

4. Review of New Psychoactive Substances Use: Trends, Challenges, and Strategies in the Context of Uzbekistan

Guzalkhon Zakhidova, Jakhongir Ravshanov, Gulnoza Abdukakharova

Uzbekistan recorded an 18.4% increase in drug trafficking offences in 2021. The city of Tashkent was at the forefront of drug offences, especially those involving new psychoactive substances (NPS). Internet networks, in particular the messenger service Telegram, have become a platform for the advertising and marketing of drugs. For the first time, cases of drug manufacture in clandestine laboratories have been recorded. To combat this phenomenon, the country is developing legislative approaches and models of assistance to provide support to people with drug addictions, oriented towards a comprehensive solution to the problem. Of the various NPS on the market, synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones predominate in Uzbekistan. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of people registered at narcological clinics with NPS use disorders. NPS use behaviour is a serious problem, given the risk of psychiatric disorders and the unpredictable effects of these substances. Addressing this problem requires a comprehensive approach that includes education, improved legislation, health system development, and social support, with coordinated efforts from the state, community organisations, and healthcare providers. However, there are various barriers to providing assistance to NPS users, such as sociocultural biases, technical problems with data collection, and the legal stigmatisation of drug addicts.

The New Challenge of New Psychoactive Substances in Uzbekistan

New psychoactive substances are chemical substances with similar effects to traditional drugs, appearing on the market with new chemical formulas that makes them difficult to define. These substances were known as ‘designer’, ‘synthetic’, ‘chemicals’, and so on until the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) coined a special term for them in 2009: ‘new psychoactive substances’.

The emergence of new psychoactive substances on the drug scene is becoming increasingly relevant in Central Asian countries, as seizures of NPS (synthetic cathinones and synthetic cannabinoids) and their use among problem drug users have already been reported in Uzbekistan (Zabransky/Mravcik 2019).

In recent years, there has been a shift in the Russian Federation (RF) and Central Asia from opioids to synthetic stimulants. This transition coincided with the rapid emergence of synthetic drugs, which quickly gained market dominance, leading to a decline in the market share of opiates (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2020).

According to the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan, young people are moving away from ‘traditional’ drugs such as opiates, heroin, cocaine, cannabis, and alcohol and are instead using more potent and psychotropic substances (Gazeta.uz 2020).

It should be noted that the global drug situation, including in Uzbekistan, has been affected by the Covid-19 epidemic. Since the beginning of 2020, drug users—in addition to traditional drugs, such as heroin, opium, poppy straw (kuknara), marijuana, and hashish—have sought treatment for substance use disorders relating to the use of pregabalin (‘regapen’), tropicamide, mephedrone, dimedrol, desomorphine, zopiclone (‘sonnate’), and tramadol, as well as mixtures made from poppy seeds and other ingredients. Almost all types of drugs are available on the black market, including heroin (less common), opium, marijuana/anasha, hashish, amphetamine, mephedrone, pregabalin, ‘spice’, alfa-PVP, and others (UNODC Research and Trend Analysis Branch 2020). Information on the number of NPS users remains insufficient, especially given the difficulties in identifying and counting young users because of their mistrust of official authorities and due to the sociocultural specificities of the region.

Changes in Drug Use in Uzbekistan Caused by the Covid-19 Epidemic

According to a report by the UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia, the Covid-19 epidemic has had an immense impact on the drug use situation, drug services, and harm reduction programmes in Central Asian countries. Patterns of substance use have changed rapidly in various regions of Uzbekistan. For example, a significant increase in alcohol use was registered in the Republic of Karakalpakstan. A high prevalence of cannabis smoking was revealed in Andijan, Fergana, and Namangan provinces. In the latter

two provinces, the use of various pharmacy pills was also widespread. In Bukhara province, the use of desomorphine ('crocodile') by injection was reported. In Navoi province, cannabis smoking, oral use of tramadol and opium, and injecting of desomorphine was documented. In Samarkand province, pregabalin, tramadol, and opium use and heroin injection dominated. In Tashkent province, a decrease in injecting and an increase in smoking drug use were observed.

