



Garda Síochána Analysis Service

SPIKING INCIDENTS

May, 2024.

Unless otherwise stated, data contained in this report is based upon operational figures from PULSE and is liable to change. Figures are based on the date incidents were reported and are correct as of 01/02/2024.

Introduction

There is no specific crime/incident type by which incidents involving spiking may be recorded on PULSE¹. In order to identify these incidents, it is necessary to look for relevant keywords within descriptions or incident narratives. Results are then manually reviewed to determine if they do indeed relate to an incident in which the injured party reports being spiked.

‘Spiking’ is a colloquial term used to describe a method of offending. Most commonly reports of spiking relate to a substance being added to a person’s drink without their knowledge. Reports have been received of a needle being used to inject the injured party or an undetermined method being used to give the injured party drugs without their knowledge or consent. All of these types of behaviour would involve the criminal offence of poisoning. This method may be used to facilitate committing other criminal offences.

¹ PULSE (Police Utilising Leading Systems Effectively) is the incident recording system used by the Garda Síochána nationwide.

Identifying Reports of Spiking

Incidents were selected based on narrative keyword searches of the PULSE incident categories of ‘Assaults’ and ‘Sexual Offences’ and all incidents of the PULSE incident type ‘Poisoning’ followed by manual examination and selection of incidents.

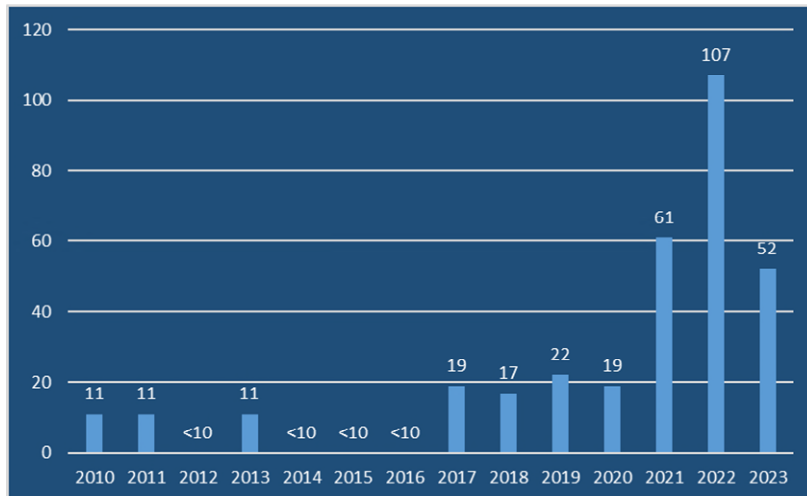
This analysis includes all unique incidents of spiking as identified by the above methodology. Whilst every care has been taken to ensure all such incidents reported to Gardaí are included in this report, it is possible there are other incidents where the offender utilised spiking to commit the offence but this information is not recorded on PULSE using one of the identified keywords.

Within the relevant incidents identified, there were 11 incidents reported to An Garda Síochána between 2010 and 2023 which occurred outside the jurisdiction. As there is no possibility of investigating these incidents, they are not included in the figures provided in this report.

Overview of Spiking Incidents Reported 2010-23

Annual incident counts varied across the period 2010² to 2023. Between 2010 and 2016, incident counts tended to be low with 11 or fewer incidents annually. There was a range of between 17 and 22 incidents in the years 2017 to 2020.

Number of Spiking Incidents Reported each Year (2010-2023)

