

Trends in Trafficking and Consumption of Psychoactive Substances Among Youth in Skikda Province: Pregabalin as a Case Study

اتجاهات المتاجرة واستهلاك المؤثرات العقلية بين شباب ولاية سكيكدة: البريغالين بوصفه نموذجا.

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Abstract :

This study investigates the trafficking and consumption of psychoactive substances among youth, focusing on Pregabalin as a case study. Drawing on three years of data from the Security Department of Skikda Province, it analyzes demographic and social factors influencing the phenomenon, including seized quantities, age, and occupational status of users and traffickers. Adopting a descriptive-analytical and quantitative approach, the study also examines the role of social media in promoting these substances and shaping consumption patterns. Findings reveal that the widespread use of Pregabalin is linked to its accessibility through questionable prescriptions and black-market channels, as well as its affordability compared to traditional drugs. Young unemployed individuals represent the most affected group. The study recommends strengthening pharmaceutical control, enforcing stricter penalties for illicit trafficking, and implementing awareness programs targeting youth to mitigate the public health and social risks associated with psychoactive substance abuse.

Keywords: Pregabalin, trafficking, consumption, psychoactive drugs, youth, public health.

المخلص :

تتناول هذه الدراسة ظاهرة المتاجرة واستهلاك المؤثرات العقلية بين فئة الشباب، مع التركيز على مادة البريغالين كنموذج تحليلي. استند البحث إلى بيانات تمتد لثلاث سنوات صادرة عن مصالح أمن ولاية سكيكدة، لتحليل العوامل الديموغرافية والاجتماعية المرتبطة بالظاهرة، من حيث الكميات المحجوزة، والفئات العمرية، والوضعين الاجتماعي والمهني للمتعاطين والمتاجرين. اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي والمنهج الكمي لدراسة اتجاهات الاستهلاك والمتاجرة. كما بحث دور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في الترويج لهذه المواد. أظهرت النتائج أن انتشار البريغالين مرتبط بسهولة الحصول عليه عبر وصفات طبية مشبوهة أو من السوق السوداء، واستخدامه كبديل زهيد للمخدرات التقليدية، خصوصا بين العاطلين عن العمل. وتوصي الدراسة بتعزيز الرقابة على صرف الأدوية المؤثرة عقليا، وتشديد العقوبات على الاتجار غير المشروع، وتكثيف برامج التوعية الموجهة للشباب للحد من مخاطر هذه الظاهرة على الصحة العامة والسلامة الاجتماعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البريغالين، المتاجرة، الاستهلاك، المؤثرات العقلية، الشباب، الصحة العامة.

1- Introduction

The phenomenon of consuming and trafficking psychoactive substances has become one of the prominent challenges facing modern societies. It is no longer confined to a specific country but has transformed into a global issue that requires collective efforts to address it. Technological advancements and the widespread use of modern communication tools have facilitated the promotion and smuggling of drugs, exacerbating the phenomenon and expanding its scope.

In this context, combating drugs and psychoactive substances has gained increasing international attention, manifested in several international agreements, such as the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, and the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988. Arab countries, including Algeria, have also intensified their efforts in this field through national strategies and deterrent laws aimed at curbing the spread of drugs and dismantling the criminal networks associated with them.

At the national level, Algeria has adopted strict policies to combat drugs and psychoactive substances by issuing specialized laws and enhancing security cooperation with international bodies. The state has also focused on developing preventive and awareness programs targeting the most vulnerable groups, particularly youth, who are considered the most affected by this phenomenon.

This study aims to analyze trends in the trafficking and consumption of psychoactive substances among youth in the Skikda province, with a focus on pregabalin as a case study. Through a comparative analysis of three years, the study examines key demographic factors, seized quantities, age groups, and the mechanisms of promoting this substance among youth. Additionally, the study addresses the role of social media in spreading the phenomenon and its impact on youth behavior.

This research is part of efforts to understand the dynamics of the psychoactive substances market among youth, contributing to evidence-based recommendations that can help develop more effective strategies to address this escalating issue.

Problem Statement

The phenomenon of trafficking and consuming psychoactive substances, particularly pregabalin, poses an escalating challenge to

modern societies due to its profound impacts on health, social stability, and security. The illicit use of this substance has exacerbated addiction issues among youth, negatively affecting their psychological and social well-being, alongside posing severe risks to public health. Its proliferation in the black market—whether through pharmacies with forged prescriptions or smuggling networks—has complicated efforts to combat it, raising questions about the effectiveness of legal oversight and preventive policies.

