that you have or the opportunity for a positive influence, are significant. But how do you maximise that to give people the desire, and the confidence to be that good influence. (p2)

It was commented upon that further work may be done to look at the trends of drug and alcohol use in young people in Liverpool City Centre and across Merseyside and that educating officers further in this area would assist when they were on duty in the NTE. Using gatekeepers to young people, such as universities, was viewed as a potential way to engage with young people to explore their behaviours more.

They'll never talk to the Police. So, if you had said people in education that go to colleges they interact with their tutors speak to them. And then the tutor's feedback to us. We're not after individuals we're after what are people doing, what is the trends the culture and feed that back to us. (FG)

Mistrust in reporting to police

It was highlighted that individuals need to 'feel confident in the police' when reporting crimes of this nature and that the first contact they have with police is very important but can also be a challenge. Reporting in the media around cases such as Sarah Everard were seen to create mistrust in the police, which made the job of the police challenging. One of the participants spoke about being 'wary' of approaching a vulnerable person and the practicalities of trying to increase trust/feelings of safety in

the police through using the City Watch CCTV system and looking at the availability of a female officer. An example was given where when dealing with a vulnerable female, officers asked for the City Watch system to focus in on them so that all actions were recorded, and they also requested to see if any female officers are in the vicinity – all of these actions were carried out with a view to making the person feel as safe and comfortable as possible.

So how we deal with a victim is key to how the public feel confident in the
Police…that's been a massive impact of for us in terms of making sure that
officers get it right… it's all the stages of a sexual violence investigation that's key
to confidence because that's what they'll talk about, their experiences and how
that's impacted on them, which can obviously have a lasting impact. (P1)

Within this also featured discussion around spiking and the need to be cautious when this is reported and complete the necessary steps to investigate.

Say you got 10 reports, you probably get one or two that are genuine. And then
the rest are like, they just can't accept that they've had too much to drink or
something they've drinks not agreed with them…as soon as there's like, that
mention of spiking…as soon as it's reported through the control room, we're
gonna go through like this whole, like, steps to investigate. (FG)

It was felt that the police have accountability and responsibility for individuals to ensure that they are safe (e.g., putting them in a taxi), but at the same time frustrations were relayed around those aspects that may be resource intensive and that they could be 'babysitting' people whilst waiting for ambulances to arrive or taking them to hospital where there were long waits for ambulances.

We just see people who are just that they just don't know what day of the week it
is. They don't know where they are. They've got no phone. And us as, police
officers, at some point, you then have a responsibility or accountability. You
know, you're accountable for that person. (FG)

Role of the wider criminal justice system

One of the officers suggested that courts have an element of responsibility, in those perpetrators or 'people of concern' who are on bail may have been told not to come into Liverpool City Centre, but that it is very difficult to police this. It was suggested that a tag or monitor for individuals would at least alert officers to the fact that perpetrators were not where they should be.

…for the perpetrators that have been arrested for them type of offences, and if
they've been charged or put on bail, they should be put on tag or monitored...I
think the courts need [to take] an element of responsibility, because if they're [the
perpetrator's] like, just on bail and it's just don't enter the city centre, you can't
monitor that can you unless you bump into them. But if they're on tag or
something then we know they're not in their address. (FG)

Environment and infrastructure

A number of practical aspects relating to the environment (e.g., CCTV and lighting) and transport networks were seen to be beneficial in preventing and responding to sexual violence. Good CCTV was seen to be very important in helping to make positive identifications as they provide evidence to support or refute specific claims. A number of participants stated that there needed to be better lighting in certain areas of Liverpool City Centre.

> *The wish list would be you know more CCTV. I think our transport network isn't particularly great and particularly after midnight, you know, it's certainly a lot of feedback. With on top of that, taxis at the moment, you know, prices are really, really high and does that then force people to maybe walk when they wouldn't do. So, I think our transport network itself in terms of that flexibility for later night transport like buses, but we haven't got the capability to do that...You could even have specific taxi services, or I know that there's some cities that operate women only taxi groups and things like that. (P1)*

Licensed premises staff

It was felt that the door staff from clubs and bars have a more positive relationships with the police with many having also received education around the NTE not only in terms of how to identify those who may be vulnerable, but also how to conduct themselves in a professional manner. One participants also acknowledge that more education is needed for nightlife workers in relation to sales of alcohol to drunks and the ramifications of letting nightlife users get too drunk particularly since Covid-19 with businesses trying to get back lost revenue. However, lack of resources are evident across all sectors in relation to violence prevention with organisations and businesses trying to do more with less.

> *I've found door staff working more with us rather than against us, which I think they're getting more education on as to what to look out for, and how to be a little bit more professional in the role that they're doing. (FG)*

> *I say education. I think that needs to go for the clubs and bars and everything as well, but unfortunately, especially after COVID, they were all trying to get back in the game again, and rightly so because they keep people employed and all the rest of it. So, whereas prior to COVID they'd have said, now you've had too much. And I'm not saying that's what's happened, but probably that's what I believe it is the fact that they just kind of went, look, we need money, because otherwise we're not going to the bars not going to survive this. So, I think education from bars from councils...I think councils could do more. I think that everyone is in the same boat though. It doesn't matter whether it's councils, police, social services, everyone is trying to do more with less. (P3)*

3.3 Nightlife user survey

3.3.1 Sample characteristics

356 people participated in the nightlife user survey. The majority of participants were female (72.2%), under the age of 30 (79.9%), heterosexual (78.1%), currently living in Liverpool (74.4%) and 43.7% were students (Table 2).

3.3.2 Nightlife usage

When asked about their frequency of nightlife usage in the past 12 months, the majority of participants (38.4%) had been on a night out in Liverpool City Centre (LCC) once a month or less, a similar number of participants reported frequenting LCC's night-time economy 2-3 times per month (28.2%) or at least once a week (26.6%), whilst 6.8% reported this was their first time on a night out in LCC.

