

Molesters' hunting ground: Nightspots

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More women getting intoxicated these days, making them easy prey

WHEN Anna (not her real name) went to popular nightspot Zouk last year for a night of fun, she did not expect to become a victim of molestation.

As she was leaving the club with her boyfriend, the 25-year-old flight stewardess felt a slap on her buttocks.

'I was shocked at how bold he was, and that he could take advantage of a girl like that,' she told The Straits Times.

Fortunately for her, alert bouncers managed to nab the man before he could escape in a taxi, and though he denied committing the crime, footage from the club's closed-circuit television cameras showed otherwise.

He later pleaded guilty and compounded the offence for \$2,000.

Nightclubs are among the hot spots where molesters go on the prowl, especially because intoxicated girls can be easy targets. A bartender at Harry's Bar in Chijmes, Mr Iswandi Hufin, 27, said he sees more women drinking now - and drinking hard - than when he entered the food and beverage (F&B) industry 10 years ago.

He said that it is common to see drunk women at the bar.

While more people across most age groups are picking up the habit now compared with 10 to 20 years ago, research shows that frequent drinking among young adult females is on a sharper rise, sociologist Mathew Mathews said.

He cited a push for greater gender equality as a factor contributing to this increase, as 'more younger women are wanting to experience similar types of pleasure that men seem to enjoy'.

Some popular nightclubs told The Straits Times that they work closely with the police to keep the problem at bay.

In the first six months of last year, 647 people were nabbed for outrage of modesty. This is slightly more than half of the total number of cases for 2009 and 2008, - 1,273 and 1,236 respectively.

At The Butter Factory, posters designed in collaboration with the police urge patrons to be vigilant. They are placed in highly visible parts of the club.

Security officers at the club are also trained in-house and with the police to identify potential suspects and take necessary deterrent steps.

At St James Power Station, more security officers patrol the dance floor on busy nights.

However, it is not just the women who need to watch out.

Lawyers told The Straits Times that they have seen instances of men being accused of molestation when too intoxicated to defend themselves.

Criminal lawyer Amolat Singh said he has seen three such cases in the past year or so. In one instance, his already inebriated client went with a friend to a bar in Boat Quay. There, he was accused of slapping a woman's behind. He had no recollection of doing so.

The woman called the police, and he was acquitted after spending the night in a police lock-up.

'In such cases, the claim is difficult to refute... There is always the fear that the woman may be an opportunist,' he said, adding that documentary evidence like video footage and witness statements can be hard to obtain.

Criminal lawyer Josephus Tan said molestation cases in clubs often involved 'rough play' under the influence of alcohol.

In such cases, 'what starts off as harmless flirtation and teasing on the dance floor gets out of hand', he said.

Most molestation cases at nightspots often end up as 'he said, she said' cases and are more likely to be compounded. This means the offender is acquitted after he pays a composition sum to the victim.

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