

## HOW P DIDDY AND THE OTHER RAP SCUMBAGS DRUGGED THEIR VICTIMS

Baby oil and massage oil that the victims were encouraged to rub on themselves was infused with a drug called scopolamine

*“It’s not a drug you can buy in the way you might buy some other new psychoactive substance, some legal high, or whatever. It’s not available in that sense because it’s not a drug you would want to take for any pleasurable purpose.”* ~ Dr. Les King, chemist and former forensic scientist There are few substances surrounded by as much myth – *and dread* – as scopolamine hydrobromide. Although it is well-known as one of the oldest plant-derived alkaloids, and despite the fact that it is listed by the World Health Organization as an “essential medicine”, scopolamine is gaining a reputation as the “world’s most dangerous drug”. In Colombia, scopolamine is called “the Devil’s Breath” – because it *steals your soul*

It’s not an urban legend: there really is a drug that is sometimes slipped into a woman’s drink in order to sexually abuse her. In fact, there have also been instances of elderly people intoxicated with it in full daylight and robbed of their savings.

Spain’s emergency rooms are increasingly familiar with this type of case, and with the name that is associated with it: burundanga.

Burundanga is the popular name for scopolamine, a drug that is used in medicine to treat nausea and motion sickness, among other conditions. But its side effects include drowsiness, a loss of inhibition and memory lapses.

A rapist who was arrested in Madrid in 2012 was passing himself off as a shaman and giving his victims scopolamine

It is cheap and easy to purchase online, and can be slipped into someone’s food or drink while the victim is not looking. It can even be blown into their faces. The targets will not remember a thing afterwards. It is known as “chemical submission.”

It is a well-known practice in Colombia and other Latin American countries, where burundanga is used in robberies and express kidnappings.

But in Spain, its existence is still poorly acknowledged by authorities, mostly because the drug is quickly eliminated by the victim’s body, leaving little or no trace behind.

The picture that emerges is one where doctors are treating scopolamine intoxications far more frequently than official data would suggest, given that few cases ever make it to a courthouse.

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“There’s been the odd case in the past, but in Spain its incidence rate is practically zero,” said one high-placed official with the judicial police.

Yet the day-to-day experience at hospital emergency rooms is quite a different story.

“We get two to three cases a month, and that’s in this hospital alone, so imagine if all the 35 hospitals in the Madrid region and all the ones in the rest of Spain were sensitive to the situation and acted correctly [to identify cases],” says Andrés Santiago, head of legal medicine at Hospital Clínico San Carlos. This center has been a pioneer in raising awareness about scopolamine intoxications.

The problem is that if medics are unaware of the issue, they will not correctly identify cases coming into the ERs. Yet experts estimate that 20 to 30% of sexual assaults may be caused by chemical submission.

Barcelona’s Hospital Clínic confirms this figure. “The problem lies in certifying it; you reach the conclusion based more on the victim’s stories than on what you can scientifically prove, which unfortunately is little,” says Dr Manel Santiañà.

### **More cases will emerge**

“Time is proving us right; with suspicion indicators and well-trained personnel in emergency rooms, it is possible for cases to emerge,” says Andrés Santiago, of San Carlos Hospital. “The key lies in creating awareness among health personnel, judges and prosecutors. The goal is for people to go to the hospital or to report cases if they feel suspicious symptoms. In two to three years, this is going to be a generalized thing; the problem is going to be known and accepted.”

A lack of official data is making it difficult to raise awareness. Cases typically emerge in specialized publications and symposiums. One study of 306 sexual assaults in Madrid between 2010 and 2012 found that a third, or 107, might be cases of chemical submission.

Only the most extreme cases of chemical submission make headlines. Two youths who died at a party in Getafe in 2011 had taken burundanga. A rapist who was arrested in Madrid in 2012 was [passing himself off as a shaman](#) and giving his victims scopolamine. Sometimes the victims are underage: the [pedophile from Ciudad Lineal](#), who was arrested in 2014, lured his young victims with candy that was laced with lorazepam, a drug with sedative effects.

This week marks the opening of the trial against two men from Granada who are charged with sexually assaulting a woman in 2013 after slipping scopolamine in her drink. The 40-year-old victim, who is married and a mother of three, went out for a business dinner and returned home the next day in an evident state of confusion, “as though she was returning from an orgy,” in her husband’s words. She said she had two drinks at a nightclub, and that the suspects bought her the last one. All three later had

sexual relations. The men say that she consented to it. The blood, urine and hair samples did not turn up any substances, but the prosecutor holds that the woman's story is credible and compatible with a case of chemical submission.

There have been recorded cases of chemical submission since 2003, when this hospital and Santiago de Compostela University conducted parallel studies on scopolamine following a string of robberies. The Clinic, which is a national reference in the treatment of sexual assault, introduced a special protocol in 2008 to help medical workers identify cases of scopolamine intoxication. In February 2015, Madrid hospitals adopted a similar working document.

In Madrid, San Carlos Hospital has just published a Guide for the Detection of Chemical Submission for its emergency room personnel.

The guide underscores medical experts' concern at how this reality is being underestimated, and opens with the following statement: "Spain, together with neighboring countries, is experiencing a rise in the number of intoxications aimed at sexually assaulting or robbing [the victim]. Governments, administrations, institutions, scientific societies and professionals are becoming aware of the need to assess the situation and propose early detection action."

The document adds that "it is a relatively frequent situation, but one which is difficult to diagnose."

Suspected cases rarely end up in police complaints backed by evidence because scopolamine disappears from the bloodstream in two to six hours. It remains present in urine for around 12 hours, although it is possible to detect it up to a week later.

What this means is that victims often face skepticism by the people around them. And in rape cases, there is the added problem that there is no genital abrasion because the drug inhibits resistance. As for elderly people, their symptoms of disorientation and memory loss are often attributed to senility or a stroke.

What's more, chemical submission is also underplayed in Spanish legislation. Contrary to United Nations recommendations, and in contrast with some European countries, Spain's penal code does not consider the use of scopolamine an aggravating circumstance, and it is included in the category of sexual abuse without violence or intimidation.

Last year, some Madrid hospitals, including the one in Henares, reported surprising cases of elderly people who were disoriented and had been robbed, yet had no recollection of recent events. Medical experts consulted by this newspaper said they suspect the intoxication may have occurred through the skin, by picking up scopolamine-treated leaflets handed out on the street. Moisturizing lotions may be another way to administer the drug to their targets.

Skin intoxication, however, is a controversial issue that not all experts believe in. "It is difficult to prove, but we have had our doubts in several cases, and it can happen because those substances are easily absorbed," says Helen Dolengevich, a psychiatrist at Henares Hospital and coordinator of the 2015 book *New psychoactive drugs*.

But María Antonia Martínez, of the National Toxicology Institute's Drugs Service, says that scopolamine intoxication through the skin is "practically in the realm of science fiction."