The frequency of drug use during Covid-19 quarantine decreased due to poor drug supply (such as heroin, opium, cannabis, and 'spice') and the high prices of drugs. Users started to find cheap substitutes at the pharmacy. For example, local users started using Bralget (a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug) and Phenibut (a nootropic drug) instead of pregabalin or switched to injecting mixtures prepared from confectionery poppy seeds. People who inject drugs (PWID) tried to prepare their own injecting mixtures or enhance the effects with pharmaceutical adjuvants. Available data from regional Confidence Cabinets (except Tashkent city and Tashkent region) indicated an increase in injection drug use of tablet mixtures, probably due to either the inability to obtain the required opioid drugs or to limited financial resources.

Overview of the Drug Situation in Uzbekistan

The drug situation in the country can be observed through the prism of two key groups of characteristics. The first is the work of law enforcement agencies to suppress the distribution of narcotic substances and precursors in Uzbekistan (drug supply). The second group of indicators covers the provision of medical and psychosocial assistance by narcologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists (drug demand). Preventive work is carried out by legal and medical structures, as well as with the participation of the Ministry of School and Higher Education.

In 2021, 7,142 offences related to drug trafficking were detected. The number of offences related to drug trafficking was 18.4% higher than in the previous year. At the same time, 2,165 offences were related to drug trafficking, 441 to smuggling, 1,571 to the illegal cultivation of narcotic plants, and 53 to the maintenance of drug dens.

There was a 24.2% increase in the number of crimes related to trafficking psychotropic medications and a 76.7% increase in the number of seizures

of those psychotropic medications. The structure of seized narcotic drugs is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Narcotic and psychotropic substances seized in Uzbekistan in 2020 and 2021 (National Information-Analytical Center on Drug Control under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2022)

Table 1: Narcotic and psychotropic substances seized in Uzbekistan in 2020 and 2021 (National Information-Analytical Center on Drug Control under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2022)

Substances	Seized quantities	
	2020	2021
Heroin	28.31 kg	102.96 kg
Opium	124.1 kg	342.7 kg
Poppy straw (kuknar)	323.9 kg	77.9 kg
Hashish oil (cannabis oil)	127.3 kg	0.002 kg
Hashish	223.9 kg	511.1 kg
Marijuana	692.8 kg	790.9 kg
Cocaine	279.4 g	15.2 g
Synthetic drugs	1,528.3 g	8,973.3 g
Other drugs (MDMA, amphetamine, mephedrone, LSD, and other types of narcotic drugs)	446.98 g	8,115.2 g
Medicines containing narcotic drugs	19.96 kg	21.7 kg

In 2021, there were nearly double the number of recorded offences linked to the distribution and usage of synthetic cannabinoids compared to the previous year, with 181 cases in contrast to 95. Tashkent city accounted for the majority of drug offences related to NPS, with 170 such crimes committed there in 2021 versus 93 in 2020. The number of NPS crimes in other regions was significantly lower. In Tashkent region, there were registered 5 crimes. In Khorezm region, 4 crimes were detected. In the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the Andijan region, only one crime was

recorded. NPS-related crimes comprised 10.1% of all registered crimes in Tashkent: 4 crimes were for smuggling, 40 were for the sale of drugs, and 126 were related to the possession of drugs without intent of sale, i.e. for personal consumption (National Information-Analytical Center on Drug Control under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2022).

Internet networks are widely used to advertise and sell drugs. The most popular is Telegram messenger, which is used by about 18 million people throughout Uzbekistan. There are many different channels, profiles, and bots offering users to buy various drugs in Tashkent and other regions of the country. Advertisements for these Telegram channels, profiles, and bots are increasingly appearing in public places in Tashkent and other cities in Uzbekistan in the form of inscriptions on walls and pavements (so-called 'drug graffiti').

In 2021, for the first time in Uzbekistan, five cases of local drug manufacturing were detected. A total of 3,977 g and 4,316 tablets of psychotropic substances were seized from illicit trafficking by the country's law enforcement agencies. In addition, 71 kg and 15 litres of precursors were seized in the same year.