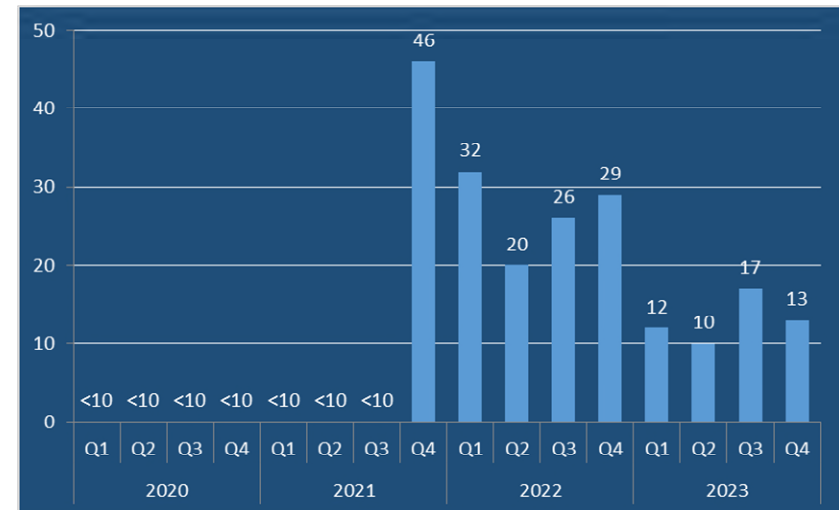


There were 61 incidents in 2021³. The largest number of spiking incidents were reported in 2022, with 107 incidents reported in the year. This number halved (-51%) in 2023 when 52 incidents were reported.

² Data for the years 2010 to 2019 is based upon operational data from the PULSE system on 15/10/2023 and is liable to change.

When we further examine the trends between 2020 and 2023 by quarter, it can be seen that the highest number were reported in quarter four of 2021 (46 incidents). Quarterly figures during 2022 ranged between 20 and 32 incidents. In 2023 these numbers reduced, ranging between 10 and 17 incidents per quarter.

Number of Spiking Incidents Reported each Quarter (2020-2023)

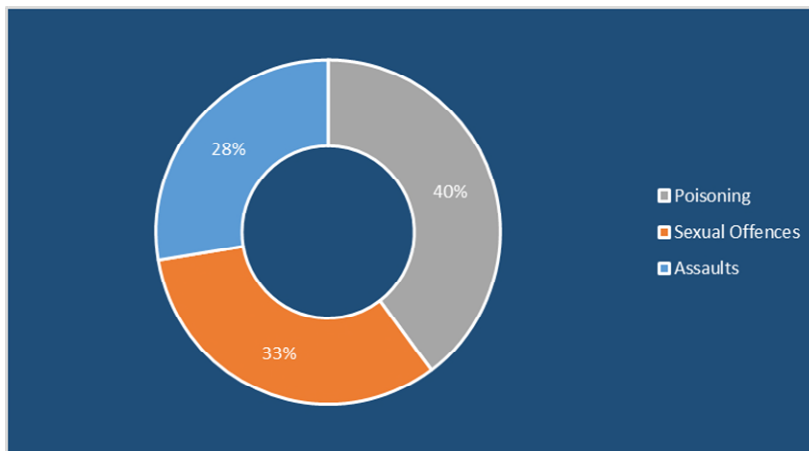


³ The totals in 2020 and 2021 should be interpreted in the context of the Covid pandemic and the related restrictions when many licenced premises were closed or operating under certain conditions only.

Details of Spiking Incidents Reported 2020-23

As noted, there is no specific crime type of spiking. Spiking may be reported as an independent offence (poisoning) or be used by offenders to facilitate committing other crimes. The highest number of incidents of spiking were recorded as ‘Poisoning’, 95 incidents or 40% of the total. A further 78 incidents (33%) were recorded as part of an incident within the ‘Sexual Offences’⁴ group and the remaining 66 incidents (28%) were within the ‘Assaults’⁵ group.

Spiking Incidents Crime Types/Categories (2020-2023)



⁴ These include rape and sexual assaults

To give some context to these figures, the total number of all reported incidents of ‘Assaults’ ranged from approximately 14,900 to 19,100 a year between 2020 and 2023; those which featured a reported spiking accounted for less than 0.5% of these assaults.

The total number of all reported incidents of ‘Sexual Assaults’ ranged from approximately 2,600 to 3,200 a year between 2020 and 2023; those which featured a reported spiking accounted for less than 1% of these sexual assaults.

Poisoning incidents ranged from <10 to 60 incidents in each year between 2020 and 2023 with reported spiking incidents accounting for 87% of such incidents.

