

A STUDY ON SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DRUG ABUSE DETAINEES IN AL-NAJAF GOVERNORATE, IRAQ

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Abstract. Given the data suggesting ties abuse of drugs among people-particularly young- to a higher chance to develop drug use disorders and exacerbating health and social problems, with risky pattern of drug abuse involvement. We carried out an institutional-based, descriptive cross sectional research with non-probability sample in the Governorate of Al-Najaf. The goal was to investigate or explore the sociodemographic and environmental characteristics of the drug users that may have contributed to the development and the spread of behavior of abusing drugs. There were 91 drug users in all, 7(7.7%) of whom were female and 84(92.3%) of whom were male. 30.62 years was the mean age of the subjects. In comparison, the percentage of drug users among wage earners—those with variable incomes—was 55 (60.4%), while among idlers—those without jobs or work—it was 20 (21.9%). 53.9% of the participants were dropped out of elementary school before. The greatest percentage(86.8%) of the subjects lived in metropolitan areas, do so in rented or unofficial housing and make insufficient money. Family challenges, including the loss of one parent exacerbated by the low life standards and inadequate education of the parents of the majority of the participants, may have prevented them from developing prosocial skills and acting as a buffer against the harmful influence of peers and readily available drugs. Early smoking and alcohol abuse was present among the highest percentage of the drug users. Most respondents agreed to using drugs as a coping mechanism, stress reliever, and productivity enhancer. Amphetamine Type Stimulants like "crystal" and captagon were common among them; their prevalence was about 75%, 44% respectively. Followed by prescription drugs with 57%, while hallucinogens, cannabis(hashish), cocaine and heroin by 19.8%, 13.2%, 3.3%, and 4.4% respectively. Poly drug use was 33% among drug abusers.

Key words : drug abuse, socio-demographic, environmental characteristics

INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse is the use of illegal substances or excessive use of legal drugs with negative effects. It causes problems for the abusers' physical and mental health, breaks familial balance and cohesiveness, and weakens the social fabric of society (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2023). According to ICD-10(International Classification

of Diseases), the medical classification list by WHO recognizes psychoactive substances as those, the self-administration of which produces mental and behavioural disorders. The list includes alcohol, opioids, cannabinoids, sedatives and hypnotics, cocaine, caffeine and other stimulating agents, hallucinogens, tobacco and other volatile substance. Drug misuse is a public health issue since it has been linked to unsafe sexual activity, injury, aggression, and the acquisition of HIV and TB

(Gordon *et al.*, 2021). Globally, it promotes illicit financial flows, organized crime, terrorism, and corruption (UNODC, 2017). People are fighting for their lives as a result of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and lifestyle changes. This has resulted in a sharp rise in drug usage and abuse globally, particularly in emerging nations. In many regions of the world, including the Middle East, the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other illegal drugs has dramatically expanded in tandem with developments in Europe and the US (Ünüböl and Sayar, 2021). Since at least 5.5% of people worldwide, between the ages of 15 and 64, take drugs in one way or another, drug addiction has become an important global concern that threatens the existence of humanity as a whole (UNODC, 2019). Indeed abuse of drugs has become a major issue in today's society, and what is even more concerning is the recent rise in the number of young people engaging in this risky behavior, which has a detrimental impact on their physical, social, psychological, economic, and health. Substance abuse cases were previously more common among the elderly, but recent research has shown that psychoactive substance use is spreading to younger groups and may eventually result in addiction (Igunma *et al.*, 2022). This problem poses an important threat given the Middle East's average high youth population. About 500,000 people lost their lives to drug usage in 2015. Approximately 170,000 (2.7%) of those fatalities were directly related to drug use problems, primarily as a result of overdoses (Wubetu *et al.*, 2020). Clinical studies depend on magnetic resonance imaging data, show that drug use in adolescents is linked to functional and structural changes (Hamidullah *et al.*, 2020). It can also develop into an addiction over time, potentially leading to lifetime abuse and addiction, and among developing adults (ages 18 to 29) it can cause a loss of productivity (Ünüböl and Sayar, 2021).

