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She was drugged.

She was abducted.

The police did not believe her.

THEY DO NOW.



COMMUNITY

TOLEDO FREE PRESS EXCLUSIVE

Toledo police investigate 12 'club drugging' cases

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Bartenders' roles are part of ongoing investigation

Toledo police are investigating more than a dozen cases of “club drugging” and say local bartenders may be involved in using the illegal substance GHB to drug women, making them vulnerable to abduction by sexual predators.

In an effort led by Northwest District Toledo Detective Bonnie Weis, city police will host a seminar by national club-drugging expert Trinka Porrata in September. Porrata will teach police, hospital staff and prosecutors to better identify drugged victims and pursue aggressors.

Weis is leading the effort to make the public aware of the danger, after initially “mishandling” a GHB abduction case.

A random abduction

In December 2005, a female Toledo attorney, Jane Doe (Toledo Free Press agreed to withhold the victim's name after details of her story were confirmed by police), a 34-year-old mother of two children, visited a Toledo club with a female friend. The woman said she sipped a cosmopolitan and half a glass of beer. Within an hour, she said, she was abducted. Her friend said the club was so crowded, she lost track of the victim.

Jane Doe's memory is spotty, but she said she remembers riding by car to a home where she was left on a couch. She said a black male tried to kiss her. She blacked out, and when she awoke, fled the house. She said she wandered North Toledo streets in a fresh snowfall, circling confused for more than an hour before finding a resident willing to call 911.

She said she is still unsure if her aggressor pursued her. Picked up by police, but not tested for the presence of club drugs, she was eventually driven home.

She and her husband said police refused to begin an investigation in the following days. As Detective Weis became involved, the victim said she and her husband were repeatedly told that a crime had not been committed. Jane Doe said police suggested she went willingly with a strange man to an unknown neighborhood and was extremely intoxicated when met by police.

“[The police] didn't believe me,” Jane Doe said.

Although she and her husband gained valuable tips from club management and employees, they made no progress in encouraging police to investigate.

A wait, a new attitude

In March, having no success in convincing police to investigate her case, the victim informed Weis of an upcoming club drugging presentation by Porrata at St. Vincent Mercy Medical Center. Porrata is a 25-year LAPD detective who authored the GHB warning book “While You Were Sleeping.”

Weis attended the event and said she recognized ways in which she “mishandled” the woman's case.

“I hear, ‘Oh my God’ all the time,” Porrata said, noting the surprise she often encounters from police investigators.

After the Porrata seminar, the victim presented Weis with details pinpointing a suspect based on witnesses, past acquaintances, a matching car description and a home location, all gathered by her and her husband's personal investigation. But criminal lawyers said the evidence would not hold in court, and after renewed talks with Weis in June, the woman said she began to accept that her case would not be pursued.

Weis said she has since admitted mishandling the case, although it remains open.

“I knew something happened to her, but I didn't know enough about GHB to say, ‘Wow, maybe she was drugged,’” Weis said. “In educating myself I said, ‘She had the classic symptoms.’”

“They said they believed me,” the victim said of recent talks with police.

She said the officers told her they would “bet their paycheck” that she correctly identified her aggressor, but that the evidence would not hold up.

“We still are working on it,” Weis said. “They really all are [open cases] until there's an arrest made. With DNA, we never rule anything out.”

Weis takes charge

Weis and Porrata said officials and the public need to be aware of local club drugging.

GHB is odorless and colorless, and has a salty or soapy taste that is easily diluted in alcohol.

“Treatment centers don't know about GHB,” Porrata said.

She said GHB can slip through tests. GHB affects people for four hours and remains in the body for 12 hours. The potent drug blurs memory, alters behavior and soon disappears, making it a coveted drug for serial rapists, Porrata said.

Weis has looked into “uncountable” cases that occurred before she entered the department and is pursuing approximately a dozen suspected drugging cases.

Weis said she has been more aggressive in getting victims to talk.

“There is a huge amount of embarrassment,” she said.

