

Committee: World Health Organization

Topic: The Question of Addressing the Regulation of Designer Drugs

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Introduction

Designer drugs also known as synthetic drugs, legal highs, research chemicals, or NPS(New Psychoactive Substances) are threatening public health and is a growing problem in many countries around the world. According to the 2014 Global Drugs Survey, nearly 10% of countries responded they used synthetic drugs within the past year. Especially in the US, that number is about 20% —one in five people used some form of synthetic drug in the last year. In the first few months of 2015, US poison control centers reported four times as many reports of bad drug reactions from synthetics than in all of 2014. This means about one person in five in this country has dabbled in a drug that was made in a laboratory. Such drugs are called “designer drugs” and have been specifically developed to produce a high or a euphoric state in people who take them.

One of the biggest misconceptions about new psychoactive substances (NPS) is that they are safe just because they are sometimes advertised as legal. In reality, NPS are not safe because they are new and unregulated. The effects of NPS can vary greatly depending on the drug, the dose, and the individual taking it. There is limited information available about the short- and long-term effects of NPS, but they have been reported to have more serious side effects than traditional drugs. These drugs make people feel differently about themselves and the world. However, these cause serious impacts such as abuse and addiction. This makes them difficult to detect and regulate, and it can also pose a serious health risk to users. Designer drugs consist of several classes of substances, which vary in their psychological and physiologic effects.

The main reason that makes designer drugs popular is that they are technically legal. By changing just a couple of molecules that make up a drug, people create something that is not an illegal drug, making

it easier to sell or buy it. Not only are they legal, but also cheap and easy to get. Online dealers sell drugs on the internet platforms and people can order whatever drug. Moreover, synthetic drugs have become one of the most profitable illicit businesses in the region. According to the UNODC report, the expansion of the methamphetamine market has valued at up to 6.14 billion dollars annually. These drugs are not being controlled by international drug conventions.

There are 2 aspects of drug design: rational and empirical. It is essentially impossible to keep up drugs with laws. The number of molecular changes that can be made are infinite, so unpredictable side effects will continuously occur. Instead of restricting supply, drug laws focused on a group of well-known chemicals have simply pushed users towards new and increasingly dangerous forms. Treatment of designer drug substance use disorders is challenging for several reasons.

Definition of Key Terms

Designer drugs

Designer drugs refers to drugs that are created in a laboratory. There are seven different types of designer drugs: Cannabinoids, Phenethylamines, Tryptamines, Piperazines, Pipradrols, N-ring systems. These drugs are called “designer” because they are based on existing illegal recreational drugs with chemical structures that are modified to varying degrees to evade the drug laws.

Some designer drugs cause such intense symptoms so quickly that teens don’t have a chance to adjust, and teens have died from these experiences. According to Fox News, this is what happened to two teens in North Dakota who took a designer drug known as “Smiles.” It’s likely that these teens didn’t know that this synthetic amphetamine could cause them to hyperventilate or stop breathing, but that’s exactly what happened to them. Other designer drugs can cause symptoms that are also life-threatening. Some designer drugs cause intense sweating and a fast heart rate, and teens may have a lowered thirst response. At a crowded dance party, teens on drugs like this could become so overheated and so dehydrated that they lose their lives.

Synthetic cannabinoids

Synthetic cannabinoids are drugs that are made to act like THC, the main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis. They are often sold as legal or herbal alternatives to cannabis, but they can be just as dangerous, if not more so. Synthetic cannabinoids are typically made in labs and can be much stronger

than THC. They can also be laced with other harmful chemicals, which can make them even more dangerous. These affect people to cause psychosis, seizures, health problems, and even death.

Opioid drugs

Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine, and many others.

Opioids work in the brain to produce a variety of effects, including pain relief, euphoria, and drowsiness. They can also be addictive, and misuse of opioids can lead to overdose and death. Opioids are used to treat moderate to severe pain. They are also sometimes used to treat cough and diarrhea. These are available in a variety of forms, including pills, capsules, liquids, and patches. They can be taken by mouth, injected, or inhaled. The dosage of opioids depends on the individual patient and the severity of their pain. Opioids should only be taken as prescribed by a doctor.

