



THE PERFECT DATE-RAPE DRUG

(YOU'LL PROBABLY
TAKE TONIGHT)

Date-rape drugs don't always come in the form of a sinister pill. Welcome to the rapist's favourite drug: alcohol

When you think of rape, you probably imagine some kind of event that takes the form of an awful, shocking, sudden attack," says Ophelia Kings-Hott, a 25-year-old student from London. "But in my case it crept up on me gradually, during an ordinary evening at the end of an unremarkable day.

Ophelia had been working all evening. "We often went out together after work to wind down," she recalls. "My boyfriend Mark* would join us but that night we had an argument and he ended up storming off. I remember shouting, 'Go on then, go. I don't care.' But of course >

I didn't mean it. Soon after, one of my colleagues, Dean*, noticed some of the others comforting me and he passed me a Jack Daniel's and Coke, saying it would make me feel better.

"We were all chatting in pockets along the tables when Dean started to pull me away from the others, and began asking me all sorts of questions about why Mark and I had been arguing. All the time, he kept getting me more drinks, telling me I'd feel better and that I should forget about Mark.

"I didn't mind at first, but after a while I began to feel tired. 'I think it's time I went home now,' I told Dean. But he insisted I was in no fit state to see Mark."

Ophelia remembers thinking she hadn't drunk enough to warrant feeling as bad as she did. It was then she realised that Dean must have been giving her doubles – and that he wasn't drinking at all because he had an early start the next day. "One of my friends noticed I was looking rough and suggested calling a cab," she recalls. "But Dean stepped in and said, 'I'm looking after Ophelia. I'll take her back to my flat to sleep it off. I tried to stand up and insist on going home, but the room was spinning and my legs just buckled."

Ophelia somehow made it back to Dean's flat. "I can't remember much about how we got there except I wasn't able to walk by myself and he was hauling me along," she says. "It must have taken some force because the next day I had bruises in the shape of handprints all over my ribs. He was much bigger than me and was physically dragging me down the street. If only someone had stopped us and asked if we were OK...



Ophelia now helps other rape victims

Crime stats indicate that only 10% of rapes and sexual attacks are reported, and rape involving alcohol has the lowest report rate of all

I'd have told them I wasn't and needed my mum."

Back at Dean's, Ophelia's memories are a patchwork of blanks. "I remember him slumping me down on his sofa. I tried to fall asleep but he kept getting angry, telling me to stay

awake. I remember him giving me an orange drink and saying it would make me feel better. I thought it was juice but it must have been more alcohol."

"The next thing I remember was being face down with him lying on top of me. I remember the sickening feeling of him inside me, thrusting. I panicked and shouted, 'Get off me!' but he didn't even pause. He just shouted at me to 'hold still!'

"He had me pinned down from behind and when I tried to move, he held my head down. I don't remember how long it lasted. When I woke up the next

morning, I was alone and naked. Then Dean came in and said, 'I've called you a taxi. Get your clothes on.'"

Ophelia left Dean's flat in a daze, then wandered around town before ending up at her boyfriend's house.

"As soon as he saw me, Mark realised that something had happened to me. I told him where I'd been and he just said, 'He had sex with you, didn't he?' I nodded and then he said, 'And you didn't want him to?'

"He knew straightaway.

"I didn't leave Mark's house for three days. I couldn't face telling my family what had happened but, when I finally did open up to my mum, she was wonderful. She arranged for a female police officer to come and I started the process of reporting the attack. But in the end, I didn't pursue it. When you have so many gaps in your memory, what chance do you have of being believed in court? It would have been my word against his. In some ways I'm glad I didn't put my family through the stress of fighting for a conviction, but at the same time I just hope that I didn't leave him free to do it again to someone else."

Targeted attacks

Although Ophelia is now moving forward with her life, she knows she'll never walk free from the damage inflicted that night.

"What Dean did to me changed me in a matter of seconds," she says. "He forced me to know what it feels like to be a victim of rape. That's something I'll have to live with forever."

But as well as bravely waiving her anonymity to tell *Cosmo* her story, Ophelia is also now a volunteer with the Amina Project, a service that helps women who have been raped or sexually abused, based at the Eaves Scarlet Centre in south London. Determined to draw something positive from the attack, she befriends >

CONSENT: A GREY AREA?

The way rape cases are often talked about suggests that if alcohol is involved, consent becomes a grey area – that it dilutes a victim's ability to call what she went through 'rape'. Wrong. When it comes to

consent, the situation is black and white. Being drunk – whether through your attacker's design or yours – is not a crime. Rape is. Sexually exploiting someone by getting them drunk, or having sex with someone who's incapable

of giving her consent, are wrong in the eyes of the law. But that doesn't mean we can't all help protect ourselves and our friends by watching the amount we drink.

