

Illicit Circulation of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and Preventive Measures

¹Oyunbayar Garamdorj., ²Tumendari Sereeter

¹(Lawyer, LL.M), Lecturer, Ikh Zasag Law School, Ikh Zasag University

²(Ed.M), Senior Lecturer, Ikh Zasag Law School, Ikh Zasag University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500199>

Received: 29 April 2026; Accepted: 04 May 2026; Published: 26 May 2026

ABSTRACT

In recent years, crimes related to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances have been escalating sharply in Mongolia, reaching a level that poses serious threats to public health, social stability, and national security. The purpose of this study is to examine the current state of drug-related crime, the factors influencing it, prevention possibilities, and international experiences. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative analysis, drawing on statistical data from 2018–2026, legal documents, government agency reports, and international research sources. The findings indicate that young people aged 18–34 are the most frequently implicated in drug-related crimes, with socioeconomic, family, and psychological factors playing a dominant role. The growing use of synthetic narcotic substances and the increase in cross-border illicit supply are also of significant concern. Accordingly, the study concludes that addressing this issue requires not only criminal sanctions but also the implementation of policies grounded in preventive education, psychological support, healthcare services, and inter-agency cooperation.

Keywords: narcotic substances, psychotropic substances, crime, prevention, youth, national security

INTRODUCTION

The illicit use, trade, and trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances has become one of the most pressing global challenges. This category of crime exerts a detrimental impact on public health, social order, the economy, and national security.

In Mongolia, drug-related crime has demonstrated a consistent upward trend in recent years, with increasingly sophisticated methods and organized characteristics. Whereas Mongolia was once regarded primarily as a transit country for narcotics, it has now transformed into a country of consumption a development of grave concern.

A 2022 survey conducted by the Training and Research Center of the Office of the Prosecutor General found that 29 percent of children and youth among more than 1,000 respondents reported either having used or currently using narcotic substances. Furthermore, over the preceding decade, 1,112 individuals were implicated in 388 criminal cases (National Police Agency, 2022), demonstrating a clear deterioration of the situation.

The purpose of this study is to identify the current state of drug-related crime in Mongolia, determine the factors influencing it, conduct a comparative analysis of international experiences, and establish effective prevention strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research. Statistical data on drug-related criminal cases registered between 2018 and 2026 were collected from the reports of the National Police Agency, the Office of the Prosecutor General, the National Statistics Office, and border and customs authorities.

Comparative analysis was conducted on the legal frameworks, policy measures, and prevention practices of Mongolia, the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, and the United States. The study also utilized reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2024), the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), academic articles, and policy documents.

The collected data were subjected to content analysis, comparative analysis, and statistical analysis to assess trends in criminal activity, age composition, geographical distribution, and the effectiveness of preventive policies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Current State of Drug-Related Crime in Mongolia

Drug-related crime in Mongolia has exhibited a persistent upward trend over the past decade. Official statistics indicate that the majority of such offenses are registered in Ulaanbaatar, which is associated with population concentration, the nighttime entertainment industry, and the influence of the digital environment.

The overwhelming majority of those implicated in drug-related crimes are young people aged 18–34, demonstrating the adverse impact on the working-age population and the future labor force.

In recent years, the increasing use of synthetic narcotic substances including those locally known as "ice," "spice," and "Mi Mi" alongside intensified cross-border illicit supply, has further exacerbated the situation.

Notably, 80 percent of those implicated in narcotics and drug-related crimes are aged 18-34, with 20 percent falling within the 19-25 age bracket (Office of the Prosecutor General, 2022), illustrating a stark pattern of youth vulnerability to this threat. Drug-related offenses have increased by approximately 60 percent over the past decade, with 1,112 individuals implicated in 388 criminal cases a scale that, given Mongolia's relatively small population, constitutes a threat to national security.

A 2022 survey by the Training and Research Center of the Office of the Prosecutor General, covering more than 1,000 respondents, found that 29 percent of children and youth reported using narcotic substances (Office of the Prosecutor General, 2022), with incidents of collective drug use among classmates also reported. Official estimates place the number of regular users at 5,000–8,000 (National Police Agency, 2022); however, given the hidden nature of such crime, the actual figure could rise to as high as 40,000. Crimes against public safety and public interest totaled 756 in 2021 a 2.6-fold increase from the previous year with Ulaanbaatar accounting for a 2.3-fold increase, constituting a dominant share of this growth.

