

Kazakhstan's Drug Policy and Practice Today: Is the Reactive Approach of Fighting the Consequences of Drug Trafficking while Ignoring its Causes Changing?

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ABSTRACT

Kazakhstan is facing an increase in the smuggling of precursors from Russia and an increase in domestic production of synthetic drugs. Young people are increasingly involved in drug trafficking, both as consumers and distributors. The spread of Internet technologies has facilitated the online sale of drugs, and the patterns of covert trade that originated in Russia are now spreading to Kazakhstan. Qualitative research methods are used, including analysis of legislative initiatives, law enforcement practices, and surveys of law enforcement officials and lawyers, to assess the development of drug policy in Kazakhstan. The results indicate a restructuring of Kazakhstan's drug policy and legislative framework to address emerging threats, with a particular focus on combating online drug trafficking. Law enforcement practice shows a division of roles between online and offline actors, and enhanced monitoring of social media and digital platforms has become a key tool in law enforcement efforts.

Keywords: Drug Trafficking; Internet Drug Trafficking; Online Drug Trafficking; Drug Trafficking in Kazakhstan.

INTRODUCTION

Opiates in Kazakhstan mainly arrive in transit from Afghanistan through the country via the "Northern Route." This route is actively used by organized crime groups from Central Asian states. In addition to being a transit country, Kazakhstan is also a consumer market for cannabis. Similar to several other countries in the region, since approximately 2015, Kazakhstan has seen an increase in the consumption of synthetic drugs. More recently, the country has become an independent domestic producer of synthetic drugs (Vorobyeva, 2023). The establishment of local synthetic drug production in clandestine drug laboratories occurs through the use of

precursors and equipment originating from Russia and China. The precursors for synthetic drugs are delivered to Kazakhstan predominantly from Russia (Akhmetzhanov, 2023).

Today, the main types of drugs present on the illegal market in Kazakhstan include: opiates; synthetic drugs, the production of which has become widespread within the country; naturally growing and cultivated cannabis and its derivatives; and pharmaceutical drugs containing psychoactive substances—commonly referred to as "pharmacy" drug addiction. The annual volume of illegal drug trafficking in Kazakhstan amounts to approximately 20–25 tons. More than 95% of this volume consists of cannabis-based drugs, about 5% are synthetic drugs, and less than 1% includes opium, heroin, and other substances.

In 2022, the seizure figures were as follows: a total of 15.9 tons, of which synthetic drugs made up 582.9 kg (3.6%), heroin and opium – 172.7 kg (1%), marijuana and hashish – 6.7 tons (42%), and cannabis – 8.5 tons (53.2%) (Comprehensive plan, 2023).

The Role of the Internet in the Illicit Drug Trade

Since the 2010s, foreign online platforms, instant messaging services, electronic wallets, and later cryptocurrencies, anonymous and fake "drop accounts" have been actively used in drug trafficking. Today, "online drug stores" are most often created through mobile applications such as Telegram. Young people may be offered jobs as stashers, couriers, or individuals who post advertisements for websites selling drugs. Under current Kazakhstani legislation, all of these activities are criminal offenses and are punishable by long prison terms (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). The role of the Internet in the illicit drug trade and drug use is emphasized in the annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). The INCB states that online drug trafficking has increased the availability of drugs on the black market. The Board warns that patient safety is at risk due to illegal online pharmacies selling medications directly to consumers without prescriptions. The Board urges governments to utilize the full range of tools and programs offered by the INCB to support their efforts in combating the use of the Internet for illicit drug trafficking (International Narcotics Control Board, 2024).

Youth Involvement as Distributors and Drug Users

Law enforcement agencies report that Tramadol (a pharmaceutical product and a potent opioid analgesic) is becoming a "gateway" drug to addiction for teenagers. In Kazakhstan, there is also a growing trend of youth involvement in the illicit drug trade, both as distributors and as users. The main factor contributing to the involvement of young people in drug trafficking is their broad access to various Internet resources, including those that advertise and sell drugs openly. One of the reasons for the widespread use of synthetic drugs is their low cost. In both Kazakhstani and international practice, there have been cases where such drugs are disguised as chewing candies and lollipops (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024).

The Model Of Drug Trafficking Has Spread To Kazakhstan

The groundbreaking shift in the global drug trade, first started in Russia, is now spreading worldwide. This system differs from traditional drug trafficking models in that it uses darknet markets and cryptocurrencies for anonymous transactions. This allows buyers to extract drugs from hidden physical locations or "caches" without physical contact. The Russian darknet markets control about 93% of the global share, with revenues of about 1.5 billion US dollars for 2023 for such large platforms as Kraken, Mega and Blacksprut. This dominance marks a new era for organized crime, as Russia's digital drug economy far surpasses traditional Western darknet markets in scale and influence. (Daly & Shortis, 2024).

The growth of the illicit drug trade in Russia is driven by several unique national factors: restrictive anti-drug policies, strained Western trade relations, and a solid technological foundation. Due to these conditions, the cache model has changed the way drugs are distributed in Russia. Now, drug transactions do not involve face-to-face interaction; instead, orders are placed online, paid for in cryptocurrency, and retrieved from secret locations in different cities within a few hours. This system, which offers convenience and anonymity, has led to the fact that synthetic drugs such as mephedrone have overtaken traditional imported substances such as cocaine and heroin in Russia and Kazakhstan. These powerful synthetic drugs are cheap, easy to manufacture, and easily distributed through extensive delivery networks (Daly & Shortis, 2024). Outside of Russia, this model of drug trafficking is now expanding across borders, posing risks to public health and safety. It strongly affects young people, which leads to violence, criminalization and increased dependence on synthetic drugs (Daly & Shortis, 2024).

