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Communities Giving Voice to Sexual Assault Victims

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This is what survivors of sexual assault should be met with.

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SUSPECTED DRUGGING IN SURPRISING NUMBER OF SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES

Toronto, March 2, 2009 – New research shows that one in five sexual assault victims believe they were drugged prior to the assault.

The study, to be published in the March 3 issue of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* shows that 20 per cent of sexual assault victims seen in Ontario Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centres (SADVTC) met pre-determined criteria to support this belief.

“This finding is significant because it shows that drug-facilitated sexual assault is a common problem,” says Dr. Janice Du Mont, Research Scientist, Women’s College Research Institute and one of the Principal Investigators of the study. “We hope our findings will lead to the creation of standardized programs and guidelines that meet the needs of those experiencing this type of victimization.”

The study found that drug-facilitated sexual assault victims are more likely to be employed, compared with other sexual assault victims. The research also reveals that these victims are more likely to use alcohol, over-the-counter medications, and street drugs like marijuana and cocaine. Based on these results, the investigators recommend that women be informed that these substances, alone or in combination, may cause them to become incapacitated and more vulnerable to sexual assault.

“Whether a woman has consumed substances that contributed to her incapacitation, and/or she was slipped a drug, she is not able to consent to sexual activity and is a victim of drug-facilitated sexual assault, adds Dr Du Mont. While knowing how to protect yourself is important, we must remember that sexual assault is a societal issue and assailants must always be held accountable for their actions.”

Conducted by the SADVTCs in Ontario and the Women’s College Research Institute at Women’s College Hospital in Toronto, the study looked at 882 sexual assault victims, mostly women (97 per cent) who visited one of seven Centres across the province.

“Providing safety and support to sexual assault victims is always our top priority at Women’s College Hospital and the Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centres throughout the province,” said Sheila Macdonald, Co-Principal Investigator of the study and Provincial Coordinator, SADVTCs. “Our advice for those who believe they may have been drugged and/or sexually assaulted is to visit their local SADVTC as soon as possible for testing, treatment and personal support.”

This study was supported by funding from ECHO, formerly the Ontario Women's Health Council, and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Seven SADTVCS representing the diverse communities across Ontario participated in the study including Women's College Hospital, Toronto; Scarborough Hospital – Grace Division, Scarborough; Guelph General Hospital, Guelph; Lake of the Woods District Hospital, Kenora; Hamilton Health Sciences Centre, Hamilton; Ottawa Hospital – Civic Campus, Ottawa; and Renfrew Victoria Hospital, Renfrew.

Further research about sexual assault and violence against women is being investigated as part of the *Violence & Health Research Program* at Women's College Research Institute.

About Women's College Research Institute

Women's College Hospital has established Canada's largest research institute dedicated solely to generating knowledge about women's health. Called the Women's College Research Institute (WCRI), it is leading the charge in breakthrough research and charting the path globally in new developments.

Over the past decade, WCRI's work has had a substantial impact worldwide. Breech births are safer because of its research. Women's College Hospital is a world leader in understanding the genetics of breast and ovarian cancers. And it is now possible to identify the potential for osteoporosis in young women.

Today, as Canada's only facility that tests women's healthcare innovations within an ambulatory care community, WCRI continues to forge new ground as it focuses on key areas of women's health and sex- and gender-based medicine: women and violence, mental health, genetics and cancer, obstetrics, osteoporosis, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS.

-30-

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