Pharmacologic

The term "pharmacologic" refers to anything related to pharmacology, which is the study of drugs and their effects on living systems. So, a pharmacologic effect is any effect that is caused by a drug. This could be a desired effect, such as the relief of pain or the reduction of inflammation, or it could be an unwanted effect, such as nausea or drowsiness. Pharmacology includes mechanism, site, duration, potency, adverse effects. The study of pharmacologic effects is a complex and ever-evolving field. As new drugs are developed and new research is conducted, our understanding of how drugs work and their potential effects on the body continues to grow.

MI (Motivational Interviewing)

MI is a type of behavioral therapy that is often used to help individuals who may not have the initial internal motivation to seek change on their own. MI can help these individuals to recognize that change is necessary, through non-confrontational and nonjudgmental methods. Behavioral therapy can improve a person's self-esteem and feelings of self-worth while teaching healthy stress coping mechanisms and communication tools, thus helping to prevent relapse.

Background Information

The DRE categorization process is premised on these long-standing, medically accepted facts. DREs classify drugs in one of seven categories: CNS (central nervous system) depressants, CNS stimulants, hallucinogens, dissociative anesthetics, narcotic analgesics, inhalants, and cannabis. Drugs from each of these categories can affect a person's central nervous system and impair a person's normal faculties, including a person's ability to safely operate a motor vehicle. To specify, these categories are based on their effects and properties. Depressants are drugs that slow down your brain function. Examples include alcohol, alprazolam (Xanax), and barbiturates. Stimulants are drugs that elevate your mood and increase your alertness and energy. They're usually highly addictive and can cause paranoia over time. Examples include cocaine, methamphetamine, and prescription medications for ADHD. Hallucinogens alters your perception of reality by changing the way the nerve cells in your brain communicate with each other. Examples include LSD, psilocybin, and MDMA. Opiates are powerful painkillers that quickly produce feelings of euphoria. They're highly addictive and can have lasting effects on your brain. Examples include heroin, morphine, and other prescription painkillers.

Black markets started their existence during wartime when countries imposed restrictions on resources essential for human life, primarily food. Products like gasoline, rubber, and metal also fell under these restrictions. Governments introduced rationing to provide everyone with a fair share of food. This step resulted in people getting involved in illegal activities like selling and buying on black markets. However, these substances caused many hospitalisations and even deaths. have been smuggled across the US and Mexico border for decades. But in recent years, synthetic drugs like meth and fentanyl have emerged as major threats. Originally produced for medical use, they have altered the illicit-drug market. Therefore, the development of designer drugs happened and these resulted in unexpected side effects. Synthetic drugs are often used to connote synthetic recreational drugs, sometimes even those which have not been designed at all. Designer drugs are often traded on the black market.

Illegal designer drugs are issued because they cause extreme physical and psychological dangers to users. The use of designer drugs has big connections with health problems. The minor errors in the synthetic process could result in substances very different from the desired products. The side effects of design drugs range from seizures to agitation, aggression, acute psychosis and dependence. Design drug users hospitalized with severe intoxications. Designer drugs have become widespread in 139 countries and territories are increasing.

Up to 2022, 1,182 substances as designer drugs to the UNODC. NPS (New psychoactive substances) are not controlled under the International Drug Control Conventions, so their legal status can vary widely from country to country. Up to 2022, 67 countries and territories have implemented legal responses to control NPS, with many having used or amended existing legislation and others having used innovative legal instruments. Several countries have adopted controls on entire substance groups

of NPS using a so-called generic approach, or have introduced analogue legislation that invokes the principal of “chemical similarity” to an already controlled substance to control substances not explicitly mentioned in the legislation. At the international level, up to March 2022, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided to place 71 NPS under international control. These control measures have to be implemented into the national legal framework of each country.

Possible solutions

Multilateralism and international cooperation

Multilateralism, process of organizing relations between groups of three or more states and The UN will support countries to work together to address the challenges posed by synthetic drugs. This will be done through international cooperation activities, such as workshops, conferences, and trainings. The UN will also work with other organizations, such as the WHO (World Health Organization) and the INCB (International Narcotics Control Board), to identify ways to coordinate and improve the response to synthetic drugs. The UN will also work with the pharmaceutical industry to ensure that there is a shared understanding of the science of synthetic drugs.