The smuggling of various concentrates, precursors and ready-to-use substances occurs mainly from the territory of Russia through mail and transport and logistics companies. The model of the Russian cache trade in synthetic drugs is rapidly spreading beyond Russia. It has become the main method of buying drugs in several countries on the border with Russia, making synthetic drugs and drug trafficking jobs more accessible. It is also

gaining momentum in Asia, and its presence has been noted in Europe (International Narcotics Control Board, 2024).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employed a qualitative methodology to examine the evolution of Kazakhstan's drug policy in response to emerging challenges in the illicit drug market. The study included a comprehensive content analysis of recent legislative initiatives aimed at combating synthetic drug production and online drug trafficking. In addition, empirical data were collected through structured interviews and surveys involving law enforcement officers and legal practitioners, providing firsthand insights into current enforcement practices and the practical implications of policy changes. Case studies of criminal investigations were also analyzed to understand the operational dynamics between online and offline actors in the drug trade. The integration of these methods allowed for a multifaceted evaluation of the effectiveness and adaptability of Kazakhstan's drug control strategies.

RESULTS

First, the analysis revealed a significant gap in Kazakhstan's strategic approach to drug policy. Since 2015, the country has not implemented a full-scale national program to counter drug addiction and trafficking. The only interdepartmental initiative currently in place is the Comprehensive Plan to Combat Drug Addiction and Drug Trafficking in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023–2025, which lacks high-level political and legal authority, diminishing its impact and scope.

Second, administrative reforms within law enforcement have adversely affected institutional effectiveness. The former Committee for Combating Drug Crime, previously a specialized body under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, has been downgraded to a departmental level, resulting in a twofold reduction in staff and a significant decrease in regulatory authority.

Third, structural changes to other authorized bodies, particularly customs, have disrupted interagency coordination. The transfer of law enforcement responsibilities from customs to the Economic Investigation Service has created functional limitations, as its personnel lack access to critical customs zones.

Finally, the current anti-drug enforcement framework is fragmented. Law enforcement agencies, special services, forensic units, and treatment institutions operate without a unified strategy, adequate legal support, or synchronized operational actions. This results in reactive measures focused more on the consequences than the root causes of drug trafficking in Kazakhstan.

DISCUSSION

How is Kazakhstan Trying to Respond? – Review of Changes in Drug Policy and Legislation in Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, as well as throughout the world, the situation in combating drug trafficking has been changing significantly in recent years. This is mainly due to the fact that "traditional" (opium) drugs are beginning to give way to new psychoactive substances in the illegal market. They are distinguished from cannabis and other types of drugs by their relative cheapness, and according to medical observations they have a pronounced psychotropic effect and rapid addiction formation. Taking into account the above and other changes in the local illegal drug market, the Kazakh authorities have initiated amendments to the current legislation.

So, in 2015, the institute of "analogues" of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances was introduced. In 2019, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan was given the competence to approve lists of substances subject to state control. In 2020, inciting to consumption and selling drugs via the Internet were classified as serious and especially serious crimes. New crimes have also been introduced – advertising and propaganda of drugs. In 2021, "synthetics" were classified as heavy drugs. Due to the accepted standards in Kazakhstan, almost all currently known dangerous types of synthetic drugs are controlled by government agencies (about 300 substances in total and more than 1,000 of their analogues).

The mechanism for bringing new psychoactive substances under the control of government agencies has been simplified. The legal responsibility for the advertising and online sale of drugs and the use of the Internet has been strengthened. Since January 10, 2024, a new qualifying feature (aggravating circumstance) has been introduced into the criminal legislation of Kazakhstan for drug crimes - "using electronic communication systems." This crime is provided for in a number of articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan: sale of drugs; trafficking in derivatives for their manufacture; involvement in drug use using electronic communication systems (Republic

of Kazakhstan, 2014). According to the legislation of Kazakhstan, these crimes belong to the category of grave and especially grave crimes and long terms of imprisonment are established for their commission.

A new norm, Article 299-1, has been introduced into the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which criminalizes (criminalizes) advertising and propaganda of drugs. According to this article of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, criminal liability is imposed for distributing links to Internet sites promoting and selling drugs, as well as for graffiti drawings with addresses of drug sites. The punishment under this article of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan provides for imprisonment of up to 3 years. If this crime is committed by a group of persons, repeatedly or in educational organizations, then up to 6 years of imprisonment (Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019).

The new mechanism for bringing new psychoactive substances under the control of state bodies is implemented through the adoption of a Government Decree (an act of the executive body). Previously, amendments to the legislative acts of the Parliament (the act of the representative body) were required. Currently, new types of synthetic drugs and chemicals appearing on the illegal market are included in the list of narcotic drugs, the distribution of which entails criminal liability by Government Decree (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019). For example, the aforementioned Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan was amended in 2024 to include 11 new types of synthetic drugs and 17 names of precursors – chemicals used for drug production (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024).

Another important area of changes in the legislation of Kazakhstan on combating drug trafficking was the reduction of the criminal weight of the most popular drugs to bring a person to criminal responsibility. Previously, 50 grams of drugs such as pyrovaleron (speed), mephedrone (mef) and synthetic cannabinoids (spices) were required to accuse a person (criminal liability) of drug crimes, but now 1 gram is enough (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023).

In 2025, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan signed a law that tightened criminal liability for drug production, as well as for the manufacture, processing and production of drugs by officials. Now, for these crimes, the perpetrators can be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of 15 to 20 years or life imprisonment with confiscation of property.

