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Comprehensive Study of Various Chemical Samples in Forensic Toxicology: Focus on Urine Sample

[1] Sazida Yasmin, [2] Aditya Kumar

[1, 2] Programme of Forensic Science, Faculty of Science, Assam down town University, Sankar Madhab Path, Gandhi Nagar, Panikhaiti, Guwahati, Assam, India

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Corresponding Author: **Aditya Kumar**

Abstract

Toxicology deals with the measurement and analysis of toxins. It is itself a vast branch of science, though it has several branches and one of these is forensic toxicology. Forensic toxicology is a branch of toxicology that lines up with other disciplines, namely clinical chemistry, postmortem forensic toxicology, human performance toxicology and forensic drug testing, providing medical jurisprudence of adverse effects such as drug abuse, poisoning and death. The key role of forensic toxicology is to identify and analyse the toxin compounds found during adverse events. This review paper aims to draw an idea about the toxin, in the collected biological chemical samples such as urine samples and their effects on their day-to-day life.

Keywords: Forensic Toxicology, Biological Samples and Toxin

Introduction

Forensic science is a branch of science that deals with the cause of death by collecting and analysing the evidence found during the investigation of the crime scene. Forensic toxicology helps to analyse various biological and chemical samples using different analytical techniques such as Chromatography which involves thin layer chromatography, Gas Chromatography; Spectroscopy which includes Ultraviolet spectroscopy, Mass spectroscopy; Electrophoresis and many more. Using these techniques during analysis may help us find the composition of the sample, and determine the toxin present, metals and other natural products.

As per the biological samples, the most used samples are hair, blood and urine samples. Among these urine is most commonly used as it is a simple and non-invasive sampling procedure. The detection window for most drugs and/ or drug metabolites is moderate and is very well suited for a short time for continuous urine testing [1]. One of the common ways to test urine is urinalysis, it is a series of tests conducted on urine samples to check common conditions and diseases. For drug detection in urine, a urine drug test is done. Several forensic laboratories offer urine drug testing (UDT) facilities [2]. Urine is a popular forensic sample considering it is simple to obtain [2]. Some laboratories now provide UDT specifically designed for monitoring patients on chronic opioid therapy [10].

History of forensic toxicology

With this renowned theory that "the dose makes the poison," Paracelsus (c. 1493–1541) is arguably the most significant individual in the past in the realm of toxicology. In an additional comprehensive declaration, he stated that "all those chemicals become poisonous; there can be naught that's not considered poisonous." His actual name had been Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Afterwards, Ho. The appropriate dosage distinguishes a poison from a cure. The level of precision plus the potential harmful or beneficial consequences may arise ascertained, according to Paracelsus, who classified the substance to be a carcinogen that determined testing in reaction to an ingredient. He also highlighted that both medicinal or harmful qualities are distinguished by dose. These were fundamental principles that have grown to form the foundation of toxicology.

Mathieu Joseph Bonaventure Orfila (1787–1853), who became the first renowned Historically, forensic toxicologists authored a book named "Traite´ des poisons." Alexander O. Gettler (1883–1968), a poison expert in the Bureau of the Chief Medical

Examiner in the City of New York, is credited with starting the current era of forensic toxicology in the United States. His adventures have been the subject of numerous publications and movies, and He's been referred to as the American field of forensic toxicology field's pioneer. The development of forensic toxicology was aided by several significant individuals as well as notable organizations, such as the American Board of Forensic Toxicology, the Society of Forensic Toxicologists, and the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. The primary purpose of AAFS and SOFT was to facilitate ideation through meetings and organizations, whereas the ABFT was established to certify persons and accredit laboratories. In forensic toxicology, certification and accreditation are crucial because they support the superior control of investigations or testimonies [22].

Chemical Compounds in urine

Major Components:

a) Urea
b) Creatinine
c) Uric acid
d) Electrolytes (sodium, potassium, chloride).

Trace Components:

a) Glucose
b) Protein
c) Ketones
d) Bilirubin.

Drugs and Metabolites:

a) Caffeine
b) Acetaminophen
c) Cocaine metabolites
d) Alcohol metabolites etc.