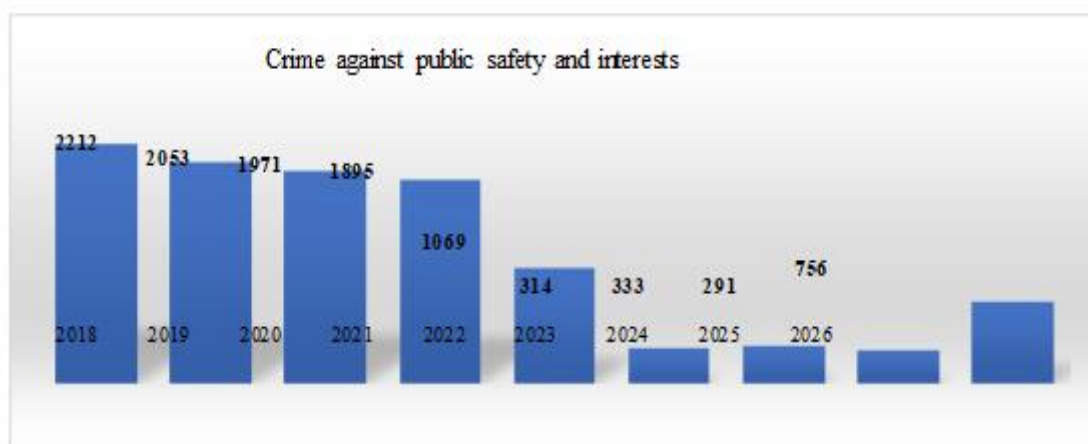


Figure 1. Crimes against public safety and public interest, 2018–2026

Within this category, crimes involving the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances decreased to 187 in 2021, representing a decline of 15 cases (7.4%) from the previous year, with Ulaanbaatar recording a 33-case (18.5%) reduction.

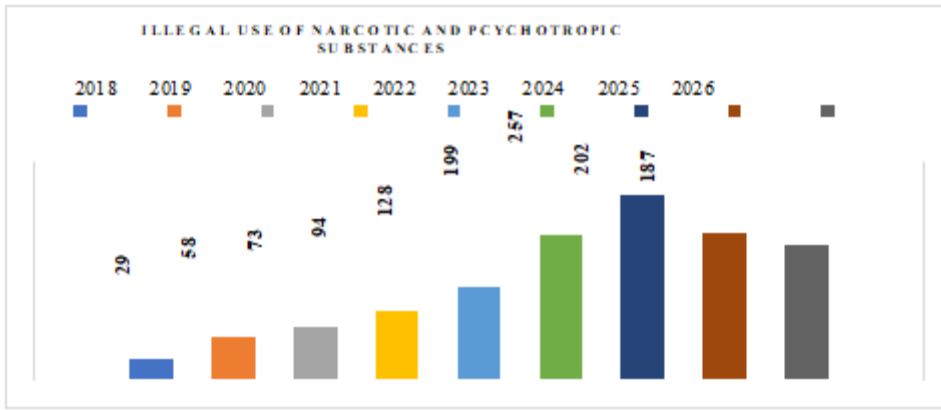


Figure 2. Crimes involving the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances 2018–2026 Of the 187 drug-related criminal cases registered nationwide in 2026, 145 cases (77.5%) were recorded in Ulaanbaatar.

