

Deceptions in the Illicit Drug Market

For the past 3 years, we have become increasingly concerned with the fact that persons taking illicit psychedelic drugs were running great risks, not only because of the possible dangers inherent in the psychedelics themselves but also because of unknown dangers in the products imputed to be psychedelics.

We have been able to obtain a number of street drugs, marketed as psychedelics, and these have been analyzed. The 44 samples allegedly consisted of the following: 20, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide); 6, psilocybin; 13, mescaline; 1, peyote tar; 1, MDA (3,4-methylene dioxymphetamine); 1 DET (diethyltryptamine); and 2, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Of the 44 samples, 10 were thought, because of similarity of size, shape, and origin, to be duplicates. Of these duplicates, five were alleged to be LSD, two psilocybin, and three mescaline. However, it is questionable that any one sample would be the same as any other, even if said to be in the same batch. The samples represent (not completely) (i) what is now available on East Coast markets, both urban and suburban, and (ii) the LSD available over the past 3 years in the New York area.

We have received the results of the analyses of 36 samples (Tables 1 and 2). While most of the samples said to be LSD were actually LSD, none of the samples said to be mescaline, psilocybin, or THC were those substances. Four of the samples said to be mescaline were actually STP (2,5-dimethoxy-4-methylamphetamine). There was a wide variation in the amount of LSD and STP in the samples. The amounts of LSD were from 50 to 283 μg (median 100 μg) in samples that were

probably thought by the users to contain about 250 μg of LSD or a comparable quantity of mescaline.

These findings are confirmed in part by a survey by the Alcoholism and Drug Addiction Research Foundation in Toronto (1) of 222 samples of street drugs which were analyzed. Of these, 23 alleged samples of mescaline contained no mescaline at all. However no STP was found, and no quantitative analyses were reported in the Toronto study.

Our findings warrant public attention for the following reasons:

1) Drugs alleged to be mescaline and psilocybin are being made illegally and sold because there is a good market for these drugs, partly because of the LSD chromosome-damage scare. Mescaline and psilocybin probably are not being made because the basic substances or starting materials are more difficult to acquire or more expensive than those from which LSD and STP are produced or because the chemical procedures for producing them are more complicated or more dangerous.

2) Many persons who would hesitate to take LSD will take mescaline or psilocybin; hence this deception is leading to more widespread use of stronger psychedelics, particularly among new and infrequent users.

3) Most of the psilocybin and mescaline samples are actually LSD. However, STP, which is a very dangerous drug that even experienced users reject, is being sold as mescaline. Thus new and inexperienced users may be taking STP and, believing it to be mescaline, some (particularly the most experienced older users—among whom are teenagers) will mix it with LSD. The combination of STP and LSD is likely to lead to prolonged confusional states.

4) "Magic pumpkin seeds" and "strawberry mescaline," drugs said to be mescaline but which are really STP, are

Table 2. Amounts of LSD (seven samples) and STP (two samples) in samples analyzed.

Sample	Alleged chemistry	Actual chemistry	Amount
1	LSD	LSD	50 μg
2	LSD	LSD	80 μg
3	LSD	LSD	80 μg
4	LSD	LSD	100 μg
5	LSD	LSD	110 μg
6	LSD	LSD	200 μg
7	Mescaline	LSD	283 μg
8	Mescaline	STP	3.7 mg
9	Mescaline	STP	4.8 mg

now available in the illicit drug market in very large quantities. (i) The "magic pumpkin seed" is a pill shaped as an elongated oval, tapering toward the edges on both rounded surfaces, and is bright yellow in color. This product is sold to the street trade as mescaline. (ii) "Strawberry mescaline" is a round pill, about the size of an aspirin tablet, but thinner from surface to surface; it has a moderately light, reddish pink color. The color is somewhat uneven, giving nearly the appearance of a speckled surface. This product is also traded in the street as mescaline.

5) The amounts of LSD and STP vary considerably in the capsules sold (Table 2). This could be dangerous if the illicit user, failing to get much reaction from one pill, took another or several others which might contain large amounts of LSD or STP.

Publicizing these findings could (i) inform users that they are not actually being sold mescaline and psilocybin but probably more dangerous drugs; (ii) inform users that STP is frequently masked as mescaline and that large amounts of it are now available on the street market; and (iii) reduce the confidence of the users in the quality and safety of the illegal drugs that they are buying.

FRANCES E. CHEEK

STEPHENS NEWELL

Bureau of Research in Neurology and Psychiatry, New Jersey Neuro-Psychiatric Institute, Princeton 08540

MILTON JOFFE

Division of Drug Sciences, Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, U. S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.

Table 1. Alleged and actual chemistry of 36 drug samples. One LSD and three mescaline samples were possible duplicates.

Alleged chemistry	Actual chemistry							Total
	LSD	Psilocybin	Mescaline	STP	MDA	Other	None identified	
LSD	14					1*		15
Psilocybin	4						1	5
Mescaline	7			4		1†	1	13
STP					1			
THC						2*		2
MDA								
Total	25			4	1	4	2	36

* Sernyl (phencyclidine).

† Aspirin.

Reference and Note

1. J. A. Marshman and R. J. Gibbons, *Addictions* 16 No. 4, 22 (1969).
2. This study was initiated by the investigators at the New Jersey Neuro-Psychiatric Institute who collected the illicit drugs which were analyzed by Dr. Joffe at their request.

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