Over 95% water and a small amount of additional ingredients make up urine, which is an aqueous solution. The remaining ingredients include, in smaller amounts, urea (2%), creatinine (0.1%), uric acid (0.03%), chloride, among others potassium, sodium, sulphate, ammonium, and phosphate, in addition to various ions and molecules [3]. Protein can only be identified in trace amounts in a comparison with blood plasma [3]. The Urine Metabolome Database (UMDB) is a comprehensive resource for human urine metabolites identified with current technologies. It provides in-depth information on each metabolite, including its name, chemical structure, clinical significance, and biochemical properties [37, 38, 39]. The UMDB is a continually evolving resource, and as analytical techniques improve, we expect to identify and include even lower-abundance metabolites in future updates. Urine metabolite levels vary considerably between individuals due to factors like age, gender, genetic makeup, daily fluctuations, overall health, activity level, and dietary choices [40, 26].

From a research point of view, taking urine as a biological sample for analysis of various drugs and forensic applications has always been a beneficial interest with a maximum result. Hoiseth *et al*. [11] examined the plasma and urine dynamics of alcohol while related metabolism product, ethyl glucuronide (EtG), and observed that EtG concentrations were usually significantly higher in urine than in blood [2]. On a molar basis, the total amount of EtG released in urine was 30mg (range 21.5-39.7), representing 0.017% (median, range 0.013-0.022) of the ethanol given [11].

Identifying the toxic compound can provide key information as to what type of toxin is present and whether the amount is consistent or above a harmful level.

In forensic toxicology testing urine samples take place in various preparation methods. The useful screening methods are simple dilution procedures or extraction methods such as liquid-liquid extraction(LLE), and solid phase extraction (SPE).

Common Substances Analysed in Urine:

- Opiates and opioids
- Cocaine and metabolites
- Cannabinoids
- Amphetamines
- Benzodiazepines
- Alcohol and ethanol metabolites
- New psychoactive substances (NPS).

Urine samples are mostly found

These samples are mostly found in harassment, rape, murder cases, burglary, poisoning and drug trafficking. Especially in rape cases, it is prime evidence for forensic experts.

Analytical Techniques for urine testing

Urine testing in forensic toxicology is essential for detecting the presence of drugs and other substances in an individual's system. Various analysis techniques are employed for this purpose, including:

1. **Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectroscopy (GC-MS):** It has high sensitivity and specificity for a wide range of compounds. Excellent for drug testing and identifying unknown substances [4], drugs and their metabolites in urine samples. Whereas the limitations are the requirements of skilled operators and expensive equipment and it is time-consuming and not ideal for high-throughput analysis [4]. The complete using a gas chromatography-mass spectrometry approach was devised to track the ingestion of neem or Krypton in urine. Mitragyna speciosa, a plant used for healing, is utilised improperly as a natural treatment for keno. A novel herbal mixture (krypton) containing O-desmethyl tramadol (ODT) and kratom is on the market. The detection limits for the parent alkaloids were 100ng/ml and 50ng/ml for ODT [13].
2. **Liquid Chromatography-Mass Spectroscopy (LC-MS):** It can analyse a wide range of compounds, including polar ones and it has high sensitivity and selectivity [5]. The drawbacks are that it is costly and time consuming and has complex instrumentation and maintenance [5]. Liquid chromatography in conjunction with low- and high-resolution images of several cycle spectrometry detectors was looked at in a study for its use in drug metabolism investigations, structural clarification, and qualitative as well as quantitative detection of drugs in a variety of natural specimens, such as urine [12].
3. **Immunoassays:** These are initial screening tests that use antibodies to detect the presence of specific drugs or their metabolites. It has high throughput and is relatively simple to use. Well-suited for rapid screening of specific compounds [6]. It is limited to specific target analytes and cross-reactivity with structurally similar compounds [6].

4. **Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR):** It is non-destructive, provides structural information, and is suitable for untargeted metabolite analysis. It has lower sensitivity than MS-based techniques, in addition to more expensive equipment and longer analysis times [7].
5. **High-Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC):** Excellent separation of compounds and suitable for quantification and routine analysis. It is limited to compounds with appropriate chromatographic properties and sample preparation can be time consuming [8].
6. **Colourimetry and spectrophotometry:** It is simple and cost-effective for routine testing and suitable analytes with colour changes. It is limited to compounds with chromophores and is less sensitive compared to instrumental methods [9].
7. **Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA):** ELISA can be used to detect the presence of specific drugs or their metabolites in urine through antibody-antigen interactions.
8. **Paper-based microfluidic analytical devices (µPADs):** They offer a versatile technology for detecting a wide range of drugs, including drugs of abuse (benzodiazepines, cocaine, fentanyl, and MDMA) and psychoactive substances (ketamine, flunitrazepam and GHB) in drug-facilitated crimes. These methods offer several advantages: Fast results, high sensitivity to detect small amounts and affordability. This makes them ideal for use in non-specialized crime investigators and for on-site testing (point-of-need) [35].
9. **DART-MS:** A combination of portable Raman and DART-MS data provided an overall accuracy of 96% drug of abuse, diluents etc. Portable Raman analysis allows for testing without opening certain types of packing, thereby reducing potential drug exposures. It produces high confidence in results when analyzing pure substances [36].

