



Sexual Violence and Substance Abuse

Sexual violence is any act (verbal and/or physical) which breaks a person's trust and/or safety and is sexual in nature. The term "sexual violence" includes: rape, incest, child sexual assault, marital rape, sexual harassment, exposure, and voyeurism. Substance abuse refers to the overuse/abuse of substances such as: alcohol, drugs, prescription medications, and food.

There are many connections between sexual assault and substance abuse. Although there are many cases of rape, at the societal and individual levels, alcohol may be a contributing factor in its occurrence. In many sexual assaults the perpetrator and/or victim may be using/abusing alcohol or drugs prior to the assault. For the perpetrator, being under the influence may remove both physical and psychological inhibitors, which keep all people from acting out violently. An offender may also use the alcohol or drugs as an excuse for criminal behavior. The use of alcohol and drugs also makes it much more difficult for the victim to stay away from dangerous situations and to problem-solve a way out of an assault. Many sexual assault perpetrators have admitted to feeding alcohol or drugs to their victims.

Being under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs is not an excuse for perpetrating sexual violence. It does not give someone a right to hurt other people. Victims who were under the influence of substances at the time of the assault are not responsible for the perpetrators' actions.

Many studies also document the high percentage of people who abuse substances who are victims/survivors of sexual violence. Many of these people report that drugs and alcohol helped them to "numb out" and push away the awful memories of sexual violence. [Many of these survivors struggle to stay clean and sober as they deal with sexual abuse issues.]

HERE ARE THE FACTS:

- On average, each year about 183,000 (37%) rapes and sexual assaults involve alcohol use by the offender, which is about 1/3 of the total sexual assaults that occur each year. (Greenfeld, L. Alcohol and Crime: An Analysis of National Data on the Prevalence of Alcohol Involvement in Crime. U.S. Department of Justice, 1998.)
- Combined use of drugs and alcohol accounted for 18% of the alcohol-involved sexual assaults. (Greenfeld, L. Alcohol and Crime: An Analysis of National Data on the Prevalence of Alcohol Involvement in Crime. U.S. Department of Justice, 1998.)
- 75% of male college students and 55% of female college students involved in date rape had been drinking or using drugs at the time. (Koss, M.P. 1998. Hidden Rape: Incident, Prevalence, and Descriptive Characteristics of Sexual Aggression and Victimization in a National Sample of College Students. Rape and Sexual Assault, Vol. II. edited by A.W. Burgess. New York: Garland Publishing Company.)
- Date rape drugs such as Rohypnol and GHB (Gamma Hydroxybutyrate) can be given to victims without their knowledge, often by slipping it into a drink, and can prevent the victim from resisting a sexual assault. The drugs create an amnesia-effect so that the victim is uncertain as to what-if-anything occurred. (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, Fact Sheet- Drug Facilitated Sexual Assaults, 28 April, 2000.)

This information sheet was compiled in 2000 by the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA). WCASA is a membership organization of sexual assault centers, other organizations, and individuals throughout Wisconsin working to end sexual violence. For information sheets on other topics or to become a member, contact WCASA 600 Williamson St., Suite N-2, Madison, WI 53703, (608)257-1516, www.wcasa.org. For more information about sexual assault or to receive support with a sexual assault experience, contact your local sexual assault program. This sheet may be reproduced in its original format only.

- Analysis of a sample of urine drug tests of sexual assault victims demonstrated that alcohol was present in 63% of the victims, marijuana was present in 30% of the victims and GHB and Rohypnol was present in about 3% of positive samples. (Slaughter, L. Involvement of Drugs in Sexual Assaults. Journal of Reproductive Medicine. Vol. 45. 2000.)
- College binge drinkers (those who have five or more drinks in one sitting) are 2.3 times more likely than non-bingers to have experienced forced sexual touching and 2.7 times more likely to endure unwanted sexual intercourse. (Presley, CA, Meilman, PD, Cashin, JR, and Leichter, JS. Alcohol and Drugs on American College Campuses: Issues of Violence and Harassment: A report to College Presidents. The Core Institute, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1997.)
- Fraternity members reported higher levels of using alcohol and verbal coercion to ply females for sex than non-fraternity members. (Boeringer, S.B. Influences of Fraternity Membership, Athletics, and Male Living Arrangements On Sexual Aggression. Violence Against Women. Vol. 2. 1996.)
- In 29% of sexual assaults recorded by a medium-sized, middle Atlantic university, the victim could not have consented to the sexual activity because she was incapacitated by alcohol. (Meilman, P., Haygood-Jackson, D. Data on Sexual Assault from the First Two Years of a Comprehensive Campus Prevention Program. Journal of American College Health. Vol. 44. 1996.)
- According to the UW-Madison University Police Department, the potential for Rohypnol related date rape exists, but the drug most often used for date rape on this campus is alcohol, with 80% of the reported acquaintance rapes related to this substance. (University of Wisconsin-Madison Police Department. Sexual Assault Prevention - What You Can Do to Reduce the Chance of Being Sexually Assaulted, 2000.)
- Substance abuse on the part of the offender occurs less frequently in family rapes (10%) than in rapes by other people (16%). (Crime in the United States. Uniform Crime Reports. Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998.)
- In a nationally representative sample, youth who experienced sexual assault were twice as likely as their nonvictimized peers to report past-year alcohol or other drug abuse or dependence. (Kilpatrick, D., Acierno, R., Saunders, B., Resnick, H., Best, C., Schnurr, P. Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse and Dependence: Data from a National Sample. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 68 (1): 1-12. 2000.)
- Over one half of adolescent victims said that their first use of substances occurred after the year they were first assaulted. (53.8% for alcohol, 47.8% for marijuana, and 63.5% for hard drugs). (Kilpatrick, D., Acierno, R., Saunders, B., Resnick, H., Best, C., Schnurr, P. National Survey of Adolescents Executive Summary. Charleston, SC: Medical University of South Carolina, National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, 1998.)
- Adolescent girls who have been sexually abused are more likely to use a greater variety of substances, initiate substance use at an earlier age, and are more likely to use substances to self-medicate painful emotions than non-abused girls. (Harrison, P.A., Fulkerson, J. and Beebe, T. Multiple Substance Use Among Adolescent Physical and Sexual Abuse Victims. Child Abuse and Neglect. Vol. 21. 1997.)
- When compared to non-victims, rape survivors were 3.4 times more likely to use marijuana, 6 times more likely to use cocaine, and 10 times more likely to use other major drugs. (Orsillo, S. Sexual Assault Among Females. National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, 2000.)
- 38-45% of women in substance abuse treatment programs are survivors of sexual violence. (Steele, C.T. Sexual Abuse and Chemical Dependency. The Source. Vol. 8, No. 3. 1998.)
- In a recent study of substance-abusing women who were admitted for services sponsored by the New York City Administration for Child Services - the public agency responsible for responding to reports of child abuse or neglect - 24% of the women reporting had been sexually abused in their childhood. (Kang, S., Magura, S., Laudet, A., Whitney, S. Adverse Effect of Child Abuse Victimization Among Substance-Using Women in Treatment, 1999.)