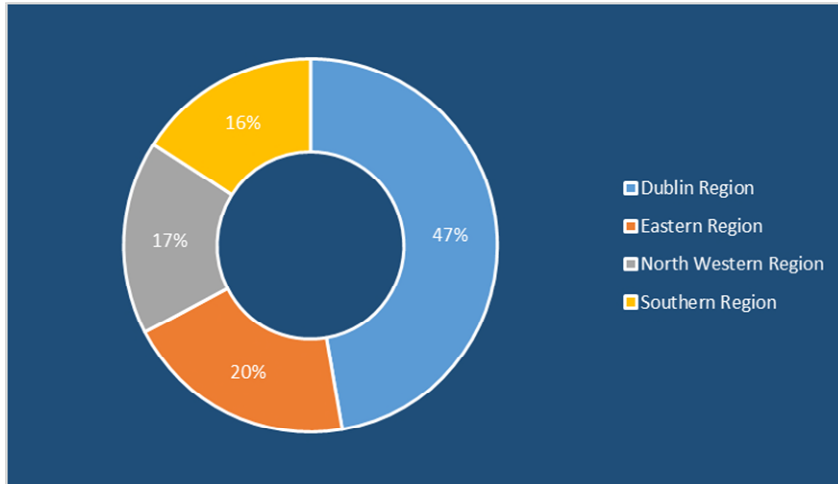
Incidents by Garda Area

Most spiking incidents, 47% or 113 incidents, occurred in the Dublin Metropolitan Region. The remaining three regions saw between 16% and 20% of incidents reported: 48 incidents (20%) in the Eastern Region; 40

⁵ These relate to minor assaults and assaults causing harm.

incidents (17%) in the North Western Region and 38 incidents (16%) in the Southern Region.

Regions where Spiking Incidents Occurred (2020-2023)



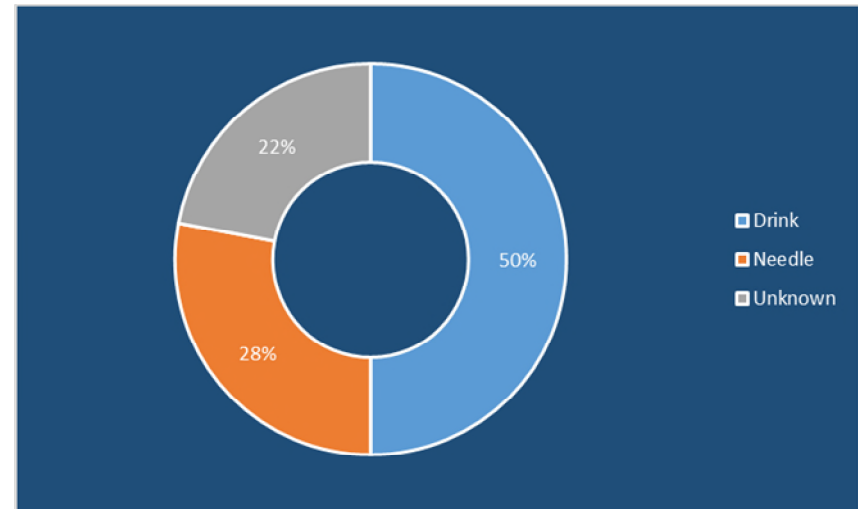
Location Types

The most common location types where spiking incidents occurred were licenced premises or clubs with 132 out of 239 incidents (55%) at these location types. A further 54 incidents (23%) occurred at houses or apartment/flat complexes.

Method of Administration

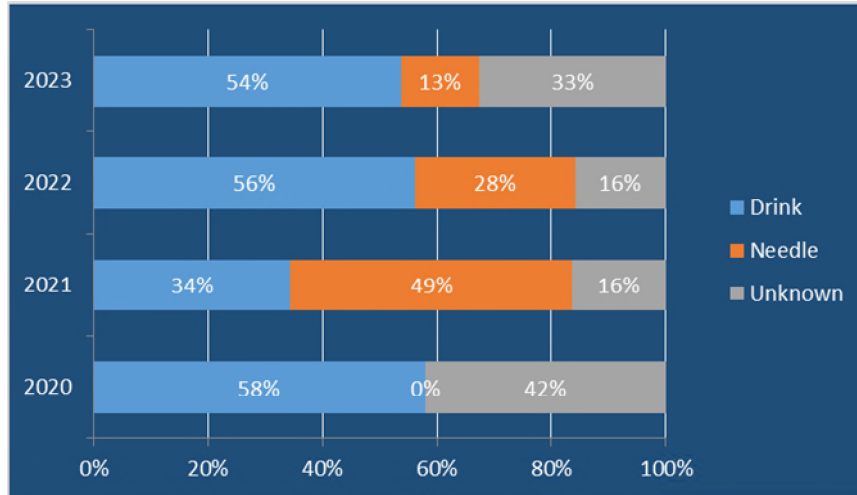
There are a number of ways in which a spiking was reported to have occurred. In 50% of all incidents identified, it was reported a drink was spiked (120 incidents). A needle was used in 28% or 67 incidents. In the remaining, 22% or 52 incidents, the method was unknown or it was not possible to determine from the information recorded on PULSE.

