



E48 The Current State of Illicit Drugs, Counterfeit Pharmaceuticals, and New Psychoactive Substances in West Asia — Particularly Turkey

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand: (1) the influence of developments in the opiate market in Afghanistan on the drug control situation in West Asia, particularly in Turkey; (2) the importance of the Balkan route as one of the main trafficking routes of opiates out of Afghanistan; and, (3) the main issues of concern for the region and for Turkey.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing an update on the current state of illicit drugs, counterfeit pharmaceuticals, and new psychoactive substances in West Asia, particularly Turkey.

Nearly all heroin available on the illicit drug markets in Europe originates in Afghanistan. Despite the diverse trafficking routes, the main one remains the so-called Balkan route, with Turkey serving as a starting point of the main corridor for trafficking bulk quantities of Afghan heroin via the Islamic Republic of Iran to Bulgaria and through countries in the western Balkans to Western and Central Europe, or from Bulgaria through Romania and Hungary to Western and Central Europe.

In 2014, seizures of heroin and morphine along the Balkan route amounted to 48 tons, an increase compared with the quantity seized in previous years. The largest quantities were seized in the Islamic Republic of Iran (24.4 tons) and Turkey (8.3 tons). Recent reports indicate that other routes are gaining in importance. In 2015, Turkey observed the emergence of a second route, encompassing Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, in addition to the countries traditionally lying on the Balkan route.

Turkey reported a significant amount of seizures involving MDMA or “ecstasy” -type substances, namely more than five and one-half million tablets in 2015, as well as seizures of LSD.

A substantial challenge with respect to psychotropic substances in the region and Turkey remains the supply of the so-called counterfeit “captagon” tablets that continue to be seized in large quantities, especially in countries in the Gulf and Middle East. “Captagon” was originally the official trade name for a pharmaceutical preparation containing fenethylline, a synthetic stimulant. The substance currently known as “captagon” are tablets similar in appearance containing amphetamine cut with multiple adulterants, such as caffeine and other substances. In 2015, Turkey reported seizures of more than 15 million tablets. There is no other synthetic drug seized as regularly in such quantities. Other countries that reported large so-called “captagon” seizures include Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

Turkey was also one of the few countries in West Asia reporting large seizures of synthetic cannabinoids often advertised as legal replacements for cannabis (more than 500kg) in 2015.

More than 200,000 persons are estimated to be in need of treatment for drug abuse in Turkey. In 2015, Turkey reported an increase in the residential treatment of methamphetamine addicts, a slight decrease in the overall number of persons injecting drugs (mainly heroin), some increase in the use of amphetamine-type stimulants and tranquilizers, as well as opioid-containing pharmaceuticals. More than half of overdose deaths involved polydrug use, with half associated with opioid and one-third with amphetamine-type stimulants and/or cannabis use.

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