

Date rape drug making rounds, crisis centre says

Cases not always reported to police

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Staff Writer

Women in York Region are being warned not to accept drinks from strangers after, in one week, the region's crisis line received calls from five women who have been victims of the date rape drug.

All of the accounts have been similar, according to Michelle Smith, executive director of the Women's Support Network of York Region. Each of the women had gone to a local bar, had a drink, only remember bits and pieces of the night and woke up in an unfamiliar place. None of the five incidents are currently related except for the drug

that may have been used.

"Being the only crisis centre in the region, we have a responsibility to inform the public that this is going on," she said.

The official name for the drug is gammahydroxybutyrate or GHB for short, according to www.health.org. It comes in the form of a powder, capsule or liquid that is clear, odourless and has a subtle salty taste. GHB has gained popularity and is used by many teenagers as a recreational drug at raves but was once marketed for athletes since it has weight loss and muscle development capabilities.

Given in large quantities, GHB produces a feeling of being intoxicated and when mixed with alcohol, the feeling is intensified. The drug also decreases social inhibitions and increases sexual drive.

However, a large dose can cause a loss of consciousness, irregular breathing, tremors, coma and even death.

Despite the recent rash of calls to the crisis line, incidents involving GHB have not been seen lately by the police, York Regional Police Det. Brian Bigras said.

"In 2000, we had a number of cases involving the drug," he added. "But it has kind of taken a back seat lately and it's not occurring often."

Even though the drug is illegal, it is accessible through dealers or homemade production, Det. Bigras said.

The shame a woman feels after an incident could be behind the limited reports to police, Ms Smith said. After an experience like this, many women tend to blame themselves and don't come forward.

"It's not their fault," she added. "They call the crisis line because it is anonymous, we support them and let them know what their options are."

Those options include going to the hospital to get tested, calling the police, calling the crisis line for counseling or talking to someone in the community they trust. But the onus shouldn't be just on the women going out, Ms Smith continued.

There are specially made coasters available on the market that can help people detect chemicals in their drink. By simply sticking a finger in a drink and wiping it on the coaster, a colour change in the coaster indicates the presence of a chemical substance.

Any woman with a similar experience needs to come forward,

because Ms Smith said women need to let people in the community know of the potential of ongoing problems that need to be addressed.

The crisis line — 1-800-863-6734 — is staffed 24 hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week and anyone who has experienced a similar situation is encouraged to call for support.

Safety Tips:

- Get educated on the subject via the Internet or the women's support network;

- Never leave your drink unattended and keep your hand over the top if possible;

- If someone is going to buy you a drink, friend or stranger, go to the bar and get the bartender to hand the drink directly to you.

- Don't go out alone, go in a group of people.

Student hurt in machete attack

A 17-year-old student was left with a nasty gash on his arm and another one on the back of his head after a machete attack outside Milliken Mills Secondary School Thursday night.

The student was leaving a night-school class with a friend just after 9:30 p.m. when he was approached outside the Kennedy Road school by four masked men carrying machetes.

He was struck in the head and arm before the assailants took off.

The student was taken to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries that included a cut on the back of his head and another on his arm requiring 20 stitches.

Police brought out dogs and the York Regional Police helicopter, catching up with a group of four young men shortly after the attack.

They found three machetes in the area, a quantity of ecstasy and debit card skimming equipment.

None were enrolled in night classes at Milliken and police could not confirm what led to the attack.

Three men from Scarborough, 18, 19 and 20 years old, along with a 17-year-old from Markham, face several charges, including assault causing bodily harm and assault with a weapon.

CORRECTIONS

Safety Village party today

There was an incorrect date published for the Community Safety Village Halloween party in Thursday's editions. The party at Bruce's Mill Conservation Authority in Whitchurch-Stouffville is today from 5 to 8 p.m. The Economist & Sun regrets the error.

St. Patrick finishes eighth; Flowervale first in EQAO results

Incorrect information was supplied regarding the public and Catholic school board EQAO results published Thursday and last Sunday.

In the Catholic Grade 6 results, St. Patrick School in Markham finished eighth overall with an average of 89.

In the public board results, Flowervale Public School in Thornhill finished first in the Grade 3 tests with an average of 93.

It was among five schools tied for second in the Grade 6 results with an 88 in reading, 94 in writing, 88 in math and an average of 90.

The Economist & Sun regrets the errors.

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