Along with this, the Law slightly mitigated the penalties for drug pawnbrokers. For committing such a crime for the first time without aggravating circumstances, the Law provided for imprisonment for a term of 5 to 8 years with confiscation of property (previously from 5 to 10 years with confiscation of property). This mitigation of punishment is due to the fact that the so-called drug dealers, most of whom are teenagers and young people, did not directly manufacture or process them themselves, and were often used by the organizers of drug trafficking for their criminal purposes. However, repeated commission of a crime will result in severe punishment in the form of imprisonment for a period of 7 to 12 years with confiscation of property.

At the same time, the Law retained rather harsh sanctions for persons distributing drugs as part of a criminal group, in educational organizations, and for minors, providing for punishment in the form of imprisonment for a period of 15 to 20 years with confiscation of property. The law also tightened the criminal liability of officials for drug distribution. If earlier they were threatened with imprisonment for a term of 10 to 15 years with confiscation of property for these crimes, now they are provided with imprisonment for a term of 15 to 20 years with confiscation of property. In addition, the Law has taken other measures to increase the effectiveness of countering illicit trafficking in drugs and potent substances. For these purposes, criminal liability has been established for the illegal cultivation of prohibited plants containing narcotic substances by a criminal group and on an especially large scale.

Criminal liability has been introduced for the illicit trafficking of precursors and potent substances, as well as substances, tools and equipment used for the production of drugs, precursors, toxic and potent substances. Responsibility has been established for violating the rules for handling analogues of drugs, psychotropic substances, as well as precursors and potent substances (Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025).

In June 2023, a comprehensive plan to combat drug addiction and drug trafficking in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2025 was adopted (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023).

The Plan provides for the work of government agencies in the following areas: 1) Analysis of the drug situation and trends in its development; 2) Improvement of the legislative and regulatory framework; 3) Increasing the effectiveness of countering new challenges and threats of the modern drug business; 4) Improving the system of prevention, treatment of drug addiction and the development of a rehabilitation system for drug addicts; 5) Ensuring legal trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors; 6) Strengthening and expanding international cooperation.

However, over the past 4 years, the number of seized "synthetics" has increased 100 times. Therefore, the forensic examination of this type of drug belongs to the category of complex. It takes about 1 month or more to complete." In turn, this negatively affects the quality of the pre-trial investigation. The principle of the "inevitability of punishment" in relation to suspects is not respected. For example, without an expert opinion, it is impossible

to apply the measure of "arrest". For this reason, 108 criminals have been put on the wanted list today. In this regard, it is planned to equip the forensic examination bodies with modern and high-quality equipment.

Distribution of Criminal Roles in Drug Trafficking

Drug trafficking through social media is described as existing "between crypto markets and street drug markets" (Moyle, Childs, Coomber, & Barratt, 2019, p. 104), as it usually combines online marketing with the personal exchange of money for drugs between sellers and buyers. Although offline elements are usually mentioned in passing, existing research tends to focus mainly on the online aspects of this type of drug trade. For example, this method of sale is commonly described as "online drug trafficking," "social media trading," or "app trading," while sellers are described as "social media merchants" or "online merchants," and the market area as an "online marketplace," "digital market," "application market" or "social media market" (Bakken, 2021). The problem with separating "social media trading" into a separate new category is that this is often done through a demarcation process in which "online drug sales" are contrasted and differentiated from so-called "street" and "traditional" markets, including the analog "telephone market." The result is too often disjointed thinking (Søgaard, Kolind, Haller, & Hunt, 2019) and an underestimation of the importance of continuity, intersections and relationships between online and offline areas, markets and sales methods. It is important to bridge the gap between online and offline drug trafficking by exploring the hybrid nature of drug trafficking through social media. The researchers of this issue (Korshøj & Søgaard, 2024) have illustrated how many sellers are not technological exclusionists, how many of them use a multi-channel approach to sales that includes both online and offline means, and how combinations of online and offline spheres play a central role in recruiting drug workers by sellers and in their massive search for drugs for resale. The findings of these authors point to the importance of replacing traditional technocentric isolated thinking with a more holistic approach, and offer analytical, conceptual, and methodological reflections on how future research could better capture the mixed reality of most modern drug markets, including crypto markets (Korshøj & Søgaard, 2024).

Based on this, the practice of law enforcement agencies in Kazakhstan shows the following distribution of criminal roles in online and offline (hybrid) drug dealing. In such a criminal group, functions are clearly distributed, ranging from the organization of Internet resources to the direct transfer of drugs (Glushkov, 2018).

- a. Organizer (dealer) - the team leader who initiates the creation of the platform and manages the process. His responsibilities include the launch and administration of an online resource; the purchase and packaging of large quantities of drugs; the development of schemes for the transfer and receipt of funds; interaction with manufacturers and suppliers.
- b. The manufacturer is engaged in the synthesis or cultivation of narcotic substances, organizes their storage in large quantities and transmits the location coordinates to the operator.
- c. The supplier's tasks include receiving orders for drug delivery; hiring front persons ("drops") who perform risky tasks such as cashing out funds or receiving parcels; controlling the delivery of drug shipments, re-ordering them and transferring the coordinates of storage points to the store.
- d. The regional manager, his responsibilities are the selection and coordination of group members in the region; control of their work and conflict resolution; development of logistics for drug transportation; schemes of money withdrawal from the control of the authorities.

Law enforcement experts note that a special feature of the structure of such criminal groups is a network organization. This allows them to quickly adapt to changes in legislation and effectively conceal their activities. Criminal groups use high-tech methods of interaction: anonymous messengers, cryptocurrencies and distributed databases. Such methods make their activities resistant to attempts at suppression by the State.

