



**SA Federation for
Mental Health**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health – Nyaope Use

Nyaope, is a street drug that can go by different names depending on the areas it is sold in, such as being called "Whoonga", "Nyaope", "Sugars", "Ungah" or "Pinch". Cheap and highly addictive, it typically contains a mix of substances such as marijuana, low-grade heroin, cocaine, and other additives like rat poison and antiretrovirals, which are used to treat HIV.

Because nyaope is highly addictive it has a poor rate of recovery, and some users report feeling heavy cravings even on the first day of use. It is also dangerous, because it reduces both heart and lung function. In overdose, heart and lung function reduction can become fatal. Withdrawal symptoms reportedly involve both craving and pain, which are temporarily relieved by fresh doses of the drug.

The effects of nyaope include:

- Severe body aches, shivering, anxiety, insomnia, glazed eyes, hot and cold flushes
- The low-grade heroin used means one can get toxic side effects such as skin diseases, frequent infections and lowered immunity
- Because nyaope is smoked with dagga, the user becomes addicted to dagga as well. Dagga can have side effects such as hallucinations, paranoia, flashbacks, changes in eating habits, weight loss, and restlessness
- Nyaope users usually begin to neglect their school work, or their jobs, and may eventually quit work or school altogether. Users need for extra money to pay for the drugs also increases, and this often leads to criminal behaviour when they no longer have legal access to money
- Because nyaope is so addictive, addicts may become violent when they are unable to access the drug, and may commit violent crimes even against family members or friends in order to get money.

When you have a substance abuse problem and a mental health issue such as depression, bipolar disorder, or anxiety at the same time, it is called a dual diagnosis. In a dual diagnosis, both the mental health disorder and the drug or alcohol addiction have their own symptoms that may affect a person's ability to function, handle life's difficulties, and relate to others. These co-occurring

disorders also affect each other and interact. Many people who are addicted to drugs are also diagnosed with other mental disorders, including anxiety and depression. Some people develop mental health problems because of their drug use, and some people take drugs in an attempt to alleviate symptoms of mental health disorders.

Drugs such as dagga, ecstasy and heroin have the ability to affect your mood. They can cause certain emotions or dampen down others. This may be why you use them. The changes in your mood or behaviour caused by drugs are the result of changes to your brain. This is also the part of you that controls your mental health.

Some drugs cause a condition called drug-induced Psychosis, which usually passes after a few days. However, if someone has a predisposition to a psychotic illness such as Schizophrenia, drugs may trigger the first episode in what can be a lifelong mental illness. Using drugs can also make the symptoms of mental illnesses worse and make treatment less effective.

It is important to educate young people early on about the dangers of nyaope use and the effects that it will have on their physical, emotional and mental health, as well as on their relationships with others and their outlook for the future. The best way to prevent addiction to nyaope or any other addictive substance is to not use them even once.

Signs and symptoms of drug abuse or addiction –

- Behavioural changes, such as:
- Drop in attendance and performance at work or school
- Frequently getting into trouble (fights, accidents, illegal activities)
- Using substances in dangerous situations such as while driving or operating a machine
- Engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviour
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Changes in personality or attitude
- Sudden mood swings, irritability, or angry outbursts
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity, agitation, or giddiness
- Lacking of motivation
- Appearing fearful, anxious, or paranoid, with no reason

Physical changes, such as:

- Bloodshot eyes and abnormally sized pupils
- Sudden weight loss or weight gain
- Deterioration of physical appearance
- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing
- Tremors, slurred speech, or impaired coordination

Social changes, such as:

- Sudden change in friends, favourite hangouts, and hobbies
- Legal problems related to substance use
- Unexplained need for money or financial problems
- Using substances even though it causes problems in relationships

If you or someone you know suffers from substance abuse or addiction problems, please contact The South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse on 086 14 72622, or seek the help of a licensed medical practitioner.