This year, Baroness Stern published her

review of how rape cases are handled, and concluded that there is no ambiguity – sex without clear consent is rape – regardless of alcohol, clothing, behaviour or any of the other myths that are so often peddled

around rape cases. As we wait for the new coalition government to outline how they plan to take Baroness Stern's recommendations forward, don't forget that a woman *never* 'deserves' to be raped.

women who've been raped and offers them support as they rebuild their lives.

Her experience – of being plied with booze by a man seemingly intent on raping her – is one that police and rape charities are growing increasingly worried about. While date-rape drugs such as Rohypnol and GHB have grabbed the headlines, recent research shows that alcohol is by far the preferred substance of would-be rapists.

Dave Gee, former senior adviser to the government on rape, is aware of sinister situations where men purposely target women with a friendly approach and a few drinks. While the girl relaxes and opens up, the man continues to ply her with alcohol before sexually assaulting her.

In 2006, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) conducted a review of drug-assisted rape across England and Wales. The report, Operation Matisse, showed that in 120 reported incidents of assisted rape, all but one of the women had been drinking alcohol before the attack. In contrast, only two women tested positive for GHB and there was no evidence of Rohypnol being used at all. Limitations in forensic testing means that these results can't be taken to conclude that date-rape drugs are not in use, but Dave Gee, who co-authored the research, is in no doubt that alcohol is the rape drug of choice.

'There are predators out there looking for vulnerable women'

Vulnerable

Operation Matisse also discovered that only 38% of women who had experienced alcohol-assisted rape had known their attacker for longer than a day. Most attacks were carried out after meeting a man earlier that evening, usually in a bar or club. Half the rapes included in the report took place at the suspect or victim's home. Most of the others happened in the bars and clubs where they met, with two carried out by unlicensed taxi drivers in their cabs.

"There are predators out there," warns Dave Gee. "Predators waiting in bars looking for vulnerable women – who may have had a few drinks and have become

PROTECT YOURSELF

Dave Whatton, Chief Constable of Cheshire Constabulary and ACPO's national lead on rape, offers this stay-safe advice for the party season

- 1**
Stay together with your group at all times
- 2**
Know where you all are all the time
- 3**
Plan your journey home before you go out and make sure you only use reputable taxi companies
- 4**
Keep checking how you're feeling and make sure you stay aware of what's happening around you and can avoid situations in which you feel uncomfortable
- 5**
Don't accept a drink from someone you don't trust
- 6**
Don't share or exchange drinks
- 7**
Don't leave a drink unattended, even if you're just going to the toilet
- 8**
Don't go home alone

separated from their friends – with the sole attention of getting them drunk enough to rape them. Some of these men are raping girls in this way week after week."

Dr Miranda Horvarth is a senior lecturer in forensic psychology at the University of Middlesex. In her research,

she's pinpointed the characteristics of alcohol-assisted rape to show exactly why alcohol is a rapist's perfect accomplice:

- Just a small amount can impair a woman's ability to recognise signals in man's behaviour that would make her feel uncomfortable if she were sober.
- A little more impairs her ability to solve problems (eg, plan an escape).
- Eventually, the alcohol reduces her physical strength to fight back and, ultimately, leaves her unconscious and completely powerless

This is exactly the experience 33-year-old office worker Julie* lived through when she was raped during a holiday with friends in Spain in 2007. She explains:

"We'd made friends with lots of people who were staying at our hotel, including an older man who was always making us laugh. On the last night we ended up having some drinks with him." Julie remembers him bringing her a drink every time he went to the bar. Later that night, she woke in her hotel-room bed...

"The first thing I recall is waking up to find us naked, with him on top of me. I've no memory of how we got there and can't remember any struggle. I felt responsible. It took me a long time to realise that this man had purposely used alcohol to get me drunk and have sex with me. I didn't want to have sex – I was in no fit state to consent and I now understand that this was rape. But because I let him buy me drinks, I still feel I somehow allowed it to happen; I still feel I was in some way unfaithful to my partner – and I've never been able to talk to him or my friends about what happened."

Julie is not alone in her reaction. Rapes involving alcohol can be particularly problematic for women to understand and come to terms with. But as Miranda says, "What separates a misguided one-night stand from rape is the intention and motivation of the perpetrator, right from the outset, to have sex with a girl against her wishes." ♦

GET HELP

It's advisable to contact the police as soon as possible after a rape or sexual assault. Women across London can get help and support from the Amina Project at the Eaves Scarlet Centre. For more information visit www.eaves4women.co.uk. The Rape Crisis Centre national helpline is on 0808 802 9999 between 12-2.30 pm and 7-9.30pm every day of the year.

BY SARAH MILNE. PHOTOGRAPH URBAN LIP. *NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED