

What is a Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault?

Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault (DFSA) involves the administration of an anesthesia-type drug to render a victim physically incapacitated or helpless and thus incapable of giving or withholding consent. Consent cannot be given if a person is drunk, unconscious, asleep, frightened, or otherwise unable to indicate a willingness to participate, regardless of a prior relationship. Some people choose to experiment recreationally with these drugs. However, consenting to taking drugs does not mean that you have consented to sex. Even though we all have responsibility for our behavior, we are not responsible for a crime that someone else commits. Victims may be unconscious during all or parts of the sexual assault and, upon regaining consciousness, may be unable to recall events that occurred while under the influence of the drug, they may become physically ill and not know why, and they may make decisions to go places with people that they normally don't make. Victims often have no memory of an assault, only an awareness or sense that they were violated.

How common are Drug Facilitated Sexual Assaults?

It is difficult to estimate the number of DFSA's that occur each year; however, national law enforcement reporting indicates that the number of these assaults appears to be increasing. Many DFSA's are not reported. Victims are often reluctant to report incidents because of a sense of embarrassment, guilt, or perceived responsibility, or because they lack specific recall of the assault. Moreover, most of the drugs used during sexual assaults are rapidly absorbed by the body making it difficult for these drugs to be detected in routine urine and blood drug screenings.

Is DFSA illegal? YES.

Most of the drugs typically used to facilitate sexual assaults are designated as controlled substances under the Controlled Substances Act of 1970. The Drug-Induced Rape Prevention and Punishment Act of 1996 provided penalties of up to 20 years imprisonment and fines for persons who intend to commit a crime of violence (including rape) by distributing a controlled substance to another individual without that individual's knowledge.

Common Responses to DFSA

Guilt, confusion, depression, fear, anxiety, irritability, anger, denial, and helplessness, are common reactions to sexual violence.

Victims of DFSA often have additional concerns that make the trauma harder to deal with, such as:

- Partial or complete memory loss
- Memories of being helpless to stop the assault
- Self-blame or self-doubt stemming from fear that their choices allowed someone to hurt them

Physical Effects of Drugs

Tiredness, difficult walking or moving normally, dizziness, muscle relaxation, slurred speech, poor memory, poor judgment or decision-making, loss of inhibitions, loss of consciousness, visual disturbances, nausea, nervousness or aggressive behavior in some people.

Trust Yourself

It is hard to know what to do about something when you can't fully remember what happened. Victims often find themselves preoccupied with thoughts about the assault or with trying to recover pieces of memories that they don't have. Trust what your instincts are telling you, and seek help.

Many people experience feelings of loss after a sexual assault: loss of your safety, loss of your body integrity, loss of dignity, and threatened loss of your life. Talking to someone you trust about these feelings is often helpful in healing from the assault.

Some other ideas for taking care of yourself:

1. Take steps to insure your personal safety.
2. Grieve the loss by allowing yourself to cry.
3. Be gentle and nurturing to yourself.
4. Remember how you've gotten through difficult times use those strategies.
5. Learn and practice relaxation techniques.
6. Seek counseling for yourself.
7. Get extra rest.
8. Avoid self-blame.
9. Physical activity can help.
10. Get all the information you can about sexual assault, the court system, how trials go, or any other information.
11. Warm milk, herbal teas, and other warm drinks may be calming.
12. Remind yourself that you will heal from this trauma.
13. Join a support group.
14. Remember alcohol and drugs only postpone your feelings and don't help healing.
15. Express your anger in non-hurtful ways.
16. Take a self-defense class.
17. Take a hot bath for relaxation.
18. Give yourself time to heal.
19. Don't push yourself to do anything until you're ready.
20. Remember SFTRC is available to help you.