

Protecting Yourself From Drug Facilitated Rape / Sexual Assault

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Before talking about this in more detail, I wanted to share this experience with you. A while ago, I went away for a long weekend to a capital European city with a friend. On our last night there, we went out to a local bar to get a snack and have a couple of drinks. We got chatting to some "nice"guys who seemed "normal", funny, conversational, good looking and....harmless. When they offered to buy us a drink of course we accepted.

A short while after this, we left the bar as I was feeling a bit nauseous (I was blaming it on the chicken I'd eaten for dinner!), and we wanted an early night anyway because we had to get up at 5am to get to the airport! We got back to the hotel and I went straight to bed. A short while later, I woke needing to vomit. My friend got up to get me something to vomit in – and as she stood up, she collapsed on the floor and was rendered completely unconscious. When I stood up to try to help her, I became incredibly confused, and remember having pins and needles all over my body, and actually believed the lights in the room were trying to attack me. I was panicing, and felt totally unable to get a grip on the situation, feeling dizzy, confused, and hallucinating some very unpleasant images. I actually thought I was dying.

I lost all awareness of who I was, and all inhibitions just left me. I left the room and managed to get outside where I was wandering around naked – before some kind Samaritan bought me back into reception – where I promptly collapsed. For the next 24 hours I was in hospital, and I have very little memory of what happened during that time. Toxicology tests confirmed that I had ingested Rohypnol and Ketamine.

As scary an experience as this was, I was one of the lucky ones. When I think of how close I probably came in this instance to being sexually assaulted.....well, it doesn't bear thinking about. But I know it was only luck that saved me that night.

Unfortunately, it is a known fact that many rapists administer drugs without consent to a potential victim in order to render this person in a state which facilitates the opportunity and ease of an assault. Similarly, some rapists target people who appear to be intoxicated by drugs to the extent that they could overpower them and lessen the risk to themselves of being reported. These crimes are called "drug-facilitated sexual assaults.(DFSA)" It is a criminal offense to administer drugs to another person without their knowledge and consent. It is also a criminal offense to have sex with someone who is intoxicated to the extent that they are unable to give informed consent. Therefore any one who administers drugs to someone else without their knowledge, or who taken advantage of the effects of intoxication, has committed a crime.

What drugs are used in DFSA

ALCOHOL:

The most common drug by far is alcohol. It's legality makes it one of the safest drugs for a perp to use. Sometimes people will spike someone's drink unknowingly - and sometimes they will simply take advantage of the fact that someone has been drinking. A common ploy is to buy someone a drink, and get them a double or a triple measure to speed up the process. Try to be aware of how much you are drinking, and if you feel more drunk than you believe you should be, then this is a warning sign. Alcohol also increases the effects of many other drugs, so never mix drugs and alcohol.

As most of us know who can remember silly things we have done when drunk, alcohol reduces our inhibitions and affects our ability to make good decisions. It also lessens our ability to respond in an unfamiliar situation.

ROHYPNOL (a.k.a. Roofies, flunitrazepam):

Rohypnol has been responsible for many DFSA. It can be mixed into drinks as its taste and colour is virtually undetectable - particularly in dark coloured drinks.

It is a strong sedative which starts working about 30 minutes after ingestion. It can make you drowsy, confused and disorientated. It also impairs your physical skills, makes you less inhibited, and impairs your judgement. To others, you may appear drunk, being unsteady and slurring your words. One of the most disturbing elements of this drug is that it can cause complete or partial "anterograde" amnesia, meaning that your memory of events that occurred immediately after ingestion can be damaged.

GHB (Gamma-hydroxybutyrate, Liquid E / Liquid Ecstasy, Scoop, Cherry Meth):

This comes in powder form and also a clear liquid and so can also be mixed into drinks and is virtually tasteless, although slightly salty. Its effects can begin as quickly as 15 minutes after ingestion and can last for several hours.

It is one of the drugs of choice in DFSA because it causes disinhibitions, especially with social contact, it has an aphrodisiac effect, induces sleep and unconsciousness, and affects your memory.

