

Abstract

Background: Kratom is a natural psychoactive substance origin to Southeast Asia, which use is expanding in the Czech Republic in recent years. The issue of kratom use is coming to the fore in 2022, mainly due to inappropriate regulation of kratom and reports of increasing kratom use not only among students and adults, but also among children and adolescents. So far, there is very little research data on the use of kratom in the Czech Republic.

Objectives: The aim of the thesis was to find out and describe the patterns of kratom use in the population of its users in the Czech Republic. The research also focused on risk behaviors related to kratom use. The sub-goals of the research were to map the use of other psychoactive substances and to determine the connections with the use of kratom. Furthermore, to map the need of seeking professional help due to the kratom use, and to find out the opinion of kratom users on its legal regulation in the Czech Republic.

Methods: The research was designed as a quantitative survey, a questionnaire was used to collect data, distributed in online form through social media. Data were collected from 23.10. to 6.11. 2022 and the research sample consisted of 1367 respondents. Data were analyzed in Microsoft Excel using descriptive statistics and pivot tables.

Results: The average age of first kratom use was 20,9 years. Most respondents had used kratom for a short period of time – 51,7 % less than 1 year and 34 % 1-2 years. The most common frequency of use was daily (40,9 %) and once or several times a week (31,3 %), with younger respondents using less frequently and older respondents using mostly daily. In the group of minors (15-17 years old) were almost a third of daily users (29,1 %). Respondents used kratom mostly for the purpose of stimulation or relaxation. Over half majority also used it for relief from mental health problems. It was most often used in the form of a drink (85,1 %). Almost half of the respondents (48,9 %) had ever overdosed on kratom. Negative effects or consequences of use were noted by 49,2 % of respondents. The majority of respondents (70 %) ever combined kratom with another substance, most often with alcohol and cannabis. Only 1,6 % of respondents had sought professional help for kratom, but 3,9 % had thought about it. 9,9 % of respondents would meet the diagnosis of addiction syndrome. The vast majority of respondents are of the opinion that kratom should be regulated.

Conclusion: People use kratom mostly for short periods of time and often at high frequency. Kratom is widely used by adolescents, even minors. Users report a number of positives that kratom use brings to them, from stimulation, relaxation, through relief from mental health or health problems, to recreational use. But they also expose themselves to risks such as overdosing or combining with other substances, and experience negative effects or consequences. Almost 10 % of respondents meet the symptoms for addiction syndrome. The results point to the need of adaptation of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention interventions to the emerging trend of kratom use.

Key words: kratom, patterns of use, substance use, addiction, substance use risks, questionnaire survey