



# Environmental Factors in Brazilian Nightclubs Associated with Sexual Risky Behavior and Sexual Assaults: A Qualitative Study



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**Introduction:** Every day thousands of youths and young adults attend the nightclubs in São Paulo city which are targeted to different groups as GLBT (gays, lesbian, bisexual and transgender) and no GLBT audience. The international literature showed that environmental factors in “baladas” (nightclubs in English) are directly related to sexual risky behavior and sexual assaults [1]. In Brazil there is no scientific study focusing on this subject, thus understanding the relationship among environmental factors, sexual risky behavior and sexual assaults in nightclubs is the first step to provide data to develop public health intervention to the patrons.

**Aim:** To identify the environmental factors associated with sexual risky behaviors and sexual assaults in Brazilian nightclubs.

**Methods:** In this survey, nightclubs were defined as leisure venues that sell alcoholic beverages, have one or more dance floors, and offer individual control of patron entry and exit. The nightclub frame list was created by an active search of magazines and guides specialising in leisure activities and a search of the first ten pages returned from a Google search using the following key words: “São Paulo Bars, Nightclubs and Discos”. Ethnographic observations were conducted inside 31 nightclubs and generated data for 307 hours of observation. Each nightclub was observed once for an average of 8:30 hours. Two instruments were used: 1) a structured questionnaire based on the KAREn - *Kit for Assessment of Recreational Nightlife* - venue questionnaire [2] and *Safer Bars* [3]; and 2) a field diary filled out during and immediately after the observational research, with 4 thematic axes: drinking behaviour, violence, sexual behaviour and illicit drug use in the nightclubs. Each night of observation in the field diary was analysed using the content analysis technique described in Bardin's theoretical framework [4]. Field notes were sorted into major themes (i.e., portions in agreement with each thematic axis) and grouped into reports [4]. At this stage, the computer software NVivo-10 was used [5].

**Results:** The majority of the quotes from the thematic node “sexual risky behaviours” in nightclubs came from the observations conducted where “areas reserved to sexual intercourse” were present. In these areas it is possible to have sexual intercourse with many people at the same time. Most of them were present in some GLBT venues, and according to managers the use of condoms does not seem to be usual among patrons who frequent these areas:

On the other hand, in nightclubs targeted to straight people we did not notice reserved areas to intercourse, but the high level of alcohol intoxication led to sexual assaults: :



“... Three very drunk boys surrounded me and one of them held my hand strongly and tried to pass it on his chest. He said: I want you, I kiss you now. I said: let me go, I'm working and I know a lot of people here, you will not kiss me (all the time I shook myself to try to get rid of him)!” He came close to my face and said very emphatically: listen to what I'm telling you, I'll kiss you tonight. The other two boys were laughing all the time (FD\_NoGLBT\_15)”.

Just two times we observed couples having sex inside the nightclub, since venues targeted to this population do not allow this practice. The abuse of alcohol in both types of nightclubs was high and in one of them, patrons were very young.

“...the nightclubs are targeted to very young people that drink a lot...I saw one couple having sex on the table...the venue prohibits sexual intercourse inside the nightclub (FD\_NoGLBT\_08)”.

“I saw a young couple going for a more hidden place (dark and under a ladder) ... they were having sex when the bouncer arrived and asked them to get out of the establishment” (FS\_NoGLBT\_04)



**Discussion:** In Brazil the HIV epidemic recrudescence is concentrated among MSM, aged 20 to 25 years old [6], the same age group of Sao Paulo's nightclub patrons investigated in this survey. Therefore, “darkrooms” or similar areas may be one of the contextual causes associated with the increasing number of HIV cases in this specific population. On the other hand, it seems important that nightclubs invest in security to curb sexual assaults and sexual risky behavior.

**Conclusion:** The data of ethnography showed that the abuse of alcohol and other drugs in nightclubs is associated with sexual risky behaviors and sexual assaults, but they are very different according to the target of venues. In Brazil there are no evidence based intervention directed to the patrons that attend the nightclubs. Thus, these information become extremely important to development effective preventive actions aimed at this audience respecting the differences among the nightclubs and their patrons.

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“...after 3:00am more than 100 patrons went upstairs to the dark-room...the nightclub didn't offer condoms and patrons seemed not to be concerned about that. (DF\_GLBT\_17)”

Content data analysis of the field diaries supported that high level of alcohol intoxication by patrons as well as the use of synthetic drugs (mainly in GLBT venues with electronic music) were present in these nightclubs.

“...the sound was electronic...some patrons were using ecstasy and in the area reserved to smokers some people were smoking marihuana...behind the bar there is a restricted area called “JE”, a large garden surrounded by bamboo groves . During all night hundreds of people go to “JE”. In the end of the party a drunk man said: I did so many blow jobs that I can suck anything (FD\_GLBT\_24)”.

“The bouncer said: on the second floor is the dark- room (literally a dark-room) where patrons make their sex and we can not enter . I asked the manager if the nightclub offers condom, he answered: “Yes, we have a partnership with the city hall of São Paulo which gives us condoms, but they are very rarely found in the garbage and our stock is always full”....During the night some patrons enter the dark room alone, in couples or with more people (FD\_GLBT 07)”.