Ketamine (ketamine hydrochloride, Special K, Vitamin K, Kit Kat, Ket, Cat Valium):

A veterinary tranquilizer which again can be added to drinks. In people, the drug can increase vulnerability as it can lead to feelings of invulnerability, numbness, and heightened sexuality, as well as leading to unconsciousness.

Ecstasy (MDMA, X, E, XTC, hug drug) :

E is usually in powder form, and again can be added to drinks. It increases sociability and impulsive behavior - rendering us susceptible to sexual assault. The effects of E are lessened if mixed with alcohol, so it is likely to be used by rapists where alcohol is not being used. Pacifiers and lolly's, often used by people who chose to take E, can also be laced with E by would-be rapists.

What can you do to help protect yourself from a DFSA

Firstly, it is vital to point out that no one who is targeted for a DFSA is responsible for what may or may not happen to them. Although there are some precautions you can take to lessen the risks of becoming a victim of a DFSA, failure to follow these precautions does not mean that there is any blame to be attached to yourself. Nor does it mean that following these suggestions will guarantee your safety - its simply a matter of some things you can do to lessen risk.

Protect your drinks:

Don't drink any drink that you didn't open yourself or watched being poured at the bar.
Don't share your drink.
Don't drink from a communal container or punch.
Never leave your drink unattended. Discard any drinks left unattended.
Discard anything that tastes or looks unusual.
Don't accept a drink from anyone you don't trust.

Protecting yourself:

Don't mix drugs and alcohol.
If anything tastes or looks unusual, don't drink it.
Be aware of the amount of alcohol you're drinking, and how much that may affect your decisions and ability to protect yourself.
Know the main signs that you may have been drugged: feeling sleepy, sick, out of control, dizzy, loss of consciousness, confusion.
Stay with the group, and don't go off with anyone who you don't know and trust.
Plan your night out including the journey there and back.

Use the buddy system:

Go out with a group of friends.
Check up on each other and watch out for each other.
Make sure that someone knows where you are and what time you are expected home.

So, what are the early general signs that I may have been drugged without my knowledge?

Feeling more intoxicated than you feel you should.
Drowsiness, confusion and dizziness.
Blurred vision, slurred speech and uncoordination.
Aggression / excitability / increased sociability

What should I do if I am out in a social situation and feel I may have been drugged?

Being drugged can not only lead to rape / sexual assault, but it can also have very serious health implications, including death if untreated. It is therefore vital that you get help if you are in any doubt at all - and similarly to look out for friends who may be in this state and not recognise the signs.

Get to a safe place - preferably somewhere where there are groups of other people. Ask a trusted friend to stay with you.

Get emergency help - police and ambulance.

Get to hospital. Inform the hospital that you believe you may have been drugged. Many drugs are metabolized very quickly by the body, and therefore treatment needs to be started quickly and toxicology testing needs done as soon as possible.

If you are the victim of a DFSA:

How can you tell?

It is not always easy to tell whether you have been the victim of a DFSA because of the confusion and amnesic effects associated with many of the drugs of choice. However, many victims describe feeling as if they have been assaulted even though they can't remember it. Trust in your instincts as they are usually right.

- Unexplained soreness / bruising.
- Waking up in a strange place, being naked, used condoms around, traces of semen / vaginal fluid.
- Feeling as if you had had sex but being unable to remember it.
- Waking up feeling fuzzy headed or hung over, with associated memory loss.
- Friends telling you that you were acting strange, out of character etc.

What to do if you think you have been assaulted?

Get yourself to a safe place. Get medical attention.

Call a rape crisis center for support and information.

Consider reporting the assault to the police. If you chose to do this then you will need to inform the doctor that you wish to submit to a rape exam. Do not shower, douche, brush your teeth, eat or drink prior to the exam. Keep the clothes you were wearing, and do not

attempt to clean or disturb anything in the area where the assault occurred. Even if you do not want to press charges at this time, it is important to preserve the evidence so you have options later.

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