Other roles in the criminal group structure:

- e. The operator acts as the coordinator of the group. Its tasks are: making a deposit to the dealer; selecting and hiring couriers; transferring addresses of large shipments of drugs to "kladmen"; managing a database of product locations; sales control; interacting with customers through anonymous communication channels, including conflict resolution (for example, if the product is missing at a specified location).
- f. Couriers are engaged in packaging drugs into small batches, placing them in caches (clutches) and transmitting information about these locations to the operator. Their number varies depending on the scale of the group's activities and the territory. Recruitment of new group members is carried out through the job search sections of the forum. Vacancies are organized by region, and candidates apply through comments or personal messages. When applying for a job, you may be required to provide passport information, a car, or a questionnaire with personal information. Such information obtained by law enforcement agencies can facilitate the investigation of the group's crimes.

Drug trafficking criminal groups actively use marketing strategies to create the illusion of a legitimate business. Drug trafficking websites and forums have all the signs of a well-organized international trading company. Online resources for drug trafficking operate under the guise of "shops". Each of these "stores" has a standard set of attributes of online commerce: price lists with discount systems, secure communication channels with sellers, courier services, customer base, and forums for feedback on product quality and service level.

- g. An "advertiser" specially hired for this purpose is engaged in marketing. His task is to attract customers and ensure the development of the store. For this purpose, both online advertising and primitive methods are used, for example, putting advertising labels on the walls of houses.
- One of the key features of the drug network (criminal group) is a high degree of anonymity. All stages, from placing an order on the website to obtaining the coordinates of the masonry, are carefully hidden. Chain participants such as couriers, operators, and organizers do not have direct contact with each other. This minimizes the risk of exposure. Online platforms provide so-called transaction insurance due to the fact that payment for goods is made in advance. In addition to customers, store employees may also bear risks. Their deposits are kept by dealers. Therefore, dealers also need to be monitored.
- h. The administration of the Internet site performs the task of such control. To maintain discipline within the drug network (criminal group), site administrators use the following mechanisms: "trading quotas"; "deposits" and "transaction guarantor". "Trading quotas" - dealers purchase the right to work on the platform, and in case of violation of the rules, their quotas can be canceled. "Deposits" - dealers are required to deposit deposits, which are kept by the administration and used as a guarantee of fulfillment of obligations.; "Guarantor of the transaction" - in case of disputes (for example, if the buyer has not discovered the treasure), the administrator acts as an arbitrator. If necessary, a "remortgaging" of the goods is organized with a deduction from the collateral of the guilty party. Such a well-established system allows criminal groups to ensure stability and maintain the trust of customers, despite their illegal activities.

Although drugs such as cocaine, MDMA, and heroin are still imported, drug trafficking networks have been stimulated by darknet markets. to engage in the production and sale of synthetic drugs. In recent years, synthetics have begun to displace traditional drugs. The supply, fueled by the acquisition of precursors mainly from Russia, has greatly simplified. An increasing number of synthetic, potent, fast and cheap manufactured and consumed in Kazakhstan are produced here in our country.

The damage caused to society and the health of society by the cache model of drug trafficking is catastrophically high. With such a cache model of drug trafficking, young people used as "kladmen" receive harsh sentences or face violence from their employers. Considering that over the past 4 years, the number of seized "synthetics" in Kazakhstan has increased 100 times, one can only guess at the actual volumes of synthetics on the market. Thus, modern drug trafficking on the Internet is a complex, technologically advanced network with a clear distribution of roles and internal control mechanisms. This requires the development of new counter-strategies by law enforcement agencies, including monitoring the Internet space, analyzing transactions, and strengthening cybersecurity measures.

Monitoring of Social Networks and Internet Space

The purpose of constant monitoring of the Internet space by law enforcement agencies is to identify websites, posts, blogs and advertisements containing information about the distribution of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, precursors and their analogues.

The staff of the AFM RK (Staff of the Financial Monitoring Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan) monitors the Internet space, which covers the channels of the Telegram messenger, social networks, and ad services for the distribution of narcotic drugs and precursors. The results of such monitoring in Kazakhstan are as follows. In the first half of 2024, 875 Internet resources were installed and blocked (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). About 300 channels in messengers, 4 of the largest Darknet marketplaces where prohibited funds are sold, have been identified by monitoring. 80 users of Telegram channels who constantly advertised and also sold narcotic and psychotropic substances on the territory of Kazakhstan were identified. 3 large drug sales sites with a total number of participants of almost 35 thousand people were identified. Almost 10 thousand people who are potential users of narcotic drugs have been identified. The analysis showed that more than 50% of consumers come from Astana, Almaty and the Almaty region of Kazakhstan.

Law enforcement officers of the AFM RK (Law enforcement officers of the Financial Monitoring Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan) in 2024, 36 drug stores with a turnover of 25.6 billion tenge (51,200,000 USD) were identified. 59 card accounts belonging to 60 drug sites are installed in the Telegram messenger (Financial Monitoring Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024).

In 2017, the Cybernadzor system developed by the IT company Kazdream Technologies began monitoring online content on the Internet. "Cybernadzor" is an information system that is used to monitor compliance with the requirements of the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Internet (and telecommunications networks in accordance with the Law "On Communications"). This system allows government agencies to coordinate efforts to detect, identify, and restrict illegal content on the Internet. There was no public information about the operation of this system. In 2022, information was published that the Cybernadzor project was used to identify drug transactions on the Internet and track criminals.