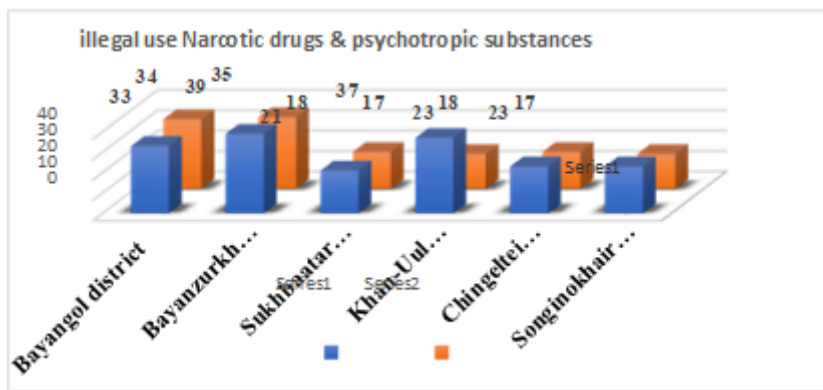


Figure 3. Drug-related crimes registered in Ulaanbaatar by district, 2025–2026

The number of such offenses in Ulaanbaatar declined by 33 cases, or 18.5 percent, from the previous year, with Khan-Uul District recording a particularly notable decrease of 20 cases (54.1%), which the research findings identify as the primary contributing factor.

Nevertheless, data from the police, border, and customs authorities indicate that illicit supply of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances from the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, and Southeast Asian countries into Mongolia continues unabated. In particular, cases of illicit importation, attempted importation, and trafficking of synthetic stimulants including amphetamine- and methamphetamine-type substances as well as plant-derived narcotics, continue to rise.

B. Types of Narcotic Substances and Their Harmful Effects

Internationally, the term "narcotic" derived from the Greek word meaning to induce numbness, anesthesia, intoxication, or sleep is widely used. Mongolian legislation employs the term "narcotic and psychotropic substance."

Narcotic and psychotropic substances are classified as follows:

- **Depressants** (marijuana, hashish)
- **Opioid-type substances** (heroin, morphine, opium)
- **Stimulants** (amphetamine, methamphetamine, cocaine)
- **Hallucinogens** (LSD, mescaline)

These substances adversely affect the human central nervous system, causing dependency disorders, psychological disturbances, and behavioral changes. Prolonged use results in dysfunction of vital organs including the liver, kidneys, lungs, and brain and poses life-threatening risks.

C. Factors Contributing to Drug-Related Crime

Drug-related crime cannot be explained by a single cause; rather, it emerges from the interaction of multiple social, psychological, economic, and environmental factors, including:

1. Socioeconomic factors: Unemployment, poverty, and low living standards create conditions in which children and youth become drawn into drug use and trafficking.
2. Family and psychological factors: Weak parental supervision, domestic violence, and psychological stress increase the risk of substance use among adolescents.
3. Digital environment and foreign cultural influences: The promotion and clandestine sale of narcotic substances through digital platforms and social media networks are on the rise. The tendency to emulate foreign groups, cultures, and lifestyles is also increasing.
4. Weaknesses in border and customs control: Mongolia's shared borders with two major neighboring countries create a high risk of illicit cross-border trafficking. Synthetic substances, in particular, are small in volume and easy to conceal, making interdiction more challenging.

International Experience and Comparative Analysis

Narcotic substances cause necrosis in all organs and impair cognitive capacity, disrupting the processes of moral development, social order, proper human formation, and the cultivation of sound values. Organ damage particularly necrosis of the liver, kidneys, and lungs leads to cirrhosis and fibrosis, resulting in high treatment costs and conditions generally considered irreversible. Treatment outcomes for drug-dependent individuals are poor; in countries with advanced medical systems such as Russia, China, and the United States, treatment success rates stand at only 3-5 percent. Accordingly, prevention and awareness-raising regarding this category of crime are of greater practical value than treatment alone.

Mongolia acceded to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs in 1990, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances in 1999, the 1988 UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Vienna Convention) in 2001, and the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime in 2008. Under these instruments, Mongolia bears international obligations in the prevention of and combat against human trafficking, narcotic and psychotropic substances, and organized crime.

Mongolia has made efforts to strengthen its legal framework in order to meet its international obligations, enacting the Law on Control of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in 2002, incorporating criminal liability for such offenses into the Criminal Code adopted that same year, and implementing the National Program on Combating Narcotics and Drug Abuse from 2000 to 2005.

Globally, uncontrolled use of narcotic and psychotropic substances and the resulting dependency disorders have become widespread, with each country developing its own approaches to interdiction and prevention.

