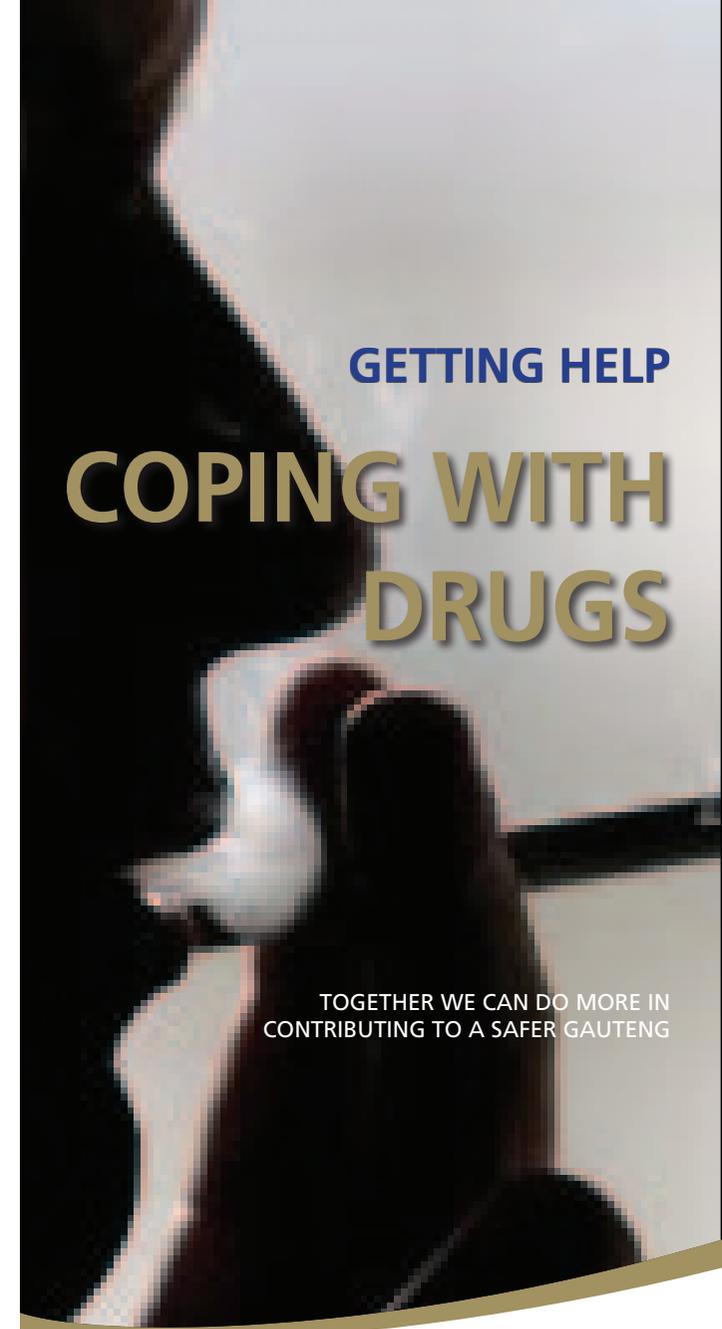


GETTING HELP

If you or someone you know is abusing drugs, free treatment for drug addiction is offered at public hospitals.

- You can also contact the SANCA National toll-free Line on 0861 472 622 or visit www.sancanational.org.za to find the closest SANCA office to you.
- You can also contact the South African Depression and Anxiety Group toll-free line on: 0800 20 50 26 or SMS: 32312 to find out about various drug rehabilitation services. Also visit: www.sadag.co.za
- If you'd like to chat to a counsellor, call loveLife's toll-free Youth Line on: 0800 121 900.
- You can also send a 'Please Call Me' (PCM) message to the love-Life Youth Line. The automated system will call you back and link you to a counsellor when one is available. Free of charge and easy to use, all you need to do is send a 'PCM' to service specific numbers which are accessible through Vodacom, MTN and Cell C.
- **'PCM' messages can be sent to MTN: *121*0833231023#; Vodacom: *140*0833231023#; Cell C: *111*0833231023#.**

SMS
'ABUSE' 'POLICE' 'BRIBE'
TO 32026 R1/sms



GETTING HELP

COPING WITH DRUGS

TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE IN CONTRIBUTING TO A SAFER GAUTENG



In South Africa, there are drugs that are common to specific communities – tik, nyaope and whoonga. loveLife's Thandiwe McCloy looks at how people are getting high in different parts of Mzansi.

Since 2004, Tik abuse has been rife on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape. Nyaope first made an appearance in Pretoria, Northern Gauteng, a few years ago, but has now infiltrated other provinces. And Whoonga is the new kid on the block, cutting its way across KZN.

