

Profile and correlates of colorimetric reagent kit use among people who use ecstasy/MDMA and other illegal stimulants in Australia, 2019-2021

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Introduction: Colorimetric reagent kits can provide information about the presence or absence of a nominated substance in drug samples. We aimed to identify patterns and correlates of colorimetric reagent kit use, as well as behavioural outcomes of testing, among people who use illegal stimulants in a context lacking permanent government-sanctioned drug checking services.

Method: Australians residing in capital cities who reported monthly or more frequent use of ecstasy/MDMA and/or other illegal stimulants in the past six months were interviewed about testing the contents and/or purity of illegal drugs, and features of last colorimetric reagent kit use. Logistic regression identified correlates of last using a testing kit.

Key Findings: Of 2403 participants, 34% reported testing drug contents and/or purity in the last year; of whom, 86% last used a colorimetric reagent kit. On the last occasion, 48% tested a substance received as MDMA; of these 87% detected MDMA. Of those who expected and detected MDMA, 66% and 29% reported this finding to their friends and dealer, respectively. Factors associated with use of drug checking include younger age (adjusted odds-ratio 1.77; 95% confidence interval 1.35-.33), being male (1.61; 1.25-2.07), weekly MDMA use (1.4; 1.03-1.89), and daily cannabis use (1.55; 1.12-2.44).

Discussions and Conclusions: In the absence of permanent government-sanctioned drug checking services, it is important to acknowledge that people who use illegal stimulants seek out objective information about the contents of their illicit drugs and already engage in drug checking practices. However, predominant technologies employed are suboptimal, lacking tailored specialist advice and education.

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