

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT DATE RAPE

Evidence shows that the majority of rapes in Namibia are committed by persons known to the victims. Rape often occurs at public events such as parties and weddings. Americans call this date-rape, but the term date rape can be misleading because the person who commits the crime might not be dating the victim, or they might not be on a date. The perpetrator could be anyone from a boyfriend, a close friend, an acquaintance or a complete stranger. It is important to understand that whatever one may call forced sex, it is always an act of aggression and violence, namely rape. No-body ever asks to be raped and the person raped – is never responsible for the rape. Dating a person, dressing provocatively, or flirting may be seen as mixed signals. However, any person who declines sex with an acquaintance, a partner, or boyfriend essentially establishes non-consent, even if the person who declines has given mixed signals, or consented to sexual intercourse in the past. Anytime a would-be sexual partner requests that sexual behaviour stop, and it must stop or it is an illegal and criminal act.

Alcohol and drugs make you more vulnerable as they may slow down your judgement of a situation or prevent you from escaping from a dangerous situation. Therefore it is important to stay sober and aware. If you are with someone you do not know very well, be aware of what is going on around you and try to stay in control.

Always get your own drink-no matter what you drink. Watch it being poured. Also never leave your drink unattended since this may give perverts the chance to mix drugs into your drink that can make you black out and/or lose control. It is also advised not to taste someone else's drinks. If you do accept drinks from anyone, make sure that it is given to you in a closed or sealed container. If your drink tastes odd, pour it out immediately. Women and girls need to learn that they do not have to be afraid to offend or always to please others, especially if it your feel intuitively that something is not right.

Precautions you should take are:

- Avoid secluded places (this may even mean your room or your partner's) until you trust your companion or partner.
- Do not spend time alone with someone who makes you feel uneasy or uncomfortable. This means following your instincts and removing yourself from situations that you do not feel good about.
- Know what you want. Be clear about what kind of relationship you want with another person. If you are not sure, then ask the other person to respect your feelings and to give you time. Don't allow yourself to be subject to peer pressure or encouraged to do something that you do not want to do.
- Go out with a group of friends and watch out for each other.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help if you feel threatened.

Should you become a victim of date rape, (remember you are never responsible for being raped!) find someone you trust and feel safe with and tell them what happened. Call or go to the nearest police station or let your family member or friend accompany you to a Women and Child Protection Unit where you should open a case of rape. Remember to preserve all physical evidence. Do not shower, wash your hands, change your clothes, brush your teeth, drink anything, urinate, etc. All of these things will destroy evidence (things that your attacker may have left behind, such as fibres, hairs, saliva or semen).

Ask trusted persons to help you get medical attention. Always ask for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and the morning-after pill as this will reduce the possibility of HIV infection and prevent pregnancy .

For more information on opening a case of rape or assault, see our April 2012 issue.

