

The Psilocybin Surge: How Psychedelic Mushrooms Are Gaining Ground in Medicine

Study Finds Surge in Availability of Illicit Psilocybin Mushrooms in the U.S.

New York, NY, June 4, 2024 — A new study reveals a significant increase in the availability of illicit psilocybin mushrooms in the United States, according to data collected by law enforcement agencies. The study, conducted by researchers at New York University (NYU), suggests that psilocybin mushrooms have become much easier to find on the street compared to previous years.

Study Findings

The research, published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, analyzed 4,526 psilocybin seizure reports from 2017 to 2022. It categorized the annual number of confiscations and the weight of seized mushrooms per state. The findings show that law enforcement seizures of psilocybin mushrooms in the U.S. skyrocketed from 402 seizures in 2017 to 1,396 in 2022. The total weight of psilocybin mushrooms seized also surged by 2,749%, from 226 kilograms (498 pounds) in 2017 to 844 kilograms (1,860 pounds) in 2022.

Regional Trends

The increase in psilocybin seizures was observed across all regions of the U.S., with significant upticks in the Northeast, West, South, and Midwest. The West Coast, in particular, showed the highest weight of seized mushrooms. “We found that the number of shroom seizures and the total weight of shrooms seized annually increased through 2022, and the greatest weight of shrooms seized was in the West,” said Joseph J. Palamar, co-author of the study and an associate professor at the Department of Population Health at NYU’s Langone Health.

Implications of the Data

While law enforcement data indicates an increase in psilocybin availability, Palamar cautioned that seizures do not perfectly reflect the actual amount of psilocybin in circulation. “We don’t treat drug seizures as an indicator of use but rather more of an indicator of availability,” he explained. “This might seem a bit counterintuitive at first because seizures literally remove drugs from the market, but we believe seizures only represent a small sample of drugs available.”

Rise in Psychedelic Use and Medical Research

Self-reported data on psychedelic use is limited, but previous research indicates that psilocybin is the most consumed plant-based psychedelic in the U.S., excluding cannabis. The growing interest in psilocybin is partly driven by research highlighting its potential medical benefits, including treating conditions like major depressive disorder, anxiety, PTSD, and substance use disorder.

Since Denver, Colorado decriminalized psilocybin in 2019, several cities and the District of Columbia have followed suit. Oregon decriminalized psilocybin in 2020, and Colorado did so in 2022. The rising decriminalization and positive media coverage of psilocybin research are believed to contribute to its increased availability.

Challenges and Future Directions

The study also noted challenges in conducting psychedelic research, particularly the difficulty in maintaining blinding due to the unmistakable effects of psychoactive drugs. “There’s the possibility that the data might not be representative of what’s actually happened in clinical trials,” said Ne?e Devenot, a senior lecturer at Johns Hopkins University involved in psychedelic research.

The surge in psilocybin mushroom availability underscores the need for continued research and potential policy adjustments to address both the benefits and risks associated with psychedelic use. As the therapeutic potential of psychedelics gains more recognition, understanding and regulating their use becomes increasingly important.

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