

To view an archived recording of this presentation please click the following link:



<http://pho.adobeconnect.com/pkeol4y1nzaf/>

Please scroll down this file to view a copy of the slides from the session.

Disclaimer

This document was created by its author and/or external organization. It has been published on the Public Health Ontario (PHO) website for public use as outlined in our Website Terms of Use. PHO is not the owner of this content. Any application or use of the information in this document is the responsibility of the user. PHO assumes no liability resulting from any such application or use.

Helpful tips when viewing the recording:

- The default presentation format includes showing the “event index”. To close the events index, please click on the following icon  and hit “close”
- If you prefer to view the presentation in full screen mode, please click on the following icon  in the top right hand corner of the share screen

Understanding Male-to-Female Sexual Harassment and Aggression in Public Drinking Settings

Public Health Ontario
February 2, 2021

Samantha Wells
Senior Scientist & Senior Director
Institute for Mental Health Policy Research

camh



DISCLAIMERS

- The presenter at this session has not received financial support or in-kind support from a commercial sponsor.
- The presenter does not have potential conflicts of interest to declare.
- Research in this presentation was supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)

Learning objectives

- **Summarize the extent and impact of alcohol-related sexual harassment and aggression in public drinking settings (prior to the pandemic)**
- **Explain the role that alcohol plays in addition to the roles of normative attitudes and beliefs, in public drinking settings**
- **Discuss prevention and policy options to prevent and respond to alcohol-related sexual harassment and aggression in public drinking settings**

Gender-based violence and sexual violence

Gender-based violence

Violence that is committed against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender (Statistics Canada, 2019). It includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse, threats, coercion, and economic or educational deprivation.

Sexual violence

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. (World Health Organization [WHO], 2010)

Unwanted sexual behaviour & sexual objectification

In Canada, about 32% of women (~4.9 million women) 15 years of age or older experienced some form of unwanted sexual behaviour while they were in a public place in the past 12 months compared to 13% of men (~2 million men) (Statistics Canada, 2019)



Sexual objectification experiences have been found to be linked directly and indirectly to mental health and substance use problems among women (see review by Szymanski et al. 2011)

Why is it important to study sexual harassment and aggression in drinking settings?

- Compared with other ages, young adult women (ages 18-24) are most at risk for rape and sexual assault (Sinozich & Langton, 2014)
- Alcohol is involved in at least 50% of incidents of sexual violence (Abbey et al., 2011; Senn et al., 2014)
- How men and women interact at bars and clubs may set the stage for what happens when they leave the bar (Kavanaugh, 2013)

Why focus on bars and clubs?

Male-to-female sexual assault is most likely to occur in a “culture marked by male dominance, in a group that provides peer support for violence, in an atmosphere where alcohol is abused” and where there is a “lack of punishments or deterrence”

Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997 (pp. 131)

Sexual harassment and aggression in drinking settings



Unwanted sexual touching



Unwanted persistence

Sexual harassment and aggression in drinking settings



Unwanted sexual comments or gestures

Bargoer Study

Methods

- groups of young adults randomly selected for recruitment based on the “fixed line method” (Voas et al., 2006)
- same sex groups of 3-5 young adults (ages 19-29 years)
- 10pm and 12:30am, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings over 11 week period



Bargoer study

Methods

Persistence

Did anyone keep trying to hit on you when you had clearly given them the message that you were not interested?

Unwanted touching

Did anyone touch you sexually in a way that you did not want to be touched or do something else sexual to you that you didn't want them to do?

Percent of women reporting sexual aggression experienced that night

	Percent
Persistence only	28.9%
Unwanted touching only	5.3%
Both persistence and touching	18.4%
Any sexual aggression that night	52.6%

Descriptions of worst incident

Examples of persistence

A guy was trying to dance with me at a club, I declined. He kept coming back then continued to watch me dance all night.

A guy got angry when I wouldn't dance with him and followed us to different bars.

A guy would not take no for an answer so he spit on me because I would not give him attention.

The guy tried to use pick up lines to get my attention and when I told him I was not interested he followed me around the bar all night making jokes that I thought I was too good for him to impress his friends.

