

Symposium | Addiction : [Symposium 15] Disorders Due to Substance Use and Addictive Behaviors and Measures against Related Harm in Asia and around the Globe

📅 Thu. Sep 25, 2025 4:25 PM - 5:55 PM JST | Thu. Sep 25, 2025 7:25 AM - 8:55 AM UTC 🏢 Session Room 2 (Main Hall B)

[Symposium 15] Disorders Due to Substance Use and Addictive Behaviors and Measures against Related Harm in Asia and around the Globe

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[SY-15-01] Substance Use Disorders in Asia: Epidemiological Trends, Cultural Contexts, and Emerging Policy Challenges

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Keywords : Substance use disorders, Asia, Methamphetamine, Drug policy

Substance use disorders (SUDs) are a significant global public health concern, contributing to approximately 0.6 million deaths in 2019, primarily due to infectious diseases and drug overdoses, especially among opioid users. In 2021, an estimated 296 million individuals aged 15–64 engaged in psychoactive drug use, leading to a loss of 36.7 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) in 2019. This burden disproportionately affects the working-age population, impeding sustainable development and economic productivity. Focusing on Asia, this presentation examines the region's unique cultural, socioeconomic, and policy landscapes influencing SUD prevalence and treatment. Factors such as collectivist values, religious beliefs, traditional medicine practices, stigma, and gender roles significantly shape substance use patterns and help-seeking behaviours. Rapid urbanisation, economic disparities, and varying substance availability complicate the issue. A critical area of concern is the escalating methamphetamine problem in East and Southeast Asia, home to the world's largest population of amphetamine-type stimulant users. The evolving drug policy landscape, exemplified by Thailand's recent cannabis legalisation, presents both opportunities and challenges. While legalisation has spurred economic growth in sectors like tourism and agriculture, it has also raised public health concerns, including increased accessibility to youth and potential rises in addiction rates.

Additionally, the use of plant-based substances like kratom, prevalent in Southeast Asia, warrants attention due to its complex pharmacological profile. Traditionally used for pain relief and to combat fatigue, kratom has potential therapeutic applications but also poses risks of misuse and addiction. This presentation will explore emerging trends in substance use, the influence of commercial determinants, and potential future directions for research, prevention, and intervention efforts in both global and Asian contexts. Emphasis will be placed on the necessity for comprehensive, culturally sensitive policy responses to mitigate the adverse impacts of psychoactive substance use on health and development.