



DRUG TRADE AND PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF THIS CRIME IN UZBEKISTAN LEGISLATION

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Abstract

This article analyzes the criminal and legal features of the illegal trade of drugs, in particular modern synthetic substances and psychotropic drugs, in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The practice of contactless commission of crimes through internet networks (messengers) and "dead drop" (stash) methods is studied, and emerging gaps in the current criminal legislation are highlighted. Furthermore, specific legal solutions are proposed to increase the effectiveness of combating this type of transnational and digital crimes, as well as to adapt criminal sanctions to modern requirements.

Keywords: Drug trafficking, synthetic substances, criminal legislation, dead drop method, cyber-drug trafficking, punishment system, Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Introduction

In the global community, illicit drug trafficking is shifting from its traditional forms (poppy, hashish, opium) to the trade in synthetic and psychotropic substances (mephedrone, alpha-PVP, etc.) created mainly in laboratory conditions. Today, this transnational threat is also taking on a serious form in Uzbekistan, manifesting itself in the form of cyber-drug trafficking. According to official statistics, if in 2024 about 1.7 tons of drugs were seized in the republic, in 2025 this figure doubled to 3.6 tons (of which 180 kilograms are purely synthetic substances) [1]. The most alarming aspect is that 95% of modern synthetic drug trade is carried out directly via the Internet, in particular, the Telegram messenger, and payments are accepted in cryptocurrency.

Criminals are using the "pawning" method (secretly leaving) without meeting the buyer face to face. This method creates a number of difficulties for law enforcement



agencies in conducting operational-search activities, as well as in proving the existence of a crime and intent in judicial investigation practice. The fact that in the first quarter of 2026 alone, 10 clandestine drug laboratories were exposed in Uzbekistan, 50 kilograms of synthetic substances and 234 thousand psychotropic substances were confiscated shows how serious the situation is [2]. In such complex conditions, the traditional norms of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in particular Article 273 (Illegal transfer of narcotic drugs), are insufficient to fully legally qualify and prevent the actions of "contactless" drug trafficking, clandestine cyber-shops and "pawners". The purpose of this study is to analyze crimes related to the use of the "pawn" method and cyber-platforms in the trade of synthetic drugs and to develop proposals for improving national criminal legislation.

Level of research on the topic (Literature analysis)

The issues of modern illicit drug trafficking and forensic chemical examination have been studied by many scientists. In particular, in the practice of national examination, comprehensive approaches are being developed to study the qualitative and quantitative indicators of synthetic substances such as alpha-PVP, to assess and prove their destructive effects on the body [3]. At the international level, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is conducting reports on the fight against synthetic drugs and increasing the forensic capacity of Central Asian countries [4].

Legally, in recent years, gaps in investigative practice and legislation related to "pawn" crimes have been widely discussed by the legal community. In response, the reorganization of the National Center for Drug Control into the Agency for Control of Drug Trafficking and Illegal Weapons by the decree of the head of state in 2025, as well as the establishment of new departments to combat cybercrime, brought institutional research in the field to a new level [5]. Nevertheless, the issues of objective differentiation (differentiation) of criminal liability of "pawnbrokers" and ensuring the inevitability of punishment for online store administrators (operators) and group organizers have not yet found their full scientific and legal solution in the legislation.

In the process of this research, systematic-structural analysis, comparative legal study and deduction methods were used. The norms of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan related to drugs were compared with the real investigative practice of crimes committed in the digital space.



Main part

Today, the trade in drugs, in particular synthetic drugs such as mephedrone and alpha-PVP, has completely switched to a "contactless" (non-face-to-face) method. The criminal scheme mainly consists of three participants: the "operator" (the administrator of the cyber-store), the "courier-pawner" (the person who secretly places the substance), and the buyer. The operators, who organize the crime, are often based in foreign countries and open secret shops on Telegram messenger and Darknet platforms. They accept payments from buyers not via bank cards, but via cryptocurrencies that are easy to lose track of (Bitcoin, Monero) or various anonymous electronic wallets [6]. After payment is made, the buyer is sent the GPS coordinates and a photo of the place where the drugs are hidden.

The weakest link in this scheme, but the one that law enforcement agencies often encounter, are the "pawners". They are mainly young people and students who are attracted to this business through advertisements on social networks in search of a quick profit, and do not know the real organizers of the crime at all. They receive a large amount of the substance, divide it into small doses (grams) and hide it throughout the city.

Article 273 of the current Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Illegal preparation, acquisition, storage and other actions with the aim of transferring narcotic drugs, their analogues or psychotropic substances, as well as their illegal transfer) is adapted to traditional criminal methods, which creates difficulties in qualifying digital drug trafficking.

First, the problem of proving intent and purpose. When a courier (pawnbroker) is detained, usually about 1-2 grams of packaged synthetic substance is found with him. According to the Criminal Code, in order to impose a severe penalty under Article 273, it must be proven that the person acted specifically for the purpose of "transfer" (selling). Experienced lawyers and criminals are exploiting this loophole, using the excuse that the substance found in their possession was "only for my own consumption", thereby changing the offense to the relatively mild Article 276 [7]. If the offender's phone is blocked or correspondence is deleted, the investigative body's ability to prove that he or she colluded with the "operator" is sharply reduced.

Secondly, the lack of aggravating circumstances for using the Internet and telecommunications networks. Although more than 90 percent of drug trafficking today is carried out via the Internet, Article 273 of the Criminal Code does not



specifically mention the fact that this crime was committed "using the Internet and computer networks" as an aggravating factor (qualifying factor). If we look at foreign experience, for example, Article 228.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation [8] and Article 297 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan [9] directly classify the sale of drugs via electronic, information and telecommunications networks (including the Internet) as a particularly serious crime and is punishable by imprisonment for a term of 15 years to life.

Third, illegal drug promotion. Cases of Telegram addresses of cyber-shops being stenciled on the walls of buildings on the streets are on the rise [10]. However, Uzbek legislation only provides for administrative liability for drug promotion (Article 43-1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan) [11] or the general provisions of the Criminal Code on illegal advertising, which do not fully correspond to the real scale of the threat posed to public safety.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study and the analysis of current judicial investigation practice, it can be concluded that combating modern, "contactless" cyber-forms of drug trafficking requires significant conceptual changes to the current criminal legislation.

Firstly, a special aggravating feature should be introduced into Article 273 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan (as well as other similar articles) of the drug trafficking "committed using information and telecommunications networks, including the Internet", and the penalties for this act should be tightened based on international experience (the practice of Russia and Kazakhstan), that is, transferred to the category of especially serious crimes.

Secondly, taking into account the scope of the promotion of "narcograffiti" and cyber-shops, which are causing the spread of drug trafficking among young people, it is vital to introduce a separate article in the Criminal Code entitled "Illegal advertising and promotion of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their analogues" and establish criminal liability, not limited to administrative punishment.

Thirdly, in order to eliminate the problems arising in the legal qualification of the actions of "pawnbrokers" (couriers), it is advisable to include in the relevant decisions of the Plenum of the Supreme Court a clear legal explanation that "the discovery of synthetic substances in a person's possession in a package prepared for sale and the



presence of correspondence with secret messengers (cyber-shops) or GPS coordinates on his mobile device, regardless of the amount of the substance, is a sufficient basis for assessing the act as an act committed with the aim of direct transfer (sale)."

Finally, expanding the cyber powers of operational-search bodies to monitor, block and deanonymize financial flows of digital drug trafficking, in particular transactions carried out through cryptocurrency and anonymous wallets, serves as a guarantee of protecting the national gene pool from modern threats.

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