

FCASV Position Statement:
Sexual Violence Prevention Strategies
Aimed at Potential Victims of Drug Facilitated Sexual Battery:
“Watch your Drink” Messages and Drink Testing Devices

Background:

In recent years, the crime of drug-facilitated sexual battery 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 batteries can be drawn at this time.¹ Advances have been made in investigating and prosecuting these crimes although cases can still often be difficult to pursue. Victims are left devastated by violent experiences that they cannot fully remember making recovery more complex. These victims deserve justice and a full array of recovery services to aide them in healing.

Discussion:

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 battery 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 two prevention strategies targeted directly at potential victims of drug-facilitated sexual battery that have gained prominence in Florida:

1. Messages aimed at potential victims in “drinking” situations such as bars and parties such as the “Watch Your Drink” cocktail napkin campaign that encourages keeping control of ones drink at all times and
2. Devices such as test kits, coasters and swizzle sticks that can be used to test a beverage for the presence of certain drugs associated with drug-facilitated sexual battery.

FCASV sees some limited usefulness in the first approach. The “Watch Your Drink” napkin campaign may well be broadly helpful in building overall awareness of the problem of sexual violence and the ubiquitous nature of it. The tag line is “catchy” and bars and other public venues may be more amenable to

participating in such a campaign than a general sexual violence prevention campaign that more deeply challenges dominant cultural beliefs. It is a message that is palatable to a large audience. Additionally, because the napkin campaign includes the toll-free statewide rape crisis hotline, the general public may likely become more aware of the availability of support for victims and general information about sexual violence.

However, both approaches give cause for concern as predominant sexual violence prevention strategies because they:

1. Target only the potential victims of one type of sexual violence;
2. Point the community's attention away from alcohol, the drug most commonly used to facilitate sexual battery²;
3. Divert funding away from broad anti-sexual violence messages that target youth, potential offenders, bystanders and the general public; and
4. Obscure other potential risk and create a false sense of safety.

In addition, the testing devices seem to point the attention of potential victims toward strangers as perpetrators when research demonstrates that women are actually at greater risk from someone they know. Finally, a cornerstone of risk reduction is encouraging women to trust their instincts—a device cannot substitute for this principle and may provide a false sense of security when, in fact, there is cause for concern.

Position:

FCASV supports prevention strategies that address the root causes of sexual violence and include messages aimed at potential offenders, bystanders and the general public. While messages such as the “Watch Your Drink” campaign may have some usefulness, FCASV recommends that, whenever possible, funding for prevention address broader concerns. FCASV does not endorse products such as coasters, test kits and swizzle sticks used to test drinks for the presence of certain drugs.

1. Fitzgerald, N. and Riley, J.K., April 2000, “Drug Facilitated Rape: Looking for the Pissing 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.