Method of Administration in Reported Spiking Incidents (2020-2023)

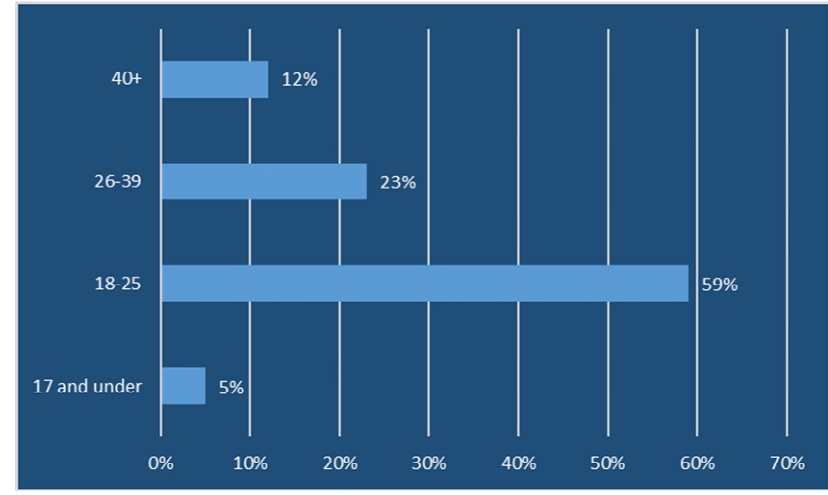


Needle spiking counts were very low before 2021 with less than 10 incidents in total from 2010 to 2020. The vast majority of needle spiking was reported in 2021 and 2022.

Method of Administration in Spiking Incidents (2020-2023) by Year



Age of Injured Parties in Spiking Incidents (2020-2023)



Percentages above appear not to add to 100% due to rounding.

Injured Parties

The majority of injured parties, 87%, are female with males accounting for 13%. The majority of injured parties (male and female) were aged between 18 and 25 years (59% of the total) on the date the incident occurred. Comparatively fewer of the spiking incidents were reported by those aged 40 years and older (12%). There are a low but not insignificant number of child injured parties, 5% or 12 injured parties were aged 17 years or younger.

There was a slightly higher proportion of male injured parties aged 26 years and older when compared to the younger age group of 25 years and younger (19% and 10% respectively).

Sex and Age Range of Injured Parties in Spiking Incidents (2020-2023)

Age Range	Female	Male
25 years or younger	90%	10%
26 years and older	81%	19%

Proceedings

There have been 31 charges or summons in cases involving spiking incidents up to the end of January 2024, relating to 12 unique incidents. These charges and summonses may be made in relation to the principal offence, for example, the sexual assault or assault causing harm, rather than for the spiking/poisoning element of the incident. It is important to note that these may be complex investigations and given some incidents were reported in 2023 many investigations will be on-going. It would be expected that the number of proceedings will increase over time.

Other Data Sources

As all incidents may not be reported to the Gardaí, data from other independent sources was sought to provide additional insight when assessing trends.

Sexual Assault Treatment Units (SATU)

There are six SATUs nationwide and they provide medical and other support services to anyone who has experienced a sexual assault and/or rape. During their engagements SATU ask if the person had any concern that drugs/drugs (including alcohol)⁶ had been used to facilitate a sexual

⁶ Between the years 2009 and 2018, attendees were asked if they were concerned that Drugs had been used to facilitate a sexual assault. Between 2019 and 2022, attendees

assault and/or rape. This is a broader definition and not all of these would relate to a spiking event. Given the different definitions, it would be expected that SATU numbers would be higher. SATU data was obtained for the 13 year period from 2010 to 2022 (the most recent published).

