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I35 The Psychology of Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault: A Case Series From Victoria, Australia

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After attending this presentation, attendees will develop a better understanding of not only the prevalence of drug-facilitated sexual assault, but also victim typology, including an understanding of the role of premorbid mental health conditions and drug and alcohol use.

This presentation will impact the forensic scientific community by widening the understanding of risk factors and contextual factors that may contribute to drug-facilitated sexual assault in the hope that this can inform future prevention strategies.

Despite public perception and media representations that covert “drink spiking” is the primary risk factor for Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault (DFSA), research suggests that self-administered alcohol and substance use represent a greater risk; however, what remains unclear is the impact of certain combinations of bio-psycho-social factors, such as mental health, age, and socio-economic status, on the development of harmful drug- and alcohol-use behaviors that may increase an individual’s vulnerability to DFSA.

Clinical files from the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine were reviewed for all cases of alleged DFSA over a three-year period from January 2011 to December 2013 in order to identify any patterns in contextual and victim specific factors associated with different types of DFSA.

A total of 204 suspected DFSA cases occurring over that period that included a forensic examination of the victim and collection and analysis of a toxicological sample were retrospectively reviewed for this study. Nearly all victims ($n=190$) were female, with a median age of 26 years (range=18-54 years of age). All assailants were male, and 34.4% were considered acquaintances of the victim, while 24.5% were strangers. Assaults typically occurred in private residences (48.1%), and all victims self-reported some form of drug or alcohol consumption prior to the assault occurring. Additionally, while half the victims reported no significant medical or mental health history, 27.9% of the victims reported at least one pre-existing significant mental health diagnosis, an additional 10.3% of the victims reported a pre-existing significant mental health condition and the presence of a physical ailment, and 12.3% reported a pre-existing physical ailment in the absence of mental health issues.

The prevalence of pre-existing mental health conditions in the victims of DFSA was significantly greater than prevalence rates represented in the general population. Given that alcohol and drug use are common maladaptive coping behaviors in individuals with poorly managed mood conditions, these mental health conditions may have increased the victims’ likelihood of engaging in risky drug and alcohol use, thus increasing their vulnerability to DFSA.

Sexual Assault, Drink Spiking, Psychology