

Police seizures of psychedelic drugs are soaring throughout the US, study shows

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Credit: Maurício Mascaro from Pexels

Seizures by law enforcement officials of psilocybin, a compound found in psychedelic mushrooms, have increased by 369% since 2017, a new study shows. The authors say their findings may signal growing

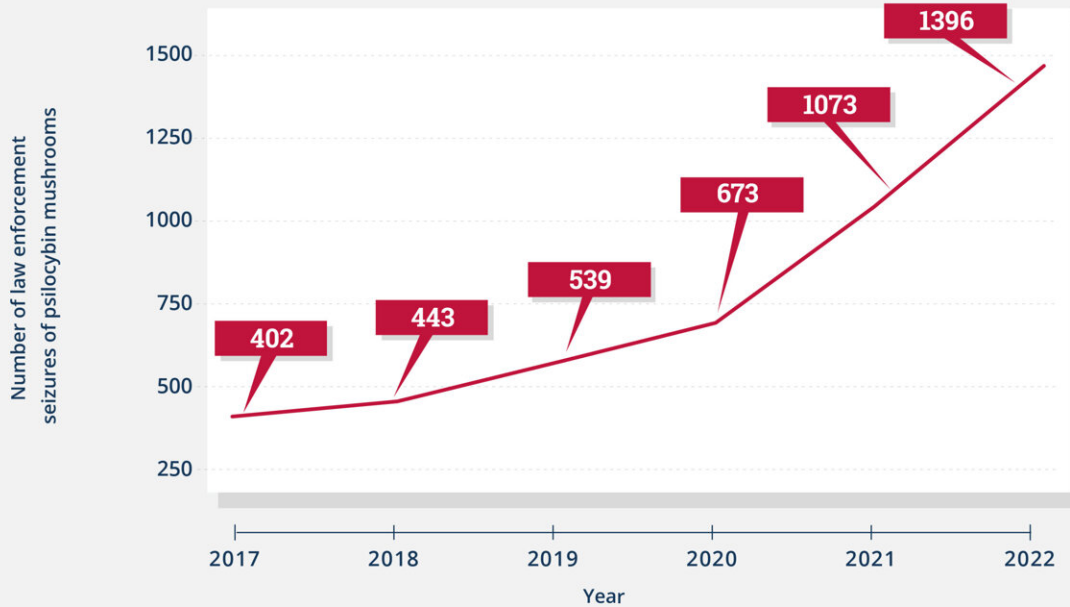
availability and public awareness of the hallucinogenic drug, along with possible heightened risks associated with recreational and unsupervised use of the drug.

The study was led by researchers at NYU Grossman School of Medicine and other members of the National Drug Early Warning System, an organization that conducts surveillance of shifting drug trends. Their analysis of national and state-level trafficking data revealed that across the country, seizures of [psilocybin](#) rose from 402 confiscations in 2017 to 1,393 confiscations in 2022. The amount of the seized drugs nearly quadrupled, from 226 kilograms to 844 kilograms, in the same time frame.

"Our findings, which uncover an increase in confiscations of psilocybin, suggest that popularity and availability of this psychedelic may be increasing," said study lead author Joseph Palamar, Ph.D., MPH. "Although psilocybin is by no means the most dangerous drug, adverse effects do happen, so heightened prevention efforts and harm-reduction education may be necessary," added Palamar, an associate professor in the Department of Population Health at NYU Langone Health.

Psilocybin is a naturally occurring compound derived from fungi with mind-altering qualities similar to those of LSD and mescaline. The drug has become the topic of media attention recently as research trials have explored, in closely supervised [clinical settings](#), its potential to treat conditions such as alcohol use disorder, post-traumatic stress, and major depression tied to cancer.

Number of Law Enforcement Seizures of Psilocybin Mushrooms in the United States, 2017-2022



Estimates based on data reported by the Office of National Drug Control Policy's High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program

Reference: JJ Palamar, et al. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. DOI: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2024.111086 (2024)

Law enforcement seizures of "magic mushrooms" or "shrooms" containing the psychoactive component psilocybin increased dramatically in the United States between January 2017 and December 2022, according to a new study funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, part of the National Institutes of Health. Credit: National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health

At the same time, restrictions around psilocybin, which is a controlled substance under federal law, have loosened in a number of American cities, particularly in the Midwest and West, says Palamar. However, little is known about its popularity as a [recreational drug](#) or how these

factors may be contributing to its rising use.

Palamar says the new study, published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, is believed to be the first of its kind to examine trends in psilocybin seizures across the U.S.

For the research, the team analyzed data from the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program, created by Congress to measure and help reduce illegal drug trafficking and production. The program oversees 33 regional areas throughout all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and collects data on reports of drug seizures made by thousands of federal, state, and local law-enforcement groups.

As part of the study, the team analyzed 4,526 psilocybin [seizure](#) reports from January 2017 through December 2022. They categorized the annual number of confiscations and the total weight of seized drugs by state. Then, they organized the data into four main census regions in the country: the Northeast, West, South, and Midwest.

Among the findings, the analysis revealed that the highest number of psilocybin seizures occurred in the Midwest (36% of confiscations), with the West following closely behind (33% of confiscations). In terms of overall weight, 4,380 kilograms of psilocybin were captured within the study period, with the greatest proportion (43%) coming from the West. Palamar notes that the West's environmental conditions, which are well suited for growing the mushrooms from which the compound is derived, may help explain this finding.

"These results highlight the need to better understand not only how the availability and popularity of psilocybin is changing and why, but also how the drug affects those who use it recreationally," said Palamar.

He says that more research is needed to specifically examine whether

decriminalization efforts around psilocybin and other drugs may be affecting both use and the number of seizures.

Palamar also cautions that law-enforcement seizures are not a perfect indicator of drug availability or use. In addition, just because a confiscation occurred in a particular state does not mean that the psilocybin was intended for use in that area. For example, some of the reports in the data reference large shipments that may have been headed to other states for sale.

More information: JJ Palamar, et al, National and regional trends in seizures of shrooms (psilocybin) in the United States, 2017–2022, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2024.111086](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2024.111086)

Provided by NYU Langone Health

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