Forensic toxicologists often use a combination of these techniques to ensure accurate and reliable results in drug testing from urine samples. The choice of method depends on factors like the substances being tested for, the available equipment, and the required sensitivity and specificity.

Interpretation of results

Interpreting the results of urine testing in forensic toxicology involves identifying the presence and levels of chemical compounds to determine if a person is exposed to drugs, toxins, or other substances. Toxicologists employ various analytical techniques, such as gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) and liquid chromatography-mass spectroscopy (LC-MS), to detect and quantify substances in urine samples.

The interpretation process can be complex and may involve the following key steps:

- **Identification of Compounds:** Toxicologists begin by identifying the specific chemical compounds present in the urine sample. This is done through comparison with reference standards and databases of known substances.
- **Quantification:** Once identified, the toxicologist quantifies the levels of each compound in the urine. The concentrations are typically measured in nanograms per millilitre (ng/ml) or microgram per millilitre.
- **Comparison to thresholds:** Toxicologists compare the levels of identified compounds to established threshold values or reference ranges. The thresholds may indicate intoxication, impairment, or exposure.
- **Interpretation of results:** The toxicologists interpret the results in the context of the case, considering factors like the type of compound, its concentration, and the individual's history or symptoms. A positive result may suggest drug use, poisoning, or exposure to toxins.
- **Reporting:** Toxicologists prepare a detailed report of their findings, which can be used as evidence in legal proceedings. This report includes the compound names, concentrations, and their potential implications.

Difficulties faced by toxicologists in interpreting urine test results include:

Variability: Urine composition can vary greatly between individuals, and even within the same person over time, making it challenging to establish universal reference ranges.

Metabolism: The metabolism of substances in the body can lead to the presence of metabolites in urine, which may complicate interpretation.

False Positives: Cross-reactivity with other substances, medications, or dietary components can lead to false-positive results.

Timing: The time between substance exposure and urine testing affects the presence and detectability of compounds, making it crucial to consider the window of detection.

For accurate urine analysis, disclosing all consumed foods and medications is crucial. Certain foods and medications can alter examination results. Studies have shown that poppy seeds can lead to the detection of morphine and codeine in urine [24, 25, 27]. To distinguish between illicit methamphetamine and potential contributions from the inhaler medication, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) recommends analyzing the ratio of d-methamphetamine to l-methamphetamine in urine samples, as high levels of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine from the inhaler can interfere with standard tests [28].

A critical concern is the possibility of drugs being absorbed through the skin and showing up in urine tests, leading to misinterpretations. Despite its protective role, skin can be a pathway for foreign substances to enter the body [29]. A concerning incident highlights how PCP residue on clothing can lead to prolonged positive urine tests, even after a couple of multiple washes [30]. Studies have shown [31, 32] that crime laboratory workers handling cocaine can have trace amounts of benzoylecgonine, a cocaine metabolite, detected in their urine.

Pain patients using various opioid medications show false positives and forensic drug tests. When someone takes codeine, their body breaks it down into other medications. These include morphine and hydrocodone. Hydrocodone can then be further broken down into hydromorphone [33, 34].

The detection window for alcohol and drugs varies considerably due to their differing lipophilicity. This table details the detection windows for commonly used substances [23].

