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## Therapeutic benefit with caveats?: Analyzing social media data to understand the complexities of kratom use

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### Abstract

**Background:** *Mitragyna speciosa*, referred to as "kratom", is increasingly used in the United States for self-treating pain, psychiatric, and substance use disorder symptoms. It is used by some to attenuate opioid withdrawal and as a longer-term drug substitute. Most self-report data have come from online surveys, small in-person surveys, and case reports. These may not be representative of the broader kratom-using population.

**Purpose:** Analyze user-generated social media posts to determine if independent, descriptive accounts are generally consistent with prior U.S. kratom survey findings and gain a more nuanced understanding of kratom use patterns.

**Methods:** Reddit posts mentioning kratom from 42 subreddits between June 2019–July 2020 were coded by two independent raters.

**Findings:** Relevant posts (number of comments, upvotes, and downvotes) from 1274 posts comprised the final sample ( $n = 280$ ). Of the 1521 codes applied, 1273 (83.69%) were concordant. Desirable kratom effects were described among a majority, but so too were adverse effects. Reports of kratom as acute self-treatment for opioid withdrawal were more prominent compared to longer-term opioid substitution. Quantitative analysis found higher kratom doses associated ( $p < .001$ ) with greater odds of reported kratom addiction (OR = 3.56) or withdrawal (OR = 5.88), with slightly lower odds of desirable effects (OR = 0.53,  $p = .014$ ). Despite perceived therapeutic benefits, kratom was characterized by some in terms of addiction that, in some cases, appeared dose-dependent. Polydrug use was also prominently discussed.

**Conclusions:** Results validated many prior survey findings while illustrating complexities of kratom use that are not being fully captured and require continued investigation.

**Keywords:** Harm-reduction; Kratom; Kratom withdrawal; Opioids; Polydrug use.

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