Measures to Combat the Trafficking of Psychoactive Substances

To protect public health, the international community has developed a range of legislative approaches to effectively address the dynamics of the NPS market. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, various legislative strategies are being formulated to effectively manage the evolving NPS market. These strategies include leveraging existing health protection and promotion laws, as well as crafting innovative new legislation. In Uzbekistan, the term 'NPS' is used relatively rarely and mainly as a collective concept used by medical specialists. There is no legal definition of 'NPS'. But in the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan 'On Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances' (19th August 1999, No. 813-I), the following terms are used: 'narcotic substances', 'psychotropic substances', and 'analogues'. Narcotic substances are substances of synthetic or natural origin, drug-containing preparations, and plants included in the lists of narcotic drugs and subject to control in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Psychotropic substances are defined as substances of synthetic or natural origin included in the list of psychotropic substances and subject to control in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Analogues of narcotic

or psychotropic substances are substances of synthetic or natural origin, similar in chemical structure and properties to narcotic or psychotropic substances, the psychoactive effect of which they reproduce (Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan 1999).

In accordance with Decision No. 330 of 12th November 2015 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan ‘On improving the procedure for import, export and transit through the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors, as well as control over their circulation’, the ‘List of narcotic drugs whose circulation in the Republic of Uzbekistan is prohibited’ (List I), the ‘List of narcotic drugs whose circulation in the Republic of Uzbekistan is restricted’ (List II), and the ‘List of psychotropic substances whose circulation in the Republic of Uzbekistan is restricted’ (List III) were approved. According to this Decision, synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic stimulants are included in List I, synthetic opiates in List II, and synthetic benzodiazepines in List III.

NPS Spread in Uzbekistan

According to statistical data, synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones predominate in Uzbekistan. Thus, in 2020, there were 22 patients with synthetic cannabinoid use registered by drug treatment organisations, versus seven patients who reported use of synthetic cathinones. However, in 2021, the numbers increased, with 25 patients registered as using synthetic cannabinoids and 17 using synthetic cathinones. However, the prevailing majority of registered patients with substance use disorders (SUDs) use several types of psychoactive substances, such as marijuana, heroin, anasha, hashish, etc., combining them with NPS (mephedrone, alpha-PVP, ‘spice’).

Suicidal Behaviour and NPS Use in Uzbekistan

NPS use can lead to a range of psychiatric disorders, including depression, anxiety, and psychosis, which in turn increase the risk of suicidal behaviour. The effects of NPS are often unpredictable due to their unknown composition and the concentration of active ingredients, making them particularly dangerous. In Uzbekistan, where family ties and social support are traditionally strong, suicidal behaviour can be particularly stigmatised, making

it difficult for people suffering from the effects of NPS use to find help and support.

Addressing the problem of suicidal behaviour associated with NPS use in Uzbekistan requires a comprehensive approach that includes both measures to reduce the availability and popularity of these substances and to improve the mental healthcare and support system for those at risk. The key aspects of this work encompass education and prevention, improvement of legislation, development of the healthcare system, and social assistance. In Uzbekistan, there is a need to increase public awareness of the risks associated with NPS use through educational programmes and media campaigns. Enhanced control over the distribution of NPS is also needed, through legislative and regulatory measures. It is extremely important to establish and expand specialised services for addiction treatment and to provide psychological assistance to individuals demonstrating suicidal behaviour. On the agenda is the development of programmes for social support to reduce stigma and assist in the social integration of people facing mental health problems.

Barriers to Providing Assistance to People with NPS Addictions in Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, a model of care for people with SUDs, based on an integrated approach, is being introduced to meet patients' needs for medical, psychological, and social services. The main goal of this model is to improve the quality and effectiveness of therapeutic procedures, expand the range of services provided, and increase the accessibility of treatment and prevention programmes for people who use drugs.

