

# Drug Facilitated Assault of a Living Victim of the Cleveland Strangler

Presented at the Society of Forensic Toxicologist, (SOFT) 2014 meeting,  
October 22, 2014

**Douglas E. Rohde**<sup>\*1</sup>, Eric S. Lavins<sup>2</sup>, Katie A. Gabbard<sup>3</sup> and Robert G. Topmiller<sup>3</sup>;  
<sup>1</sup>Lake County Crime Laboratory, Painesville, OH, USA; <sup>2</sup>Cuyahoga County Regional Forensic Science Laboratory, Cleveland, OH, USA; <sup>3</sup>Hamilton County Crime Laboratory, Cincinnati, OH, USA.

**Introduction:** A 39 year old woman was abducted in Cleveland, OH in April 2009 and driven to an unknown residence where she was bound and repeatedly assaulted over the course of two days by the 49 year old male driver. During the woman's captivity, the assailant forced her to drink a mixture of beer and wine and swallow an unknown tablet. The woman eventually escaped after a struggle with her assailant. The male was subsequently arrested in October 2009 as a suspect in the murders of eleven women whose remains were discovered at his Cleveland, OH duplex.

**Objective:** The assailant in this case, identified by media reports as the Cleveland Strangler, was known to lure his victims to his home with the promise of drugs and alcohol. The assailant preyed on women who used crack cocaine, and took it upon himself to exact punishment for their addictions. This case presents the toxicology results of a living victim of the Cleveland Strangler proximate to the time of assault.

**History:** The victim reported she voluntarily entered the assailant's vehicle after recognizing a female passenger, who asked the victim if she wanted a ride. After the passenger was dropped off, the victim was immediately assaulted by the assailant, driven to the duplex and forced inside Wednesday 2100. The victim escaped two days later Friday 0930-1000. The victim relates she was forcibly drugged late Thursday morning and raped four times during the 36 hour captivity. The victim was transported within one hour of her escape to an area hospital where a sexual assault kit and blood/urine specimens for toxicology were collected Friday 1217.

**Method:** Routine screening of whole blood and urine for drugs of abuse and volatiles was performed using enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) and headspace-gas chromatography/flame ionization detection (HS-GC/FID). Subsequent confirmation of presumptive positive drug screen results was performed using gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (GC/MS).

**Results:** Blood screening revealed presumptive positive results for cannabinoids and cocaine/metabolites. Blood confirmation yielded the following results: 11-nor-9-carboxy-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC-COOH) 18.7 ng/ml, benzoylecgonine (BE) 19.0 ng/ml. A volatile screen and general drug screen performed on blood were negative.

Urine screening revealed presumptive positive results for benzodiazepines, cannabinoids, cocaine/metabolites and opiates. Urine confirmation yielded the following results: BE positive, ecgonine methyl ester (EME) positive, THC-COOH positive, morphine positive. A general drug screen on urine revealed positive results for diphenhydramine,

nordiphenhydramine, doxylamine and acetaminophen. A volatile screen on urine revealed a 0.014 g/dl ethanol. The benzodiazepines did not confirm.

ELISA benzodiazepine screen calibrator 20 ng/ml oxazepam with confirmatory limit of detection 10 ng/ml for the following benzodiazepines: alprazolam,  $\alpha$ -hydroxyalprazolam, clonazepam, 7-aminoclonazepam, diazepam, nordiazepam, flunitrazepam, 7-aminoflunitrazepam, flurazepam, desalkylflurazepam, lorazepam, midazolam, oxazepam, phenazepam, temazepam and triazolam.

The remains of eleven victims recovered at the duplex underwent toxicological examination; six revealed the presence of BE only, two revealed THC-COOH only, one revealed the presence of BE and fluoxetine and two were negative.

**Conclusion:** The assailant was charged with 85 counts of murder, rape and kidnapping and pleaded not guilty. He went on trial in June of 2011 and was convicted on July 22 on 83 counts. The jury's recommendation for the death penalty on August 10 was upheld by the judge two days later. The victim in this case did not testify during trial; subsequently the results of her sexual assault/toxicology examinations were not entered as evidence.

**Keywords:** Drug Facilitated Assault, Serial Murder, Drugs of Abuse