Table 2: Nightlife survey sample characteristics (N=356)

		n	%
Sex	Male	98	27.8
	Female	255	72.2
Age	18-21 years	145	41.1
	22-29 years	137	38.8
	30+ Years	71	20.1
Sexuality	Heterosexual	278	78.1
	Other	78	21.9
Residential status	Currently live in Liverpool city region	262	74.4
	Does not live in Liverpool city region	90	25.6
Student status	Student	155	43.7
	Nonstudent	200	56.3

There was a significant association between those who reported going on a night out at least once a week and age.

- Prevalence was higher amongst 18-21 years (44.4%) compared to 22-29 years (16.2%) and 30+ years (11.3%; $p<0.001$; Figure 5)

Figure 5: Frequency of nightlife usage by age categories
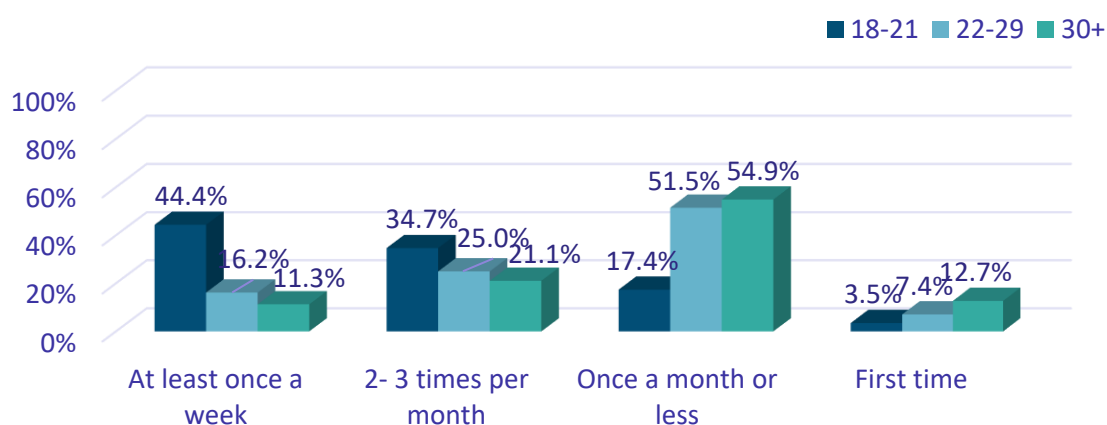
Participants were asked how often they consumed alcohol when on a night out in LCC in the past 12 months - most (74.8%) reported consuming alcohol every time or almost every time they went out, 12.3% most times, 5.2% occasionally, 4.9% half the time and 2.9% never (Figure 6). There were no significant differences between demographics and alcohol consumption on a night out in LCC.

Figure 6: Proportions of participants who reported the frequency of consuming alcohol on a night out in LCC in the past 12 months
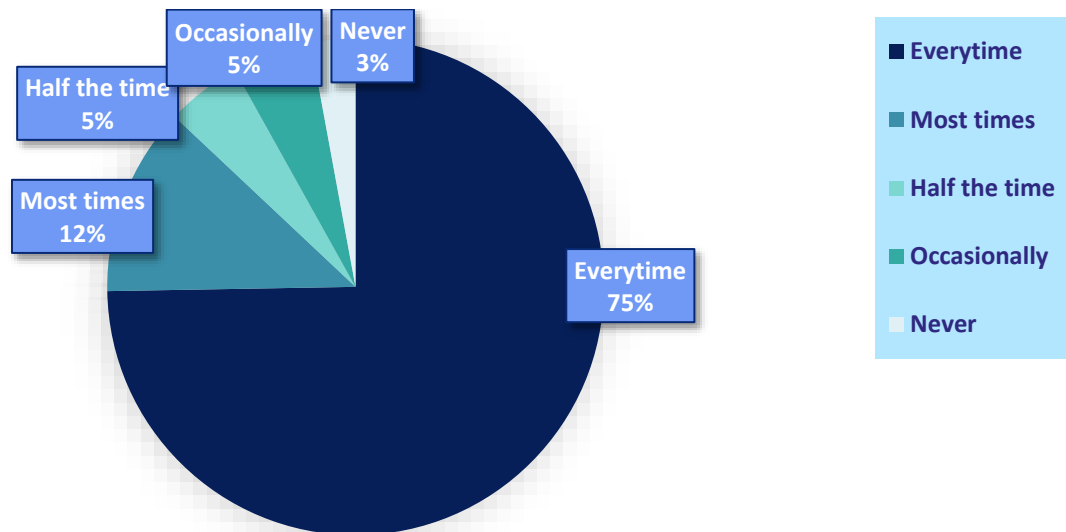
Of drinkers (i.e., those who had reported ever consuming alcohol on a night out), 37.3% stated that they preload every time or almost every time they go out, one in five (19.2%) occasionally, 17.2% most of the time, 11.5% half of the time and 14.8% never preload.

Significant differences were found between those who reported preloading every time they went on a night out and the following groups.

- Prevalence of preloading was highest amongst those aged 18-21 year(48.2%) compared to 22-29 years (31.0%) and 30+ years (27.7%; $p<0.01$).
- Prevalence of preloading was highest amongst other sexuality (48.7%) compared to heterosexual (33.8%; $p<0.05$).

Participants were asked in the past 12 months, how many standard drinks containing alcohol they have on a typical night out in LCC (including any preloaded alcohol consumption). Of drinkers, most (67.3%) reported typically drinking seven or more standard drinks, with 11.5% reporting 17+ standard drinks (Figure 7).

There was a significant association between consuming 10 or more standard drinks and gender.

- Prevalence was highest amongst males (58.7%) compared to females (37.3%; $p<0.001$).