Drug use disorders are prevalent in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), where they cause 4 disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and 9 deaths per 1000 people, as opposed to 2 DALYs and 4 fatalities per 1000 people worldwide (Sweileh *et al.*, 2014). The National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics (NCDAS) states that amphetamine usage is mainly problematic in Europe and the Middle East. Political conflict, unrest, and war are causing long-lasting emergency situations in many Eastern Mediterranean countries. Millions of individuals are displaced both domestically and abroad as a result, and there are additional psychological stress and economic hardships that increase the likelihood of drug use and social exclusion. Cannabis, opium, khat, and tramadol are the most commonly used substances in the Eastern Mediterranean region (Rostam-Abadi *et al.*,

2023). However, information on the prevalence of drug use disorders is few and inconsistent.

The social context seems to have an impact on drug use, both at the beginning and throughout. Additionally, research has linked injected drug use in the industrialized world to socioeconomic and demographic characteristics such as depression, homelessness, poverty, and low levels of education. Additionally, empirical data points to a negative association between adult drug addiction and socioeconomic position (Abri *et al.*, 2020). Poverty is said to have negative social and psychological effects on people as well as families. Youth in low- and middle-class neighborhoods turn to drugs to cope with stressors including prejudice and inadequate social assistance (Mahmood *et al.*, 2019). Resolving this issue more effectively may need an understanding of the socioeconomic and ecological characteristics of drug abusers (Jalilian *et al.*, 2015). Research conducted worldwide revealed that certain sociodemographic characteristics, such as male gender, younger age, lower income or unemployed status, and geolocality in metropolitan regions, were linked to drug use (Peltzer and Phaswana-Mafuya, 2018).

In Iraq, there is very little published research on drug abuse, and there is no clear and accurate perception of the size of the problem, its distribution and the age groups where drug misuse is most common. Newer drugs like captagon, crystal, and Tramadol may signal a rise in drug use disorders. Studies conducted by Al-Suwaidi in 2021 and Al-Hemiary and colleagues in 2014 have showed that drug use has increased in Iraq and that a drugs new that were unknown before have surfaced. In order to provide decision makers with a clear image which aid in the development of remedies for this escalating health issue, we attempted to throw light on this phenomena and explore the characteristics of drug users in this study. Prevention is the most cost-effective approach to treating drug addiction, and progress in preventing drug abuse problems necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the risk factors of addiction from different perspectives.

METHODOLOGY

91 drug users—84 men and 7 women— were requested to participate in interview and complete survey form regarding their use of drugs in the Al-Najaf Governorate after receiving permission and clearance.

Design of Study

Cross-sectional descriptive study carried out in the institutions through January to 30 February 2024. Dependent variables include lifetime and drug abuse through last three months. While independent variables involve sociodemographic and ecological characteristics

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with items like age, sex, place of residence, economic standing, education level, and living situation; they also include issues like having friends who use drugs; having a family history of drug use; having conflict within the family; having an income; having access to substances; peer pressure; and the family's marital status.

Setting for study

This investigation was carried out in the Parking and Transfer Division of the Ministry of Interior, and the Rehabilitation Center for Drug Users and Addicts of the Directorate of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Affairs in Najaf Governorate.

Sampling and Population Techniques

Drug users who were classified according to drug abuse screening test made up the study population. Purposive non-probability sampling was used to enlist ninety-one participants. In the event that the population under study lacks a sampling frame, the purposeful (convenient) sampling technique is used (Aldridge and Levine, 2001). The participants, who range in age from 18 to 60, are of both sexes. The

requirements for enrollment were that participants had to live in the Al-Najaf Governorate, be willing to participate in the study from those who had drug use through life time or last 3 months, those who detained in the Parking and Transfer Division and from those who were deposited in Rehabilitation Center for Drug Users and Addicts.

Study Tool and Collection of Data

After receiving permission and approval from the Ministry of Interior's administrative units in the governorate of Al-Najaf, drug abusers asked questions regard their drug use. Following review a relevant literatures, a customized survey instrument was employed for looking into the sociodemographic and ecological features of drug users. Validity had established by a team of specialists included community medicine and social specialists.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS software was done to examine findings. To display the population distribution according to the chosen socio-demographic factors, percentages and frequency tables were used.