The main components of this model are detoxification, medication-assisted withdrawal, inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, and anti-relapse therapy. All interventions are carried out in a specific sequence with a gradual transition of patients from hospitalisation to the outpatient phase of treatment. The ultimate goal is the psychological adaptation of patients to a drug-free life and their successful integration into society (Zabransky et al. 2018).

It is evident that while a comprehensive treatment model, including detoxification, rehabilitation, and anti-relapse therapy, is structured to support patients' recovery and reintegration into society, societal attitudes pose significant challenges. The stigma and discrimination associated with

drug addiction not only impede the successful implementation of these healthcare interventions but also obscure the true scope of the NPS issue by deterring families from seeking help or reporting cases. This societal reaction complicates efforts to address the problem effectively, underscoring the need for integrated strategies that also focus on changing public perceptions and increasing awareness about the complexities of addiction and its management.

The primary importance lies in cultural and social barriers: stigma, discrimination, and poor understanding of NPS-related problem. Faced with social stigma around drug addiction and suicidal behaviour, many families may hide substance use and suicide attempts or suicides within the family for fear of judgment or social exclusion. This makes it difficult to accurately record and report such cases. Lack of awareness and understanding of the nature of drug addiction and suicidal behaviour as medical and social problems may lead to the underestimation of these phenomena in society and among healthcare professionals.

Methodological and technical problems include deficiencies in data collection and ambiguity in criteria used to classify NPS in forensic and clinical practices. Health and social care systems may have difficulty collecting, processing, and analysing data on drug addiction and suicidal behaviour due to insufficient funding, training, or technical capacity. The lack of uniform criteria for classifying NPS, suicide attempts, and suicides can lead to ambiguity and inaccuracy in reporting and statistics.

Legal and regulatory challenges consist of legal stigma, a lack of specialised programmes and services, and insufficient outreach by community organisations and NGOs to this vulnerable population. In conditions where drug addiction is perceived more as a crime than as a health problem, people who use NPS may avoid seeking medical help for fear of legal prosecution, which reduces the likelihood of seeking medical, social, and psychological help, and also precludes prevention measures. Limited drug treatment and suicide prevention programmes, as well as a lack of specialised support services for people who use NPS, increase the risk of undetected and underreported suicidal behaviour in this group.

The situation regarding the use of NPS in Uzbekistan requires consideration by society, healthcare professionals, and government agencies. Only through joint efforts based on education, prevention, and access to quality medical care and support will it be possible to significantly reduce the risk level of NPS consumption and promote the healthy and safe development of society.

Government Measures

In order to combat the illicit trafficking and abuse of pharmaceuticals, as well as to improve the regulation concerning the handling of potent substances, Presidential Resolution No. PP-4438, dated 6th September 2019, 'On strengthening measures to prevent illicit trafficking in pharmaceuticals' was adopted, which is supported by Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers, No. 818, dated 27th September 2019, 'On regulating the circulation of potent substances in the Republic of Uzbekistan' (National Information-Analytical Center on Drug Control under the Cabinet of Ministers Republic of Uzbekistan 2022). The resolution introduces a regulatory control list for managing potent substances with addictive potential, including Zaleplon, Pregabalin, Tropicamide, and Cyclopentolate.

Since January 2000, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan 'On Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances' has been enacted, which regulates public relations in the sphere of trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, and precursors and aims to counter their illicit trafficking, protect the health of citizens, and ensure state security. The anti-drug strategy is carried out by implementing long-term comprehensive programmes. In June 2016, by decision of the State Commission for Drug Control, the Programme of Comprehensive Measures to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking for 2016–2020 was approved. The main goals and objectives of this programme were: increasing the efficiency of government agencies in identifying and suppressing illicit drug trafficking and related offences; improving the quality of drug treatment services through the introduction of modern technologies for prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of persons with SUDs; improving legislation in terms of combating illicit drug trafficking, and taking into account the provisions of the international treaties of the Republic of Uzbekistan; improving anti-drug propaganda and enhancing healthy lifestyle skills in society; and strengthening and developing cooperation with interested states and international and foreign organisations (Zabransky et al. 2018).