In 2023, the law enforcement agencies of Kazakhstan planned to automate the detection of drug trafficking via the Internet, as well as set up website blocking functions online using artificial intelligence (AI). There are legal questions about how AI can block websites online in this system. Legal restrictions on the operation of websites under Kazakh law require court decisions or an order from an authorized body to temporarily suspend access to online content.

In the Cybernadzor system, the algorithm of interaction between government agencies is as follows. Government agencies monitor content on the Internet, the distribution of which is prohibited or restricted on the basis of legal acts and court decisions. In case of detection of such content, government agencies send a notification to the authorized body (the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan) through Cybernadzor. The notification must contain the following information: the legality and validity of the information, screenshots of the identified materials that confirm their illegality. In the future, the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan makes the following decisions: a) in case of confirmation of the fact of violation of laws, it takes measures to block access to controversial content (in accordance with Article 41-1 of the Law "On Communications"); b) in the absence of confirmation of the fact of violation of laws, it rejects the notification indicating the justification for the absence of violation of legislation Of Kazakhstan (Minister of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

Law enforcement agencies block such online stores. This year, for example, 604 drug sites were discovered and blocked. But this measure will not solve the problem dramatically, as new sites appear quickly. And identifying them is a long process. Establishing the organizers is even more difficult. Because they are abroad. Modern hardware and software is needed to block such illegal content. Although operational staff can regularly use search engines to detect online stores engaged in illicit drug trafficking, the process of further blocking these resources is lengthy and time-consuming.

Proposals to Combat Drug Trafficking: Generalized Opinions of Law Enforcement Officials

Table 1. Summarized (generalized) responses of law enforcement officials to the survey questions (DEA – Directorate for Drug Control of the Almaty Police Department)

Question	Summarized employee responses	Discovered problems	Implementation proposals
What measures will improve the effectiveness of the fight against prohibited content?	<p><i>One of the key steps in detecting criminal activity is the systematic monitoring of Internet resources offering prohibited substances.</i></p> <p><i>Although operational staff can regularly use search engines to detect online stores engaged in illicit drug trafficking, the process of further blocking these resources is lengthy and time-consuming.</i></p> <p><i>A more expeditious solution to the problem could be provided with the help of automated Internet monitoring systems, which would make it possible to quickly identify sites with illegal content. An important step would be active cooperation with search services (Google, Yandex, Rambler and Mail, etc.) to exclude links to resources related to illegal activities from search results, which would have a preventive effect on illegal business.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High dynamism of the appearance of new sites • Lengthy blocking procedures through Roskomnadzor • Lack of automation 	<p>Network resource monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of AI content analysis • Direct integration with search engines • Creation of a unified registry of prohibited resources
What technical measures are effective against anonymization?	<p><i>After detecting the fact of illegal activity on the Internet, the next important step is to identify and analyze the devices from which illegal actions were carried out or which were used for communication. These devices may include mobile phones, tablets, computers, and other hardware. One of the main identifying features of a device on the Internet is the IP address, which, combined with the MAC address, allows you to locate the device and identify the participant in criminal activity. Each Internet service provider assigns a unique IP address to the subscriber, and the MAC address is linked to the device by the</i></p>	<p>Device identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread use of VPN/TOR • IPv6 • Legal barriers to DPI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deployment of the COPM 2.0 system • Training of cyber intelligence specialists • Legalizing timing attacks for borders

Question	Summarized employee responses	Discovered problems	Implementation proposals
	<p>manufacturer. For law enforcement agencies, establishing an IP address is a key element of the investigation, as it allows you to determine the location of the subscriber, record his connections and gain access to information transmitted over the network. This data can become the basis for evidence of criminal activity. As part of operational search activities, such as removing information from technical communication channels, data can be obtained that allows tracking the actions of criminals. However, the problem lies in the use of anonymization technologies by criminal groups, such as VPN services or TOR, which hide the chain of addresses of the connection route and complicate the identification of participants. The use of NAT (Network Address Translation) technology is a common problem faced by law enforcement agencies. The implementation of the COPM system (operational search measures system) in communication channels can solve a number of tasks. COPMS are based on Deep Packet Inspection technologies, which allow analyzing both stationary and streaming data at all levels of the OSI network model. These systems can be used not only to monitor traffic, but also to check content on the servers of Internet companies, which can help in the fight against drug trafficking. Even the Tor network is not completely secure. There are vulnerabilities associated with controlled nodes that can monitor traffic, and with the possibility of so-called timing attacks, when the transit time of packets is analyzed, allowing them to set the route of their movement through the network. These vulnerabilities become apparent when monitoring a large number of routers on the Internet, which allows law enforcement agencies to use appropriate methods to detect criminal activity, even when using such secure networks.</p>		
How can we improve the interaction between stakeholders?	<p>To successfully solve crimes through the Internet, it is important to work purposefully with Internet companies. Operational authorities should clearly understand what information needs to be obtained and how technically possible it is. In order to effectively solve problems related to the use of special equipment and the conduct of operational search activities, operational staff need special technical knowledge. The sources of information about users can be companies providing telecommunications services, social networks, forums, hosting and other Internet services. However, interaction with foreign Internet companies is a big problem, as these companies are often located outside the jurisdiction of the country. This makes it difficult to cooperate with them, and if there is no interest from foreign law enforcement agencies, it becomes impossible to carry out operational activities.</p>	<p>Working with Internet companies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refusal of foreign platforms from interaction • Lack of technical specialists in squad at the Ministry of Internal Affairs 	<p>Conclusion of international memoranda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a "digital squad" at the Ministry of Internal Affairs • Development of data query standards
What are the IT ways and methods to combat the illegal sale of narcotic drugs?	<p>One of the approaches to combating the illegal sale of drugs may be the use of hacker methods and virus software aimed at directly affecting the sources of illegal information or the computers of criminals. However, such actions require legal support, as they may violate the law and jeopardize the integrity of the investigation.</p>	<p>Contradiction of the Criminal Code</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The risk of recognizing evidence as unacceptable 	<p>Hacker methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special law on "legal hacking" • Creation of an Ethical Hacking Unit in the structure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs
How to minimize the risks?	<p>In addition to technical measures, operational staff also use methods of searching and obtaining information from open sources. In some cases, it is possible to freely obtain subscriber's personal data using vulnerabilities in Internet services. For example, restoring an account</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictions on social media policies • Ethical issues of surveillance 	<p>Open source analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Software development for OSINT analysis