RESULTS

TABLE 1. Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	N (%)
Sex	
Male	84(92.3%)
Female	7(7.7%)
Age, years	
18-25	30(32.9%)
26-34	41(45%)
35+	20(21.9%)
Status of Marriage	
Got married	50(54.9%)
Single	31(34%)
Separated/widowed	10(10.9%)
Level of Education	
Lack of literacy	13(14.3%)
Elementary school	36(39.6%)
Middle grade education	23(25.3%)
Preparatory school	13(14.3%)
Undergraduate	6(6.6%)
Employment status	
Idle	20(21.9%)

Wage earner	55(60.4%)
Employed	7(7.7%)
Housewife(females)	6(6.6%)
Residence	
Rural	12(13.2%)
Urban	79(86.8%)
-Rented house	30(32.9%)
-Informal housing	27(29.6%)
-Owned house	34(37.4%)
Economic level	
Low	43(47.3%)
Middle	40(43.9%)
High	8(8.8%)
Mother's educational level	
Illiterate	31(34%)
Primary School	36(39.6%)
Middle School	11(12%)
Secondary School	8(8.8%)
Bachelor or above	5(5.5%)
Father's educational level	
Illiterate	25(27.5%)
Primary School	20(21.9%)
Middle School	20(21.9%)
Secondary School	15(16.5%)
Bachelor or above	11(12%)
Living/ Accommodation	
With parents	62(68.1%)
Independent Housing	25(27.5%)
With Relatives	2(2.2%)
With Friends	2(2.2%)
Numbers of Brothers/and Sisters	
None	6(6.6%)
1-3	18(19.8%)
4-5	28(30.8%)
More than 5	39(42.9%)
Parent marital status	
Married	35(38.5%)
Widowed/widower	42(46.15%)
Divorced	14(15.4%)
Family history of drug abuse (mostly smoking)	

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Yes	27(29.7%)
No	64(70.3%)
Religiosity	
Interested to Pray	57(62.6%)
Not Interested	34(37.4%)
Ever Smoking	
Yes	82(90.1%)
No	9(9.9%)
Ever Alcohol Consumption	
Yes	64(70.3%)
No	27(29.7%)