Figure 7: Past 12 months - number of standard drinks containing alcohol consumed on a typical night out in LCC (including any preloaded alcohol consumption) (drinkers only)
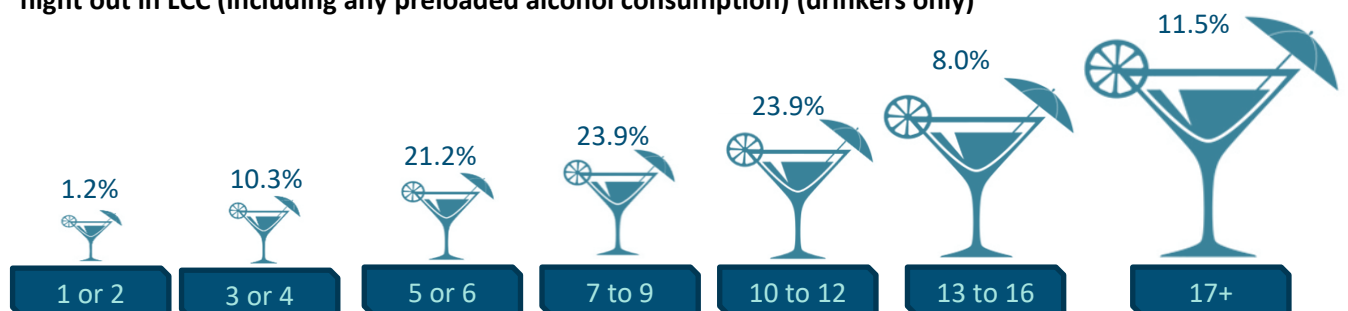
3.3.3 General perceptions of sexual violence in nightlife

When asked about their general attitudes towards sexual violence the majority agreed/strongly agreed that: a women should be able to wear what she wants without being at risk of sexual violence (97.7%); sexual violence is a problem in nightlife (91.7%); consent can be taken back at any time (86.0%); and sexual violence is never the fault of the victim (78.8%). Less than one in ten participants agree/strongly agree that if someone who is experiencing sexual violence is drunk, they are at least partly to blame (6.0%) and if the person committing sexual violence is drunk, it is not really their fault (5.4%; Figure 8).

Figure 8: General perceptions of sexual violence in nightlife
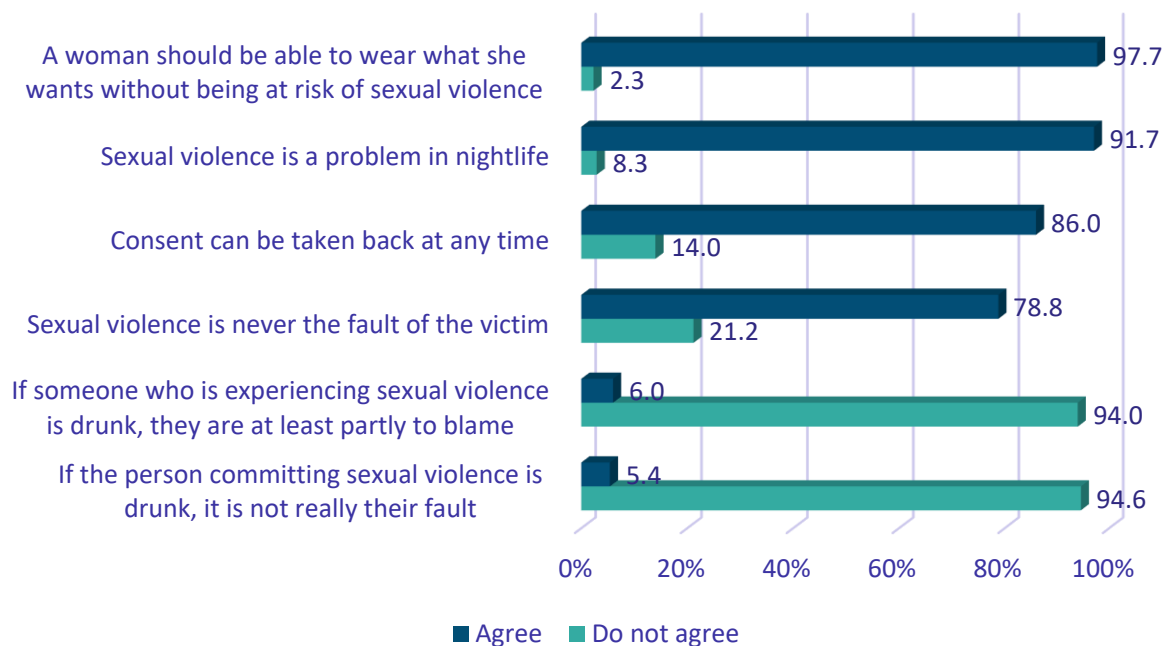
To the following statements, a higher proportion of those in the following groups were **more likely to agree/strongly agree** than their counterparts.

Sexual violence is a problem in nightlife

- Prevalence was highest amongst younger ages groups; 18-21 (96.5%) and 22-29 years (94.8%) than 30+ years (75.4%; p<0.001).
- Prevalence was highest amongst students (96.7%) compared to non-students (87.7%; p<0.01).

If someone who is experiencing sexual violence is drunk, they are at least partly to blame

- Prevalence was highest amongst males (10.4%) compared to females (4.4%; p<0.05).

If the person committing sexual violence is drunk, it is not really their fault

- Prevalence was highest amongst males (9.4%) compared to females (3.6%; p<0.05).

3.3.4 Confidence to seek support

Most participants agreed/strongly agreed that they had the confidence to ask someone who has experienced sexual violence if they are okay and if they would like further support (91.4%); and that

they believed their peers would listen to them if they spoke out against sexual violence (87.1%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Confidence offering support and discussing sexual violence with peers

My peers will listen to me if I speak out against sexual violence — Agree: 87.1, Do not agree: 12.9

I have the confidence to ask someone who has experienced sexual violence if they are okay and if they would like further support — Agree: 91.4, Do not agree: 8.6

■ Agree   ■ Do not agree

There were significant differences in agreement with the statement **'I have the confidence to ask someone who has experienced sexual violence if they are okay and if they would like further support'** in the following groups:

- Prevalence was highest amongst females (93.6%) compared to males (85.4%; $p<0.05$)
- Prevalence was highest in the youngest age group and the oldest age group 18-21 years (95.8%), or 30+ years (91.3%) compared to those aged 22-29 (86.6%; $p<0.05$).

