

Beware! Rape drugs in bars by Larry Grand*

Although most bar staff are aware of drugs like marijuana, cocaine and hallucinogens like ecstasy or LSD, rape drugs, sometimes improperly known as date rape drugs, are less known. This article is intended to increase your knowledge and awareness of these drugs, provide ideas for keeping them out of your bar, and when necessary, how to help someone who has been drugged.

The two rape drugs of interest in this article are **Rohypnol** and **GHB**. In Canada, medical and police reports of sexual assault rarely involve Rohypnol. GHB is commonly confirmed as the drug used to facilitate sexual assault. That said and not intending to diminish the importance of understanding the role these drugs play in sexual crime, it is important to note that alcohol remains the most common substance a perpetrator relies on for the purpose of harming someone in this war.

Sexual assault

Simply stated this is how the drugs are used. A customer in the bar secretively slips a strong dose of the drug into the intended victim's drink. When the victim suddenly becomes very intoxicated and helpless, the perpetrator steps in to remove the victim from the bar. Taken to another location, away from the view of others, the victim is sexually assaulted.

Rohypnol is the first known rape-assisted drug. Until recently, Rohypnol, a legal, minor tranquilizer in other countries but not Canada, dissolved quickly in liquid, making it easy to slip into drinks without arousing suspicion. Since 1997, the tablets have been manufactured to dissolve more slowly in liquid, turn clear beverages bright blue and turn darker beverages murky, these changes make it easier to detect the presence of the drug in a drink. Even when Rohypnol is taken without alcohol or other drugs, users can appear "drunk". The effects include loss of inhibitions and judgment, slurred speech, weakness and staggering, dizziness,

confusion and severe drowsiness. Users may also experience visual disturbances (hallucinations) and amnesia (loss of memory of events during the intoxication and beyond from eight to 24 hours).

GHB in its liquid form is odorless, colorless and tasteless. It is usually sold as a liquid in small vials and is also available as a white powder or capsule. The effects intensify with the amount used. In low doses, the user may feel more sociable, less inhibited and lightheaded. At higher doses, the user feels drowsy and dizzy, then nausea and vomiting can occur. An even higher dose can make the user fall into a deep coma-like sleep that is the state the perpetrator is trying to achieve. An overdose can lead to difficulty breathing and even convulsions and death. The effects can be felt within 10 to 20 minutes of taking the drug and last up to four hours.

It is important to distinguish between GHB use that is voluntary and recreational and GBH that is given to another person without their knowledge and consent. In the latter situation, the drug is intended to incapacitate the victim and enable the perpetrator to dominate and sexually violate the person to whom it is administered.

Defense is prevention

Bar staff are in a perfect position to help protect valued customers from such a crime. The first line of defense is prevention. Here is a list of things that can be done: Be on the look out for a customer or a group of customers, almost always males, who are unknown to you, coming into the bar. Are they moving or looking around a fair bit? Do they seem to be there to 'case the joint' instead of enjoying the venue? Are they approaching other customers, almost always females, offering to get them a drink directly from the bar? Are they buying a drink and then

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bringing this drink to another customer without the customer's consent or knowledge? If you have suspicions about such a customer or groups of customers, politely speak to that customer, express your concerns cautiously and continue to keep an eye on them. Often this brief encounter will motivate the potential perpetrator to give up or leave. When doing this, it is important not to interfere with a person's civil rights to be in the bar. Educate your female customers about these drugs and what they are used for. There are easy convenient ways to do this. For example, the Student Life Education Co. in Toronto has a very good poster directed to women. This poster could be put up in the women's washroom. Table tents with information are another form of education, as are brochures. Such brochures are available from the Center for Addiction and Mental Health, 1-800-463-6273 or 416-595-6111 or the Student Life Education Company 1-416-243-1338 or 1-416-243-2339 (fax).

Intervention

Sometimes prevention is not enough to stop someone from putting these drugs into a customer's drink. So, while at work, if you observe a customer in your bar experiencing any of the following symptoms, it is very important to intervene to protect that person from any potential harm. These symptoms include:

- The customer suddenly appears very intoxicated despite the number of drinks served.
- The customer is also dizzy, disoriented and confused; is experiencing weakness and staggering; feels simultaneously too hot and too cold and nauseous; is having difficulty speaking and may even pass out.

If you observe any of these symptoms, (whetherr they are drug related or not) here is a list of actions to take:

- Speak with the manager on duty.
- Call 911.

- Be aware of unaccounted males (one or more) who suddenly appear on the scene to "rescue" or accompany the intoxicated customer (usually a female) from the bar.
- Further to the above, do not let a male take the female customer from the bar unless you know the person escorting the customer and you are completely confident that they will act in the customer's best interest (examples include a husband/partner you know to be with that person or a close friend you know to be a close friend of the customer).
- If you cannot vouch for the escorting person, with the manager's and other staff assistance, have a staff person stay with the customer at all times.
- Never give another drug to the customer to counteract the effects of other drugs.
- Never put water in the mouth of an unconscious person.
- Examine the area where the customer in question had been. Collect any container, usually a small vial that might have held the alleged drug and if possible, the customer's last drink. Pass these items to the police as soon as possible.

Game plan

The use of rape drugs is an ever-increasing threat to bar customers. With a balanced game plan and attention to the possibility that rape drugs could be used in your bar, your customers' safety will be enhanced.

*Larry Grand is the
Project Consultant
Center for Addiction and Mental Health
1005 Grist Mill Rd.,
Eganville ON, K0J 1T0
613-628-9264
613-628-9263 (fax)
larrygrand@primus.ca