

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust PRESS RELEASE

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Charities say drunkenness increases risk of sexual assault.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust and Alcohol Concern today issued a joint statement in response to the findings of Operation Matisse.

Operation Matisse was a twelve months study into the nature of drug-facilitated sexual assault in England conducted by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Forensic Science Services (FSS) and Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs).

The study has concluded that the single biggest influencing drug in instances of sexual assault is alcohol.

"There has been so much emphasis in the media during the last few years about the dangers of drug rape and drink-spiking", says Julie Bentley, Chief Executive of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, "but we have always believed that the real threat to people's safety is not what is put in your drink but the drink itself."

The study, conducted by 6 major police forces, looked into 120 cases of reported sexual assault and found only two cases where date rape drugs had been used. The remainder of the subjects had been found to be influenced by alcohol; with a significant number drinking to excess.

Srabani Sen, Chief Executive of Alcohol Concern, adds:

"Alcohol is a mind altering substance which impairs our ability to make safe decisions and choices. Even a few drinks can make a person to take risks which they wouldn't dream of doing normally – such as getting into an unlicensed minicab or getting involved with strangers."

Julie Bentley continues:

"What people sometimes forget when thinking about drunkenness and its related violent incidents, is that when you are drunk you are not only more likely to commit a crime but the chance of you becoming a victim dramatically increases.

"We are concerned that the culture of binge drinking in the UK is creating huge numbers of 'easy targets' for criminals. "

"Putting your finger at the top of your alco-pop bottle may stop someone drugging you, but it won't stop you getting drunk."

ENDS

Notes to the Editor:

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Operation Matisse was a twelve months study into the nature of drug-facilitated sexual assault (DFSA) in England conducted by the three main services engaged in evidence collection for sexual offences:

- The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)
- Forensic Science Service (FSS)
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)

Police forces involved:

- Derbyshire Constabulary
- Greater Manchester Police
- Lancashire Constabulary
- Metropolitan Police (London)
- Northumbria Police
- West Midlands Police (Walsall)

Findings

- In total, 120 cases were submitted for examination.
- 119 of the 120 victims had reportedly been drinking alcohol. However alcohol was only detected in 62 (52%) cases (see para 3.2).
- In 22 out of the 62 (35%) of these cases blood alcohol levels at the time of the incident were estimated to be greater than 200 mg% or greater *i.e.* more than 2-3 times the driving limit of 80 mg% (mg% = milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood).
- In 57(48%) cases controlled or prescribed drugs were detected.

- Cannabis and cocaine were the most commonly detected drugs (in 20% and 17% of cases respectively).
- The combination of drugs and alcohol would exacerbate intoxication.
- Rohypnol (flunitrazepam) was not detected in any of the submitted cases.
- Gammahydroxybutyrate (GHB) was detected in two cases.
- 10 cases were suspected DFSA assaults in which a sedative or disinhibiting drug was detected which either had been given to the victim by an alleged assailant or where the victim denied its legitimate use.
- In 11 other cases DFSA could not be discounted due to a lack of clarity surrounding the circumstances of the case.