

Mephedrone boosts illegal drug use

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Experienced clubbers are more likely to add the former 'legal high' mephedrone to their drug repertoires rather than use it to replace popular established club drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine, according to new research by Lancaster University, Durham University and Guy's and St Thomas Hospitals, London.

Analysis of a survey from over 300 clubbers conducted just after the UK ban on mephedrone showed that clubbers will take ecstasy pills, [cocaine](#) and MDMA powder as well as mephedrone as part of their drug repertoires. This is the case even at times of low purity of club drugs.

The findings indicate that polydrug use is the norm amongst clubbers with legal, newly banned and established illegal club drugs all forming part of the drug range, particularly for 'early adopters' such as gay clubbers in London.

The researchers say polydrug use significantly increases risks of health complications and therefore puts strain on the [NHS](#). It also puts pressure on the [criminal justice system](#) and demands more specific targeting of interventions such as drugs outreach and information services and drug treatment. The research is published in the academic journal *European Addiction Research* and was funded by the British Academy.

Key findings include:

- Amongst clubbers who reported having ecstasy within the past

month, three quarters also had mephedrone within the past month.

- Two thirds of the clubbers who reported having cocaine within the past month, also had mephedrone in the same period.
- Nearly 80 per cent of those who had used MDMA powder in the past month also had mephedrone in the past month.

Study author, Dr Karenza Moore of Lancaster University, notes:

"Despite concerns about the low purity of popular club drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine at the time, clubbers did not seek to replace those drugs with mephedrone but instead added it to their drug-taking profiles.

"We are seeing the extension of certain types of polydrug use, with experienced drug users taking 'legal highs' alongside illegal drugs rather than replacing them."

Co-author Professor Fiona Measham of Durham University, said:

"Polydrug use can increase the potential harms for [drug users](#) and wider society, putting a greater strain on health and criminal justice services that are already over-stretched.

"If we know little about individual 'legal highs' we know even less about their combined use. However, our growing understanding of how legal, newly banned and established illegal drugs are used, why and with what consequences can help to build a picture which allows local decision-makers to target interventions more effectively."

More information: Moore, K., Dargan, P., Wood, D. and Measham, F. Do Novel Psychoactive Substances Displace Established Club Drugs, Supplement Them or Act as Drugs of Initiation The relationship between Mephedrone, Ecstasy and Cocaine, *Eur Addict Res* 2013;19:276-282 ([DOI: 10.1159/000346678](https://doi.org/10.1159/000346678)).

Provided by Lancaster University

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