

June 2006

Official Position Statement on **SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGIES DRUG-FACILITATED SEXUAL ASSAULT**

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the crime of drug-facilitated sexual assault has gained recognition as a serious threat to public safety. Specifically, newer and dangerous drugs such as rohypnol, GHB and ketamine have gained notoriety for their use in drug-facilitated crimes. The incidence of these offenses is extraordinarily difficult to measure, and no clear conclusions about the prevalence of drug-facilitated sexual assaults can be drawn at this time.¹ Advances have been made in investigating and prosecuting these crimes although cases are still often difficult to pursue. Victims are often left devastated by violent experiences that they may or may not fully remember. All victims deserve justice and a full array of recovery services to aide them in healing.

POSITION

NJCASA supports awareness and education about drug-facilitated sexual assault, its prevalence and risk reduction strategies that address the root causes of sexual violence and include messages aimed at potential offenders, bystanders and the general public. While the aforementioned campaigns may have some usefulness, NJCASA does not recommend relying solely on them to prevent sexual assault.

RATIONALE

With the increased focus on the issue of drug-facilitated rape, it is not surprising that attention has turned to possible prevention strategies. Unfortunately, as with sexual violence in general, there are no easy fixes to a problem that is part of the fabric of our society. Although newer drugs are now used in drug-facilitated sexual assault and our awareness of these crimes has grown, our primary focus must remain on those prevention strategies that are most likely to have the greatest long-term impact on the overall problem of sexual violence.

For these reasons, it is important to address the limitations of prevention strategies targeted directly at potential victims of drug-facilitated sexual assault such as 'watch your drink' campaigns and testing devices.

These campaigns are aimed at potential victims in "drinking" situations such as bars and parties and involve maintaining control over ones drink at all times and/or utilizing devices such as test kits, coasters and swizzle sticks that test a beverage for the presence of certain drugs associated with drug-facilitated sexual assault. Such approaches give cause for concern as predominant sexual violence prevention strategies because they:

1. Can create a false sense of security by focusing solely on one type of sexual violence, therefore ignoring other potential risks;
2. Diverts the community's attention away from alcohol, the drug most commonly used to facilitate sexual assault²;
3. Distracts from broad anti-sexual violence messages that target youth, potential offenders, bystanders and the general public and
4. Inadvertently place the responsibility on the potential victim, rather than focusing on those individuals who prey and commit such acts

¹ Fitzgerald, N. and Riley, J.K., April 2000, "Drug Facilitated Rape: Looking for the Missing Pieces" National Institute of Justice Journal.

² LeBeau, M., et al. "Recommendations for Toxicological Investigations of Drug Facilitated Sexual Assaults," Journal of Forensic Sciences, 1999, 44-227-230.