

Recreational Nitrous Oxide Use: Increasing Risks and Harms

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Abstract : The pleasurable and intoxicating effects of psychoactive substances result in widespread use. However, deaths and injuries from psychoactive substance use, particularly among young people, are a global public health problem. Understanding the benefits and problems associated with different drugs is an important part of creating contextually and physiologically relevant harm reduction strategies. Nitrous oxide use is increasing. A systematic review sought information for harm reduction strategies. The aim of this study was to systematically collate and synthesize the disparate body of research on recreational nitrous oxide use to inform harm reduction approaches tailored for young people. A mixed-methods systematic review combined quantitative data such as prevalence and incidence statistics as well as interpretive data on the experience of N₂O use. Thirty-four studies were included in the final analysis. There was minimal information available to inform policy, health care, or individuals using N₂O. The cultural, contextual, and personal reasons for N₂O use are largely unexplored.

Keywords : substance misuse, nitrous oxide, harms, harm reduction, systematic review

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