Participants were asked how confident they would feel asking for support either for themselves or for someone else from a list of different individuals. Most (95.1%) felt confident/really confident asking for support from a friend, followed by police (62.2%), a nightlife worker (51.0%), and participants felt equally confident asking for support from a transport worker (27.5%) as a stranger (27.5%; Figure 10).

Figure 10: How confident participants feel asking different individuals for support in relation to sexual violence

Friend: 95.1, Police: 62.2, Nightlife worker: 51.0, Transport worker: 27.5, Stranger: 27.5
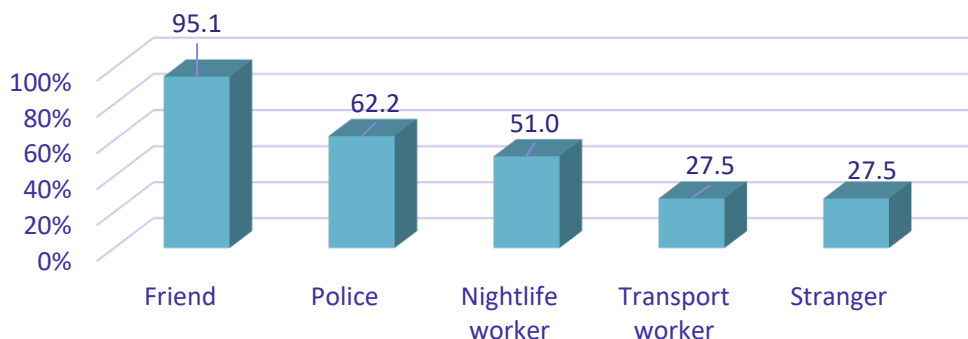
3.3.5 Perceptions of sexual violence in Liverpool City Centre's nightlife

Participants were asked to identify how often they believed sexual violence happened to different groups of people on a night out in LCC. Nearly nine in ten (88.9%) participants felt sexual violence occurred often/always to women, 33.8% to men and 74.1% to LGTBQ+ individuals (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Proportion of participants that thought sexual violence happens often/always to different groups in nightlife
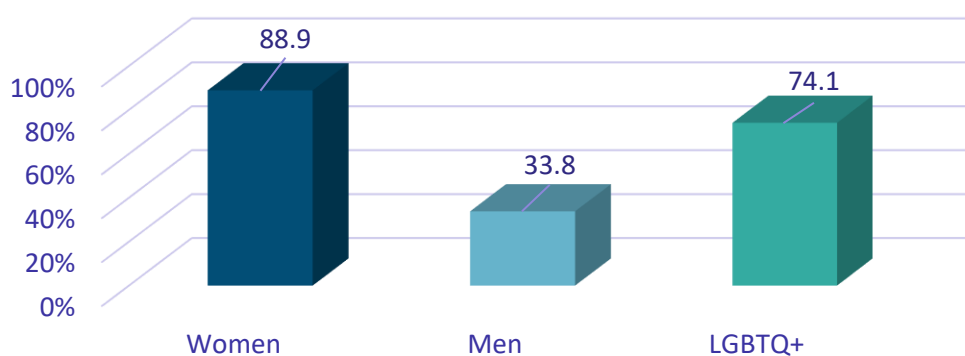
To the following statements, a higher proportion of those in the following groups were **more likely to think sexual violence happens often/always to selected groups** than their counterparts.

Sexual violence happens often/always to women in nightlife

- Prevalence was highest amongst the younger age groups 18-21 (93.7%) and 22-29 years (88.6%) compared to those aged 30+ years (80.0%; p<0.05).
- Prevalence was highest amongst females (91.9%) compared to males (80.6%; p<0.01)
- Prevalence was highest amongst students (95.4%) compared to non-students (83.7%; p<0.001)

Sexual violence happens often/always to men in nightlife

- Prevalence was highest amongst those aged 18-21 (40.6%; n=58) and 30+ years (35.4%; n=23) than 22-29 years (26.5%; n=35; p<0.01).
- Prevalence was highest amongst females (37.2%; n=92) compared to males (22.6%; n=21; p<0.01)

Sexual violence happens often/always to LGBTQ+ in nightlife

- Prevalence was highest amongst females (77.3%; n=191) than males (64.5%; n=60; p<0.05)
- Prevalence was highest amongst students (79.6%; n=121) than non-students (69.5%; n=132; p<0.05)

When asked how acceptable it is for a man to touch a woman in a bar without her permission nearly all (98.6%) participants felt it was unacceptable/very unacceptable. When asked how acceptable other people think it is over half (52.2%) felt others would feel it was unacceptable/very unacceptable. When asked the same question but about the acceptability of a woman touching a man in bar without his permission, nine in ten (90.4%) participants felt it was unacceptable/very unacceptable but only 29.0% thought that others would think its unacceptable/very unacceptable (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Proportion of participants thinking touching is unacceptable/very unacceptable and what they thought other people think
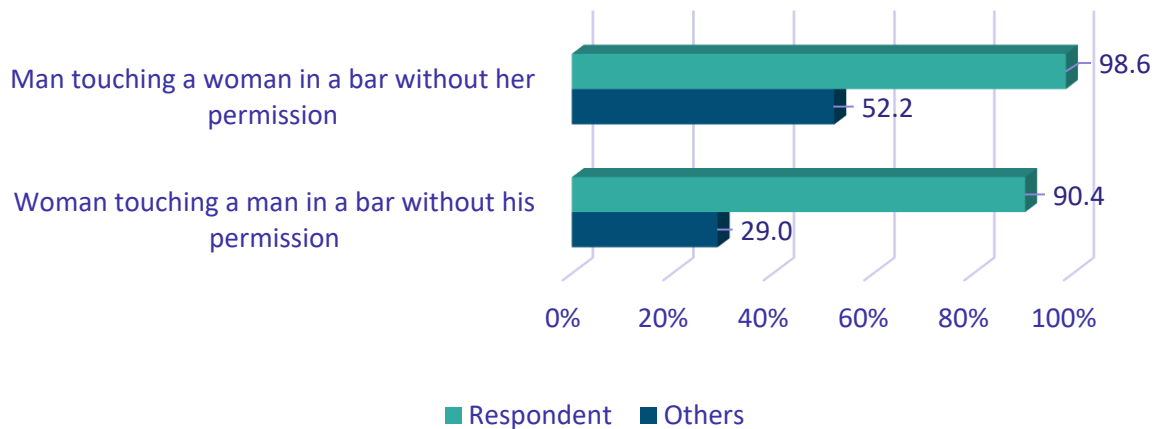
To the following statements, a higher proportion of participants were **more likely to think they were unacceptable/very unacceptable** than their counterparts.