CRYSTAL METH, OR TIK

Tik abuse has exploded on the Cape Flats - an area of flat, sandy land just north of Cape Town. It was first identified in Cape Town in 2002, but levels of Tik addiction have rapidly escalated in the city in the past eight years.

Andreas Pluddemann, Senior Scientist at South Africa's Medical Research Council, says one of the major reasons for high levels of Tik abuse in Cape Town are that there are highly-organised criminal gangs in the city who're able to smuggle and sell Tik on a large scale.

Tik is also cheap - it goes for between R30 and R40/straw - and is widely available. "While Tik abuse is found in other areas across South Africa, it's nowhere near the levels it has reached in Cape Town," says Pluddemann.

Scientifically known as Methamphetamine, Tik is highly addictive. It is a white, odourless, bitter-tasting crystalline powder that readily dissolves in water or alcohol and is a powerful stimulant that affects the central nervous system.

In South Africa, Tik is mostly smoked by placing the powder in a glass pipe called a 'Tik lolly', and is often smoked in its pure form, without being mixed with other drugs. Pluddemann says the majority of people on Tik are between 15 and 30 years old.

Besides the physical side-effects of Tik, the drug has had social effects, too. Its furious spread has been associated with gangsterism and increased rates of crime; and its use has led to vicious gang wars as rival groups try to control the Tik market.

Nicolette Kwalie is a social worker at the SANCA satellite office in

Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town. "Tik is leading to high rates of domestic abuse," she says. "The psychosis it causes has led to all mental health facilities in the area being full. Tik is causing financial strain on families because it's leading people to lose their jobs."

While Tik addicts are increasingly coming forward for help, Kwalie says many of them often don't stick to their appointments. "Out of about 80 people who book appointments at the Mitchell's Plain office each month, only 30 come for them," she says.

In a move to address the high levels of Tik and other drug abuse in the province, the Western Cape Government has developed various policies, such as increasing the number of drug rehabilitation facilities and boosting the amount of funding provided to NGOs that offer drug abuse treatment and prevention services.

NYAOPE

Nyaope, which is a potent mix of dagga and cheap heroin, is becoming increasingly prevalent among thousands of youth across SA. The drug is said to have originated in 2006 in the Pretoria townships of Atteridgeville, Soshanguve and Mamelodi, but is now available in the city's suburbs.

It has also spread to other parts of the country under different street names, which are area specific. In Durban, Nyaope goes by the name "Sugars", while in the Western Cape, it's called "Ungah." It's known as "Pinch" in Mpumalanga and Limpopo, and "Kataza" in Joburg.

According to Shamim Garda, SANCA's National Executive Director, Nyaope abusers are typically between 13 and 19 years old. The drug has become so widespread because it's cheap - it costs R35 to R40 a straw, depending on the purity of the drug - and is easily obtainable.

A highly addictive drug, Nyaope is sometimes mixed with bicarbonate of soda, pool cleaner, teething powder, and even Rattex (rat poison) to make it last longer and give users a stronger high.

To smoke Nyaope, users place it on metal, heat the metal, and then inhale the fumes. On smoking small doses of Nyaope, users get a rush of euphoria and a sense of warmth and wellbeing. Larger doses cause

drowsiness and feelings of being content, safe and relaxed.

While the drug may make a person feel "good" in the short term, its consequences are far from nice. Nyaope addicts often lead disorganised, criminal lives that revolve around getting their next fix.

They often stop thinking rationally, and forget about their values and beliefs. Users often do crime, mainly theft, so they can sell products to get money to finance their habit. Women often resort to prostitution, which increases their risk of contracting HIV.

According to Garda, people are becoming increasingly aware of Nyaope's dangers and are seeking treatment. But it contains Heroin, and so treating Nyaope addiction isn't cheap. Treatment for Heroin addiction is expensive because of the high cost of medication needed to deal with withdrawal symptoms.

Garda adds that in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of people being treated for heroin addiction. She says this may be because the surge in Nyaope has caused more people to become addicted to heroin. And because of the rise in heroin addiction, SANCA predicts an increase in HIV infections because users tend to share a needle which exposes them to infection.

WHOONGA

Whoonga is similar to Nyaope in that it's a mix of dagga and cheap heroin, but contains another 'secret' ingredient - antiretrovirals (ARVs). Whoonga began spreading across KwaZulu-Natal, mainly rural areas, about 18 months ago.

"People are adding ARVs to Nyaope because it gives them a higher kick," says Garda. "The situation is alarming. There have been cases of people stealing ARVs from clinics, buying them from patients and even trying to get HIV themselves so they can get free ARVs."

Garda says the effects of smoking Whoonga are the same as those caused by Nyaope, except the ARVs cause violent stomach cramps. She adds that research still needs to be conducted on the full effects of Whoonga.