

UK buying more legal and illegal drugs online, survey finds



Global Drug Survey (GDS) finds users moving from dealers to internet, while extent of alcohol use remains 'very worrying'

More drug users are buying their [drugs](#) online – including so-called legal highs as well as illegal drugs such as [cannabis](#) and MDMA – because they say the quality is better, there is more choice and it is more convenient, research has found.

The 2014 Global Drug Survey (GDS) – which questioned almost 80,000 drug users from 43 countries, and is the largest research of its kind – indicates that although the majority of drug users still

use dealers, a growing number are following 21st-century shopping habits by going online.

Hidden online drug marketplaces such as Silk Road – known as the "Amazon for drugs" before it was shut down in October last year – have sprung up and drug users are using the virtual currency [Bitcoin](#) to make transactions. The UK is also at the vanguard of this shift online, with the highest percentage of people who had ever bought drugs over the [internet](#). Almost a quarter of UK respondents to the survey – which is partnered by Mixmag and the Guardian in the UK and is likely to be answered by people who take drugs regularly – said they had bought drugs over the internet. Just under 60% knew about Silk Road, and of these, 44% had accessed the site. The most likely drug to be bought online was cannabis, followed by MDMA, LSD and ketamine. Of the 22% who had bought drugs online, 44% had first done so in 2012 or 2013, suggesting a new trend, according to Dr Adam Winstock, a consultant addictions psychiatrist in London and director of the survey.

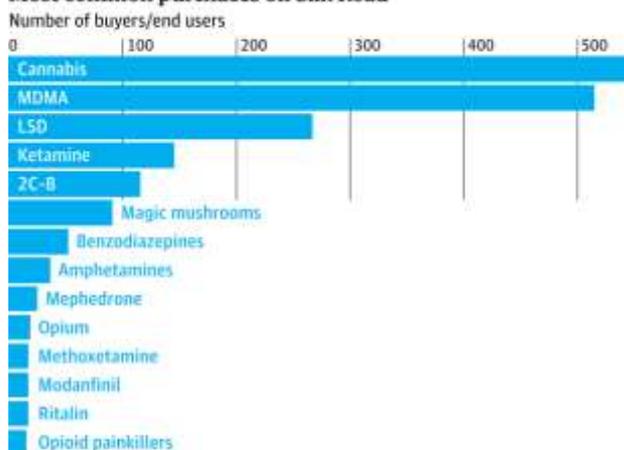
"The fact that 44% of respondents who had bought drugs online said they'd done it for the first time recently says to me there is growing recruitment," he said. "It is currently a minority way to get drugs, but it really mimics the growth in [e-commerce](#) – we buy things online because it is convenient, cheap, and there is a better product range."

Until it was shut down last year, Silk Road was the largest online black market site in the world.

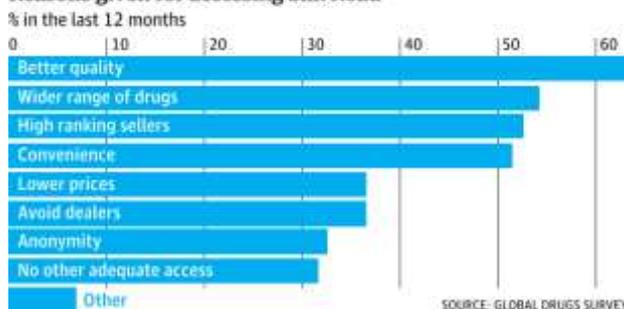
The site was accessed via the anonymous web browser Tor, which bounces internet users' and websites' traffic through "relays" run by volunteers around the world, making it extremely hard for anyone to identify the source of the information or the location of the user. Payments were made in Bitcoin, the world's first crypto currency, a nearly anonymous way of sending money over the internet without involving credit card companies or banks.

UK users of Silk Road

Most common purchases on Silk Road



Reasons given for accessing Silk Road



In October 2013, the FBI arrested Ross Ulbricht, a 29-year-old from San Francisco said to be Silk Road's founder, and the website was seized and shut down.

The survey also reveals that the UK, more than any other country, is a nation of hedonists, said Winstock – 73.8% of respondents had taken at least one illegal drug over the last 12 months.

