The Determinants of Drug Addiction among Algerian Youth and Its Implications: A Field Study in Skikda Province.

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Abstract: Drug use and addiction have become a widespread phenomenon in all societies without exception, and there is no disagreement regarding their negative consequences on psychological, social, economic and religious aspects. Perhaps this is what prompted us to investigate the motives driving our Algerian youth to enter this world, experiment with it and trade in it. We therefore set out the objectives of this study with a view to finding answers to questions that have long preoccupied us. It was essential for us to conduct fieldwork so that our findings would be closer to reality than to theory. We employed a descriptive approach, as this is the most suitable method for such studies, relying on a questionnaire administered to a sample of 100 young Algerians of both sexes, drawn from drug rehabilitation centres, re-education centres, and some students at Algerian universities. The results revealed a range of factors driving our young people to use drugs, including the social pressures they currently face from unemployment, poverty and deprivation, as well as unproductive leisure time and a desire to imitate and experiment with anything new. This preoccupation with the world of drugs has had profound repercussions on their mental health, their thinking, and even on their bodies and relationships.

Keywords: addiction; drugs; Algerian youth.

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1- Introduction

Contemporary societies are witnessing the spread of numerous phenomena with negative consequences for individuals and groups; among the most dangerous and widespread of these is drug abuse, a phenomenon known to humankind since ancient times, Its earliest origins date back to the Stone Age, when certain tribes used narcotics in their religious rituals and to treat certain illnesses. Drugs were not regarded as a social or economic problem until the 1960s, when they were classified as a crisis requiring urgent intervention and management due to their alarming spread, It has affected all countries of the world with very few exceptions, and as the Arab world is not among those exceptions, recent years have seen an increase in the quantities of drugs seized on the one hand and a rise in the number of addicts on the other. The 2016 World Drug Report, published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), revealed that around 250 million people worldwide use drugs of various kinds, It estimated that over 10% of drug addicts are concentrated in the Arab world, although there are no accurate statistics on the number of addicts in Arab countries due to several factors, including the concealment of certain cases or the failure to report them to the relevant authorities, particularly where the addiction involves girls and women. Nevertheless, approximate figures have been provided. For example, in Algeria, to name but one, the number of drug addicts of both sexes is estimated at around 400,000, whilst in Palestine, around 80,000 users have been recorded, of whom around 10,000 are addicts, representing 0.2%. Moving on to Tunisia, statistics put the figure at around 311,000 addicts, representing 2.8% of the total population. In Egypt, 9 million addicts have been recorded, equivalent to 10% of the Egyptian population, whilst in Jordan the proportion of addicts has been estimated at between 2% and 3% according to official Jordanian reports. Not far from Jordan, Lebanon has recorded around 24,000 addicts, representing 0.6% of the total population. Moving towards the Gulf states, statistics in Saudi Arabia indicate around 200,000 addicts of all types of drugs, equivalent to 0.7% of the total Saudi population. This variation in the number of drug users across Arab countries is primarily due to the population size of each country.

Drug use is considered an individual, subjective behaviour that is acquired gradually through several stages until the individual reaches the stage of addiction, which is considered the most dangerous stage of drug use. However, in 1964, the World Health Organisation approved the replacement of the term ‘addiction’ with two other terms that are more precise in meaning and wording, namely ‘physical dependence’ and ‘psychological dependence’. Both forms of dependence are linked to the duration of use and the type of drug consumed. Drugs are not limited to one or two types, but fall under a wide range of classifications, categorised according to their effects, components or source, with each category distinguished from the others by certain characteristics and consequences. However, regardless of their types, names and effects, they share common causes behind their striking prevalence in our Arab homeland. We will therefore attempt to shed light on the drivers of drug addiction among Arab youth, as they constitute the majority of the Arab population. We have chosen Algerian youth as a representative sample of Arab youth through a field study conducted on a large number of young addicts, with the aim of answering certain questions.

1.1- Research Questions:

- What are the most widespread and popular types of drugs within Algerian society?
- What are the motives for addiction among young addicts in Algerian society?
- What are the consequences and effects of addiction on the addict and society?

1.2- Objectives of the study:

-To identify the most popular drugs among Algerian youth.
- To understand the causes and motivations behind addiction among Algerian youth.
- To identify the most significant psychological, mental and social consequences and effects of addiction on the individual and society as a whole.

