

An Analysis of Changes in Patterns of Substance Usage among Substance Users during the COVID-19 Pandemic Period in Gampaha, Ampara, Mannar, Anuradhapura, Badulla, Vavuniya and Kandy Districts, Sri Lanka

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The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting people, including substance users' patterns of usage and associated complications. The objective of this study was to assess the changes in the pattern of substance usage in a selected group of tobacco, alcohol, and other substance users, such as heroin and cannabis. Mixed research methods were used to assess the pre and post-status. The pre-status is defined as the period before the 1st COVID-19 patient was reported in Sri Lanka and the post-status is defined as 02 months after the lockdown period. A sample of 78 male substance users of age between 18 – 60 years was recruited for the survey using a purposive sampling method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted through telephone calls. The participants were categorized into two groups based on the frequency of usage of a particular substance. The first group consisted of participants who use a particular substance 5 or more than 5 days per week (n=43). Among them, 74.41% were tobacco users, 67.44% were alcohol users and 4.6% were other substance users. During this pandemic period, 11.62% of participants have stopped, 58.13% have reduced and 27.90% have continued the usage as before. The second group consisted of the participants who used a substance up to 4 days per week (n=35). Among them 37.14% were tobacco users, 85.71% were alcohol users and 28.57% were other substance users. During this pandemic period 94.28% have reduced the usage and 8.57% have continued as before. The factors responsible for the reduction and quitting of substance usage included: reduction of peer influence, limited availability, low income, and fear of being contracted with COVID-19 and staying safe at home during this period. As per the results of the survey, the majority of participants in selected districts have shown a reduction in substance used during the pandemic period.

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