Belgium probes dozens of drug-aided sexual assaults

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Belgian authorities are investigating the rape and sexual assault of at least 41 women whose drinks were spiked — with a trio of bar managers identified as prime suspects, prosecutors said on Thursday.  
  
Officials believe drugs were mixed into the women’s drinks, including ketamine, a general anaesthetic used for recreational purposes because of its hallucinogenic effects.  
  
Investigators believe the three main suspects, who run the establishments where the spiking took place in the northwestern city of Courtrai, discussed the attacks with each other.  
  
“There are already 41 victims identified for the period between December 2021 to December 2024, and the investigation continues to potentially identify others,” Griet De Prest, a spokesman for the Western Flanders public prosecutor’s office, told AFP.  
  
De Prest said one of the main suspects has been arrested.  
  
A second is due to appear in front of a judge on Thursday while a third was released after a series of arrests on Tuesday and Wednesday.  
  
The men are suspected of rape, sexual assault and illegal administration of harmful substances, the prosecutor’s office said.  
  
“The young women were offered shots of alcohol, often with an amaretto flavour, after which they woke up the next morning groggy in an unknown bed or in their own bed with clear evidence of sexual abuse,” Tom Janssens, another spokesman for the prosecutor’s office spokesman, told Flemish public television VRT.  
  
Quizzed by lawmakers, Belgium’s interior minister Bernard Quintin slammed the attacks as “unacceptable” and criticised how easy it was to get a hold of ketamine.  
  
“If the drug can be obtained easily and cheaply, it becomes easier to commit crimes,” the minister added.  
  
“Women must be able to go out safely, wherever they want, whenever they want,” he said.