1.3- Definition and explanation of terms:

- Drugs:
- Scientific definition: A narcotic is a chemical substance that causes drowsiness, sleep or loss of consciousness accompanied by pain relief. The word 'narcotic' is a translation of the word 'narcotic', derived from the Greek 'narcoses', meaning 'to numb' or 'to make numb'.
- Legal definition: Drugs are a group of substances that cause addiction and poison the nervous system; their circulation, cultivation or manufacture is prohibited except for purposes specified by law, and they may only be used with a licence. They include opium and its derivatives, cannabis, hallucinogens, cocaine and stimulants; however, alcohol, sedatives and hypnotics are not classified as narcotics despite their harmful effects and potential for addiction. (Adel Al-Damardash, 1982, pp. 10–11)
They are also defined as substances ingested by a living organism that alter one or more of its vital functions. (Pulci, I., 1983, p. 218)
A narcotic is a natural or synthetic substance that affects the body, altering its sensations, behaviour and certain functions; repeated use of this substance results in serious consequences for physical and mental health. (Rashad Abdullatif, 1992, p. 41)
It can also be defined as substances, whether natural or synthetic, that cause dependence (addiction). These substances include: alcohol, amphetamines, barbiturates, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens, opiates and volatile substances (inhalants). Today, the term 'psychoactive substances' is used instead of 'narcotics'. (www.arbooks.tk)
According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), a narcotic is any chemical substance or mixture of chemicals required by the body; the use of such substances alters biological and structural functions. (Messili, 1994)
Doctors, however, view every psychotropic drug as, in fact, an effective narcotic, even if these substances do not possess the same capacity to induce dependence in the user. (Block. H, 1993, p202)
Thus, a drug is any substance, whether synthetic or natural, that causes biological or neurological changes in a simple or complex manner, resulting in a disruption of vital functions; continued use leads the individual to temporary or chronic addiction.
- Definition of addiction:
The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined addiction or dependence as a psychological and sometimes physical condition resulting from the interaction of the organism with the drug. Its characteristics include various responses and patterns of behaviour, always involving a strong desire to use the drug, either continuously or periodically, in order to experience its psychological effects or to avoid the unpleasant effects resulting from its absence. A user may be addicted to more than one substance, and the following characteristics of addiction have been added to the definition:
- An urgent desire to continue using the drug and to obtain it by any means.
- Increasing the dose progressively to allow the body to become accustomed to the drug, although some addicts remain on a fixed dose.
- Psychological and physical dependence on the drug.
- The appearance of psychological and physical symptoms specific to each drug upon sudden withdrawal.

- Harmful effects on the addict and society. (Adel Al-Damardash, op. cit., p. 20)

It is defined as a state of periodic or chronic intoxication that is destructive to the individual and society, resulting from the repeated use of drugs, whether natural or chemically synthesised. It is a compulsive, obsessive, impulsive and habitual behaviour, characterised by:

- Dependence
- The body's tolerance to increasing quantities
- It is considered a learned and acquired behaviour, not an innate one. (Abdul Rahman Al-Issawi, 2000)

Some define addiction as the repeated use of a psychoactive substance or substances to such an extent that the user displays an intense preoccupation with their use, as well as an inability or refusal to stop or reduce their use, and often exhibits withdrawal symptoms. (Ghanem Muhammad Hassan, 2007, p. 39)

- Types of addiction:

1- Psychological addiction: This is a condition characterised by a sense of satisfaction, coupled with a psychological drive that necessitates the continuous or periodic use of a specific psychoactive substance (narcotic) to induce pleasure or avoid fatigue. (Mustafa Suweif, 1996)

Substances that cause psychological addiction include: stimulants, cocaine, cannabis, hallucinogens, khat, tobacco, coffee and inhalants.

2- Physical addiction: This is a state in which the body adapts to and becomes accustomed to the substance, such that the user experiences severe psychological and physical disturbances when suddenly abstaining from the drug. Substances that cause physical addiction include: alcohol, hypnotics, sedatives, opium and its derivatives. It is worth noting that there are no drugs that cause physical dependence alone without being preceded by psychological dependence. (Adel Al-Damardash, reference mentioned above)

Addiction is therefore a state of pathological dependence on one or more substances; it is a compulsive, acquired behaviour that causes the addict various harms and results in psychological and physical symptoms as soon as use is discontinued.

- Definition of an addict:

An addict is a sick person who has fallen prey to or become a victim of their own misguided behaviour, which makes them a slave and dependent on a substance, whatever its psychological or physical effects may be. They may have turned to addiction due to peer pressure or to fit in with their friends, or they may have turned to it as a false solution, an escape from a problem, or out of curiosity. Scientists have attempted to prove the existence of a specific type of addictive personality or specific traits in these addicted individuals; however, this type is rare among the general population, and researchers have not yet succeeded in proving the existence of such a personality type. (www.almanalmagazine.com) .

