

February 27, 2014

DANCE PARTIES IN CITY-OWNED VENUES

Background

- In the late 1990s, the electronic dance music scene became popular, and the 'rave' scene was growing. Although legal raves were more frequent, dance parties were still held on an "underground" basis with locations announced only hours beforehand to deter surveillance.
- Problem conditions at underground raves included a lack of drinking water, toilets and running water, and poorly ventilated spaces with high heat/humidity¹.
- In response to these issues, the Toronto Dance Safety Committee was formed, comprised of City agencies, health service providers, and people attending raves.
- This committee developed the Protocol for the Operation of Safe Dance Events/Raving², which was adopted by City Council on December 15, 1999. This protocol included a provision for the City of Toronto to lease property to event promoters for large dance parties.

Allen Ho's Death and Inquest

- The above City protocol was suspended for a few months in May 2000³ following a wave of media focus⁴ on 'raves' after the death of Allen Ho (age 21) at an underground rave held in a parking garage.
- Allen Ho was found unresponsive on the dance floor of the garage. He died later in hospital with an extremely high body temperature and seizures, and he had taken 'ecstasy'/MDMA.
- A May 2000 inquest into Mr. Ho's death looked at "the promotion, organization and operation of these all night dance parties, public health issues and relevant existing legislation"⁵.
- Recommendations from the inquest jury included:⁶
 - City of Toronto to permit raves on its properties;
 - Rave tickets/flyers should include locations;
 - Drinking water be widely available at all dance events; and,
 - Harm reduction strategies should be promoted and funded so people attending dance parties are made aware of safety strategies regarding dance parties and substance use.
- Following these recommendations, media focus shifted, exploring issues of safety and risk⁷.
- On May 3, 2000, MPP Sandra Pupatello put forward a private member's bill, the *Raves Act* (2000) in an attempt to regulate raves⁸. The bill passed Second Reading before being referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Social Policy; however, it was never enacted.
- In August 2000, City Council adopted the "Establishment of Late Night Entertainment Event Protocol (including Raves) and Co-ordinated Response to Inquest Recommendations into the Death of Allen Ho"⁹, which specifically authorized Exhibition Place to hold dance parties, and referred back to the original Protocol adopted in December 1999.

Deaths related to 'club drugs'

- In addition to alcohol, people use a wide variety of drugs in bars and clubs (either before they go or at the club) including, cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy/MDMA/MDA, ketamine, GHB, methamphetamine, and diverse other synthetics or "research chemicals".
- There is no local data about the prevalence of overdose (fatal or non-fatal) caused by substance use in specific locations such as bars, clubs or other entertainment venues.
- However, the majority of problems (e.g., violence, sexual assault, impaired driving) related to substance use in public places are caused by alcohol.
- In Toronto, deaths caused directly by 'club drugs' are infrequent compared with deaths caused by other drugs.
- Preliminary data from the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario¹⁰ shows that between 2002 and 2010, there were 892 accidental Toronto deaths in which substance use was a direct cause. Among these deaths, opiates/opioids were a direct cause in 536 deaths, cocaine was a direct cause in 319 deaths and alcohol was a direct cause in 205 Toronto deaths (not including deaths caused by alcohol-related violence or traffic accidents).
- MDMA/MDA was noted as lethal in 17 of these deaths although in over half (9), other drugs were also noted as lethal, including alcohol, cocaine, opiates and others. MDMA/MDA was the sole lethal drug in eight Toronto deaths of the 892 during this period. Of these combined 17 deaths, 10 were people aged 40 and over.

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References:

¹ Weir, Erica (2000). Raves: a review of the culture, the drugs and the prevention of harm. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 162 (13) 1843-1848.

² Minute of the Council of the City of Toronto, Dec, 14-16, 1999, Item 14.76 (Attachment #6).

³ Minutes of the Council of the City of Toronto, May 9-11, 2000, Item 7.76

⁴ Hier, Sean P (2002). Raves, risks and the ecstasy panic: a case study in the subversive nature of moral regulation. *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 27(1), 33-57.

⁵ Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario (2001). Report on the inquest into the death of Allen Ho. Toronto, October 2001.

⁶ Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario (2001).

⁷ Hier, Sean P (2002).

⁸ Bill 73: Raves Act: An act to promote peace and safety by regulating late-night dance events.

http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=583&IsCurrent=false&detailPage=bills_detail_the_bill

⁹ Minutes of the Council of the City of Toronto, August 1-4, 2000, Item 10.53: Clause 1 of Report 7 of the Community Services Committee, "Establishment of Late Night Entertainment Event Protocol (including Raves) and Coordinated Response to Inquest Recommendations into the Death of Allen Ho".

¹⁰ Preliminary unpublished data, Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario, retrieved by Toronto Public Health.