Table 1: Detection window for various commonly abused drugs

S. No	Substance	Time duration
1	Alcohol	Up to 48 hours
2	AT Substances	2-5 days
3	Barbiturates	Up to 7 days
4	Benzodiazepines	Up to 7 days
5	Cannabis	1-30 days
6	Cocaine	1-10 days
7	Opioids	2-5 days

Legal and Ethical Considerations

Using urine samples in forensic investigations raises several legal and ethical considerations.

a. Legal Considerations:

- **Chain of custody:** Proper documentation and maintenance of the chain of custody is essential to ensure that the urine sample's integrity is preserved throughout the investigative process [14].
- **Search and seizure Laws:** Urine samples collected as evidence must adhere to constitutional principles, including Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches and seizures [15].
- **Consent:** Consider the legal requirements for obtaining informed consent from individuals when collecting urine samples for forensic purposes [16].

b. Ethical Considerations:

- **Privacy and confidentiality:** Address the importance of protecting the privacy and confidentiality of individuals whose urine samples are collected for forensic purposes [17, 18].
- **Informed Consent:** Examine the ethical requirement of obtaining informed consent, ensuring that individuals are aware of the potential uses of their urine samples in forensic investigations.
- **Minimization of harm:** Discuss the ethical obligations to individuals to minimize harm and discomfort throughout the collection process [19].
- **Data Retention and Destruction:** Explore the ethical guidelines for the retention and eventual destruction of urine samples to prevent unauthorised access and potential misuse [20].

c. **Scientific Validity:** Ensure that the forensic methods used for urine sample analysis are scientifically valid, accurate, and reliable [21].

Future Trends and Advances

Forensic toxicology has witnessed several emerging trends and advances in recent years. Two notable areas of development are the utilization of advanced spectroscopic techniques and the advent of portable testing devices.

◊ Advanced Spectroscopic Techniques:

Forensic toxicologists are increasingly turning to advanced spectroscopic methods to enhance their capabilities in identifying and quantifying toxic substances in biological samples. Some notable techniques include:

- **Mass Spectrometry (MS):** High-resolution mass spectrometry, particularly liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS), is gaining prominence for its ability to detect a wide range of compounds with exceptional sensitivity and specificity. It's a versatile tool for identifying drugs, poisons, and metabolites in biological fluids.
- **Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR):** NMR spectroscopy has evolved to become a powerful tool in forensic toxicology. It can provide structural information about various substances, aiding in identifying unknown compounds and drug metabolites.
- **Raman Spectroscopy:** Raman spectroscopy is becoming more accessible in forensic laboratories. It allows for the non-destructive and rapid identification of substances in solid and liquid samples, making it useful for on-site analysis.

These advanced spectroscopic techniques offer enhanced accuracy and sensitivity in identifying toxic substances, reducing the risk of false positives or negatives.

◊ Portable testing devices:

The development of portable testing devices has revolutionized forensic toxicology by enabling rapid on-site screening and real-time monitoring. Same noteworthy advancements in this area include:

- **Field-portable Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (GC-MS):** Miniaturized GC-MS instruments are now available for on-site analysis. They are particularly useful for detecting volatile compounds in crime scene investigations or traffic accidents involving impaired drivers.
- **Handheld Infrared Spectrometers:** Handheld IR spectrometers can Identify substances quickly based on their spectral patterns. These devices are invaluable for preliminary screening of drugs and chemicals in the field.
- **Biosensors:** Advances in biosensor technology have led to the development of compact, user-friendly devices that can detect specific drugs or toxins in biological samples. They offer rapid results and can be used by law enforcement and healthcare professionals.

These emerging trends and advances in forensic toxicology are improving the efficiency and accuracy of toxicological analysis, aiding law enforcement agencies and forensic laboratories in their investigations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comprehensive review highlights the critical role of chemical compounds in forensic toxicology, with a specific focus on urine samples. The analysis of urine samples provides valuable insights into drug abuse, poisoning, and overall human health. Through this review, we have discussed the importance of various chemical compounds, their detection methods, and their significance in forensic investigations. The knowledge and techniques presented here contribute to the advancement of forensic toxicology, aiding in the accurate assessment of drug-related incidents and ensuring justice and public safety. This review serves as a valuable resource for researchers, forensic scientists, and legal professionals working in this field.

Summary

This review paper provides a brief analysis of the various chemical components that are commonly examined in forensic toxicology, with a specific emphasis on urine samples. Forensic toxicology plays a crucial role in determining the presence of drugs, poisons, and other substances in the human body, and urine samples are frequently utilized due to their accessibility and stability. A

glimpse of where urine can be found as evidence. The review delves into the methodologies, analytical techniques, and state-of-the-art instrumentation used for the identification, quantification and interpretation of these compounds in urine specimens and the difficulties faced during the interpretation. The legal and ethical values and the advancement. This review paper serves as an invaluable resource for forensic scientists, toxicologists and researchers seeking a brief understanding of the chemical analysis of urine samples in the context of forensic investigations.

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