Question	Summarized employee responses	Discovered problems	Implementation proposals
	<p>password or "lighting up" a phone on a social network. Http sniffers, software bookmarks, and special software solutions are also effective means of deanonymizing users. A promising area is the analysis of users' social connections on social networks, which can significantly help in uncovering criminal activity.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal framework for working with digital footprints
<p>How to identify patterns?</p>	<p>To combat crimes related to drug trafficking, members of criminal groups use various schemes for legalizing and withdrawing money through electronic payment systems and cryptocurrencies. Tracking cash flows can be an effective method of countering such crimes. AFM has access to all information about the movement of financial flows and can track money transfers. However, operational staff often work with information provided by electronic payment systems.</p> <p>Cryptocurrency users often turn to exchangers and online exchanges to withdraw funds, and monitoring these operations could help identify the financial schemes of criminals.</p> <p>Computer-technical expertise is also an important tool, as user actions are stored on their devices in the form of event logs, lists of visited sites, deleted files, and backups. The discovery of specialized programs or cryptocurrency wallets on computers can be the basis for tracking all transactions and detecting criminal activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymity of the blockchain • Offshore payment systems 	<p>Financial flows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of Chainalysis • Mandatory verification for exchangers >50 thousand rubles.
<p>What are the methods of collecting information?</p>	<p>One of the most effective ways to identify the facts of the sale of narcotic drugs through online sales is information received from drug users. Traditional methods of obtaining such information, as in classical operational investigative activities, remain important. This information can be especially valuable, as it contains information about the "pawnbroker", drug storage locations, as well as conspiracy methods used by criminals. After collecting and analyzing such data, it is possible to develop operational search measures aimed at identifying criminals and identifying their patterns of action.</p> <p>Operational measures, including searches, interrogations and other investigative actions, make it possible to identify members of a criminal group and detain them. After identifying all the members of the group using a set of operational search measures, it is important to evaluate the materials obtained, involving investigative officers for further investigation.</p> <p>If a pre-trial investigation is initiated, it is possible to promptly take the necessary measures, such as detention, searches and seizure. Despite its generality, such an algorithm of actions can be effectively applied to investigate the activities of online drug markets, and in the future, depending on the situation, additional measures can be developed to implement operational materials. However, it is important to remember that criminals are constantly improving their methods of committing crimes, creating new ways to circumvent the obstacles of law enforcement agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • False testimony • Risk of provocation 	<p>Working with drug users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Witness protection programs • Digital dossiers on mortgagees

Proposals to Combat Drug Trafficking: Opinions of Lawyers

Table 2. Summarized (generalized) answers of lawyers to the questionnaire questions (lawyers of the Almaty City Bar Association who have experience in legal defense of persons accused of drug crimes)

