

## **DATE RAPE – BEWARE!**

"Date rape" is an assault or attempted assault usually committed by a new acquaintance involving sexual intercourse without mutual consent (Curtis, 1997). The term "date rape" is widely used but can be misleading because the person who commits the crime might not be dating the victim. Rather, it could be an acquaintance or stranger.

Canadian statistics have shown that in Canada one woman is sexually assaulted every minute. This outrageously high statistic doesn't include battering, or sexual harassment, or the women who never say anything out of fear, shame or fear of disbelief. This is worrying because survivors of sexual assault are people's mothers, sisters, family members, co-workers and friends. No means No, and it should stay that way.

Rape is often referred to as a women's issue but men have a responsibility for men's violence and need to encourage each other to respect the right of women to decide if, how, when, and with whom they have sex. In rape, sex is not the end, it is the means. To this end, sex is used as a tool to demean and degrade women. Rape is about power - not sex.

### **Background facts and statistics**

- Date rape and the use of rape drugs constitute a criminal act in Canada.
- Women are most at risk when they are with a man that they know.
- The most common form of violence on campus is rape.

College and university students have every reason to be concerned about date rape. A national survey (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1993) on the victimisation of women found that:

- 20.2% of female students said they gave into unwanted sexual intercourse because they were overwhelmed by a man's continued arguments and pressure;
- 6.6% of female students said that they had unwanted sexual intercourse because a man threatened or used some degree of physical force; and
- 13.6% of female students said that, when they were drunk or high, a man attempted unwanted sexual intercourse.

### **What is Rohypnol?**

Rohypnol (flunitrazepam), more casually known as the "date rape" drug, is well known. Though the drug has medicinal purposes, its powerful effects have scarcely been used to incapacitate women during sexual assault -- namely, rape. Rohypnol is produced and can be sold legally with a prescription used as a short-term treatment for insomnia (inability to sleep), a sedative hypnotic and a pre-anaesthetic.

### **What happens when someone takes Rohypnol?**

Rohypnol has physiological effects similar to Valium (diazepam), but is approximately ten times more potent (Cornforth, 2009). Rohypnol can be dissolved in a drink and is undetectable

(the drug has no taste or odour), so those given it don't realize what is happening. About 10 minutes after ingesting the drug, the victim may feel dizzy, disoriented, and/or nauseated. Intoxication is associated with impaired judgment and motor skills. One may experience difficulty speaking and moving, and then pass out. Effects peak within 2 hours, and can persist for up to 8 hours. **Victims have no memories of what happened while under the drug's influence** i.e., they may be unable to clearly recall the assault, the assailant, or the events surrounding the assault.

The combination of alcohol and Rohypnol is particularly hazardous; together, their effects on memory and judgment are much greater. People who become intoxicated on a combination of alcohol and Rohypnol have "blackouts" lasting 8 to 24 hours following ingestion.

### **Why else should one worry?**

It is difficult to detect if a Rohypnol-facilitated rape has occurred. Very often, biological samples are taken from the victim at a time when the effects of the drug have already passed and only residual amounts remain in the body fluids. These residual amounts are difficult, and sometimes impossible, to detect using standard screening. If Rohypnol exposure is to be detected at all, urine samples need to be collected within 72 hours and subjected to sensitive analytical tests. The problem is compounded by the onset of amnesia after ingestion of the drug, which causes the victim to be uncertain about the facts surrounding the rape. This uncertainty may lead to critical delays or even reluctance to report the rape and provide appropriate biological samples for testing. Recently however, it has been discovered that scientists can now detect Rohypnol and related compounds in urine at least up to 5 days after administration of a single dose of Rohypnol and up to a month in hair.

### **Who uses Rohypnol and how?**

It is largely used by adults, although teen use of Rohypnol is increasing. It's commonly used as an alcohol extender -- an attempt to create a dramatic "high," most often in combination with beer -- or as a drug to incapacitate a victim before a sexual assault.

### **Protecting yourself from the "Date Rape" drug**

To protect yourself from becoming a victim, be aware and stay alert:

- Be wary about accepting drinks from anyone you don't know well or long enough to trust.
- If you are accepting a drink, make sure it's from an unopened container and open it yourself!
- Don't put your drink down and leave it unattended, even to go to the washroom.
- Notify other females you know about the effects of this dangerous drug.

If you think that you have been a victim, notify the authorities immediately and get laboratory testing for Rohypnol as soon as possible.

## References

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Author: Meck Chongo, MD.