The National Information and Analytical Center for Drug Control under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan (NIACDC), which has been in operation since November 1996, is a body created to combat drug trafficking and fulfil international obligations in this area. It is part of the State Drug Control Commission and operates on a permanent basis. This body is responsible for the development of the strategy and main direction of the state drug control policy, and for the preparation of

proposals for draft state programmes and interstate documents regarding cooperation in the field of drug control. The NIACDC prepares analytical materials and proposals for the government and the State Commission for Drug Control, and collects, analyses, and provides information on the drug situation in the country and abroad. It facilitates cooperation with other countries in the field of drug control, as well as the exchange of information, and compiles annual reports for the UN on the implementation of drug control conventions. The body plays a key role in studying and disseminating experiences in prevention and the fight against drug trafficking by providing assistance and support to government authorities. The NIACDC also determines the amount of financial resources allocated for anti-drug policies.

International Cooperation

With the active participation of the NIACDC and the support of international structures and partner countries, including the Uzbek–American cooperation, the provisions of the 2001 Intergovernmental Agreement on Drug Control were implemented, aimed at strengthening the technical base of the relevant authorities of the Republic.

Specialists from the ministries and governmental departments took part in the work of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as experts. As a result, the draft work plan (2019–2020) for the implementation of the Anti-Drug Strategy of the SCO Member States for 2018–2023 was approved. In parallel, the draft concept and plan for conducting the anti-drug operation ‘Web’ in the territories of the SCO Member States were developed.

Within the framework of the UNODC project ‘Combating Afghan drug smuggling in Uzbekistan through the creation of interdepartmental mobile teams (IMTs)’, seven trainings and courses were organised for members of the IMTs and the Operations Coordination Group (OCG), and the necessary technical equipment and vehicles were provided (ibid.).

Experts from the NIACDC took an active part in the 62nd session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), held in Vienna from 14th to 22nd March 2019. As part of the CND, at the initiative of the Government of Uzbekistan, on 18th March 2019 a side event was held dedicated to Uzbekistan’s experience in combating the spread of narcotic drugs and regional cooperation in this area. In addition, during the CND meeting, bilateral negotiations were held with the UNODC team. An agreement was reached

with UNODC Director Yuri Fedotov to organise the 54th meeting of the UNODC Subcommittee on Illicit Drug Trafficking in the Near and Middle East in Tashkent (ibid.).

In May 2019, the 11th meeting of the parties to the Memorandum of Understanding on regional cooperation in the field of drug control was held in Tashkent. As a result, the Tashkent Declaration was adopted, aimed at strengthening cooperation in the fight against the illicit trafficking of drugs and precursors, as well as preventing the abuse of drugs and psychotropic substances.

To improve the skills of law enforcement officers both within the country and abroad, practical seminars and trainings have been organised at specialised educational institutions. In 2019, 49 educational and practical events were organised to combat drug trafficking and prevent and treat drug addiction. Overall, 485 governmental officials took part, including 188 officials who took part in events organised abroad.

The Central Asian Regional Information Coordination Centre for Combating Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors (CARICC) is one of the most significant projects of the UNODC in Central Asia. Within the framework of its mandate, it facilitates, coordinates, and supports the efforts of countries in the region in the fight against drug trafficking. Participating states are the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Prevention

In Uzbekistan, high priority is given to the ongoing prevention of drug addiction, which is carried out through several strategic approaches. Primary prevention is implemented within the educational environment, especially in schools, such as through lessons on healthy lifestyles, with a focus on preventing the consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. In February 2020, the NIACDC and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, together with regional drug control commissions and public, higher, and secondary specialised education authorities, carried out more than 16.7 thousand local preventive events at educational institutions, reaching more than 2.2 million people.

Family prevention includes the development of interaction skills within the family and social skills in both children and parents. Work with risk groups at educational and medical institutions is aimed at preventing drug addiction. Preventive measures are being introduced to target high-risk groups in informal environments, where the likelihood of involvement in drug addiction is higher.