Descriptions of worst incident

Examples of persistence

Was followed around to several different bars by a man who kept getting too close, saying lewd things and occasionally touching me. It was very inappropriate and I ended up slapping him in the face.

The person was following me around the whole night, which was quite scary. So I protected myself around my friends and asked them to make sure they were looking out.

A man would not stop dancing and trying to rub against me on the dance floor. I repeatedly walked away and he would find me again.

Descriptions of worst incident

Examples of unwanted touching

I just get my ass constantly grabbed and guys seem to think they can just walk up and touch you with no cause.

I have had guys come up behind me and try to grind me on the dance floor, the one guy trying to put his hand up my skirt, another guy touching my butt, etc.

Grabbed me and pulled me into dance. Very scary when they come from behind and you have nowhere to go.

Guys in every bar always rub up on girls and grab their butts or waist. It's so common its shrugged off and the girl tends to just walk away.

What happened when women experienced unwanted sexual advances in a bar or club?

- women usually responded with evasion and indirect methods of discouragement
- third parties sometimes intervened but also sometimes encourage the initiator
- bar staff rarely intervened

Of 177 incidents described by female bar-goers:

- 5 asked bar security staff for help
- 1 involved bar staff intervention (without help requested)
- 1 perpetrator was ejected by security staff (unclear how security became involved)
- 2 threatened to call security

How did women feel about what happened?

	Touching %	Persistence %
<i>Negative feelings</i>		
Annoyed	90.5	94.6
Uncomfortable	89.3	85.0
Disrespected	83.3	67.7
Violated	82.1	57.0
Disgusted	78.6	64.5
Angry	64.3	51.1
Embarrassed	41.7	31.2
Humiliated	27.7	14.1
Afraid	25.0	23.7
<i>Neutral or positive feelings</i>		
Didn't take it seriously	47.6	59.8
A little flattered	22.6	29.0

Role of alcohol

Physiological effects

Effects on cognition

Ability to process information

Focus on most salient cues
in the environment

Ability to consider
consequences

Risk perception

Decision making

Learned effects

Effects of culture and personal experiences

Perceptions and
expectations about the
effects of alcohol

Can serve as a motivation
for drinking and influence
how people behave when
drinking

Role of alcohol

Perpetration

Intoxication increases misperception of social cues/sexual interest

Reduces concerns about consequences

Beliefs/expectations about effects of alcohol (self/other)

Alcohol interacts with personality and attitudes

Victimization

Intoxication makes targets less able to resist advances & less able to detect risky cues

Intoxication may increase likelihood of being targeted

Heavy/frequent drinkers may be more likely to be exposed to potential assailants

Alcohol consumption and sexual aggression victimization

	No touching or persistence	Persistence only	Any touching
# drinks female participant had consumed at entry to study	2.59	3.00	4.19
Total # drinks female participant consumed that night	4.75	6.15	7.81

Link between women's alcohol use and their experiences with sexual aggression

- ⇒ alcohol may make women less able to communicate clearly that the behaviour was unwanted or less able to recognize risks
- ⇒ and/or intoxicated women may be targeted because they are seen as more sexually available or less able to resist or defend themselves