FIGURE1.Environmental Factors of Drug Use

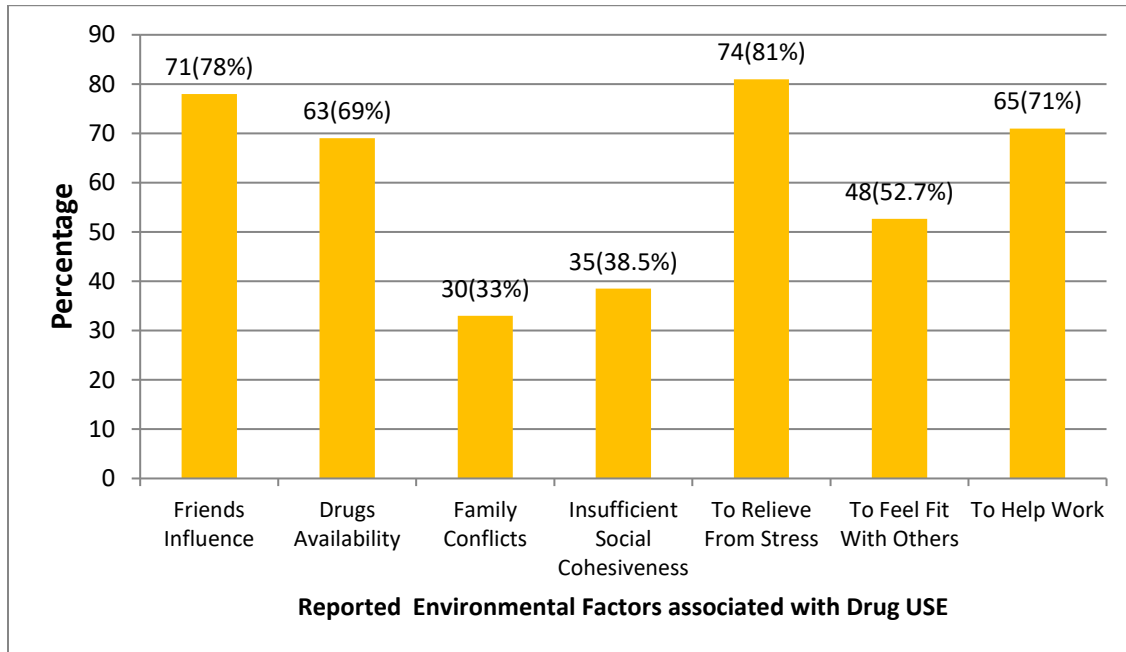


TABLE 1. Common types of abused drugs in Al-Najaf Governorate

Drug Type	Type	N(%)
Amphetamine Stimulant		
- "Captagon"		40(44%)
- "Crystal "		68 (74.7%)
(Captagon and Crystal)		37 (40.7%)
Cannabis		12 (13.2)
Prescription Drugs		52(57.1%)
Hallucinogens		18(19.8%)
Cocaine		3(3.3%)
Heroin		4(4.4%)
(Polydrug Use)		30(33%)

DISCUSSION

One of the new phenomena that floated through Iraq after 2003 was drug use among the country's various segments, particularly among the youth. Political shifts following the American invasion of Iraq had an impact on local stability and allowed Iraq to resume unprecedented contact with the outside world after decades of isolation. Political openness led to an explode in business and tourism as well as the entry of inexpensive illegal narcotics. The problem is made much worse by the weak borders, the country has become a gateway for smuggling drugs into neighboring countries and also a crucial location for consumption. The Iraqi state made matters more difficult by being lax when upholding the law against trafficking drugs (Alkudhairy *et al.*, 2024). Any change in society and living conditions affects the structure of society and shows perverse patterns of behavior, such as stress and drug addiction (Jawad 2020; Heydari *et al.*, 2015). The issue has grown and is now a complex national issue with significant financial and social costs (Jawad, 2020). Governmental officials have not supplied sufficient law enforcement personnel, as well as the legal and medical barriers.

The great percentage of the sample units is male, 84(92%) with no big difference with Jawad's findings in Baghdad in 2020. The noted differences compared to global countries regard the higher drug involvement of Arabic males compared to females may be because of a number of variables, including the accessibility and affordability of drugs within the male group, cultural norms, stigma by society, and acceptance for male drug users but rejects female users. May be there is a hidden

Iraqi female iceberg of drug users been scared from stigma!?. In most research, the prevalence of drug usage is consistently greater in men than in women. With mean age is 30.62 study found that emerging adulthood and young adults aged between (18-25 years and 26-35 years) are the more involvement in drug use by 30%,and 42% respectively. Literatures and empirical studies uphold our result. Andrea L. Stone research, which shows that lifetime prevalence trajectories of drug use and abuse peak in young adulthood at 49% among 19 and 20-year-olds and 72% by age 27 years, lends credence to this. This makes sense given the large percentage of youth in Iraq. Rapid shifts into new social situations, with more freedom and less social control than in adolescence, are what define this developmental period. Substance addiction and usage are on the rise in tandem with this greater freedom (A. Stone *et al.*, 2012). As young people assume new adult tasks and responsibilities, there is a period of elevated stress (Stoddard *et al.*, 2019). We see the percentage of married individuals is over one half (55%) while the percentage of single participants is over one-third (34%). This finding is not much different from Iranian studies done by result is consistent with Iranian research conducted in 2015 by Heydari and colleagues and in 2022 by Rastegari and colleagues.