Early warning on emerging synthetic drug threats

Enable early detection and prompt responses by national institutions to emerging threats related to synthetic drugs and their chemicals. Strengthen the capacity of forensic drug testing and toxicology laboratories worldwide to identify synthetic drugs, including NPS, and increase the use of such knowledge in strategic interventions and policy decisions. Furthermore, nations should support the development of a global campaign aimed at raising awareness of the threats posed by synthetic drugs, including dissemination of early warning messages via the UNODC Forensic Early Warning Advisory.

Promote science-informed health responses

Education and training are essential components of a comprehensive approach to ensuring the access and availability of internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. They can help to improve the understanding of these substances and their risks, which can help to prevent their

diversion and abuse. Education and training can also help to improve the rational use of these substances, which can help to reduce the risks of overdose and other health problems.

In addition, international scientific collaborations can be used to promote effective interventions for synthetic drugs. This is because synthetic drugs are constantly evolving, and it is important to have a global network of experts who are working together to develop new interventions. International scientific collaborations can also help to share information and resources, which can help to improve the effectiveness of interventions

Strengthen counternarcotic capacity and support international operations

Countries should take steps to prevent the diversion of chemicals that can be used to make synthetic drugs. This could include controlling the sale of these chemicals, monitoring their use, and enforcing laws against their diversion. Countries should also build the capacity of their law enforcement and forensic personnel to identify and disrupt the supply chain of synthetic drugs. This could include training them to use new technologies to track the movement of synthetic drugs, and to investigate online trafficking networks. Countries should also enhance the access of their law enforcement and criminal justice systems to quality equipment and training to operate at internationally accepted standards. This will help them to effectively combat synthetic drugs.

Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971

The Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 is a UN treaty that regulates the use of psychoactive drugs. It was created because the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 did not cover newly discovered drugs that had potential for abuse. The treaty classifies psychoactive substances into four schedules based on their potential for abuse and harmful effects. It also establishes controls on the production, distribution, and use of psychoactive substances. The treaty is one of the most widely ratified international drug control treaties. This treaty will be effectively used to regulate designer drugs.

Major parties involved

United States of America

The United States has a problem that legislators would pass laws prohibiting a substance used in a designer drug only to see a different version appear, using substances not covered in the original law. In the Anti-Drug Abuse Act 1986, it contained a Controlled Substance Analogue Enforcement Act which prohibited the manufacture of substantially similar analogues of banned chemicals. The concern of the designer drugs, crack cocaine, subsided in the mid 1980s. In the 1990s there were renewed fears regarding various synthetic drugs, particularly Ecstasy and methamphetamine. In the late 1990s, a new wave of concern focused on the so-called “date-rape drugs”. (Date-rape drugs are substances that make it easier for someone to rape or sexually assault another person. They include alcohol and some medications)

People's Republic of China

The rise of synthetic drugs produced in China. The abuse of Chinese synthetic drugs has reached alarming levels in the United States in recent years. More than 1,500 people per week die from taking some type of opioid, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, making opioids by far the leading cause of fatal overdoses in the country. Fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid potent than heroin leads to the epidemic. The country’s large and rapidly growing chemical and pharmaceutical industries provide an easily accessible source of precursor chemicals needed for fentanyl production.

The Commonwealth of Australia

A designer drug called mephedrone was only found in Australia and New Zealand where usage spiked on New Year’s Eve. This drug has a powerful impact on humans which is as severe as cocaine and MDMA. However, The Australian government is working to address the problem of synthetic drugs. In 2015, the government passed the Psychoactive Substances Act, which makes it illegal to sell or possess synthetic drugs. The government is also working to raise awareness of the dangers of synthetic drugs and to provide treatment and support for people who are addicted to them.

Kingdom of the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a major producer and exporter of synthetic drugs, such as ecstasy (MDMA), amphetamines, and LSD. Samples of wastewater were traced of NPS and Netherland recorded the highest usage of NPS among 8 different countries. The Dutch synthetic drugs industry is estimated to be worth billions of euros, and it is responsible for a significant amount of crime and violence in the Netherlands.