Link between women's alcohol use and their experiences with sexual aggression

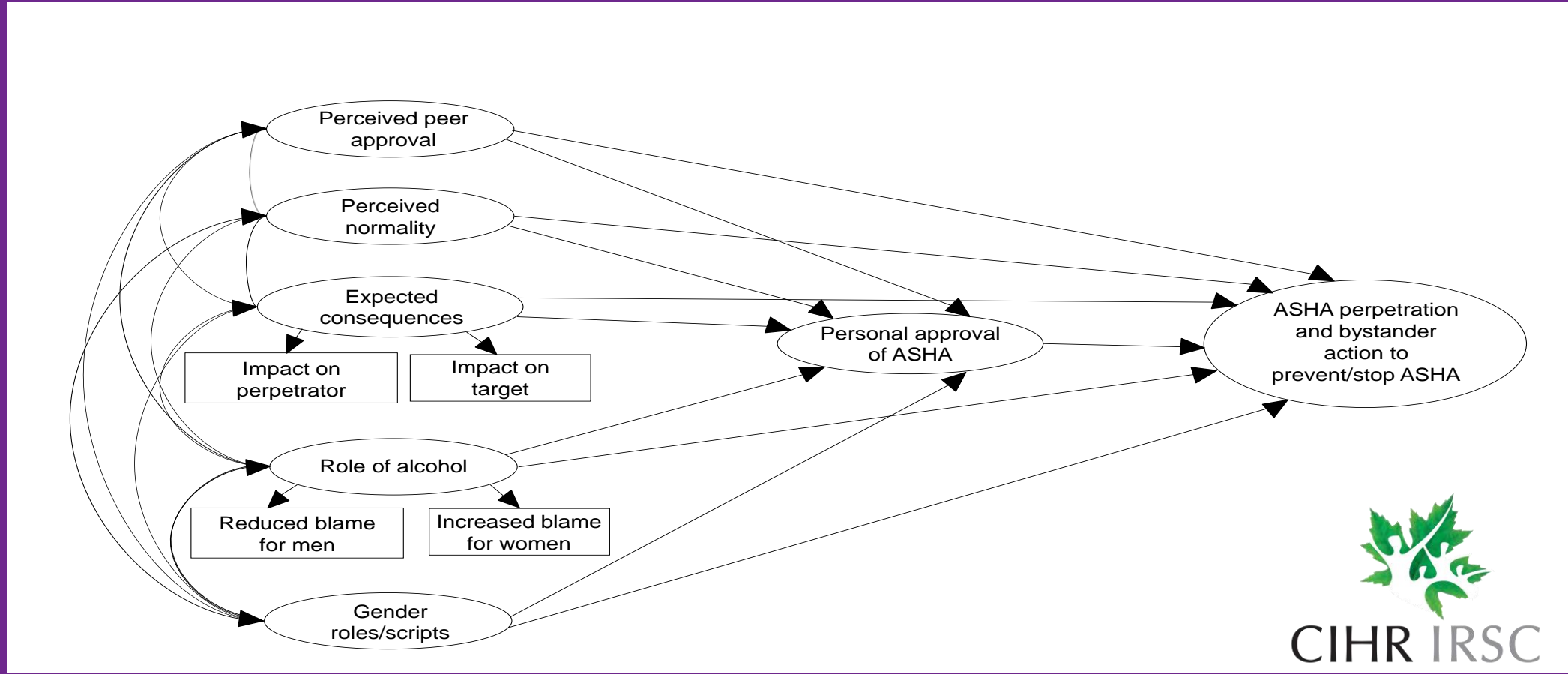
Having a lower status position in the peer group was associated with increased risk of sexual aggression among women who had consumed five or more drinks

⇒ those with less status in the group, especially those who are intoxicated, may be targeted

⇒ possibly seen as more sexually available or less able to resist due to intoxication

⇒ women with lower status may be seen as easy targets

Beliefs and attitudes contributing to alcohol-related sexual harassment and aggression (ASHA) in bars



Focus group discussions

Typical scenarios of sexual aggression

1

A guy grinds against a girl and continues to grind and touch her even after she tries to push him away

2

A guy grabs a girl's butt and disappears into the crowd

3

A guys makes comments about women's bodies as they walk by and laughs with his friends

4

A guy keeps hitting on a girl and following her around even when she says she's not interested

Normality

“ really normal ”

“ pretty normal ”

“ It’s a normal thing...all the guys do it...that’s why you go to the bar... pick up a girl, just have a good time with the boys ”

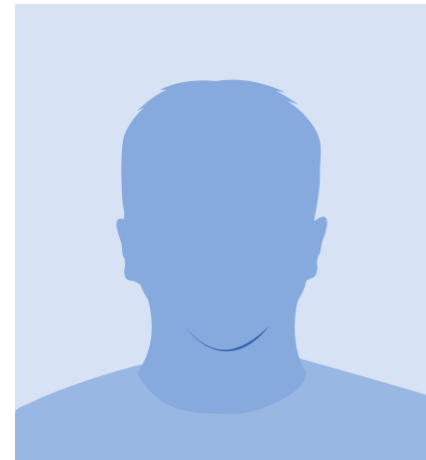
“ I wouldn’t say it’s typical but it definitely does happen ”

Approval: acceptable in bars

The guy doesn't know right from wrong, or knows it but does it anyway because he's at the bar

...bars go by different rules than everywhere else

Mostly why it's okay, yeah, just because it happens often I think



Approval: women should expect it if they go to bars

...gotta expect it when you go to a place like that

I don't think it is right to do that, but it is gonna happen if you are at a place like [that]

But not acceptable in other places

In everyday life it's totally inappropriate

It's not appropriate regardless, but I just think people get away with it and do it like in a club atmosphere as opposed to like at a bus stop...