Emphasis is placed on the use of the media and mass promotional work to create awareness of the dangers of drug use and stimulate preventive activity. During the period from 21st to 23rd June 2019, seven football matches were organised in Uzbekistan as part of the 12th round of the Super League championship. This tour was dedicated to countering drugs, with the motto 'We are against drugs'. During the matches, public service announcements were shown, commentators inserted informational messages, and team captains made appeals to combat drug addiction. A drawing competition was also held among students of children's centres in the field of fine arts, with the motto 'We are against drug addiction'. Various art theatres across the Republic have presented performances addressing the problem of drugs and drug addiction.

The regular training of specialists in the field of drug addiction prevention is necessary to maintain a high level of competencies and effective methods for combating this problem (Zabransky et al. 2018).

The NIACDC developed and implemented a road map of preventive activities among young people, including cooperation with doctors, teachers, law enforcement officials, and religious leaders. These events were organised at educational institutions and student dormitories, with the participation of both students and teaching staff. Families with children in disadvantaged conditions were also monitored to provide them with social support and protection from the risks of drug addiction and antisocial behaviour. Specialists from drug treatment institutions conducted lectures and seminars and made appearances in the media as part of the primary prevention of drug addiction among various population groups.

Harm Reduction

Needle and syringe exchange programmes exist in every country around the world. The number of needle and syringe exchange programmes has remained fairly stable in recent years. The number of contacts with IDUs and the number of syringes distributed has increased over time in Kazakhstan

and Uzbekistan, the two countries for which data are available going back to 2002.

Although Uzbekistan reports the largest number of sites where sterile injection equipment is available, it has the fewest number of syringe exchanges relative to the number of people who inject drugs (PWID) contacted by harm reduction programmes or the estimated number of PWID (NIACDC/UNODC 2020).

Trust points provide the target group with information and educational services, counselling, exchange of syringes and needles, personal protective equipment, and disinfectants and also, if necessary, refer applicants to receive various types of medical and psychological assistance (from narco-logists, obstetricians/gynaecologists, dermatologists, venereologists, therapists, psychologists, etc.) (Zabransky et al. 2018).

UNODC Prevention Programme

The UNODC actively promotes family skills training as a key drug use prevention intervention in Central Asia. The selected programme, Families and Schools Together (FAST), has been tailored to the needs of the region since its introduction in 2010. Over three cycles of implementation in 35 schools in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, FAST has proven its effectiveness after being culturally adapted. To build on this success, the UNODC plans to introduce another evidence-based family skills training programme, the Strengthening Families Program for Children 10–14 (SFP 10–14), using the existing FAST infrastructure. SFP 10–14 has been rigorously evaluated in randomised control trials and health services studies and consistently demonstrates its ability to reduce substance abuse and delinquency risks by strengthening family relationships (UNODC 2022).

The Central Asia Drug Action Programme in Uzbekistan

The Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP) represents the continuity of EU policy and long-term engagement with Central Asian partners to further strengthen drug demand reduction policies. The programme is implemented by a Consortium of the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Germany, together with the German Society for International Co-

operation (GIZ), with financial support from the European Union. Since its launch in 2003, various phases of the EU-funded CADAP programme have supported the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in implementing strategies and measures to reduce drug demand, promote prevention initiatives, and improve public treatment services. The new 7th phase, with a total budget of EUR 6.8 million, intends to continue efforts to develop integrated and evidence-based drug policies and improve access to quality drug demand reduction initiatives for vulnerable groups, following gender and human rights principles (CADAP 2024). Under the 7th phase of CADAP, a wide range of activities are planned for Uzbekistan: the development of a drug control roadmap; technical support for policymakers and partners; improvements to the collection, production, and dissemination of data relevant to targeted studies; technical support for toxicology laboratories; and the development of prevention and treatment programmes in accordance with European standards.