Questions	Respondents' responses
<p><i>Why should those who have committed these crimes be treated humanely if the laws of other countries provide for more severe punishments?</i></p>	<p><i>No one here should be pitied - people deliberately commit these crimes. But at the same time, at the state level, the wrong approach in the fight against drugs is precisely from the point of view of choosing punishment. Young guys are caught with these bookmarks and given terms from 10 to 14 years. That is, 10-11 is if you admit guilt, 12-14 is if you do not admit it. It's all the youth. And all this, of course, is not a correction - these are ruined destinies, ruined lives. Therefore, the penitentiary system needs to be reviewed. Moreover, it needs to be done very quickly at the state level. We need to review the system of punishment for drug-related crimes. Those who are caught for the first time (the so-called "first pass") should not be given huge deadlines. Because someone really needs to be given 10 years to be punished, depending on what crime they committed, of course. But most of those who get there, it's enough, perhaps, to put them away for 3 years, so that he comes to his senses. At the same time, we need to understand what we see: these terrible punishments - 10 years, 12, 14 - they have no effect on reducing the volume of narcotic drugs sold. The first crime related to drug distribution does not need to be punished for 10-15 years. Because everyone should have the right to correction, and the punitive system does not work. It doesn't bear fruit. We catch them, we plant them, we give them 10-15 years. Are there fewer drugs on the street? No, it's not. That is, this tool is not working.</i></p>
<p><i>What is the portrait of the average criminal who commits such a crime and what are the statistics?</i></p>	<p><i>If you look at the crime statistics on the website of the Committee on Legal Statistics: the number of drug-related crimes is not decreasing. That is, about six and a half to seven thousand are registered annually. And apparently this is the very indicator. 7000 are mortgagees, these are laboratories. If you look at the official statistics, who is it that commits these crimes? 87% of crimes in the country are committed by men. 84% of crimes in the country are committed by people without higher education. In addition, many commit crimes out of desperation. One of the suspects, for example, is an orphan, his mother is disabled and blind. And he has a profession - he cooks food, he is a cook. But he says: "I can't support my family by working like this." He says: "It's not working." Yes. Therefore, I say again that I am not justifying anyone, but to my great regret, he received 11 years in prison. That is, even if he is released on parole, it will not happen earlier than in seven years. Do you understand? He is 25-26 years old, and he will lose the best years of his life for this.</i></p>
<p><i>Which drugs are most often distributed by these criminals?</i></p>	<p><i>One of my clients made a laboratory. These individuals receive chemicals from curators. Curators from neighboring countries ship chemicals, bury them somewhere in secret places. His task is to dig it up, bring it to his laboratory, mix it, boil it, dry it, and sell it. They sold four kilograms in a week. 4 kilograms were sold for one and a half million. Every "mef" that is being talked about is the most popular synthetic drug. At the same time, a kilogram of this drug... a gram of this drug costs 20 thousand tenge. That is, even if you just count it: a kilogram on the street costs 20 million, the laboratory earns one and a half. A dose of this "mef" costs 4,000 tenge, do you understand? That is, it is an affordable, cheap drug. It is made from chemicals that are not prohibited. They are freely transported to the country, they are sent by mail, they are imported from China. As I understand it, it's not the most complicated formula, because brewers now are 20-25-year-old guys who can master a simple formula and produce and sell it all.</i></p>
<p><i>Where do the precursors for the manufacture of synthetic drugs come from?</i></p>	<p><i>Trading operations take place via the Internet, through messengers. We need to eliminate this. We need to somehow develop programs that will block accounts in Telegram, Signal, and drug dealers. We need to block these chemical suppliers - they also all work online. Now everything is contactless, no one is dating anyone. We are also influenced by this factor of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Because now the citizens of these countries have paid attention to our market. That is, chemicals come from them. For example, in January, a group of Ukrainian citizens were caught distributing drugs in Kazakhstan. They had a garage worth 400-500 million. In other words, these people who committed crimes at home, they have now turned their attention to us, because the market is quite large. And now they are here too. I think Ukrainians and Russians are the ones who work in the drug business, they move here too, they live here too. I think we have no idea what the volume is, what kind of money we are talking about there - it's billions, maybe even dollars, yes, every year in the country. Because it seems to me that no one has any idea at all about the volume of drugs sold. For example: Rozymbekov Mosque, Zhandosova - there is a transformer booth nearby, the name is painted. Or on Panfilov Street in the city center, there's a pedestrian zone, there's a courtyard - that's where those ads are too. And now it's everywhere, everywhere, everywhere. And what volumes are we talking about, considering that these drugs are easy to produce? Very. I don't think anyone has any idea what's going on. It may already be too late to take any cosmetic measures, and it is already necessary to take serious steps there.</i></p>
<p><i>What kind of hierarchy exists in the drug business?</i></p>	<p><i>Mortgagors (the lowest level) Sellers. Then the brewers. Tutor. People in uniform who probably close their eyes when the goods enter the country. People who know where and what is for sale. They mostly condemn mortgagors and breeders. And what are the brewers doing? This "mef" is being prepared. That is, he finds a curator, the curator informs him of the conditions, says: "I supply you with</i></p>

	<p><i>chemicals, you have to use this formula." That is, as I understand it, it is very easy to cook. And the curators or patrons of this business - were there any cases that they were condemned? I do not know of any cases where people have been detained to participate in these topics. That is, we are fighting right now, the fight has been established only with actual sales and production, and of course, not a single curator has been imprisoned. Plus there is another point here. We have drugs that are sold in pharmacies. For example, I defended one person who stole a phone, and I also got a sentence for it. Then, further... He has no front teeth at all. I ask, "Where?" He says: "And you know, I swallowed 50 pills and just fell face down, knocked out all my teeth." In addition to these chemicals, we also have problems with such drugs. Something has to be done about it, too. And to clarify, such professional chemical laboratories are not needed for cooking these synthetics. That is, they can be made in artisanal conditions. These are artisanal laboratories. Mix something, dry something. For example, one of my clients, a cook, is a young boy, he is 22 years old. There were four of them who dealt with this topic. They all got just from 11 to 14. And they, as I understand it, well... We easily coped with the task and were able to produce the product.</i></p>
<p><i>What measures can you suggest to combat this phenomenon?</i></p>	<p><i>In many ways, people do this out of desperation. We need to learn to separate very specifically who we are talking about. There are guys who go into this business out of desperation. And it's not just the drug trade. This is where awareness and hopelessness mix. That's all. It's very simple. The same goes for drug sales. Is it easy money? Yes, it's easy money. They are paid 2,000 tenge per bookmark for one bookmark. Why are they all given long deadlines? Because they are caught with a large volume. And why are there more of them? Because they take 10-15-20 bookmarks to earn more. It's not enough to plant them. Young people need to work. It's all the youth. Those who are engaged in these bookmarks, who work as brewers, are all young people. What does this mean? About the fact that it is necessary to work with young people. They need to be explained. They need to be told, "Guys, you're going to get this money, yes, for this bookmark, and then you're going to get caught. No options. They'll catch you and put you in jail for 10 years. If you're lucky, 10 years, and if you're unlucky, 14 years."</i></p> <p><i>To summarize all of the above, the suggestions are as follows:</i></p> <p><i>The first thing to do is to review the drug control system. We have a whole Ministry of Digital Development, aerospace technologies, holdings that deal with IT and electronic services. We have white hackers who are being promoted everywhere - "what cool guys, they're going to patch everything up." We need to combine them.</i></p> <p><i>First. Adopt new technologies and fight with these weapons against drugs: block accounts on social networks and messengers; stop job offers as a pawnbroker; stop advertising sales.</i></p> <p><i>Second. Think about legalizing light drugs (marijuana). We like to look back to the West - in half of the USA, Germany, Canada, it is legalized.</i></p> <p><i>The third. Change the punishment system. The current punitive system is not working. We just cut out thousands of young guys from their lives, who then do nothing in prison for 10-15 years.</i></p> <p><i>Fourth. Motivational work. We need to make films and videos to show what drug addicts look like, how their families suffer, what crimes are committed while intoxicated, etc.</i></p>

