The 6th International Conference on
Nightlife, Substance Use and Related Health Issues
ZURICH / SWITZERLAND / 7-9 JUNE 2010

Personal information on the author

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Position Professor of Psychology

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Most important career path

I have a longstanding interest in women's health issues and reducing violence against women. My dissertation focused on rape survivors' long-term adjustment and the responses of others that contribute to self-blame. After listening to many survivors' stories which included descriptions of their intoxication, as well as the perpetrators' intoxication, I became interested in the role of alcohol in sexual assault. I have been addressing this issue for the past 15 years in both alcohol administration studies and survey research. In recent years, much of this research has focused on (1) how to better measure sexual assault in community surveys and (2) developing a better understanding of the reasons for men's sexual violence toward women, so that effective prevention programs can be designed.

Co-authors

Names Rhiana Wegner, Angela J. Jacques-Tiura, and Jennifer Pierce

Title of presentation

Alcohol's Role in Sexual Assault: Explanations and Applications for Nightlife Environments

Description of the contribution

Approximately half of all sexual assaults involve alcohol consumption by the perpetrator, victim, or both. Other drugs are sometimes involved; however, alcohol is by far the drug of choice. Most sexual assaults occur among people who know each other and who have often spent the evening drinking together at a party, bar, or club. Alcohol contributes to sexual assault through psychological and pharmacological pathways. Beliefs about alcohol's effects on sexual and aggressive behavior, stereotypes about drinking women, and alcohol's effects on cognitive and motor skills encourage sexual violence. Focusing on perpetrators, research demonstrates that intoxication increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior. Alcohol's relationship to aggression is stronger for men, individuals who feel provoked, individuals with high levels of trait anger, and individuals with low levels of empathy. Thus, alcohol interacts with personality and other aspects of the situation, adding to the risk of sexual violence occurring. Focusing on alcohol's effects on victims, research demonstrates that intoxication reduces potential victim's likelihood of noticing risk cues. Intoxicated victims are also less able to actively resist the perpetrator. Data from relevant studies are summarized and their implications are discussed.