SATU Data	Concern*	Total SATU Attendance	Percentage with Concern*
2010	34	661	5%
2011	76	633	12%
2012	37	648	6%
2013	73	677	11%
2014	79	628	13%
2015	76	685	11%
2016	89	712	13%
2017	99	865	11%
2018	122	941	13%
2019	153	943	16%
2020	125	734	17%
2021	128	859	15%
2022	225	1072	21%

*Concern that Drugs/Drugs (including alcohol) had been used to facilitate a Sexual Assault and/or rape.

The count of persons who attended SATUs citing a concern that drugs/drugs (including alcohol) were used to facilitate a sexual assault and/or rape, has tended to increase year-on-year. Counts of total attendance at SATUs have also tended to increase.

were asked if they were concerned that Drugs (including alcohol) had been used to facilitate a sexual assault.

To note, counts for both total attendance and those citing a concern were lower than previously in 2020 and 2021. For the majority of years the percentage citing a concern that drugs/drugs (including alcohol) were used to facilitate a sexual assault and/or rape ranged from 11% to 21%, with the highest percentage in 2022.

HSE Data – Hospital Discharges

The Healthcare Pricing Office (HPO) of the HSE was able to provide information from the Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE) system. HIPE provides information of the number of discharges from hospitals nationwide according to relevant discharge codes. The HPO identified two discharge codes of potential relevance where a patient was assaulted and may have been spiked. More details of these codes are provided in the table below; the first relates to drugs/medicines and the second to chemical or other noxious substances. HIPE does not include any figures relating to Emergency Department attendance and only admitted patients are captured.

HIPE data was provided for the 13 year period from 2010 to 2022 (figures for 2023 will be available later in 2024). A total of 46 discharges were recorded across this entire time period in either of these categories. It

should be noted that these figures include all discharges for such assaults, all of these may not be related to spiking.

HSE Data	Total Discharges (code X85*)	Total Discharges (code X90**)
	Assault by drugs, medicaments and biological substances	Assault by unspecified chemical or noxious substance
2010	~	~
2011	~	0
2012	~	0
2013	0	0
2014	~	0
2015	~	~
2016	~	~
2017	6	0
2018	~	0
2019	~	~
2020	~	~
2021	0	~
2022	~	~
TOTAL	31	15

~ represents figures under 5, due to it being a requirement of the HSE to suppress figures of 5 or less for GDPR.
 *Code X85: Total discharges with an external cause code of ICD-10-AM Code: X85 Assault by drugs, medicaments and biological substances reported to HIPE for acute hospitals.
 **Code X90: Total discharges with an external cause code of ICD-10-AM Code: X90 Assault by unspecified chemical or noxious substance reported to HIPE for acute hospitals.

HIPE data shows that in all years aside from 2017 there were either no or fewer than five hospital discharges for either code.

Crime Prevention and Reporting

An Garda Síochána advises any victims of similar incidents or any form of spiking to come forward and report to local Gardaí. We take all reports of spiking seriously and thoroughly investigate to determine the exact nature of each incident including results of toxicology reports in each case. We continue to engage with partner agencies (HSE, HPSC, HPRA) monitoring the reporting of these matters for early warning of any identified patterns. Any incident of this type of crime (poisoning/assault/sexual assault) including those with evidence to suggest a link with ‘spiking’ will be investigated by either local Gardaí supported by or attached to Divisional Proactive Services Units.

The Vintners’ Federation of Ireland (VFI) in partnership with An Garda Síochána encourages all publicans to support the Ask for Angela campaign, which aims to stop sexual harassment and unwanted attention on nights out. The idea behind the campaign is that anyone feeling unsafe can approach a member of staff and ask for ‘Angela’. They will then be brought to a place of safety or offered a taxi home.

What to do if you believe you may have been the victim of a spiking incident?

Most drugs associated with spiking incidents leave the body within a short period of time but it is important to seek medical attention if you feel unwell.

Advice on Drink Spiking and related public health issues can be found here - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/drink-spiking-date-rape-drugs/what-to-do/>

A Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (SATU) is a safe place to go if you have been raped or sexually assaulted. A SATU can offer a health check, medications and a forensic exam and they are available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year - <https://www2.hse.ie/services/satu/contact/>.

Please report all incidents to An Garda Síochána and in an emergency call 999/112.