

## **Drug adulteration and substitution within Australian cryptomarkets: An analysis of Test4Pay**

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**Introduction:** Prohibited drugs in unregulated markets are often adulterated, resulting in increased risks for consumers. This study investigated levels of adulteration and substitution in drugs purchased by Australians from cryptomarkets.

**Method:** Data were collected from theDread subforum /d/Test4Pay (1 September 2022 to 23 August 2023). Posts were included if they reported the results of drug samples submitted to the Get Your Drugs Tested service, which uses Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) with immunoassay strip tests (fentanyl and benzodiazepines). **Results:** Typically, reports were made by community members funded by Test4Pay to "make undercover purchases for the purpose of lab testing". Sixty-seven percent of 103 samples contained only the advertised substance, 14% contained the advertised substance in combination with other psychoactive and/or potentially harmful substances and for 19%, the advertised substance was absent. MDMA, methamphetamine and heroin were consistently found to contain only the advertised substance, while 2C-B, alprazolam and ketamine were the most likely to be completely substituted. Cocaine was the least likely to contain solely the advertised substance (21%), with 68% of the samples containing cocaine with adulterants like lidocaine, creatine, levamisole and boric acid. All fentanyl tests were negative. A variety of novel dissociatives and novel benzodiazepines were detected, as well as a novel nitazene compound.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Drug markets under prohibition continue to contain numerous unexpected substances, some of which elevate risk of harm dramatically for consumers. Cryptomarkets are not immune to this problem, despite review systems which should in theory make vendors more accountable for the quality of their stock.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** Test4Pay demonstrates community desire to protect its members from adulteration and substitution of unregulated drugs. Legalised supply would

resolve these issues, but in the context of prohibition, a local postal laboratory testing service with publicly accessible results would increase the effectiveness of these efforts.

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