Problems Requiring Solutions in The Fight Against Drug Crime In Kazakhstan (According To Politicians And Legislators)

According to the opinions of politicians and legislators based on expert opinions, the negative factors contributing to the spread of drugs in Kazakhstan are the following (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). The presence of stable channels for the illegal import of transit types of drugs, precursors, other substances and equipment used for their manufacture, due to the insufficient staffing of certain sections of the state border with modern technical means. Active implementation of scientific and technological progress by drug dealers (Darknet, messengers, crypto wallets, etc.). Insufficiently studied clinic and imperfect research methods for new types of synthetic drugs. This does not allow for the formation of a zero-tolerance society for these substances and an effective law enforcement mechanism to combat their spread.

According to the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the illegal trafficking of precursors and other substances and equipment used for the manufacture of drugs within the country is not a crime, only their smuggling is criminalized. An obligatory sign of the *corpus delicti* is their sale. In order to improve legislation, an expert analysis of judicial practice in drug crimes cases based on newly introduced formulations is needed. It is necessary to develop explanations and proposals on the work of law enforcement agencies.

There is no effective mechanism for monitoring and limiting the turnover of medicines that become the subject of abuse. Consideration should be given to classifying the most dangerous of them as narcotic, psychotropic, or potent substances. At the same time, it is important to maintain access to these drugs for citizens in need on medical grounds. Medications such as tropicamide and nitrous oxide are used in "pharmacy addiction." These substances are mainly used to increase the effects of "synthetics" and other types of drugs and, due to the development of the medical market, do not have an exhaustive list.

There are medications with a certain application that cause a change in consciousness. Lawmakers plan to draft a bill providing for liability for the illegal trafficking of highly potent substances – non-medical consumption,

storage and distribution. Medications that cause changes in consciousness can be used as psychoactive substances by teenagers to experiment with their health. First of all, we are talking about tramadol, a synthetic opioid analgesic that belongs to prescription drugs and is on a par with heroin. Of particular concern is the fact that tramadol is becoming an "entry point" into drug addiction for teenagers. In addition to tramadol, atropine-type drugs can be used to change consciousness, which can be used in entertainment venues.

There is currently no accurate and reliable accounting of drug addicts in Kazakhstan. According to experts, the actual number of drug addicts is 5 times higher than the official figures. To generate a full-fledged report, you need to get information from various sources. An effective system of treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts, as well as prevention systems, is required.

In order to curb the spread of "synthetics", it is necessary to strengthen control over precursors, other substances and equipment used to manufacture drugs. Such control is required primarily in the areas of border and customs inspection of the relevant goods, with the determination of the "nature", toxicity and chemical composition of such substances. Legislative restrictions on the use of Internet technologies in the drug business, including through the expansion of representative offices of foreign online platforms and instant messaging services in Kazakhstan, as well as provider, banking and postal services. It is necessary to equip specialized departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan with modern hardware and software complexes. It is advisable to expand the Ministry's functions in the field of combating cybercrime.

According to the opinions of politicians and legislators, based on expert opinions, (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023) there should be a number of priority measures to combat drug crime in Kazakhstan:

1. equipping border checkpoints with inspection equipment for detecting drugs, precursors, and equipment for drug laboratories transported by heavy-duty vehicles under the guise of inventory items and legal chemical products;
2. strengthening the material and technical base of forensic examination bodies for accelerated research of new synthetic drugs, as well as blood samples and other biomaterials to be selected by health authorities as part of a medical examination of citizens;
3. the introduction of screening to detect drug addiction at an early stage, contributing to the formation of reliable records of drug users, effective analysis of the drug situation with the development of adequate measures to prevent drug addiction;
4. modernization and opening of treatment and rehabilitation centers, increased demand for finished products of medical and labor workshops, monitoring the provision of medical and social assistance to drug addicts from psychoactive substances in private drug centers.

CONCLUSION

Since 2015, Kazakhstan has not implemented an industry-wide program to combat drug addiction and drug trafficking. The only interdepartmental document in this area today is the Comprehensive Plan to Combat Drug Addiction and Drug Trafficking in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2025. That is, the level of the document's political and legal status has been significantly lowered. Another problem is the ill-conceived administrative reforms of law enforcement agencies. Thus, the specialized Committee for Combating Drug Crime, which operated in the structure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan as a state institution, was transformed into a Department. This main law enforcement agency for countering drug trafficking has undergone a 2-fold reduction in its staff size and a significant limitation of its powers at the regulatory level. Other authorized bodies, including customs, have also been restructured, with the transfer of its law enforcement function to the Economic Investigation Service, whose employees do not have access to the customs zone. As a result, the current situation has led to a weakening of the role of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan as an authorized coordinating body in the formation and implementation of state drug policy. Currently, a certain combination of law enforcement, special government agencies, forensic experts and drug treatment institutions, lacking a common strategy, sufficient powers, effective legislation, clear consistency and synchronicity of law enforcement, organizational, operational actions, as well as the required funding and technological equipment, is trying to carry out tasks to counter drug crime. Thus, due to the lack of clear programmatic regulation at a high political and legal level of anti-drug activities and effective state strategic management, Kazakhstan continues to focus on combating not the causes, but only the consequences of drug trafficking.

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