

DRUG FACILITATED SEXUAL ASSAULT

Information for

FIRST RESPONDERS

What it is and how we can help

Sexual
Assault and
Domestic
Violence
Treatment
Centres

Ontario
Network
of Sexual Assault/
Domestic Violence
Treatment Centres

Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault

Alcohol and/or drugs often play a role in sexual assault. The drug(s) may be ingested knowingly or unknowingly. Frequently, the victim has trouble remembering what happened. It is our role to help her/him deal with this difficult situation.

Scenarios

Possible scenarios of a drug facilitated sexual assault include:

- An assailant may ply an intended victim with alcohol and/or spike her/his drink with drugs or excessive amounts of alcohol
- or
- The victim may have knowingly consumed enough alcohol alone or in combination with over-the-counter medications (e.g. cough syrup), prescription medications (e.g. anti-depressants) and/or street drugs (e.g. marijuana, cocaine) to have contributed to her/his own incapacitation and vulnerability.

Although alcohol and/or drugs may be a factor in sexual assault, the victim is never to blame for being sexually assaulted.

The emotional impact of drug facilitated sexual assault for victims can be significant and may include feelings of powerlessness, shame, anger, self-blame, confusion, disbelief and betrayal.

For those who cannot remember what has happened, there may be uncertainty of whether or not an assault occurred. Not knowing what was done to them and by whom can also be very distressing to the victim.

What to look for

Victims of drug facilitated sexual assault may report or exhibit any of the following symptoms related to being drugged:

- Total or partial amnesia
- Conscious paralysis (immobilized but aware)
- Loss of consciousness, blacking out
- Hangover or symptoms inconsistent with amount of alcohol/drugs consumed
- Slurred speech, impaired vision and/or motor skills
- Dizziness, drowsiness, lightheadedness
- Confusion, delirium, hallucinations
- Nausea, vomiting
- Impaired judgment, reduced inhibition

Victims of drug facilitated sexual assault may report any of the following symptoms or circumstances related to being sexually assaulted:

- Vague sensation that something is wrong, something sexual has happened
- Awoke to find her/his clothing in disarray or unclothed
- Unexplained body fluids (e.g. semen) and/or foreign materials (e.g. used condom, dirt, grass) were found on the client's body or nearby
- Unexplained genital, anal, oral bleeding and/or other injuries, such as bruising
- Unexplained bodily injuries (e.g. scratches, bruising)
- Awoke to find uninvited person in bed and/or in a strange place
- Seen in compromised circumstances by witness

Delayed reporting of drug facilitated sexual assault

Drug facilitated sexual assault victims may delay seeking help at a hospital for a variety of reasons including:

Effects of the drugs/alcohol used

Lack of knowledge regarding services and options

Confusion about what has happened

Remember:

Delayed reporting = Delayed testing and treatment

Drugs used to commit sexual assault may be metabolized in the body very quickly and forensic evidence is lost through normal activities such as eating, drinking, urinating, and washing.

What can we do to help?

Accompany or encourage all suspected sexual assault victims to attend a Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centre (or to the nearest Emergency Department) as soon as possible for time-sensitive testing and medications.

If the victim needs to urinate, collect and label a sample, as testing for the presence of drugs and/or alcohol can be provided.

Preserve any forensic evidence:

Should the victim choose to have evidence collected, advise her/him to avoid eating, drinking, changing clothes, and/or washing, cleaning teeth, etc. The victim will be provided with a change of clothing and the opportunity to shower, eat, drink once testing and evidence collection has been done.

Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centres

There are 35 Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centres in Ontario with services to address the emergency as well as follow-up emotional, medical, and forensic needs of victims of drug facilitated sexual assault. Services are available 24/7.

Care provided can include: emotional support, physical and forensic examinations and time sensitive medications to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Counseling and follow-up testing for sexually transmitted infections, are also available.

For information on your local Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centre visit: www.sadvtreatmentcentres.net