

# A Changing Trend in Substance Abuse

Mathew Deepu George



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**Address for correspondence:**

Dr Deepu George Mathew,  
Annoor Dental College and Hospital,  
Muvattupuzha, Kerala.  
Email- deepugeorgemathew@gmail.com

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Substance abuse is an emerging devastating problem in our country. Health care researchers have found that there is a changing trend in the pattern of substance abuse in the community. A study conducted among patients attending a deaddiction center in north India from a period of 1978-2008 have shown some startling findings. The study showed that there is a decrease in patients reporting with alcohol dependence but an increasing trend of opioid dependence and poly substance abuse. The age of initiation of the drugs has shifted to a younger age group. The study found that 35% participants initiated the drug use by the age of 16-25 years.<sup>1</sup>

The recent survey report on substance abuse among adolescence by Excise department, Kerala state for a period of 2020-21 shows this changing trend of substance abuse. The survey reported that majority of the adolescence use ganja or ganja with tobacco (82-76%), alcohol use was seen 64%. Other drugs used by the adolescence were prescription psychiatric drugs, LSD, hashish, ecstasy, cool, cocaine, opium and heroin. The motivating factor which initiated the drug use was curiosity (78%) and peer pressure (72%).<sup>2</sup>

As dental surgeons we should be aware of these changing patterns of substance abuse and their associated oral health issues. Oral manifestations of drug abuse is not well documented. Drug abuse is reported to affect oral health either directly or indirectly due to the adverse effect on the users behavior and life style.<sup>3</sup> Some of the reported oral manifestations of drug abuse include transient chorea, buccolingual dyskinesia, perforation of the nasal septum/palate, bruxism, gingival recession,

cervical tooth loss, xerostomia, acidic erosion of enamel, hyperkeratosis, dental caries and temporomandibular disorders.<sup>4</sup>

These initial reports have shown that adolescence is a vulnerable age group who are easily initiated to drug usage, hence awareness campaigns focussing on adolescence is the need of the hour.

Dental surgeons as a primary care physician has an important role in identifying substance abusers and guiding them to seek further professional help. Further studies are needed in order to understand the oral manifestations of substance abuse.

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