Conclusion

Since 2021, the number of drug-related crimes has increased noticeably in Uzbekistan, especially in the city of Tashkent. The internet is now widely used for advertising and selling drugs. Cases of drugs being manufactured locally have been discovered. The drug control system includes law enforcement measures and medical assistance for drug addicts. However, it is necessary to continue to improve cooperation between various structures and improve legislation to combat drugs more effectively.

The increase in the number of persons registered as users of synthetic cannabinoids and cathinones in Uzbekistan from 2023 to 2024 indicates a growing problem of drug addiction in the country. In particular, increased consumption of synthetic substances may lead to an increase in the incidence of mental disorders and suicidal behaviour.

To solve the problem, an integrated approach is required, including educational programmes, the improvement of legislation, and the development of the healthcare system and social support services. Striving to reduce stigma and increase awareness of the dangers of synthetic drug use among the population plays a key role in this process.

However, there are various barriers that make it difficult to provide help and support to people who use synthetic substances in Uzbekistan, such as

stigma, a lack of specialised programmes, and technical problems in data collection.

Solving the problem of synthetic drug use and suicidal behaviour requires concerted efforts on the part of society, government agencies, health professionals, and public organisations. Only through joint efforts can these negative trends be effectively addressed in order to ensure a safe and healthy future for the citizens of Uzbekistan.

The effective work of the NIACDC and CARICC indicates a strong willingness to cooperate and exchange experiences with other states in the region in the fight against drug trafficking.

Such initiatives and cooperation in the field of combating drugs are important steps in the implementation of the anti-drug strategy and contribute to ensuring the safety and well-being of the people of Uzbekistan.

Bibliography

- CADAP (2024) About us. www.eu-cadap.org/about-us/ 25.03.2024
- Gazeta.uz (2020). Young drug users are switching from "traditional" to psychotropic drugs - Ministry of Internal Affairs. www.gazeta.uz/ru/2020/09/11/narcotic/. 24.03.2024
- Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan (1999) "On Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances". www.lex.uz/acts/86028. 24.03.2024
- National Information-Analytical Center on Drug Control under the Cabinet of Ministers Republic of Uzbekistan/ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Regional Office for Central Asia (2020). The Central Asian region information bulletin on drug-related situation for 2019. Tashkent: www.ncdc.uz/uploads/image/17122020-110017_551-6.pdf. 24.03.2024
- National Information-Analytical Center on Drug Control under the Cabinet of Ministers Republic of Uzbekistan (2022). The Central Asian region information bulletin on drug-related situation for 2021. Tashkent: Baktria press. [www.ncdc.uz/uploads/image/07102022-093616_014-Drug%20situation%20NCDC%20\(EN+RU\)_20.06.22.pdf](http://www.ncdc.uz/uploads/image/07102022-093616_014-Drug%20situation%20NCDC%20(EN+RU)_20.06.22.pdf). 24.03.2024
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020). Cross-cutting issues: evolving trends and new challenges www.wdr.unodc.org/uploads/wdr2020/documents/WDR20_BOOKLET_4.pdf. 24.03.2024
- UNODC (2022). UNODC Continues Supporting the Implementation of Strengthening Families Programme (SFP10-14) in West and Central Asia www.unodc.org/rpanc/en/Sub-programme-3/unodc-continues-supporting-the-implementation-of-strengthening-families-programme-sfp10-14-in-west-and-central-asia.html. 25.03.2024
- UNODC Research and Trend Analysis Branch (2020). COVID-19 and the drug supply chain: from production and trafficking to use. www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/covid/Covid-19-and-drug-supply-chain-Mai2020.pdf. 24.03.2024

Zabransky, Tomas (eds.)/Mravcik, Victor (eds.)/Kilibarda, Biljana (eds.) (2018). Country profile on the drug situation. Uzbekistan. 2018. www.eu-cadap.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CSS-Uzbekistan-2018_online_final.pdf

Zabransky, Tomas (eds.)/Mravcik, Victor (eds.) (2019). The 2019 Regional Report on the Drug Situation in Central Asia. Bishkek/ Prague: CADAP 6/ResAd. www.solid-exceed.org/resources/publication/regional-report-drug-situation-central-asia. 24.03.2024