

Study to look at the impact of legal alternatives to illegal drugs

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The use of legal substances that mimic the effects of illegal drugs appears to be on the rise in Australia, yet little is known about their long-term impact on users.

Deakin University health researchers, in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Tasmania and the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, are running a study to better understand Australian's experiences of using these substances, referred to as emerging psychoactive substances.

"There has been a lot of research conducted in Europe and the United Kingdom looking at why people take these substances and the harm they report experiencing as a result. However, there is relatively little information from the Australian perspective," said Deakin public health expert Matthew Dunn.

"In Australia we do not have a good understanding of who is using these substances, and we have no knowledge as to why they are using them. Are they people who are already using illegal drugs, such as ecstasy and cocaine? Are they people who have never used an illegal drug in their life? These are important questions when considering how we respond to these emerging substances, as well as how we design and disseminate education and harm reduction messages to those who may use these substances."

The researchers are calling on people to share their experiences, good

and bad, of using legal and illegal drugs through an online, anonymous and confidential questionnaire.

There is a wide range of substances on the market that mimic the effects of cannabis, stimulants like methamphetamine or cocaine, ecstasy and psychedelics like LSD. Some of these are sold online as legal alternatives to [illegal drugs](#), yet many are in fact illegal in Australia, Dr Dunn explained.

"With the UK experiencing a rise in harm attributed to emerging [psychoactive substances](#) and research indicating that efforts to make them illegal is not seriously dissuading use, we need to take a thorough look at the situation here to be sure our response to these substances is appropriate in the Australian context," he said.

"There is a gap in our knowledge of who is using these [substances](#) and why, and what impact this is having on their wellbeing. The results of our study will go some way to filling these gaps."

More information: People interested in taking part in the study can fill in the online questionnaire at healthsurveys.deakin.edu.au/opinio/s?s=264

Provided by Deakin University

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