An addict is an individual who has become accustomed to using one or more narcotic substances, and as soon as they cut down or stop using them, a range of symptoms appear, varying from person to person depending on the type and nature of the drug and the duration of the addiction.

2 - Field Study:

The presentation and analysis of the empirical data for this study are subject to a specific methodological framework comprising a series of steps and procedures, through which we have sought to examine the subject under study in concrete terms and thereby answer the questions posed earlier.

2.1 - Methodology:

We adopted a descriptive methodology, the aim of which is to describe and catalogue the characteristics of the phenomena and to define them qualitatively or quantitatively, with precision, in order to arrive at answers or solutions to the phenomena under study, whilst presenting a set of recommendations or suggestions relevant to the subject.

2.2- Tools used in the study:

We used a questionnaire comprising both closed and open-ended questions concerning drug addicts in Algeria.

We also relied on the calculation of frequencies and percentages, as well as content analysis, for interpretation and analysis.

2.3- Study sample:

A random sample was selected comprising a number of addicts (both male and female); 100 were chosen from each of the Rehabilitation Centre and the Anti-Addiction Centre in Algeria, in addition to some university students

3- Results and Discussion:

Regarding the first question concerning the duration of drug addiction, the results are shown in the following table:

70 out of 100 individuals responded that their addiction began more than a year ago, confirming the diagnosis of their condition and placing them within the category of drug addiction.

As for the reason they entered the world of drugs and became addicted to them, most of their answers pointed to what is shown in the following table:

Based on the responses regarding the causes and motivations for addiction, it was found that the primary cause of addiction among them was the problems and pressures of life they face, accounting for 36% of the total. The second cause or motivation, according to the study sample, was boredom at 24%. Immediately after this, we find bad company, which encourages peers to use drugs, at 22%, with a fourth cause of addiction, at 18%, relating to a desire to explore and experiment with drugs.

Moving on to the third question, which concerns the most commonly used types of drugs among young people, their answers were as follows:

The responses indicate that the most prevalent and widely used drugs in Algerian society are cannabis (66%), followed by hallucinogenic tablets (22%). The remaining types are rare, which may be due to the affordability of these two types for some addicts, as well as their ease of access.

As for the next question regarding whether there is a difference between their lives before and after addiction, the results are shown in the table:

Every member of the study sample answered ‘yes’ – that is, 100% – as opposed to ‘no’ or ‘no answer’, meaning there is a consensus that life before and after addiction differs significantly; consequently, addiction can be considered a transitional phase that negatively affects the addict’s life.

In the fifth question, we sought to ascertain the extent of mental disturbances such as concentration, attention and memory; the results were as follows:

All respondents answered ‘yes’, confirming that they suffer from attention and concentration disorders, which manifest particularly in frequent forgetfulness and an inability to connect information correctly, in addition to the absent-mindedness that has become a constant companion since they entered the world of addiction.

Our sixth question was: ‘Do you suffer from visual disturbances or visual hallucinations?’ The answers are shown in the table below:

From the table, we can see that 90 individuals reported suffering from visual disturbances, which are particularly evident during periods of drug use; these disturbances may escalate to visual or auditory hallucinations that negatively impact their daily lives.

We moved on to the seventh question regarding nervousness and aggressive behaviour, and the results were as follows:

The results of the seventh question indicate that addicts suffer from severe nervousness, particularly when they are craving the drug and wishing to use it. This nervousness manifests itself through aggressive behaviour towards oneself or others; it may take the form of a desire to destroy, strike or assault, and may even include behaviours such as theft in order to obtain the drug as soon as the need arises. Consequently, a shortage or absence of the drug is likely to lead to socially and morally inappropriate behaviour.

The eighth question concerned their suffering from sleep disorders, and the answers were as follows:

87% of addicts answered 'yes' compared to 13% who answered 'no', meaning that addiction causes significant sleep disturbances, manifested particularly through insomnia, according to the responses of many of them.

Moving on to the ninth question regarding addicts' experiences of anxiety and stress during the addiction phase, the responses confirmed the psychological symptoms as follows:

All the answers were positive, confirming the presence of anxiety and stress in their lives, which is particularly evident when drugs are not available, negatively affecting them and their environment, especially their social relationships.

Question 10: Do you prefer isolation or social interaction? The answers were as follows:

89% of addicts' responses indicated a preference for isolation and avoiding social gatherings, suggesting that addiction has caused them to withdraw into their own world, preventing them from enjoying and participating in social activities, thereby eliminating many of their social interests and friendships.