Other people think it is unacceptable/very unacceptable for a man to touch a woman in a bar without her permission

- Prevalence was highest amongst males (63.8%) compared to females (48.0%; p<0.01)

Participant's think it is unacceptable/very unacceptable for a woman to touch a man in a bar without his permission

- Prevalence was highest amongst those aged 18-21 (96.5%) than 22-29 years (87.2%) and 30+ years (83.3% p<0.01).
- Prevalence was highest amongst females (96.0%) compared to males (76.6%; p<0.001)
- Prevalence was highest amongst students (94.7%) than non-students (87.0%; p<0.05)
- Prevalence was highest amongst other sexuality (98.7%) to heterosexual (88.0%; p<0.01)

**Other people think it is unacceptable/very unacceptable for a woman to touch a man in a bar without his permission**

- Prevalence was highest amongst those aged 18-21 (35.0%) than 22-29 years (28.6%) and 30+ years (16.7%; p<0.05).
- Prevalence was highest amongst students (35.5%) compared to nonstudents (24.0%; p<0.05).

When asked about how safe LCC's nightlife is, a quarter (24.5%) of participants felt it was safe/very safe for women, over half (52.5%) felt it was safe/very safe for men and over one in ten (14.0%) felt it was safe/very safe for LQBTQ+ individuals (Figure 13).

There was a significant difference in participants who **agreed/strongly agree** that is was safe/very safe for women.

- Other sexuality (15.4%; n=12) compared to heterosexual (27.2%; n=72; p<0.05)

**Figure 13: How safe participants felt LCC's nightlife is for different groups**
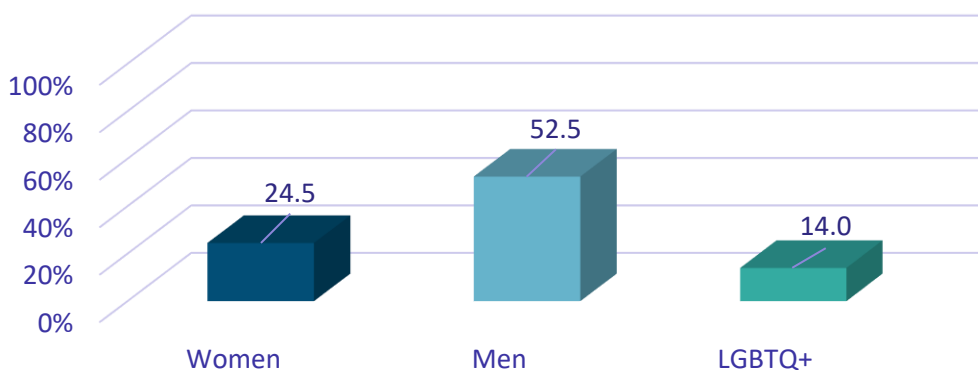
3.3.6 Respondent's experience of sexual violence in Liverpool City Centre's nightlife

Over half (59.1%) of participants had personally experienced sexual violence when on a night out in Liverpool's nightlife (including on the way to, during and after a night). Of these, 41.8% had experienced this in the past 12 months and 17.3% had experienced sexual violence but not in the past 12 months. Most of those experiencing sexual violence on a night out were female (84.3%), aged 18-21 years (50.0%), heterosexual (73.7%), and students (53.8%).