Alcohol was the most common drug taken, followed by tobacco and cannabis. Just under 11% had bought "legal highs" sold as bath salts, research chemicals or legal highs.

"The UK just does not do things in moderation. We come out as some of the largest drug takers, taking a broader range of drugs that are reasonably cheap," he said. Winstock described the extent of alcohol abuse in the UK as "very worrying". "Many countries are clueless about alcohol, but the UK and Ireland are the most clueless," he said. "People just have no idea when they are drinking at very dangerous levels." According to the survey, 60% of respondents demonstrated a medium, high or dependent level of alcohol problems. Just below 15% said they could not stop drinking once they had started at least monthly, while 17% reported feelings of guilt or regret after drinking at least monthly over the last year. Of the 7% who demonstrated dependency

levels, only 39% recognised their drinking was dangerous, while 34.5% thought they drank an average or below-average amount. John, whose answers suggested "dependency" or a high level of alcohol problems, said he didn't feel his drinking had much of an impact on his life. "It's just part of the culture," the 40-year-old PR manager said. He described various drinking mishaps, including seeing his ex-boss try to have a fight with a double-decker bus. "You drink with clients and there are events with free alcohol almost every night. Drink, drink, drink - it's just normal. "After looking at his consumption on the GDS [drinksmeter.com](https://www.drinksmeter.com), he said the results were "terrifying", adding: "Maybe I need to calm down."

The survey – which was taken by 78,820 people, 7,326 of them from the UK – also revealed that almost a third of drug users aged between 18 and 24 admitted taking a "mystery white powder". Last year, a fifth of 18- to 25-year-olds admitted doing so. Of the 11% of the whole sample who took mystery drugs in the last 12 months, 80% were already intoxicated. And more people had taken MDMA than had consumed energy drinks, with 45.2% of respondents taking the drug compared to admitting taking it compared to 44.7% who said they had drunk caffeinated energy drinks in the last year.

Alcohol remained the most likely drug to damage respondents' health, but the survey also revealed that people using synthetic cannabis had a much higher likelihood of being admitted to hospital than users of natural cannabis.

Almost one in 100 MDMA users sought emergency medical treatment, with two-thirds of those being admitted to hospital. Winstock said this was "a cause for concern for a drug that so many users consider safe" and called for a more "realistic" drugs debate focused on harm reduction.

The Global Drug Survey has created a Highway Code, which gives advice on how to take each drug safely. "Simply saying drugs are bad does not engage people, you have to tell people who want to take drugs how to reduce their risks – and also have more fun," Winstock said. "You need a dialogue and that needs to include a conversation about pleasure."

Written by Alexandra Topping & Alex Hern

The Guardian, Monday 14 April 2014

This story can be found

at <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/apr/14/drugs-uk-more-legal-illegal-bought-online-survey>

For more information on testing for illegal highs, please contact Matrix Diagnostics;T:

T:01992 762 678

E: info@matrixdiagnostics.co.uk

W:www.matrixdiagnostics.co.uk

Matrix product training videos are now available to view on YouTube [click here](#)

Links:

[1]

<http://us3.campaign-archive1.com/?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=4ae8b6bfc0&e=ffe8738a95>

[2]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=7100888d5d&e=ffe8738a95>

[3]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=e1517d0bae&e=ffe8738a95>

[4]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=f9b9298b5c&e=ffe8738a95>

[5]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list->

manage2.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=8e281310aa&e=ffe8738a95

[6]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=e3c6d1e4c7&e=ffe8738a95>

[7]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=f6f6d8a2a9&e=ffe8738a95>

[8]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=77eb598e11&e=ffe8738a95>

[9]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=503f11a921&e=ffe8738a95>

[10]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=5add69fba5&e=ffe8738a95>

[11]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=f8ccf2cb0d&e=ffe8738a95>

[12]

<http://matrixdiagnostics.us3.list-manage1.com/vcard?u=4824c0a49edceb39346b14b5a&id=8dd169eed2>

[13]

Copyright © 2014 Matrix Diagnostics Ltd, All rights reserved.

t: 01992 762 678

e:info@matrixdiagnostics.co.uk

Our mailing address is:

Matrix Diagnostics Ltd

Unit 9

Meridian Business Park, Fleming Road

Waltham Abbey, Essex EN9 3BZ

United Kingdom

