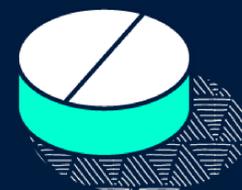


In 2024, 31% of drug alerts issued in Australia reported 'high dose' MDMA pills



What questions did this generate?

What is a 'high dose' of MDMA?

A pragmatic definition^{**}: **150mg of free base MDMA**

- does this reflect community understanding?
- how do we communicate this to consumers?

Is defining this threshold useful?

- how does it help in the drug alerts **decision-making**?
- could it inadvertently result in **alert fatigue**?

How did we answer them?

Exploring the utility and appropriateness of dose thresholds for issuing of public drug alerts on high-dose MDMA: A qualitative study

Harriet MacDonald^{1,2}, Stassi Kypril^{1,2,4}, Brendan Clifford^{1,2}, Krista J Siefried^{1,2,3,4}, Nadine Ezard^{1,2,3,4}, Jack Freestone^{1,2}

Study design

- A qualitative study, recruiting 15 participants representing drug checking services, community and government organisations.
- All participants completed an online survey. Seven of these participants completed a focus group
- The survey and focus groups considered the use of thresholds when issuing high dose MDMA alerts
- Responses were analysed using a qualitative description methodology

Results

On the use of thresholds

- Participants viewed a threshold as **expediting the process** of alert dissemination
- Simply utilising a **binary threshold may miss nuance** and the need to assess risk on a case-by-case basis was reinforced

On the 150mg dose

- Most participants thought that a threshold of **150mg of free base MDMA was suitable**
- Some participants acknowledged that **acute harm** could occur **at lower doses**
- Some jurisdictions and agencies communicate weights in **MDMA free base** and others **MDMA hydrochloride salt (MDMA-HCl)**^{***}

On MDMA education

- Educating consumers about the relationship between **dose and body weight**, **polysubstance use**, and the use of stimulants in **hot weather conditions** were discussed as priorities

On the generation of alert fatigue

- It was acknowledged that Australia lacks capacity to monitor for responses to drug alerts
- Regardless, participants broadly **rejected the idea alert fatigue was occurring**
- Participants raised concerns that **alerts are not reaching relevant communities**

On alternative approaches

- Participants discussed the value of a **national real-time repository of data** on the contents of analytically tested substances
- Agencies issuing alerts and communities may benefit from establishing a timely database of results from samples tested in Australia

Conclusion

- Thresholds are an important part issuing alerts about high dose MDMA
- 150mg free base was supported as a threshold, but there are ongoing discussions about communicating results to communities (free base vs HCl)
- Little evidence of alert fatigue in Australia but better monitoring of community responses to alerts needed
- Wide support for harm reduction education to accompany drug alerts

* 15 out of 47 (31%) drug alerts related to high-dose MDMA. These alerts contained information about 26 individual pills. Pills ranged in dose from 150-205mg of MDMA free base. Two pills contained the cathinone dimethylphenylone in addition to ≥ 150 mg of MDMA.

**150mg free base MDMA is a threshold used by CanTEST and NSW Health when issuing drug alerts.

***150mg free base = 179mg MDMA-HCl. Current drug checking methods do not allow for the determination of the MDMA salt present in a sample, however MDMA-HCl is the most common form.

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