Of those who had experienced sexual violence in Liverpool's nightlife, the majority (51.6%) reported that their most recent experience of sexual violence was both physical (e.g., unwanted sexual touching, sexual assault) and verbal (e.g., harassment, cat calling, unsolicited requests for sexual favours), nearly three in ten (27.7%) said physical, nearly two in ten (19.0%) said verbal and 1.6% said it was any other type and included things like being followed, drink spiked etc (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Type of sexual violence experienced in nightlife by sex**
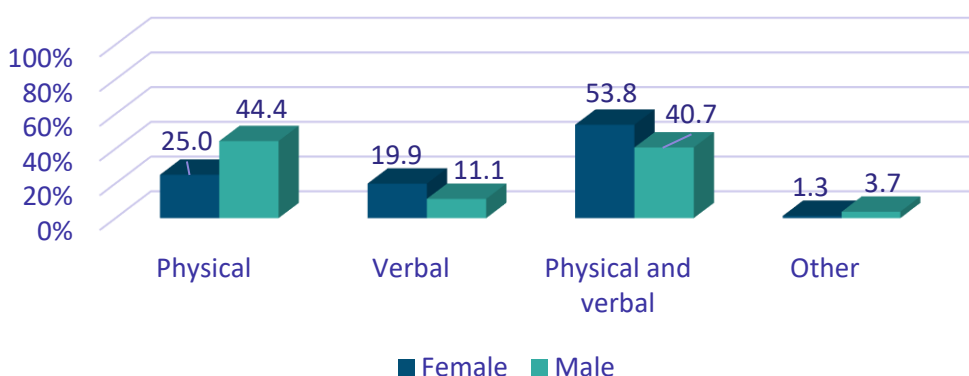
Participants were asked where their most recent experience took place (they could select more than once answer), most (77.2%) stated the incident occurred in a pub, bar, or nightclub, followed by on a street or public setting (39.0%), on public transport (13.2%), at their home or someone else's house (9.9%), food establishment (4.4%), and 4.4% stated other or prefer not to say (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Locations of incidents of sexual violence in nightlife**
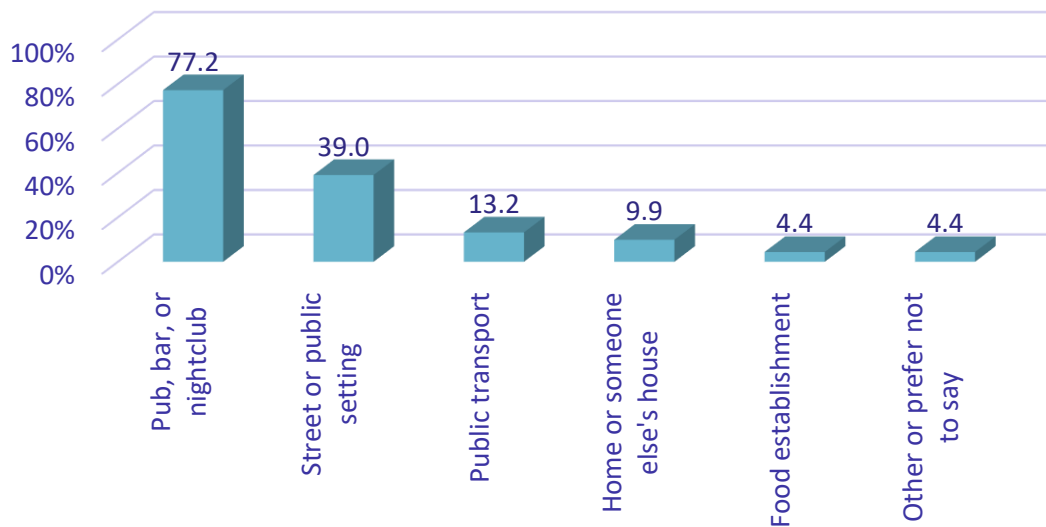
Most participants identified the perpetrator as a male (85.7%), 6.7% of perpetrators were female and 1.5% didn't know or preferred not to say. Participants were also asked questions about who the perpetrator was in the incident, over four in five (85.3%) indicated the perpetrator was a stranger, one in ten (10.5%) an acquaintance, 6.1% a friend, 1.7% someone working in a nightlife venue, 0.6% someone working in nightlife environment and 2.3% said other or prefer not to say (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Relationship to perpetrator in incidents of sexual violence in nightlife
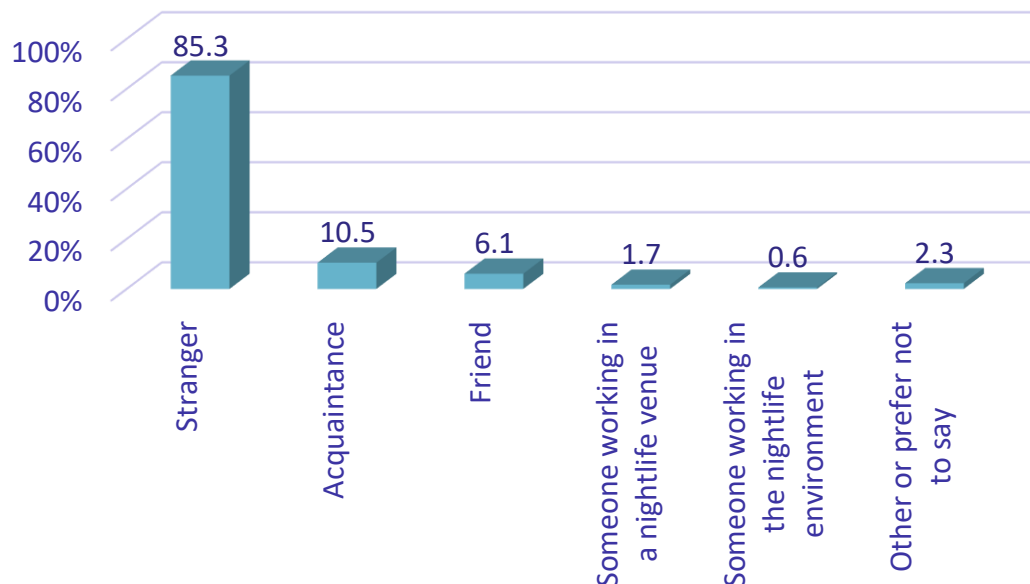
Finally, participants were asked who they reported the incident to, three in five (62.4%) said that they didn't report it to anyone, a quarter (24.2%) friend or family, 4.1% police, 4.1% door supervisor/security staff, 3.1% Bar staff, 1.5% venue manager, 1.0% health practitioner, 1.0% welfare officer and 3.0% said other or prefer not to say (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Reporting of incidents of sexual violence

Bar chart values:
- Didn't report it to anyone: 62.4
- Friend or family: 24.2
- Police: 4.1
- Door supervisor/security staff: 4.1
- Bar staff: 3.1
- Venue manager: 1.5
- Health practitioner: 1.0
- Welfare officer: 1.0
- Other or prefer not to say: 3.0
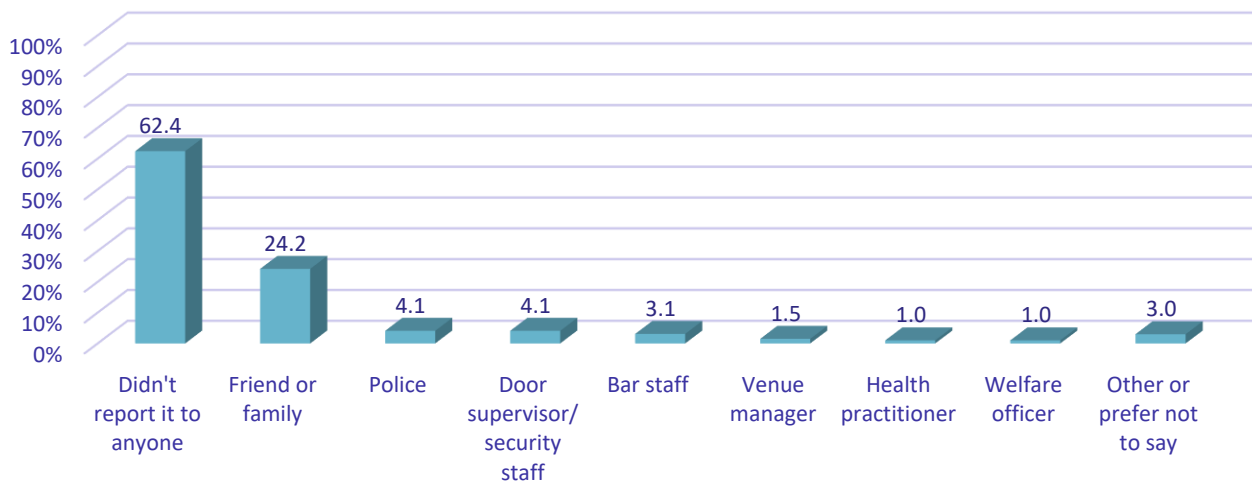
3.3.7 Interventions to prevent sexual violence in Liverpool City Centre's night-time economy

Operation Empower

This intervention involves Merseyside Police Officers working in the nightlife area to monitor behaviours, disrupt those who present a potential sexual violence risk, and support vulnerable nightlife users.

