



PUBLIC DANGER OF CRIMES RELATED TO THE ILLEGAL CIRCULATION OF NARCOTIC SUBSTANCES AND PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES IN UZBEKISTAN: MAIN TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: In Uzbekistan, as in the rest of the world, a significant transformation of the drug situation is taking place, driven by factors such as the emergence of new types of drugs, consumption patterns, the shift of drug trafficking routes, and the relocation of drug production centers. The growing abuse of narcotic and psychotropic substances has become a major issue for our country, posing a serious threat to public health, the national economy, the social sphere, security, and law enforcement.

Keywords: drug trafficking, drug trade, national security, psychotropic and synthetic drugs, cyberspace, contactless distribution.

Аннотация: В Узбекистане, как и во всем мире происходит значительная трансформация наркоситуации, вызванная такими факторами как появление новых видов наркотиков, моделей потребления, смещение наркотрафиков и центров производства наркотиков. Рост злоупотребления наркотическими и психотропными веществами в настоящее время превратилось для нашей страны в проблему, представляющую серьезную угрозу здоровью населения, экономике страны, социальной сфере, безопасности и правопорядку.

Ключевые слова: наркотрафик, наркобизнес, национальная безопасность, психотропные и синтетические наркотики, киберпространство, бесконтактный сбыт.

Millions of people around the world become victims of drug use. These are individuals of different genders, ages, and social statuses in society, but they all fall into drug addiction through the same mechanism — the desire to experience quick pleasure, unique sensations, as well as the deceptive illusion of living without fear and uncertainty, and distracting themselves from everyday problems.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) data for 2024, there are about 300 million drug-dependent individuals worldwide (approximately 3% of the global population), which represents a 20% increase over the past 10 years. Of particular concern is the formation of a specific system of drug-dependent individuals among the youth, with the number of drug users among young people growing by an average of 15-20% each year. The average age of these individuals is between 18 and 25 years [1].

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According to official statistics from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, a noticeable trend in recent years is the change in the structure of the drug market due to the increasing share of illegal synthetic drug supplies into the country. This is

determined by their affordability in terms of price and the method of acquisition (mainly in places of mass recreation and through the internet). Over the last five years, the share of confiscated synthetic drugs in the country has increased hundreds of times. For example, in 2020, 1.3 kg was seized nationwide, in 2021 – 7.2 kg, in 2023 – 70.3 kg, and in 2024 – 119.1 kg of synthetic drugs. In relation to the total amount of all narcotic substances seized in 2024, the situation is as follows: 735.8 kg, or 34% of the total amount, was marijuana; 518.0 kg, or 24%, was hashish; 207.1 kg, or 10%, was poppy; 155.5 kg, or 7%, was opium; 119.1 kg, or 6%, was synthetic drugs; and 116.2 kg, or 5%, was heroin[2].

One of the reasons for the rapid spread of drug addiction among the population is the strong dependence of the body on the consumption of narcotic and psychotropic substances and the gradual increase in the required dosage. The recent emergence of new types of surrogate synthetic drugs on the market exacerbates this situation. A characteristic feature of these drugs is their wide range. Manufacturers, striving to avoid legal restrictions, alter the structure and formula of existing narcotic substances, leading to the creation of new synthetic drugs. This trend is particularly evident against the backdrop of another problem – the increase in the supply of large quantities of "synthetics" from Southeast Asia, particularly from China.

Thus, to date, synthetic drugs have come to dominate the drug market, partially replacing naturally occurring drugs such as heroin and cocaine. A significant reason for the shift away from traditional types of drugs is the price of synthetic narcotic substances. The average dose of "synthetics" is cheaper than an equivalent dose of heroin or, even more so, cocaine.

Another alarming trend that has become characteristic of the illegal drug trade in our country is the massive shift of drug-related crimes into cyberspace. The drug trade, being a transnational crime, is marked by an increase in the volume of shadow capital circulation, the need for money laundering, and the legalization of criminal income, as well as widespread cases of contactless drug distribution at all levels.

Digitalization and the Internet have dramatically changed our lives. This statement can equally be applied to the criminogenic environment. The criminal world quickly recognized the potential of the online space and is increasingly infiltrating various areas of cyberspace, which in turn is increasingly replacing the real world[3].

This new trend has fully reflected in the criminal circulation of substances that affect the central nervous system. Over the past few years, drug addiction in our country has significantly "younger." While earlier the focus was primarily on individuals aged 18 and older, now there is a growing number of minors, aged 14-15, among those dependent on drugs. There are two main reasons for this situation:

-first, opium-based substances have lost their buyers, and the void has been filled by "synthetics" – such as snus, spice, and ecstasy – which appear harmless at first glance and only cause dependence in the body after repeated use.

-second, more and more often, drug criminals, in an effort to counter law enforcement authorities in the illegal acquisition and sale, manufacture, and production of drugs, as well as smuggling and money laundering, are using information and telecommunications networks, primarily the Internet. Messaging platforms like "Skype," "Jabber," "Viber," "WhatsApp," "Brosix," and "Telegram" are often used for communication, and these are not fully subject to technical processing by law enforcement agencies. In most cases, these internet platforms

operate in the "Darknet" space, such as "Hydra." The latter, registered in the United States, hosts over 400 stores that deal with the distribution of various types of drugs. These platforms allow drug dealers to operate anonymously. Criminals have developed a whole system of recruiting participants into this criminal activity. Anyone can enter such an internet platform and get involved as a distributor, packager, or "dropper." For their activities, they receive "income" through electronic transfers, which allows them to remain anonymous. This can include cryptocurrency, "Yandex.Money," "QIWI Wallet," or "WebMoney." Drug deliveries are made via parcels disguised as legal goods, with the details of fictitious individuals[4].

Retail drug distribution is carried out through contactless methods, such as drug "drops." The participants, regardless of their roles (e.g., "droppers," operators, couriers, packagers), do not know each other. The wide availability of anonymous drug and psychoactive substance acquisition through information and telecommunications technologies is particularly concerning.

Criminal procedural legislation, being limited by a specific list of detailed procedural means (investigative and other procedural actions), is often powerless in the face of the rapidly changing situation and the emergence of new methods for committing drug-related crimes. Against this backdrop, the importance of operational-search activities becomes paramount, as their less formalized and regulated nature allows law enforcement to act proactively and respond promptly and effectively to instances of illegal drug circulation by preventing them at various stages of the crime. It is important to note that often, identifying a drug crime can only be done through operational-search activities. The increased activity of operational units in this direction should have a positive impact on the criminogenic situation[5].

Thus, the criminogenic situation in the area of illegal drug trafficking and psychotropic substances in the Republic is currently characterized by the following main trends:

- an increase in the number of individuals engaging in non-medical drug use (especially among youth, with the prevailing belief in society that drug use is possible and harmless);
- a rise in the share of hard drugs (heroin, opium, synthetic drugs) in the overall structure of drug use;
- an increase in the smuggling and transit of drugs through the country, with the integration of domestic drug crime into the international drug trade;
- the lack of sufficient resistance and strong counteraction from law enforcement agencies to the expanding drug trade, with a reactive rather than a proactive approach from the authorities;
- deficiencies in the current criminal justice system, which does not contribute to the rehabilitation of individuals (the detention of drug addicts in correctional facilities not only leads to the establishment of a stable illegal drug market for many years but also replenishes criminal communities with new members);
- the underutilization of societal potential, with the anti-drug message from the public being weak, and the media insufficiently aggressive in addressing drug use and poorly promoting a healthy lifestyle[6].

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