

Symposium | AI&IT : [Symposium 82] Youth Mental Health in the Digital Era: Perspectives from Young Psychiatrists

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(Conference Room A)

[Symposium 82] Youth Mental Health in the Digital Era: Perspectives from Young Psychiatrists

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[SY-82-02] Digital Age Distress and Legal Substance Misuse in Japan: Understanding and Multifaceted Interventions for OTC and Prescription Drug Misuse in Young People

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While the prevalence of illicit drug use remains comparatively low in Japan, there has been a notable increase in the misuse of legal substances. Recent surveys indicate a rapid increase in over-the-counter (OTC) drug misuse, particularly among female high school students, with its frequency significantly surpassing that of cannabis use. As a psychiatrist practicing addiction treatment in a medical institution, I frequently encounter cases of OTC and prescription drug misuse among young people.

Substance misuse among young people is intricately linked to the complex social and environmental factors within their lived experiences. For many young individuals grappling with academic and familial expectations, loneliness, and psychological distress, substance use often functions not as a pursuit of pleasure, but rather as an attempt at self-medication or a cry for help. Multiple contributing factors, including the pervasive influence of digital culture, impact of social media on self-perception, social isolation from the community, and limited access to mental health resources collectively contribute to the exacerbation of this issue.

This trend is recognized not only by medical professionals, but also by various other specialists, including educators and community health workers. They are actively seeking a paradigm shift from “Dame-Zettai (Absolutely No)” drug prevention education, the traditional method in Japan, toward approaches that integrate addiction treatment perspectives and address the unique challenges of the digital age. However, significant challenges persist in establishing effective prevention strategies and multisectoral collaborative frameworks. This presentation analyzes this phenomenon based on experience from an addiction treatment hub hospital. It explores the urgent necessity of a comprehensive, community-wide framework that facilitates collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including healthcare, education, social welfare, families, and non-profit organizations, to support adolescents. This issue cannot be resolved solely within the medical domain; it requires active societal engagement and collaborative efforts from various sectors.