Weis now requests all potential club drugging cases be directed to her instead of spread among detectives. Weis also works with the local YWCA and the Hope Center to address club drugging with public service announcements and informational videos.

Volunteers post fliers at women's health club locker rooms in and around Toledo. Informational videos may be produced for education at UT and BGSU.

A spokesman for the UT police said he was not aware of any GHB cases being reported on campus, but that he was attending the scheduled Porrata seminar.

Police, nurses and prosecutors will attend the presentation, “Inside the Mind of a Sexual Predator,” Sept. 28. Porrata speaks Sept. 29. The event is not open to the public.

“It's not that our officers are uneducated, it's just reminding,” Weis said. “We know that it's out there and we know [victims] are not reporting and we would like them to.”

She said a lack of reporting and failure to test for drugs lead to difficult investigations.

“Every case that is ignored gives that rapist the urging to go on,” Porrata said.

“The police will learn how to recognize and how to process and how to pursue the perpetrators in the future,” Porrata said. “Club drug cases are difficult to investigate and prosecute.”

Prosecutors struggle with victims' memory loss caused by GHB.

“We need to understand that's part of the crime,” Porrata said.

In addition, GHB is a sexual stimulator. A drugged individual may lose inhibitions beyond those associated with drunkenness.

“It's hard to prove whether it's consensual or not,” Weis said.

She said those accused of drugging often claim the drugged individual approached them sexually. GHB does not leave an individual physically disabled. Although memory may be affected, physical actions may become sexual.

Porrata said a woman acting sexually due to drugging should not be considered consensual, but many accused of drugging make the claim. In 2003, Stark County convicted what is believed to be the first Ohio case of a woman unknowingly drugged with GHB and raped.

Be wary

Besides teaching police and hospital staff, Weis, the victim and Porrata promote similar public awareness measures.

Club-goers can watch for a series of GHB indicators, in addition to the chance of tasting something strange in a drink. Weis said the most obvious is a physical snap of the head. Much like when sleeping sitting up, a person drugged with GHB will show a lack of neck control when the drug takes effect.

Many who are drugged feel nauseous, some dizzy. Those drugged urinate frequently. Weis said the lost inhibitions can lead to unusually sexual displays such as suggestive dancing. Some victims describe an out-of-body feeling.

“After you have a couple of drinks, your inhibitions are down anyway, so we're trying to promote a buddy system,” she said.

Friends can protect drugged individuals.

In the victim's case, she even distrusted the police driving her home. She remembered her cell phone while in the police car, but the disconnect between her intentions and physical coordination resulted in her mistakenly dialing more than 20 times.

Bartenders involved?

Toledo police investigators suspect some bartenders are being paid by sexual predators to drug drinks. Jane Doe said she believes her drink was drugged by a bartender.

Weis confirmed bartenders are part of the investigation.

“We need to be concerned about it,” Weis said. “[The victim] is absolutely certain it came from behind the bar. I don't have any proof of that, but it sounds like hers did come from the bar.”

Weis said women must know of potential drugging by bartenders, although aspects of various investigations cannot be revealed.

“The police part of me says I don't want that out there because it is a part of the investigation, but the caring part of me says we do want it out there,” Weis said. “If the drugs come from behind the bar, you're doomed from the start.”

She said a separate investigation could also revolve around bartenders.

Bill Delaney, owner of Delaney's Lounge and president of the Northwest Ohio Licensed Beverage Association, said he was unaware police were investigating bartenders related to druggings.

“I haven't heard one thing,” Delaney said.

Porrata said bartending incidents have appeared across the country. She said public awareness and rules within bars can help.

For Porrata, the goal is prosecution.

“The big thing is how to catch these turkeys and put them in prison where they belong,” Porrata said.

What to do

If you think you've been drugged and/or raped:

1. Seek medical attention immediately. A victim has a small window to be tested for the presence of rape and predatory drugs. After that time is gone, the drug residue will pass through a system and cannot be detected in blood or urine. Also, you may have injuries you are not aware of due to shock.
2. If possible, keep some of the substance with you for testing.
3. Do not bathe or shower because your body is evidence.