That's the only place where you can say things... In [other locations] the girl might call the cops and say "oh, he's sexually harassing me"

Approval: making excuses for the guy

“He could just want to dance with the girl”

“Because he really likes her...”

“I guess it’s one way guys think that they can hit on a girl”

“He thinks he’ll get something out of it. Obviously, he’s not going to”

“He’s really drunk maybe”

Gender roles/scripts: it's women's responsibility

The onus is on the girl to turn around and say "no" or push them off and go away

Maybe she wasn't clear - but if she turned around and said "no" then that's different

if a guy is drunk, you gotta be clear about what you're saying - you can't just expect him to read into it and understand

Gender roles/scripts: how women dress & behave

“...clothing speaks more to easiness than attractiveness because...a girl who is easy will dress more provocatively because that’s what she’s going for”

“Women exaggerate their breasts and butt and dance provocatively to get attention. Heels can be uncomfortable. They wear them for a reason”

“If more attractively dressed - usually it’s those kinds of girls who go from guy to guy to guy”

**“If she’s dressed really provocatively then he probably thinks
‘you are dressed like that, then you’d say yes to any guy - why not me?’ ”**

“If she’s dancing alone, she’s an open target, she should expect it - she’s open”

Peer approval: peer amusement and peer pressure

**...they are just
dicking around and
want to have fun
with their friends**

**So if you see a hot girl
walking by, especially
if you don't have a
real interest in getting
with her, then you'll
just say stupid stuff
just because it's
funny, not because it's
what you're thinking**

**...keep trying until – you
know, for his buddies
more than to pick up**

Consequences for perpetrator

“Sometimes she does end up dancing with the guy”

“Even if they do resist a little in the beginning then you see that later they keep on talking with the guy”

“If she did have a boyfriend, I can see getting in trouble easily”

“He’s probably embarrassed”

“He’s getting his self-esteem shut down every single time too”

“If the girl has friends even, like they obviously [could] confront him”

Consequences for target

“confidence booster”

“it could push her to leave the bar”

“flattered”

“ruined her night”

Role of alcohol: reduced blame for men

“He’s just drunk”

**“If he’s doing this
sober its like
something is wrong
with him”**

**“Pretty typical if
he was drunk”**

**“If he was sober
he’d definitely
just be 100%
creepy...if he was
really drunk then
he wouldn’t know
what he was
doing”**

Role of alcohol: increased blame for women

“She might have led him on some way if she was drunk and she couldn’t remember if she did or something”

“But if she’s drunk then I think she would have, like her inhibitions would be lower, so she would be more likely to engage the guy maybe”

“Well for the guys that do it, it’s easy for them to do it and the girl doesn’t do anything about it”

Should bar staff intervene?

If they see it's just drunk behavior they [would] kick him out for being too drunk; they wouldn't just kick him out because he did that

If a bouncer kicked out every guy who talked to a girl who didn't want to be talked to, the bar would be empty ...but when the friend intervenes -- that interaction could possibly catch the eye of a bouncer

Wouldn't notice if it was crowded

Main themes

It's normal & acceptable

Some women invite advances (how they dress/behave, being intoxicated)

It's women's responsibility to be clearer and say "no"

Men's behavior is excusable – innocent advances or they're just drunk

Men sometimes do it for peer approval and amusement

Consequences for men are minimal – it might work!

