

Seeking to move on after drug assisted sexual assault and rape: Narrative accounts of three women.

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The nature of DASA

- ❖ Drug facilitated sexual assault is defined by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) (2007: 5) as including:

“all forms of non-consensual penetrative sexual activity whether it involves the forcible or covert administration of an incapacitating or dysinhibiting substance by an assailant, for the purposes of serious sexual assault; as well as sexual activity by an assailant with a victim who is profoundly intoxicated by his or her own actions to the point of near or actual unconsciousness.”

- ❖ DASA as gendered - assailants predominately male, survivors mostly women
- ❖ ‘Victim’ terminology - not term preferred by many women

The prevalence of DASA

- ❖ Difficult to establish due to lack of statistics on DASA at local police level (ACPO, 2006).
- ❖ DASA not routinely included the British Crime Survey, most recent BCS figures are from 2001:
 - 5% of people who had been subjected to a serious sexual assault, had been raped whilst drugged.
 - 15% reported penetrative sexual activity whilst incapable of giving consent due to alcohol.
 - 6 % reported being subjected to oral penetration or other assault by penetration whilst drugged & 17% whilst incapable of giving consent due to alcohol.
- ❖ The ACMD (2007) asserts that the low reporting rates to the police by victims of serious sexual assault are likely to be even lower for those subjected to DFSA.
- ❖ There have been increasing numbers of reports of DASA from Australia, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe. DASA is a 'significant problem in Britain' (ACMD, 2007).

The drugs used

- ❖ Difficult to determine drugs used, due to quick elimination from system. (Urine - 12hrs to 4 days; Blood - 6 hrs to 2 days)
- ❖ A variety of drugs have been implicated: Alcohol (most common), Cannabis, Cocaine, Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), Benzodiazepines (including Midazolam), Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), Flunitrazepam (Rohypnol), Gamma butyrolactone (GBL) and '1,4 butanediol' (BD), Ketamine, Sedative Antihistamines, Zopiclone, Lorazepam (Activan), Diphenhydramine (Nytol), Promethazine (Sominex), Erimin and Halcion (Triazolam) (Horvath & Brown, 2007; ACPO, 2006; Scott-Ham & Burton 2005; Forrest, 2001; Walling, 2000).

Issues for survivors

Physical and mental control arising from drugs

- Memory loss
 - 20% reported no memory, 33% realised within 4 hours, 69% realised within 8 hours, 84% realised within 24 hours, just over 30% had sufficient memory to be convinced of what had happened (Sturman, 2000)
 - Lack of control over memory recall
- Physical and mental incapacitation
 - Drugs may affect cognitive & motor skills for up to 12 hours after attack (Abarbanel, 2001)
 - Up to 69% reported being helpless to resist whilst realising what was happening (Sturman, 2000)
- Drug induced behavioural changes
- Self blame & shame
- Likely to encounter unique forms of discrimination
- Increased inability to trust & feel safe
- Increased fear or shock

(Russell & Curran, 2002; McLean, 2000; Abarbanel, 2001)

Aims, Sample & Method

- ❖ Aims:
 - To explore how survivors talk about their experiences of being subjected to DASA
 - To explore the understandings of DASA reflected in the stories women tell
 - To consider the implications in terms of the psychological consequences for women
- ❖ Sample:
 - The accounts of three women, two of whom had been subjected to DASA
- ❖ Method:
 - Narrative - a focus on stories
 - How women story themselves when narrating their experiences?
 - A narrative approach to analysis (Voice Centred Relational Method, Taylor et al, 1996; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998)
 - Exploring social and individual influences on experiences

Progression

Sue: I think the closest thing I've likened this too is like a bereavement, you know, where at first it's all consuming, you can't, you can't think about anything else and it takes over your whole life, you know especially if it is somebody who is very close, erm...but then, you know, time does make it easier

Emma: It was just that kind of..waiting for that moment where you think 'I'm all right now'. I think, I think I'm approaching it

Stability

Jane: I'm still feeling a, feeling a bit low, I'm not quite back to my happy self
(Claire: Yeah) because I am generally a lot more positive and...happy and...I usually laugh and smile a lot more than I do at the moment

Personal Growth

Jane: Err.. I don't, I feel I've changed in a way, I seem to be..erm..I don't know it sounds bizarre, but in a way I feel I have changed for the better, I'm a lot more calmer than I used to be..I don't seem to..stress about silly things like I used to and.. I don't know whether that will alter..but..I don't know I don't seem to take life as seriously cause I think you know for that night..especially given that the drugs were..were with alcohol I mean anything could have happened to me, I could have died that night, you know so I've been told by (SARC) so I think, well, you know I came through that and..it's like a..I don't know, I mean I know it's not quite a second chance at life type of thing but..erm..but I just feel that I have got through it, and yeah I feel to a degree, a strong degree, I have moved on..yes

Jane: I feel that I can come through anything now..so I feel stronger as a result

Sue: I need to feel like I'm taking something away from it

Change

Jane: I'm, spose I'm more wary, I'm not paranoid, it's like one of the officers said well don't get paranoid..I'm not, but I'm a lot more wary of what's around me..erm..and..for a while I did have panic attacks, and I spose I do still feel panicky if I'm in really busy places

Emma: ..it shapes a lot of the way I react to stuff..erm..but it will always be like that, it's always gonna affect aspects of my personality

Chaos

Sue: I won't move on completely..I won't feel like I am able to take that really big step. Which means I am starting to leave it in the past..until I know what is going to happen with the police, but what leaving it in the past will mean..I don't know, you know? I mean I know I'm, I know I'm functioning and what have you but it is always there at the moment..(inaud) I'm not getting those extremes of emotion all the time as I was in the first place but it never really leaves my mind for very long. I think it's there and taints.. pretty much my day to day life..in some way or other..erm..and.. I..but I don't know..this is just such an alien situation..I can't begin..to..think you know is there a point at which it will no longer do that, I don't know,

Theft/loss

Sue: I think back to, the closest person who I've ever lost is my grandma..erm and I lost her probably..(inaud) nearly 11 years ago and I still cry at her loss..(inaud) you know it's not one of those things that.. You know it'll never go away..the fact that I loved her desperately and she's not longer here..and you know that was a big, significant part of my life..well this has been a significant part of my life taken away so you know 10, 15 years down the line it will probably still be there..I take it all as it comes really at the moment,

Summary

- ❖ Women's accounts were multi-layered
- ❖ These women have moved on in a number of ways
- ❖ Each woman sought to resist disempowerment