

CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS



The acceptability of alcohol as a facilitator of sexual interaction results in a tolerance for unwanted sexual activity when alcohol is consumed.

FACTSHEET

6 Alcohol as a 'Date-Rape' Drug



Sex with a person who is incapacitated or so impaired as to be unable to offer consent is rape. While the use of drugs such as Rohypnol or GHB to incapacitate or impair a person in order to facilitate sexual interaction has been widely recognised as an illegal activity, the use of alcohol for the same reason has received much less attention.¹ However, 'any substance that is administered to lower sexual inhibition and enhance the possibility of unwanted sexual intercourse is potentially a date rape drug'.²

In Ireland, there has been no evidence to suggest that drugs such as Rohypnol and GHB are used with regularity in incidents of sexual assault³. Rape and Justice in Ireland did not identify conclusive evidence of the use of such substances in medical records of complainants of rape between 2000 and 2005.⁴ Alcohol, however, was found to be present in the majority of rape complaints in Ireland.⁵

The physiological effects of alcohol, including memory loss, loss of consciousness and motor impairment, in addition to the ease of administration and the ready availability of alcohol, has ensured that alcohol is the most common 'date-rape drug'.⁶

How is alcohol used to facilitate a sexual assault or rape?

- **Targeting of intoxicated people:** A perpetrator may target a person who is impaired or intoxicated due to the voluntary consumption of alcohol. This may be a 'crime of opportunity', whereby the perpetrator comes across an intoxicated person randomly, or it may be planned, whereby the perpetrator intentionally seeks out such a person in order to commit rape.

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- **Surreptitiously strengthening drinks:** A perpetrator may strengthen the drink of someone who is voluntarily drinking, for instance by ordering double shots without their knowledge, with the intention of incapacitating them or reducing their ability to resist a sexual attack.
- **Forcing or coercing a person to consume alcohol:** A perpetrator may force or pressurise a person to consume alcohol, or to consume more alcohol than they intended, in order to incapacitate them.

Who is most likely to use alcohol to facilitate a rape?

Perpetrators of alcohol facilitated rape are likely to be known to and out socialising with the victim. Rape and Justice in Ireland evidence indicates that of the incapacitated rapes reported to Gardaí, 74% of those accused were non-sexual acquaintances, while a further 12% were strangers.⁷

How common is alcohol-facilitated rape?

It is difficult to attach a percentage to this form of rape. While the vast majority of rapes reported in Ireland involve the use of alcohol,⁸ not all these rapes could be classified as alcohol-facilitated. However, 10% of reported rapes in the RAJI study involved victims who were fully incapacitated due to alcohol.⁹ Thus the figure lies somewhere between 10% and almost 80%. Anecdotal evidence would suggest it is likely towards the higher end of this scale.

Why is there so little recognition of alcohol as a date-rape drug?

- Alcohol is largely 'protected' from recognition as a date-rape drug due to the acceptability of alcohol consumption and intoxication in Ireland.
- The social acceptability of alcohol as a facilitator of sexual interaction results in a tolerance for the use of alcohol to facilitate unwanted sexual activity

The impact of alcohol-facilitated sexual violence:

- Victims are also more likely to self-blame and experience a sense of stigma.¹⁰
- Victims of this form of sexual violence are less likely to report their rape¹¹ and less likely to seek mental health services following the rape.¹²
- Jurors tend to assign less blame to perpetrators who used alcohol to facilitate a rape than those who used better recognised 'date-rape' drugs such as Rohypnol or GHB.¹³

In order to reduce the prevalence of rape in Ireland, the role of alcohol in facilitating rape and sexual assault must be acknowledged. Furthermore, victim-blaming and rape- attitudes must be challenged and ensure recognition that having sex with a person who is seriously impaired or incapacitated due to alcohol, whether voluntarily consumed or not, is rape.

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- ⁴ Hanly, C., Healy, D., and Scriver, S. 2009. Rape and Justice in Ireland: A National Study of Survivor, Prosecutor and Court Responses to Rape. Dublin: Liffey: 319
- ⁵ Hanly et.al. *ibid.*
- ⁶ Girard and Senn, *ibid.*
- ⁷ Hanly, C., Healy, D., and Scriver, S. 2009. Rape and Justice in Ireland: A National Study of Survivor, Prosecutor and Court Responses to Rape. Dublin: Liffey
- ⁸ Hanly et.al. *ibid.*: 137-138.
- ⁹ Hanly et.al. *ibid.*:229
- ¹⁰ Stormo, K., A. Lang and Q. Stritzke (1997) 'Attributions about Acquaintance Rape: The Role of Alcohol and Individual Differences', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 27(4): 279–305; Littleton et. al. *ibid.*: 452
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- ¹² Kilpatrick, D. G., Resnick, H. S., Ruggiero, K. J., Conoscenti, L. M., & McCauley, J. (2007). Drug-facilitated, incapacitated, and forcible rape: A national study. Charleston, SC: National Crime Victims Research & Treatment Center; Krebs, C. P., Lindquist, C. H., Warner, T. D., Fisher, B. S., & Martin, S. L. (2006). The Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) Study: Final report submitted to the National Institute of Justice. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.
- ¹³ Finch, E. and Munro, V. (2007) The demon drink and the demonized woman: socio-sexual stereotypes and responsibility attribution in rape trials involving intoxicants. *Social and Legal Studies* 14(4): 603-604.

About Rape Crisis Ireland:

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) is a specialist information and resource centre on rape and all forms of sexual violence with a proven capacity in strategic leadership. The RCNI role includes the development and coordination of national projects such as expert data collection, strategic services development, supporting Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) to reach best practice standards, using our expertise to influence national policy and social change, and supporting and facilitating multiagency partnerships. We are the representative, umbrella body for our member Rape Crisis Centres who provide free advice, counselling and support for survivors of sexual violence in Ireland.

The national coordination role delivered by RCNI across management, governance, data collection, data reporting, the design and delivery of a range of training courses and administration, facilitates frontline services to direct resources at meeting survivor needs, service delivery and local multi-agency partnerships.