Role of alcohol – reduced blame for men but increased blame for women

Prevention

- **Many ad hoc programs – little theory and evidence based practice**
- **Some initiatives focus on women rather than men**
- **Ontario - Dandelion Initiative: Safer Bars & Spaces**
- **Arizona Department of Health Services – Safer Bars Alliance**
- **GIS data: identify hotspots for violence**

Key ingredients in prevention

Bar staff training

- address myths/bar culture
- several sessions, interactive, role play
- skill-based - recognizing and responding - intervention skills
 - => hold perpetrators accountable
 - => change behaviour/address culture of bars

Bar policies

Measurement and evaluation

Alcohol policy

Summary

Extent & impact

- A large proportion of young adult women who go to bars experience sexual harassment and aggression
- Women often feel annoyed, violated, disgusted and some feel scared or afraid and there could be long term negative effects

Role of alcohol

- Physiological effects – misperceptions, poor decision-making, inability to perceive risks, consider consequences
- Learned effects – perceptions/expectations about the effects of alcohol

Attitudes and beliefs

- Men's attitudes and beliefs regarding the normality & acceptability of sexual aggression, perceived peer pressure/approval, gender roles & scripts, expected consequences, and perceptions regarding the effects of alcohol

Prevention

Evidence based programming to hold perpetrators accountable and address culture of bars

References

- Abbey, A., Zawacki, T., Buck, P., Clinton, A. M., & McAuslan, P. (2004). Sexual assault and alcohol consumption: What do we know about their relationship and what types of research are still needed? *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 9, 271-303.
- Abbey, A. Alcohol's Role in Sexual Violence Perpetration: Theoretical Explanations, Existing Evidence, and Future Directions. *Drug Alcohol Rev.* 2011 Sep; 30(5): 481–489.
- Graham, K., Bernards, S., Abbey, A., Dumas, T. M., & Wells, S. Young women's risk of sexual aggression in bars: The role of intoxication and peer social status. *Drug and Alcohol Review* (Special Issue on Understanding Alcohol and Other Drug Use During the Event), 33, 393-400. 2014.
- Graham, K., Bernards, S., Abbey, A., Dumas, T.M., Wells, S. When women do not want it: Young female bargoers' experiences with and responses to sexual harassment in social drinking contexts. *Violence Against Women*, 32(12), 1419-1441, 2017.
- Kavanaugh, P.R., The continuum of sexual violence: Women's accounts of victimization in urban nightlife. *Feminist Criminology*, 2013. 8(1): p. 20-39.
- Norris (2008). The Relationship Between Alcohol Consumption and Sexual Victimization. VAWnet: The National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women. https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-09/AR_AlcVictimization.pdf
- Schwartz, M.D. and W.S. DeKeseredy, Sexual assault on the college campus. The role of male peer support. 1997, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Sinozich, S. and L. Langton, Rape and sexual assault victimization among college-age females, 1995-2013. 2014, The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice.
- Statistics Canada (2019). Gender-based violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2018: Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces. (Catalogue number 85-002-X).
- Szymanski, D.M., L.B. Moffitt, and E.R. Carr, Sexual objectification of women: Advances to theory and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 2011. 39(1): p. 6-38.
- Voas, R.B., D. Furr-Holden, E. Lauer, K. Bright, M.B. Johnson, and B. Miller, Portal surveys of time-out drinking locations. A tool for studying binge drinking and AOD use. *Evaluation Review*, 2006. 30(1): p. 44-65.
- World Health Organization [WHO] (2010). Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: taking action and generating evidence. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241564007_eng.pdf

Funded Projects

Wells, S. (NPI), Cairney, J., Graham, K., Kates, N., Rehm, J. (Co-PIs), Chaiton, M., Kennedy, J., Lobo, D., Menzies, P., Tyndale, R., Verjee, Z. (Co-Is). The Ontario communities project: Using a mobile research laboratory to improve understanding, treatment and prevention of addiction and mental illness co-morbidities at the individual and community level. CIHR Emerging Team Grant: Co-morbidity of brain disorders and other health problems (CBG – 101926), 2010-2014.

Wells, S. (NPI), Graham, K., Trudell, A. (Co-PIs), Carr, D., Donnelly, P., Dumas, T., Ezekiel, F., Senn, C., Tremblay, P. (Co-Is). Alcohol-related sexual harassment and aggression (ASHA) by men toward women in bars: Using measures of young men's beliefs and attitudes, peer group norms, and status in the peer group to understand ASHA perpetration and bystander action. Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Project Grant (PJT – 387960), 2018-2022.



Thank You

camh

samantha.wells@camh.ca