

Researchers hope to forecast novel psychoactive substance use by the public

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The use of novel psychoactive substances – synthetic compounds with stimulant or hallucinogenic effects – is on the rise. The diversity and breadth of these substances has led policymakers, law enforcement officers, and healthcare providers alike to feel overwhelmed and underprepared for dealing with novel drugs. A recent article published in The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse proposes a "forecasting method" for policymakers and researchers to focus on what is likely to happen with new recreational drugs.

Using a review of literature, published case reports, and legal studies, Dr. John Stogner of UNC Charlotte, proposes a five step forecasting method. The method relies on the availability of a potential user base, the costs of the drug (legal and otherwise), the subjective experience, the substance's dependence potential, and the overall ease of acquisition.

"Forecasting allows for training focused on those compounds they are most likely to encounter," explained Stogner. "I wanted to author a plan that encouraged early action - a plan that would help highlight which potentially emergent drug would reach young people in advance, cutting off supply before the next 'spice' or 'bath salts' reached store shelves."

The five-step forecast method claims that use of e-cigarettes and Acetyl fentanyl (painkillers with potential of hallucinogenic effects) will grow, but that use of Bromo-Dragonfly and similar substances will not. "You'll likely see Leonotis leonurus (a psychoactive plant from the Mint family referred to as lion's tail or dagga) hit store shelves soon, but the bigger

worry will be synthetics," Stogner warns. "A single chemical substitution to an existing drug may make it legal. Most of the newly designed drugs fall into the stimulant category, but others more closely resemble opioids."

More information: "Predictions instead of panics: the framework and utility of systematic forecasting of novel psychoactive drug trends."

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