

Instability of the ecstasy market and a new kid on the block: mephedrone

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Abstract

Recently, several reports have indicated instability of the ecstasy market in the Netherlands and other EU countries. In the current study, we demonstrate this instability in the Netherlands, showing a decrease of ecstasy tablets containing 3,4-methylenedioxymetamphetamine (MDMA) by more than 50% in 2009. In addition, we describe a partial replacement of MDMA in tablets sold as ecstasy by a previously unseen substance, mephedrone (or 4-methylmethcathinone). Mephedrone was quantified and ecstasy tablets contained between 96 and 155 mg of this new compound. So far, no studies about mephedrone's effects have been published. For this study, we gathered information on the acute subjective effects of mephedrone from 70 regular ecstasy users. Overall, the majority of users considered the effects enjoyable. Mephedrone seemed to evoke effects similar to other amphetamine type psychostimulants, including MDMA. In contrast to MDMA, however, mephedrone induced strong feelings of craving in most users. If the unstable ecstasy market situation persists, the potential of mephedrone to substitute for MDMA might be substantial. Mephedrone, sold as ecstasy, is therefore likely to be a valid cause for health concern.

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