

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE MISUSE OF DRUGS (ACMD)

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Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault

Drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA), including rapes in which drugs are mixed with alcohol, is a significant problem, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) said today.

In a new report, “Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault”, the Council makes several recommendations to help tackle date rape. These include:

- the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) should enhance evidence gathering so that the Forensic Science Service can test for date rape drugs;
- the Department of Health should ensure hospitals have early evidence kits to allow for similar tests;
- the Government should seek advice on whether the Sexual Offences Act should be strengthened;
- drug facilitated sexual assault should be part of the British Crime Survey and be recorded by police; and
- schools and other educational establishments should alert people to take common sense measures, such as minding drinks, to avoid being a victim.

Two drugs - gamma-butyrolactone and 1,4-butanediol - are reportedly used in date rape but are not currently illegal. The Council will report on the potential for classification of these in the near future. However, most drugs used in DFSA, including flunitrazepam, also known as Rohypnol, gamma-hydroxy butyrate (GHB), ketamine and cocaine are already controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 at an appropriate level and the Council makes no recommendations to reclassify any of them.

The report also highlights the very significant role played by alcohol, either alone or in combination with other substances, in date rape. It also provides an assessment of two reports : “Operation Matisse: investigating drug facilitated sexual assault”, published by ACPO; and “Toxicological findings in cases of alleged drug facilitated sexual assault in the United Kingdom over a three year period”, published by the Forensic Science Service.

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins, Chair of the ACMD, said:

“Drug facilitated sexual assault is a particularly disgusting offence that wrecks people’s lives. It is a significant but under-reported problem.

“We need more information to help tackle drug facilitated sexual assault and find out the true extent of the problem. That is why drug facilitated sexual assault should be part of the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime statistics.

“Most drugs used in drug facilitated sexual assault are already controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act, but we are concerned that two drugs are not currently controlled and will further consider whether they should be classified. We will advise the Home Office by the end of the year.”

To avoid being a date rape victim the ACMD is encouraging people to:

- avoid going to a club, pub or party alone;
- not accept a drink from strangers;
- not share or exchange drinks;
- not leave your drink unattended even when going to the toilet; and
- be a friend by watching out for others, and be aware of any changes in their behaviour.

The Council will continue to keep drug facilitated sexual assault under review.

Notes to editors

1. The report ‘Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault’ is available at www.drugs.gov.uk from 10am today (Monday 2 April). For media enquiries on the ACMD and the report please call 020 7035 3835.

2. The ACMD is established under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to keep under review the drug situation in the United Kingdom and to advise Government Ministers on measures that they feel should be taken for preventing the misuse of drugs or for dealing with the social problems connected with their misuse. They publish highly influential reports.

3. The report was prepared following a detailed consideration of evidence by a specially formed panel consisting of members of the Council and other relevant bodies. The sub-group was chaired by Professor Sir Michael Rawlins, Chair of the ACMD, and Chairman of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). The Home Office asked the ACMD to look into drug facilitated sexual assault in January 2006.

4. Professor Sir Michael Rawlins has limited time for interviews. Please call 020 7035 3835 with interview requests.