15.7% of participants were aware of this intervention

Most participants had positive opinions of the intervention "*Totally agree it's good to have someone there to watch out for those kind of behaviours*" however some people acknowledged that it was impossible for police to be aware of every situation so more needs to be done to change the culture of sexual violence in nightlife "*Crucial for a small number of incidences however sexual violence minor incidences and severe happens on a large scale in nightlife so officers would only intervene in a very small number of incidences. A bigger culture change is needed in the nightlife to prevent sexual violence on a bigger scale*".

Participants were asked whilst on a night out, had they ever experienced support from a police officer in relation to a potential sexual violence risk involving themselves or someone else. The majority (91.6%) said no, or they weren't sure, 5.0% said yes in the past 12 months and 3.5% said yes but not in the past 12 months.

Safer Streets Liverpool

This is a campaign that aims to improve safety on public transport, for example CCTV on bus stations, and a communications campaign highlighting unacceptable behaviours such as touching, groping, and stalking, and targeting potential perpetrators.

22.0% of participants were aware of this intervention

Most participants felt it made them feel safer and that it was good that there was CCTV coverage watching out for incidences as this would help police to prosecute perpetrators. Most participants felt it was reassuring as it *"makes people feel more confident and safer"* however others felt it was important to raise awareness but questioned how effective this kind of intervention may be, stating it might not stop someone from perpetrating sexual violence but could help victims - *"Doesn't prevent but helps to support conviction if victim is aware and footage is good quality"*. Other participants felt a larger presence of transport workers at night would help make them feel safer - *"I think everyone knows it's not okay. More people present on transport at night who can support people would be better but increased CCTV is good"*.

Participants were asked if they had ever been supported by from a transport staff member in relation to a potential sexual violence risk. Nearly all (95.9%) participants said they had never or were not sure if they had received support, 2.6% said yes but not in the past 12 months, and 1.5% yes in the past 12 months.

The following interventions were only asked to participants who took part in the online survey (n=31)

Streetsafe

Street Safe is a website enabling the public to anonymously report areas where they feel unsafe

(see https://www.police.uk/pu/notices/streetsafe/street-safe/ for more information).

19.4% of participants said they were aware of Streetsafe

Nearly all (96.8%) said they had not accessed the Streetsafe website. Over half (54.8%) of the participants said if needed to they would use Streetsafe in the future, nearly three in ten (29.0%) said maybe and 16.1% said they wouldn't use Streetsafe.

The Good Night Out Campaign (GNOC)

This campaign involves training for bar staff on how to identify signs of sexual violence, disrupt those who present a potential sexual violence risk, and support nightlife users.

29.0% of participants were aware of the GNOC

Participants were asked if they had ever been supported by bar staff in relation to a potential sexual violence risk (involving you or someone else). Most (93.5%) said no and 6.5% stated that they had.

Ask for Angela

This is a safety initiative where people can ask venue staff for 'Angela' as a code to indicate to staff they require help and support with a situation.

96.8% of participants were aware of Ask for Angela

When asked if they had ever used Ask for Angela, most (93.5%) said no and 6.5% stated that they had. Participants were also asked if they needed to would they use Ask for Angela in the future - most (58.1%) participants said they would, 22.6% would not, and 19.3% said maybe or they were not sure.

Street Pastors

Street pastors patrol nightlife settings to care for, listen to and help people, who are on the street.

29.0% of participants were aware of Street Pastors

When asked if they had ever used Street Pastors, over nine in ten (93.5%) said no and 6.5% stated that they had. Participants were also asked if they needed to would they use street pastors in the future most (58.1%) participants said they would, 22.6% would not, and 19.3% said maybe or they were not sure.

4. Summary and Recommendations

Operation Empower

Throughout 2021/22, Operation Empower has been implemented across Liverpool City Centre's nightlife with the aim of preventing incidents of sexual violence by targeting people behaving in a predatory way. There was a clear consensus amongst officers and nightlife users who participated in the evaluation that Operation Empower was a positive step forward and a necessity to improve safety in the NTE, and to identify and disrupt potential perpetrators. Targeted prevention activity has led to some positive outcomes, with, for example, those posing a risk within the NTE being diverted away from the area. Whilst such examples indicate that the operation may be effective in meeting its aims, further data and operation monitoring is required to assess the impacts of the operation, and ensure it meets its objectives. Critically, further work is needed to review the implementation of the operation, ensuring where possible that a consistent team is available to implement the targeted operational activities, with staff adequately training and supported. Ideally the core team would be confident identifying and intervening with potential perpetrators, operating in plain clothes and have a good understanding of the local area and knowledge of potential individuals to look out for or particular hotspots locations. Having individuals who know what they are doing and "buy in" to the operation was seen as crucial to the sustainability and progression of the operation. Having a core team would also be beneficial to helping officers who are early in their career who may be lacking in confidence by pairing them with an officer with more experience

Whilst fewer officers participated in the Empower Training than originally anticipated (around 100/300), for those participating there was an increase in knowledge of sexual violence, and how to respond in the NTE and where to go for additional help or support. The evaluation shows that the training significantly improved attitudes around sexual violence. Pre-training, officer's confidence to respond to sexual violence and vulnerability was high, and this increased further post training (although not significantly). Such high levels of confidence to respond is key given that a lack of officer confidence and experience working in the NTE was highlighted by interviewees as a significant challenge to the success of Operation Empower. There was clear support for further and continued implementation of the Empower Training, including provision of refresher training for existing trainees, and training additional officers to ensure further buy-in for the operation.

