

Monitoring an online illicit drug market during COVID-19 in Georgia

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Tbilisi, Georgia

2021 NIDA International Forum

*The research was co-funded by the EU4Monitoring
Drugs project, funded by the European Union*

Introduction

Matanga is a major online illicit drug market that offers a wide selection of psychotropic drugs for procurement in Georgia .



Objective

The aim of the study was to examine trends in illicit drug sales on *Matanga* during COVID-19 restrictions.

Methodology

- Locally developed software was used to monitor and record transactions on *Matanga* over the period of April-September 2020.
- The software consisted of two parts: a scraper written in **Python** and an exporter written in **Golang**.
- The server ran the scraper each hour, collected and saved all relevant product information.

Conclusions

- Despite COVID-19 related restrictions, the *Matanga* platform was actively used to purchase illicit drugs in Georgia.
- Continuous monitoring of online platforms for illicit drug sales can provide useful data to better understand the dynamics of illicit drug market.
- Such monitoring can help to timely identify emerging patterns in drug supply in the country and can be an important source of data for a national early warning system.

Limitations

- Since the scraper software ran hourly, it would potentially miss transaction if the product was placed for sale and was actually sold within a single hour. It was not feasible to track and account for discounts that were given to individual customers.
- The *Matanga* market discontinued from June 23 on its old web address. Research team was able to identify a new address by July 14, so the data presented did not include transactions for the period between June 23 and July 14.