

**An analysis of changes in patterns of substance usage
among substance users during COVID-19 pandemic period
in Gampaha districts, Sri Lanka**

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COVID-19 pandemic is affecting people including substance users' pattern 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 heroine 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 24 male substance users of age between 18 – 60 years was recruited for the survey using 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 with participants who use a particular substance 5 or more than 5 days per week (n=13). Among them, 61.53% was tobacco users, 23.07% was alcohol users and 15.38% was other substance users. During this pandemic period, 30.76% of participants have stopped, 38.46% have reduced and 30.76% have continued the usage as before. The second group consisted with the participants who use substance up to 4 days per week (n=11). Among them 63.63% were tobacco users, 18.18% were alcohol users and 18.18% were other substance users. During this pandemic period 54.54% have stopped, 36.36% have reduced the usage and 9.09% 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 of substance usage during the pandemic period.

Keywords: substance use, pandemic period, factors