4. Write down any details of the events including descriptions of your attacker (hair color, height/weight, clothing, skin color, scars and tattoos, etc.) and any vehicle details (license plate, make, model, color, dents, location)

5. Seek counseling. Local Rape Crisis Centers are invaluable help. The YWCA Rape Crisis Center may be reached at (419) 241-7273

Source: www.projectghb.org

GHB Description:

A clear liquid, GHB looks just like water. It can be mistaken for water because it is usually found in a small (30 ml), clear plastic bottle, a water bottle or even Gatorade bottles, which contain several doses. One quick taste, and you'll know it's not water.

Effects: Intoxication, increased energy, happiness, talking, desire to socialize, feeling affectionate and playful, mild dis-inhibition, sensuality, enhanced sexual experience, muscle relaxation, loss of coordination due to loss of muscle tone, possible nausea, difficulty concentrating, loss of gag reflex.

Many people have bad reactions, including nausea, headaches, drowsiness, dizziness, amnesia, vomiting, loss of muscle control, respiratory problems, loss of consciousness, being conscious but unable to move. Death can result, especially when GHB is combined with alcohol or other drugs.

Effects of large doses: Dis-inhibition, sedation, desire to sleep, rambling, incoherent speech, giddiness, silliness, difficulty thinking, slurred speech, passing out and death.

Source: www.projectghb.org

The penalties

It is a crime in Ohio and Michigan to deliver, possess with the intent of delivery or manufacture GHB. In addition, simple possession of the drug is considered a felony and using the drug is a misdemeanor.

The penalties are severe:

- Any individuals caught delivering, possessing with the intent of delivering, or manufacturing the drug will be given up to seven years in prison, up to a \$10,000 fine, or both.

- Any individuals simply possessing the drug will be given two years in prison, a \$2,000 fine, or both.

- Any individuals using the drug will be given up to one year in jail, \$1,000 fine, or both.
- If GHB was used in conjunction with a criminal sexual assault, the suspect will be given 20 years in prison.

Reducing the risk

- Do not leave beverages unattended.
- Do not take any beverages from someone you do not know or trust.
- _ At parties, do not accept open-container drinks from anyone.
- Share this information with friends and talk about ways to look out for each other when you are at parties or social events.

For more information

RAINN Hotline (1-800-656-4673) The Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network will automatically transfer you to the rape crisis center nearest you, anywhere in the nation.

On the Web:

www.projectghb.org, www.trendydrugs.org

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OPINION

TOLEDO FREE PRESS EDITORIAL

Prosecute all GHB predators, accomplices

As reported by staff writer Tony Gonzalez in this week's cover story, Toledo police are investigating a dozen recent and "uncountable" totals of club-drugging incidents involving the date rape drug GHB.

In these frightening cases, unwitting women are drugged with the colorless, odorless drug, making them vulnerable to abduction, rape and assault by sexual predators. Even more alarming, police suspect some bartenders are being paid to dope their customers for the predators.

As the investigation continues and suspects are identified, we urge Lucas County Prosecutor Julia Bates to pursue the maximum penalties for these crimes. Not just for the

predators, but for any and all accomplices, including club employees and owners who knew of the acts, but remained silent or did nothing to stop them.

Nearly every Web site and informational video about the GHB date rape drug urges women to accept drinks only from bartenders, not strangers or third parties. But when bartenders become active participants in the crime, that safety measure is rendered worthless, and, worse, is taken advantage of.

Men who would resort to such reprehensible acts to prey on women should face the maximum penalty, up to 20 years in prison if GHB is used in conjunction with a sexual assault. Those who are guilty of handling the drug can be sentenced to seven years in prison.

If it is determined bartenders have participated in these schemes, they should face the same penalty as the predators committing the assault.

Club owners and employees should be on notice; tolerate or facilitate this crime, and you should be punished as severely as the scum you are aiding.