> **Recommendations:**
> - Ensure a wider team of officers attend the Empower Training and are aware of Operation Empower, increasing the capacity and capability to support the operation in the future. Where required, provide refresher training for staff to embed knowledge, attitudes and skills.
> - Incorporate body camera footage in the Empower Training to demonstrate to officer's best practice examples of engaging with perpetrators, victims and witnesses.
> - Dedicate a core team of officers to work on Operation Empower in the NTE. Operation Empower officers could be paired with less experienced officers who are lacking in confidence or who have elected to work overtime and may not have the experience or knowledge of working in LCC's NTE.
> - Ensure plain clothes officers have adequate discrete PPE to enable to blend in more effectively therefore improving officer's safety and confidence to work covertly in plain clothes.

Sexual violence in nightlife

The findings from the nightlife user survey demonstrated the high levels of sexual violence in nightlife, including both perceived prevalence and actual experiences. The majority of participants felt that sexual violence is an issue in nightlife, and that sexual violence often or always happens to women on a night out, LGBTQ+ groups, and to a lesser extent men. Over half (59.1%) of participants reported having ever experienced sexual violence whilst on a night out in Liverpool, and two in five specifically in the last 12 months. Most of those experiencing sexual violence on a night out were female, aged 18-21 years, heterosexual and students. Key hotspots for sexual violence were identified as within pubs/bars/nightclubs and the streets or public settings, with most perpetrators identified as male and a stranger. Critically, a high proportion of victims (62.4%) did not report the incident to anyone. Where they did this was most often to a friend/family member; few reported to the police or other professionals. Despite the low levels of reporting to police and other professionals, more than half of participants stated that they would be confident to ask the police or nightlife worker for support in relation to sexual violence, with only one in five feeling confident to ask a transport worker or stranger. This shows the importance of ensuring nightlife workers are routinely trained in how to identify and positively intervene in sexual violence, and support victims/survivors (training implemented locally via Liverpool City Council/RASA), but equally wider professionals such as transport workers (pertinent given the recent focus of Safer Streets on enhancing safety on transport routes).

Importantly, the survey showed that nightlife users have attitudes conducive of preventing sexual violence, with the majority agreeing for example that sexual violence is never the fault of the victim, consent can be taken back at any time and that it is unacceptable for a man to touch a women without their permission, or vice versa. Furthermore, a high proportion of nightlife users surveyed felt confident to ask someone who had experienced sexual violence if they were okay or needed support, and that their peers would listen to them if they spoke up against sexual violence. Such positive attitudes and confidence to intervene and to receive support from peers is likely to facilitate positive bystander intervention to prevent and respond to sexual violence in nightlife and other settings. Across other parts of the UK, interventions to upskill community members to be positive bystanders are starting to emerge, and such interventions may complement the professional training implemented across Liverpool's NTE and Merseyside.

In addition, nightlife users were asked how safe they felt LCC's nightlife was for different groups. Many survey respondents felt LCC's nightlife was unsafe for all groups, particularly for women and LGBTQ+ individuals. Respondents felt more could be done to improve the safety of the nighttime environment such as improved light. Further to this, there was fairly low awareness of support available to vulnerable nightlife users other than the police for example Street Pastors and Guardians. Participants suggested support should be promoted more and more visible across hotspots for vulnerable nightlife users.

Despite these positive attitudes conducive to preventing sexual violence, there was some indication that participants did not perceive others to hold similar views. Whilst the majority thought that it is unacceptable for a man to touch a women without their permission, or vice versa, fewer participants thought others held these views. Perceptions of others' acceptance of sexual violence may limit the

likelihood of positive bystander intervention, and thus it is important that nightlife users are aware of the levels of unacceptability of sexual violence amongst their nightlife using peers.

Finally, the survey demonstrated high levels of alcohol use amongst nightlife users, and police officer interviews noted how use of nightlife has changed since the reopening of nightlife spaces following COVID-19, with a perceived increase in levels of intoxication and potentially sales of alcohol to intoxicated patrons. Local partners should ensure that the Drink Less Enjoy More Intervention, which focuses on reducing intoxication and the sales of alcohol to intoxicated patrons continues to be implemented, with a strong focus on monitoring and upholding legislation around such sales.

Recommendations:

- Ensure the nightlife user survey findings are shared across relevant groups and multi-agency partnership meetings to inform sexual violence prevention and response activity.
- Support the continued delivery of sexual violence prevention training for nightlife workers and wider professionals (e.g., transport staff), and consider the delivery of such training to wider professionals/community members.
- Explore the development of campaigns to raise awareness of the unacceptability of sexual violence amongst nightlife users (and partners) and prevention activity, to support positive bystander intervention and reporting of sexual violence.
- Promote the support available to vulnerable patrons in addition to support of the police for example Street Pastors and or Guardians.
- Continue to support campaigns such as Safer Streets and Street Safe to further improve areas in the city where people are more vulnerable for example making the environment safer such as more CCTV and improved lighting.
- Ensure wider NTE activities to prevent harm continue to be implemented, including for example Drink Less Enjoy More and the Good Night Out Campaign amongst others.

Conclusion

Operation Empower has started to make a positive contribution to preventing and responding to sexual violence in nightlife, however further work is needed to review the implementation of the operation, ensuring where possible that a consistent team is available to implement the targeted operational activities, with staff adequately training and supported. Such interventions are critical given that findings from the nightlife user survey demonstrate high levels of sexual violence in nightlife, the nature of such incidents and critically, low levels of reporting. Importantly, nightlife user attitudes towards sexual violence and confidence to support victims/survivors or seek support from peers/professional are likely to facilitate positive bystander intervention to prevent and respond to sexual violence in nightlife and other settings. Such findings could aid the development and continuation of wider sexual violence and nightlife safety interventions.

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