

# Non-standard drugs: the hidden threat in parenting assessments



Marie Law, Director of Toxicology at AlphaBiolabs, examines why non-standard drugs are an emerging concern in family law

**D**rug and alcohol misuse remains a frequent factor in family law proceedings, directly impacting assessments of parenting capacity, safeguarding, and contact arrangements.

Standard drug testing panels are designed to detect the most commonly misused substances – such as opiates, cocaine and cannabis. However, an increasing number of family law cases involve **non-standard drugs**: substances not routinely included in standard panels, yet capable of causing dependency, behavioural instability, and impaired parenting.

## What are non-standard drugs?

Non-standard drugs include anything not typically found on a standard testing panel, and include substances such as **anabolic steroids**, **prescription medications** (e.g. pregabalin, gabapentin, oxycodone) and **hallucinogens** (e.g. LSD, PCP, mescaline).

These substances may be incorrectly perceived by users as undetectable or 'safe' and are often obtained via online pharmacies or illicit markets. However, their misuse can result in detrimental psychological, behavioural and cognitive effects, with serious implications for child welfare and court assessments.

## Steroid use in family cases

Steroid misuse is rarely addressed in family law contexts, yet its impact can be significant. These drugs are increasingly used by individuals – often men – seeking enhanced physical appearance or performance.

Chronic or high-dose use is associated with aggression, mood instability, and impaired judgement.

Where there are concerns about erratic or aggressive behaviour, especially in contact disputes, targeted testing for steroids should be considered.

## Prescription drug misuse

Misuse of prescription medication has risen sharply, with many drugs used recreationally for their sedative, euphoric or pain-relieving effects, often in combination with other substances.

Examples include:

- ▶ **Gabapentinoids (gabapentin and pregabalin)** – prescribed for epilepsy or nerve pain, these are now widely misused. Effects include drowsiness, disinhibition, and mood swings.
- ▶ **Oxycodone** – a strong opioid used for severe pain. Highly addictive and can severely impair cognitive and physical functioning.

As these drugs are not included in standard panels, misuse may go undetected without specific instruction. Even individuals with valid prescriptions may be at risk of dependency, potentially affecting their ability to care for children safely.

## Hallucinogens: a growing concern

Hallucinogens such as LSD, PCP and mescaline are gaining popularity, particularly among individuals engaged in **polysubstance misuse** (using multiple drugs together).

These substances can induce paranoia, hallucinations, and dissociation, significantly impairing emotional regulation and risk perception. Effects can also persist long after use, raising serious safeguarding concerns.

Although less commonly abused than mainstream substances, targeted testing is essential where hallucinogen use is suspected or unexplained behavioural issues are present.

## Tailored testing for complex cases

AlphaBiolabs continually monitors emerging trends in drug misuse and validates new substances in the laboratory, providing legal professionals with **bespoke testing options**.

Our **standard drug panel** includes the top nine court-ordered drugs: methamphetamine, opiates, cocaine, cannabis, amphetamine, benzodiazepines, ketamine, methadone and tramadol.

Where additional substances are suspected, our **non-standard panel** can be tailored to include prescription medications (e.g. antidepressants, gabapentinoids), hallucinogens, anabolic steroids and many, many more.

## Why choose AlphaBiolabs?

- ▶ Rapid results
- ▶ Widest range of drugs tested
- ▶ User-friendly reports
- ▶ UKAS 17025-accredited laboratory (Lab 51 extension for toxicology)
- ▶ Sample collection within 24-48 hours nationwide
- ▶ FREE legally-instructed sample collections at our UK & Ireland walk-in centres
- ▶ Price Promise – we'll beat any like-for-like quote by 10%

To request a quote, contact our New Enquiry team on 0333 600 1300 / [testing@alphabiolabs.com](mailto:testing@alphabiolabs.com) or complete our online quote form [www.alphabiolabs.co.uk/legal-test-forms/](http://www.alphabiolabs.co.uk/legal-test-forms/).

## Marie Law, Director of Toxicology at AlphaBiolabs

A highly-skilled and respected scientist with over 15 years' experience in the field of forensics, Marie joined AlphaBiolabs in 2022 and oversees the company's growing toxicology team.

As Director of Toxicology, Marie's day-to-day responsibilities include maintaining the highest quality testing standards for toxicology and further enhancing AlphaBiolabs' drug and alcohol testing services for the legal sector, members of the public, and the workplace sector.

