Substances

Srijan Bhattacharya, Akash Nath

Truth is, no matter how I look at it, harsh. Most of the people I know, my age or less, are in some way or the other, surrounding themselves with substitutes, substitutes for emotions. The result is a human being, but not quite. Someone so desperate to be complete that in the process they lose what they had at the start of their insatiable quest.

This hunger, this sheer void which begs you to fill it is stimulated only temporarily when you partake in these substances. Having been a witness to several people and instances which shall remain unnamed for obvious reasons, I have developed quite a knowledge base when it comes to these “substitutes”. From seizures to blackouts, I have seen a variety of people having their seconds of glory in the sun before, almost always, falling face-first on the gravel. Whether it be a first bong shot gone wrong, or a “BT”, or maybe a crossfading yourself to oblivion, it’s all far too familiar. These Substances, whether alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, etc. have a direct impact on one’s physical and mental health, both often long term.

Starting with alcohol, one of the most popular and glorified substance amongst our generation that is young adults and younger. Unfortunately, even though the legal drinking age in India is twenty-one, it is not too difficult to source alcohol and consume it regardless of age. The simplest reason for drinking is to immediately change our mood or state of mind. This might not be too serious and is occasionally associated with celebrations and culture. Drinking too much, however, can be associated with underlying anxiety to deal with difficult feelings or symptoms of mental illness. This is referred to as ‘self-medication’ in the medical field. This is often a release for people suffering from underlying or established mental health problems and pressure drink, but it can make existing mental health problems worse. Alcohol can lower inhibition and depress the central nervous system, reducing cognitive capabilities and causing mood fluctuations. It can also heavily decrease the brain’s serotonin, triggering depression.

Tobacco consumption in young adults is probably a ticking time bomb. Several people, the ages of who are probably the same or around the same ages as me and the person reading this, are heavily dependent on tobacco. This heavy and unnecessary dependence on nicotine from such a young age is severely affecting the dopamine receptors in the brain. Research into smoking has shown that instead of helping people relax, smoking increases tension and anxiety. Nicotine creates an instant ‘high’ or relaxation giving the user a feeling of release. This feeling of relaxation is temporary and soon gives way to withdrawal symptoms and further intensified cravings. Smoking can also trigger schizophrenia in people with underlying psychosis. Smoking, in general, is one of the leading causes of lung and heart- related deaths in smokers.

Marijuana, cannabis, weed, ganja, charas, hemp, and several other names. Growing in popularity amongst younger users, cannabis is a drug, typically smoked, vaporized, or cooked into edible foods. Cannabis is often associated with relief and release since it is healthier in terms of the physical aspect when compared to alcohol and tobacco. But cannabis comes with its own set of drawbacks as well.

Excess consumption of cannabis can cause temporary amnesia, mood fluctuations, depersonalization, paranoia, delusion, and disorientation. People may find that they can’t sleep well and depressed for short periods. It can also hamper motivation.

Regular cannabis use is linked to rare cases of increased anxiety and trigger of underlying psychosis. But in general, responsible cannabis consumption in states where it is legal may help in glaucoma treatment, depression, anxiety, joint pain, and more.

In the midst of every person picking their poison, we as people, only a part in the bigger picture of humans, destined to live the life we make for ourselves, must grow, whether it is a temporary phase or a persistent issue, we must grow through whatever it is that we go through, if partaking in these poisons is a part of reaching the lives we picture or want to picture for ourselves, so be it. In this jumble of voids, people, their voids, substitutes, poisons, and remedies, we must never stop introspecting and expressing. What even is the point, otherwise? The point of playing without learning?