

Drug Free Australia's series - exposing pill testing misinformation

Episode 4 – The UK's bad experience

What we know

- In Episode 3 users more likely to use MDMA (Ecstasy) if no other drug in the pill
 - therefore pill checking increases the likelihood that partygoers will use more Ecstasy
 - pill checking also often puts an unbalanced emphasis on other drugs found in Ecstasy pills
 - ACT trial in 2019 red-carded a number of pills with N-ethyl pentylone
 - there was obviously a batch of these going around
 - usually up to 200 pills per batch
 - this batch was not causing deaths
 - Australia has only had one bad batch of pills with 3 deaths in 2017



Australian
National
University

ACT Pill Testing Trial 2019: Program evaluation

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Their premise

- From Pill Testing Australia's evaluation – p 11
 - After testing a pill is given a white, yellow or red card
 - An ecstasy pill containing no other drug is white-carded

Diagram 3: Classification and reporting of detected substances

WHITE:	Where a substance was analysed, and was the same as what the patron anticipated that it might be
YELLOW:	Where a substance was analysed, and there was a significant disparity between the result and what the patron anticipated that it was
RED:	Where a substance was analysed, and revealed the presence of a substance known to be associated with increased harm / multiple overdoses/ death Where a substance was analysed and returned an ambivalent result, or functional groups known to be associated with significant harm

- Premise: Ecstasy causes negligible harm

Report on the ACT GTM Pill Testing Pilot: a Harm Reduction Service

Prepared by the Safety Testing Advisory Service
At Festivals and Events (STA-SAFE) Consortium

June, 2018

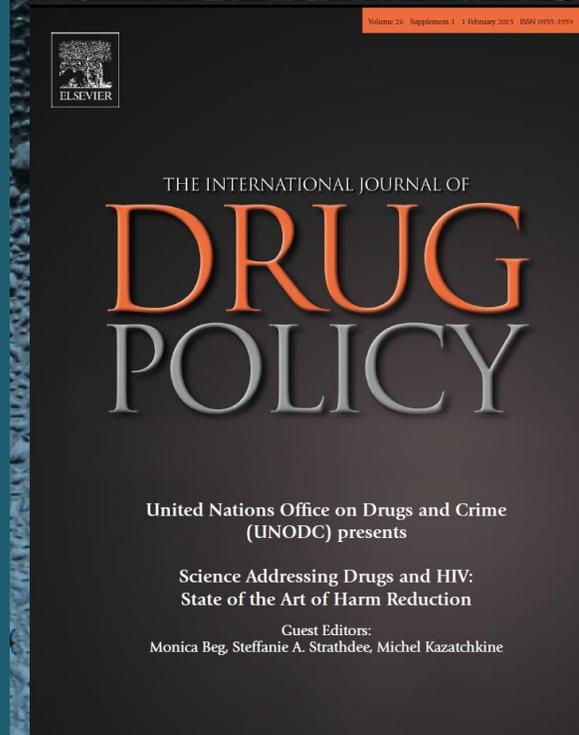
The STA-SAFE consortium consists of:

Harm Reduction Australia
Australian Drug Observatory, Australian National University
Noffs Foundation
DanceWize, Harm Reduction Victoria
Students for Sensible Drug Policy Australia



The reality

- Two scientific analyses of coroners' reports on ecstasy (MDMA) pill deaths in Australia
 - The first is a subset of the second larger study with . . .
 - 392 ecstasy deaths between 2000 and 2018
 - no deaths from impurities identified
 - 5% of deaths had another drug mixed in the pill
 - **this indicates that ecstasy is causal in 95% of deaths**
 - 'bad batch' deaths almost non-existent in Australia
 - only 3 Chapel Street Melbourne deaths (2017)
 - **so it is likely, on the probabilities of ecstasy causing the other 95% of deaths, that 99% are caused by it**



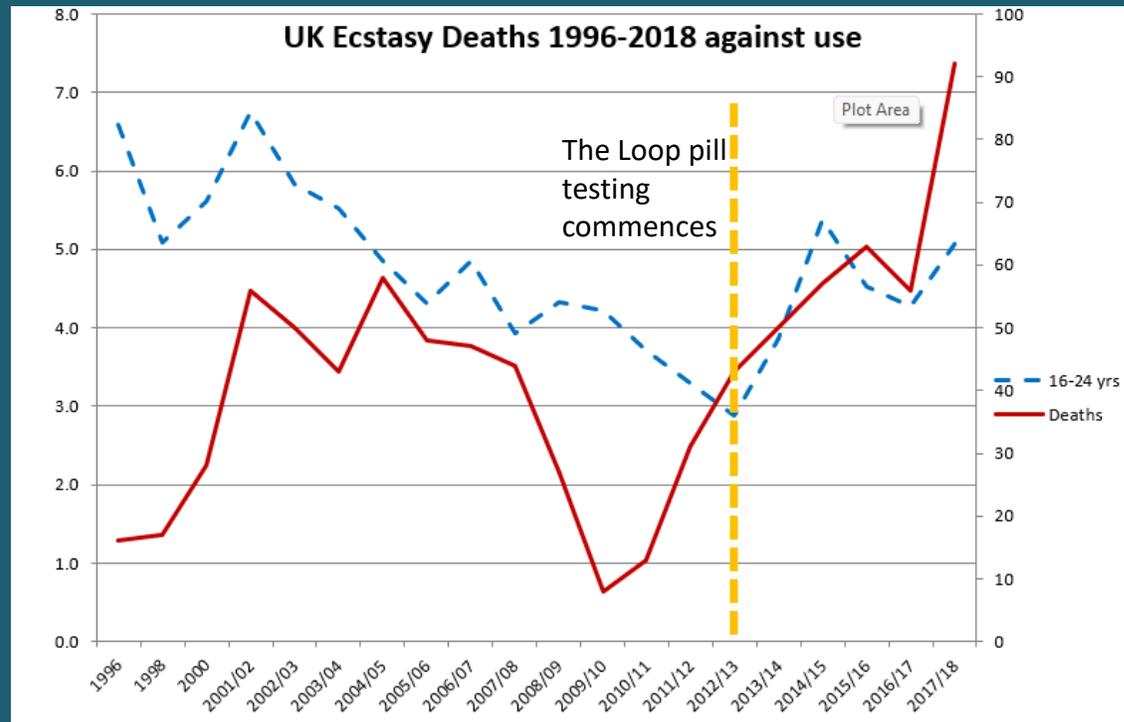
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31865118/>

European data

- European countries were at the forefront of introducing pill testing or 'drug checking'
 - nevertheless **European countries do not keep reliable data** on pill deaths
 - **Only the UK** keeps reliable and updated data on:
 - Ecstasy use
 - Pill deaths

UK use & deaths

- 'The Loop' pill testing commenced 2013



Lessons from UK

- What the data tells us
 - The ACT trial **predicts a rise in Ecstasy use** once pill testing is introduced
 - when UK pill testing was introduced in 2013, expanding to 12 cities by 2016, **Ecstasy use increased** as predicted
 - Pill testing outfit's educating of users **did not reduce use** of a harmful substance, as harm reductionists predicted
 - it **did not decrease deaths** which rather increased from 43 deaths in 2013 to 92 deaths in 2016

Next episode

- In this series

1. It's the ecstasy, stupid!!
2. How ecstasy causes death
3. More deaths the result
4. The UK's bad experience
5. **Better equipment useless**
6. Call out your politicians