A significant proportion of the subjects did not finish middle school; 14% were illiterate, 40% had only completed elementary school or merely read and write, and just 7% had graduated from high school and were enrolled in college. The majority of participants' parents had low educational backgrounds, which exacerbates their bad behavior. Nearly half of their fathers and the majority of their moms (73.6%) did not finish basic

school. An individual's cognitive performance throughout adulthood is positively connected with the amount of years they finished in formal schooling (Zhu *et al.*, 2023). About two thirds of them(60.4%) are wage earner and 22% are idle people without work. The higher percentage (86.8%) live in urban areas. Ibadi, 2013 found the same percentage from those abused prescription drugs regard their residence. Almost half of those don't have their own house; one third of them live in rented houses and the remainder reside in unofficial housing. (47.3% ,43.9%) of the whole sample with low and moderate income respectively. Most of them (68%) live with the parents with an average large size of the household members. Jawad,2020 supports these findings. 46% of drug abusers reported having missed a parent. The dealing with stress model, which draws on sociocognitive theories, postulates that drug abuse is one way people deal with painful life experiences Masferrer and Caparrós (2021). Approximately one-third of the participants had family members who were drug users, principally smokers. According to the research, AlHammad *et al.*, 2022 confirmed that one of the risk factors that increase a person's likelihood of abusing any kind of substance was a family history of drug usage . Approximately 2/3 of the participants indicated their interest in religion and prayer, whilst approximately 38% claimed they don't interest about praying. It was believed that religiosity, expressed via religious rituals and beliefs was a powerful deterrent to drug use; Praying eases one's tension. Alhyas *et al.*, in 2015 told that it eliminates any pessimistic thoughts. Praying would shield someone from drugs even if they were considering using them . While A. Stone *et al.*, 2012 showed that reduced religious commitments are linked to high heavy drinking trajectories . Before engaging in additional drug use, the majority of individuals were smokers and alcohol users (90.1%,70.3%) respectively. It is believed that early testing for alcohol, cigarettes, and other psychoactive drugs increases the likelihood of developing drug addiction and substance dependence (Arnett *et al.*, 2014). Because they are typically taken first before other drugs are explored, studies refer to alcohol and cigarettes as "gateway" drugs. 78% of interviewees reported using drugs under the influence of friends. A significant portion of the participants (69%) believe that drugs are easily accessible and available for usage in their city. Where one of the most powerful indicators of beginning and use among young people is the availability of narcotics (Broman, 2016). With more than one third of our sample was with family conflict and perceives lack of social cohesion. Great percentage (81%) of the participants said they betake drugs to relieve from the surrounding stress. The personality is formed from the sum of these psychological formations, when the effect of a group

prevails and its effect acquires the character of depth in the individual's character. This dynamic social approach is supported by recognition of the effects that primary groups achieve or have in building the individual's personality during the normalization process, as well as the recognition of the nature of the social structure in which these processes take place. Some people may seek to escape their harsh atmosphere by turning to drugs and eventually addiction as a defensive mechanism. This is as they reject the reality they live in, which may be why the low standard of living of the family impedes the family's ability to play a positive role in society as social control (Jawad, 2020). As a reflection of the narrative above, about(53%) of the participants said they used drugs to feel fit with the others. Also the majority of them(71%) answered they used drugs to help them through work time. In addition, the low cost of drugs in al-Najaf makes it simpler for those with low resources to obtain inexpensive, highly addictive narcotics. The most common drugs abused are ATS like methamphetamine crystal and captagon pills followed by prescription drugs. This may be attributed to the increasing activity of trade, transport and smuggling of this type of drugs in the Middle East and Asia and the rapid manufacturing of a new prescription drugs.

CONCLUSION

The unstable political situation, fragile economic level without enough work skills and poor education among the drug users added to the interpersonal and family conflicts related to low life standards that prohibited them from positive social role of the parents with loss of one or both of the parents that may be associated with stress among drug abusers, coincide with the negative influence of their friends . This is aggravated by easy accessibility and availability of drugs especially after the events of ISIS, which undermined efforts in this field and the role of the geographical location adjacent to drug-producing countries. Marriage or other adult responsibilities in the absence of a clear horizon of young people, they answered using drugs either to adapt to the circumstances or the environment and to help them work, in the absence of a clear role for society. Globalization, internet and societal change with lack of drug treatment facilities, opening borders to trade without enforcing strong controls, and a lack of accurate information to determine the scope of this issue and appropriate solutions represent challenges linked to drug abuse problem.

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