Kingdom of Spain

The police operation, which lasted nearly a year, was the largest synthetic drugs seizure in Spain and the second-largest ecstasy seizure in Europe in the past 20 years. The criminal organization involved in the bust was described as "the most important criminal organization dedicated to the manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs in the history of Spanish drug trafficking.

Timeline Of Events

Date	Description of event
1920s-1930s	The second International Opium Convention banned morphine and heroin. This led to the development of new drugs that were chemically similar to heroin but not covered by the convention.
1960s	In the 1960s and 1970s, a number of new synthetic hallucinogens were introduced. One notable example was the sale of highly potent tablets of DOM in San Francisco in 1967.
In 1973	Tim Scully and Nicholas Sand were prosecuted for making the acetyl amide of LSD, known as ALD-52.
late 1970s	the introduction of various analogues of phencyclidine to the illicit market.
1980s–early 1990s	During the early 1980s, the ability to rationally design drugs using

	protein structures was an unrealized goal for many structural biologists.,
In the late 1980s and early 1990s	methamphetamine re-emerged as a widespread public health issue in the United States.Methamphetamine continued to dominate the illicit synthetic stimulant market overall.
Late 1990s–2004	In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a widespread use of novel anabolic steroids by athletes in competition.
1976	Steroids had been banned by the International Olympic Committee since 1976. The introduction of increasingly formalised testing procedures. This led to the synthesis of novel and potent anabolic steroid drugs such as tetrahydrogestrinone, which were not detectable by the standard tests.
2005	Subsequently, the market rapidly expanded, with more and more substances being detected every year.
2009	the EMCDDA's early warning system discovered 24 new drugs.

UN Involvement, Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The UNODC Opioid Strategy

This strategy established the UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs to bring together over 230 cross-cutting resources and tools from across the UN system. Ghada Waly, Executive Director of UNODC, said that opioid use disorder deaths have increased by 71% over the past 10 years, and methamphetamine seizures are at a record high. She also said that UNODC has developed a UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs that provides practical resources on legislation, forensics, health policy, and more to help countries protect health and take action against synthetic drugs. The UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs is a collaboration between multiple UN agencies that brings together their expertise and innovative approaches to help countries address the challenges posed by synthetic drugs.

The UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs

This is a comprehensive resource that covers a wide range of topics related to synthetic drugs, from precursor chemicals and forensic analysis capacity to postal security and access to controlled medicines. The toolkit is regularly updated with new features and resources, and it is available in all UN languages. A mobile app is also being developed to make the toolkit more accessible. Overall, the UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs is a valuable resource for countries that are looking to address the challenges posed by synthetic drugs. The toolkit provides countries with information and tools that can help them to develop effective strategies for combating synthetic drugs and protecting their citizens from the harm caused by these drugs. UNODC is working closely with Thailand and other countries in the region through the Global SMART Programme to monitor the drug situation and to support cooperation, detection, precursor chemical control and public health strategies. The UNODC Synthetic Drug Strategy 2021-2025 thematic focus on the world drug problem.

The 2014 GDSA (Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment) by the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)

UNODC found that the global market for synthetic drugs was growing rapidly, with NPS (new psychoactive substances) becoming increasingly popular. The GDSA concluded that the global synthetic drugs market was a serious threat to public health and safety. The report called for increased international cooperation to combat the trade in synthetic drugs and to raise awareness of the risks associated with NPS. The GDSA found that the global market for synthetic drugs was growing rapidly and that NPS were associated with a number of health risks. The report called for increased international cooperation to combat the trade in synthetic drugs and to raise awareness of the risks associated with NPS.

The General Assembly resolution ‘International action to combat drug abuse and illicit production and trafficking’

This contain treaties related to designer drugs. This resolution renews its commitment to further strengthening international cooperation and substantially increasing efforts against the cultivation for illegal purposes, illicit production, sale, demand, traffic and distribution of narcotics and psychotropic substances, including synthetic drugs, and to controlling and preventing the diversion of precursors and essential chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic and psychotropic substances, in

accordance with obligations of States under the United Nations drug control conventions, based on the principle of shared responsibility and taking into account experience gained.

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