The eleventh question, regarding the presence or absence of family problems, was answered as follows:

97% of the addicts in the study sample suffer from family problems, which, according to their statements, are due to aggression and severe irritability that have negatively affected their relationships and family communication.

The final question was open-ended, aimed at understanding the victims' future and whether they had a desire for a better life; they expressed a desire to overcome their addiction and return to their lives before entering this world, which they described as a vortex that is easy to enter but difficult to escape.

Our study answered the key questions we had previously identified, revealing that the most commonly used drugs among Algerian youth are cannabis and hallucinogenic tablets, which are easily obtained through the collusion of many drug dealers and pharmacists who seize the opportunity to make a quick profit. The study also identified the drivers of addiction; the results showed that the primary cause of entering the world of drugs is the pressures of life and the problems faced by most of our Arab youth, such as unemployment, poverty and excessive social constraints, followed by a sense of emptiness, which may be a cause of addiction, as well as bad company leading to deviant behaviour due to a lack of parental supervision, particularly during adolescence. Furthermore, a love of adventure and the desire to discover new things can be a motive for some young people to experiment with drugs and subsequently become addicted to them. At the end of the study, the most significant findings regarding addiction and its effects on the addict and society were summarised. Drug users, or more precisely addicts, suffer from several negative effects and consequences that impact their lives and those of their families; anxiety and stress were the defining features of their daily lives, in addition to suffering from

mental and cognitive disorders such as memory loss, poor concentration, visual hallucinations, and sleep disturbances, as well as adopting socially unacceptable behaviours such as theft, physical assault, violence and shouting, All of this had a negative impact on their family relationships and caused them numerous problems within the community, such as isolation, rejection, failure to form meaningful relationships and achieve their goals, abandonment of interests, and a loss of desire to communicate. Addicts also express a strong desire to escape the world of addiction and live their lives normally, as they did before embarking on this experience.

4- Recommendations and suggestions:

In order to reduce the phenomenon of drug addiction and thereby limit its repercussions and dire consequences, a solution must first be found to its causes through the following:

1- Raising awareness among individuals in university circles, in particular, of the dangers of drugs and addiction through media campaigns or posters in public places.

2- Designating recreational areas where students can spend their free time safely and enjoyably.

3- Setting up counselling and support groups to help young people resolve their various problems.

4- Providing employment opportunities specifically for young people.

5- Implementing an effective security plan to help control the phenomenon of drug smuggling and trafficking.

6- Increasing oversight of pharmacists' work and monitoring their performance and dealings, particularly regarding the widespread use of hallucinogenic tablets.

7- Imposing strict legal penalties on anyone who attempts to use or traffic drugs.

8- Establishing centres for the monitoring and treatment of drug addicts, and working to effectively reintegrate them into society.

5- Conclusion:

Addiction is a phenomenon, like other negative phenomena, that is tearing apart our Arab societies and escalating at an alarming rate, leaving serious consequences that have affected all classes, groups and genders, turning them into victims of experiences that began with curiosity, a love of discovery and a desire to escape social and psychological pressures, only to ultimately cast them into an unknown world besieged by depression and regret. Therefore, these phenomena must be combated by all available means, including the media, awareness campaigns, and support groups, in addition to security measures.

- Appendix:

Research questionnaire entitled: The motivations and psychological and psychosocial effects of the most popular drugs among young people.

As part of a study on the causes and psychological and psychosocial effects of drugs, and given that you have experienced addiction, we kindly ask you to answer these questions. Please be assured that this information will be used solely to serve and enrich scientific research.

We extend our sincere thanks to you

Personal details:

Age: .....

Gender: .....

Marital status: .....

Occupation: .....

Form questions:

How long have you been suffering from addiction? Less than a year More than a year

What led you to try it and become addicted to it?

Emptiness Bad company A desire to explore

The pressures of life Other reasons I can think of

.....

What types do you use?

Hashish Heroin or cocaine

Psychedelic tablets Other types

Has there been a difference in your life before and after addiction? Yes No

Have you started experiencing problems with your memory and concentration? Yes No

How did these problems manifest themselves?.....

Do you experience visual hallucinations (disturbances in vision)? Yes No

When do they occur?.....

Do you experience irritability and aggressive behaviour? Yes No

When do they increase?.....

Do you have any sleep disturbances? Yes No

What are they?.....

Do you suffer from anxiety and stress? Yes No

What causes them?.....

In daily life, do you prefer socialising or being alone? Socialising Being alone

Do you have problems within your family? Yes No

What are these problems?.....

Do you have goals in life? Yes No

What are they?.....

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