In the People's Republic of China, police and customs authorities pursue strict enforcement against illicit drug trafficking; however, new synthetic substances continue to proliferate. Notably, adolescents have begun using nitrous oxide (N₂O) colloquially known as "laughing gas" in discotheques and karaoke establishments. While nitrous oxide has historically been used as an anesthetic and is currently employed as a food additive, criminal actors have repurposed it as a substitute narcotic substance, compressing it into small steel canisters for sale to minors. This substance has not been included on China's controlled narcotic and psychotropic substances list (Xinhua News Agency, 2020). Authorities have also issued warnings regarding attempts to conceal narcotic substances within food-labeled packaging during trafficking operations.

In the United States, the states of Oregon and Washington became the first jurisdictions to decriminalize the possession of small quantities of cocaine, heroin, and psilocybin mushrooms, replacing criminal penalties with civil fines of USD 100. Arizona, Montana, South Dakota, New Jersey, and Mississippi subsequently announced the legalization of marijuana Sohu News (2020, November 19).

In the Russian Federation, the cultivation of opium alkaloid-producing plants for medical purposes was legalized in July 2019 a development that may have direct implications for Mongolia. Similarly, the legalization of cannabis cultivation for medicinal use in several countries has contributed to increased cannabis consumption.

In neighboring countries, the number of drug-related crimes, the number of individuals implicated, and the quantities of substances seized as physical evidence have continued to increase year over year, while synthetic narcotics have penetrated illicit markets at a growing scale posing potential threats to Mongolia's national security, public health, and genetic heritage.

Drug-related crime has been characterized in journalism as a "black plague," a descriptor that aptly conveys the magnitude of its danger. Since Mongolia's transition to a market economy, a range of previously rare crime types has emerged, among them the illicit cross-border trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The revised Criminal Code adopted in 2015 classified such offenses as serious crimes and increased applicable penalties, reflecting the state's criminal policy direction in combating illicit narcotic trafficking.

The PRC applies strict criminal policies against drug trafficking, yet new synthetic substances continue to rise. By contrast, certain U.S. states have pursued decriminalization of small-quantity possession, while Russia and several European countries have reframed drug dependency as a public health issue rather than a criminal matter, emphasizing treatment, psychological counseling, and social reintegration.

International experience consistently demonstrates that combining prevention, treatment, and social reintegration rather than relying solely on punitive measures yields more effective outcomes.

Prevention Policy and Measures

Based on the findings of this study, the following measures are recommended for implementation:

- Regular preventive education programs in general education schools and universities;
- Expanded access to psychological counseling and health services for youth;
- Implementation of parent-targeted awareness and outreach programs;
- Enhanced cooperation among border, customs, and law enforcement agencies;
- Oversight and regulation of illicit online trade;
- Establishment of treatment and social reintegration centers for individuals with substance use disorders;
- Sustained public awareness campaigns conducted in partnership with media organizations.

In addition, a phased implementation of public health and harm reduction policies aligned with WHO and UN recommendations (United Nations, 1988) is required in Mongolia.

CONCLUSION

Crimes related to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances pose a grave threat to Mongolia's national security, public health, and sustainable social development. The increasing involvement of children and youth, combined with the rising use of synthetic substances, is a matter of particular concern.

Accordingly, it is imperative to move beyond reliance solely on criminal liability and to implement a comprehensive approach encompassing preventive education, psychological support, healthcare services, social reintegration policies, and inter-agency cooperation.

REFERENCES

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). World Drug Report.
2. World Health Organization (WHO). Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment Guidelines.
3. National Police Agency of Mongolia. Crime Statistics Report, 2022.
4. Training and Research Center, Office of the Prosecutor General of Mongolia. Research Report, 2022.
5. Law on Control of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, Mongolia.
6. United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988 (Vienna Convention).
7. Academic articles and research materials on narcotic substance prevention.
8. Xinhua News Agency. (2020, October 22). https://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-10/22/c_1126641833.htm
9. *[Report on the abuse of nitrous oxide ("laughing gas") among youth in China]*. Sohu.com. Retrieved from <https://www.sohu.com/a/433098482120702>