



health

Department:  
Health

PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

# WHOOONGA



# WHAT IS WHOONGA?

*Whoonga*, is sold as a powder that is usually mixed with dagga and smoked. It is predominantly sold in Umlazi, Inanda and in areas along the North and South Coast is also known by its trade name of “*Sugars*” in Chatsworth, Phoenix and Wentworth.

The drug *Whoonga* is made up of a mixture of low grade heroine and other additives like rat poison. *Whoonga* is highly addictive and a user can become addicted even after only using it once. The withdrawal symptoms of this drug are severe body pains, which include severe headaches, stomach pains and muscle spasms. This leads to users taking more of the drug because the heroin provides temporary ‘relief’ from the pain. Hence, users become trapped in a vicious cycle where the *Whoonga* both causes and (temporarily) ‘relieves’ the agonising pain.

**Demystifying Myths around ARV’s** - Many believe that *Whoonga* contains anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs). This has not been conclusively proven since laboratory results have concluded that the active chemicals in *Whoonga* or “*sugars*” are low grade/residual heroine; cocaine and strychnine. If ARV’s are used it is merely to bulk up the product, just like the drug dealers would use vim (household cleaners); asbestos or any other available chemical or drug.

## Frequently Asked Questions?

### **Question: What is substance abuse?**

**Answer:** Substance abuse is the use of a mood or behavior-altering substance resulting in significant impairment or distress. It includes the misuse of medications, alcohol or other illegal substances. This abuse can affect a person’s physical health and personal or social functioning. Substance abuse can include regular, excessive, compulsive drinking of alcohol, and the habitual use of illegal drugs.

### **Question: What are signs of substance abuse?**

#### **Answer:**

- Failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home
- Repeated absences or poor work performance
- Neglect of children or household
- Driving an automobile or operating a machine when impaired
- Arrests for substance-related disorderly conduct
- Interference with sleeping or eating
- Avoiding people or places
- Outbreaks of temper
- General changes in overall attitude
- Deterioration of physical appearance and grooming
- Wearing of sunglasses at inappropriate times
- Continual wearing of long-sleeved garments particularly in hot weather or reluctance

to wear short sleeved attire when appropriate

- Association with known substance abusers
- Unusual borrowing of money from friends, co-workers or parents
- Stealing small items from employer, home or school
- Secretive behavior regarding actions and possessions; poorly concealed attempts to avoid attention and suspicion such as frequent trips to storage rooms, restroom, basement, etc.

### **Question: How do I find a substance abuse treatment centre in my rural area?**

**Answer:** Talk to your family doctor, your pastor, your local social welfare service agency, or your local Primary Health Clinic. In addition, there are other places to go: The Department of Social Development provides comprehensive information about drug and alcohol abuse treatment programs nearest you. The National Hotline Call Centre for Alcohol and Drug Abuse at 0800 121314 provides accurate information about alcohol and drug abuse and offers alternatives and suggestions to anyone looking for answers and assistance. Staff is on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They provide in-depth information about court orders, family interventions, detox, treatment, rehab programs, and anything that is related to alcohol and drug abuse. Services are free of charge.

Other hotline numbers are—Alcoholics Anonymous helpline no. is 0800246432 and information about groups and meetings in your area.

Narcotics Anonymous at 083900962—There are also two national **suicide prevention** toll free telephone services which are available 24 hours a day. SA Depression and Anxiety group at 0800567567 and the Lifeline 0800246432.

### **Question: Does the Department of Health assist people for substance abuse?**

**Answer:** Yes; if a person needs to know whether their use of alcohol or drugs is a problem; they can be screened at their nearest PHC clinic or if acutely intoxicated; hospitals will assist in providing detoxification services

### **Question: What can be done to discourage children from using drugs and alcohol?**

**Answer:** If there are signs that your child is using drugs, stay calm and rational and discuss your suspicions with him. He is likely to deny any knowledge of substance abuse. If you are convinced that your child is taking drugs, have him evaluated by a doctor or consult a professional counsellor. If your child is already addicted to drugs, he will need help from a trained counsellor. Drug addiction is a chronic, relapsing disease and it may require a number of attempts before your child can remain drug-free. Adult supervision is a great deterrent to substance abuse. Try to ensure that all activities your child takes part in are supervised by adults. Fill his day with absorbing extra-mural activities, such as sport, arts or music classes. Everyone can help educate children on the dangers of illegal drugs and alcohol. In particular, reducing the availability of alcohol, promoting responsible adult behavior, holding adults accountable when providing alcohol to minors, enforcing laws designed to stop drinking among children and adults, and changing social norms about what children see in their homes as well as in the media regarding drugs and alcohol, all lend a hand to this

cause. KeMoja is a National substance abuse Campaign to prevent the use of alcohol and drugs by children and teens. This program provides information for parents, teachers, and signs for health care workers to look for, legislative action, reports, and more.

**Question: What are illicit drugs?**

**Answer:** Illicit drugs are drugs which are used in an unlawful manner for purposes other than those for which they are indicated or in a manner or in quantities other than directed. They can be over-the-counter medications or prescription medication. Illicit drugs can include sleeping pills, alcohol, heroin, marijuana, narcotics, cocaine, steroids, inhalants, methamphetamine, amphetamines, and hallucinogens.

**Question: Why is underage drinking and binge drinking so prevalent in rural communities?**

**Answer:** Binge drinking is defined as drinking five or more drinks at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other on at least one day in the past 30 days. It can also be defined as drinking with the intent of getting drunk, often mixing drinks, drinking as much as possible in a short period of time, and drinking to the point at which one loses control. Youth are at high risk for acute negative physical and social consequences due to their alcohol consumption. They are also at increased risk for poor school attendance and grades as well as long-term consequences such as alcohol dependence, and derailed academic and vocational trajectories.

Causes of underage and binge drinking in rural areas can be, but not limited to, economic factors, lack of employment, lack of involvement in school activities, lack of community activities, no parental supervision or parents who drink themselves, being predisposed to alcoholism, media, and peer pressure.

**Question: What effects does substance abuse have on a community?**

**Answer:** Substance abuse causes problems in communities. These problems are -  
Increased crime  
Increased violence, including domestic and child abuse  
Accidents caused by drunk driving  
Increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies  
Increased dependence on government assistance programs  
Family and social problems  
Deaths due to alcoholism, or overdose from drug use  
Fetal alcohol syndrome in children  
Spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, STDs, and Hepatitis C either through sharing of drug paraphernalia or unprotected sex  
Homelessness  
Unemployment

**Question: How can communities combat substance abuse?**

**Answer:** There are things communities can do to help control substance abuse. These might include  
Holding community or town hall meetings  
Inviting speakers to talk to school-aged children  
Inviting parents into schools to meet with teachers  
Working together with law enforcement in your community  
Collaborating with churches in your area  
Forming a community coalition  
Being good role models