In this context, this study seeks to analyze trends in the trafficking and consumption of pregabalin among youth in Skikda province through a comparative analysis of three years. It aims to identify the demographic, economic, and social factors influencing its spread, shed light on mechanisms of illicit promotion and consumption, and explore potential measures to mitigate the phenomenon and enhance community awareness of its risks.

Research Questions:

1. What demographic and social factors contribute to the spread of pregabalin consumption among youth?
2. How does the trafficking of pregabalin impact public health and social stability in Skikda province?
3. What are the mechanisms of illicit promotion for this substance, and what role do social media platforms play in its proliferation?
4. What legal and health measures can effectively reduce the consumption and illicit trafficking of pregabalin?

Study Objectives:

1. To examine the social and psychological factors associated with the consumption of psychoactive substances, with a focus on groups most vulnerable to illicit use.
2. To assess the health and social impacts of misusing psychoactive substances, particularly among youth, including effects on mental health, educational performance, and social relationships.
3. To analyze national and international laws and regulations related to psychoactive substances and evaluate the effectiveness of current policies in curbing their spread.
4. To propose preventive and therapeutic strategies to reduce the prevalence of psychoactive substances, including awareness campaigns, legal regulation, and enhanced psychological and social support.

2- Theoretical Framework

1.2. Social Control Theory and the Interpretation of Drug Trafficking and Substance Abuse

Social Control Theory is considered one of the most significant sociological contributions to explaining conformity to societal norms and deviation from them (Ghani Nasser Hussein Al-Quraishi, 2011, p. 18). Edward Ross, one of the pioneers of this theory, argues that social control operates through two main mechanisms: external and internal. The external mechanism involves the enforcement of social rules by formal institutions, while the internal mechanism reflects individuals' voluntary adoption of these norms through socialization and self-regulation (Musleh Al-Saleh, 2004, p. 21). According to Jean-Daniel Reynaud, social control represents the community's efforts to ensure compliance with rules and to penalize deviance, whether through official mechanisms or informal social pressure.

Social control manifests in two primary forms: formal and informal. Formal control is exercised by state institutions such as the police and judiciary through laws and sanctions ranging from fines to imprisonment. It also includes therapeutic and rehabilitation measures for addicts. On the other hand, informal control arises from daily interactions among individuals, where family, peers, educational institutions, and media contribute to shaping behavior through guidance, awareness, and symbolic sanctions such as approval or social disapproval (Musleh Al-Saleh, 2004, p. 93).

Drug trafficking and substance abuse can be interpreted through the lens of Social Control Theory by examining the roles played by formal and informal institutions in curbing their spread. Formal control is embodied in stringent laws prohibiting production, distribution, and consumption, along with the efforts of security agencies to apprehend violators (Maan Khalil Al-Omar, 2006, p. 154). Courts also play a role in issuing deterrent sentences, while the state offers rehabilitation programs to support addicts in their recovery journey.

Informal control is reflected in the influence of the family, which contributes to moral guidance and social upbringing, along with the role of peers and the broader community in shaping attitudes toward drugs. Supportive environments can reduce the spread of this phenomenon through positive social pressure (Maan Khalil Al-Omar, 2006, p. 139).

Moreover, educational institutions and media help raise awareness of the dangers of drugs and promote healthy behavioral alternatives.

A range of moral and social factors affect the effectiveness of social control. Ethically, self-control helps individuals resist the temptations of mind-altering substances, while social pressure enhances adherence to societal norms (Musleh Al-Saleh, 2004, p. 168). Socially, peers and family play a critical role in shaping behavior, as socialization helps instill values that encourage compliance with laws and avoidance of risky behavior (Maan Khalil Al-Omar, 2006, p. 76).

Applying Social Control Theory to the phenomenon of drug use and mind-altering substances highlights the importance of balancing formal and informal control mechanisms. Through deterrent laws, law enforcement efforts, and rehabilitation programs—alongside the role of family, community, and educational institutions—society can mitigate the spread of drug abuse and promote social cohesion. This requires integrated strategies based on awareness, legal regulation, and social monitoring to ensure individuals' adherence to values and standards that protect society from the dangers of drugs and mind-altering substances.

2.2. Psychoactive Substances: Concept and Classification

Psychoactive substances represent one of the most prominent issues in modern societies due to their direct impact on human behavior and the broader social system. This term is defined as any natural or synthetic substance—or any natural product—listed in Schedule I, II, III, or IV of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, as well as any substance nationally classified as a psychoactive agent (Wafi Khadija, 2023, p. 3). These substances include a group of chemicals that affect the central nervous system, resulting in changes in perception, mood, and behavior. While some of these substances are medically used to treat psychological and neurological disorders, their misuse poses complex health, social, and legal challenges (Farah Belkacem & Ghallab Tarek, 2015, p. 54).

Psychoactive substances are classified into three main categories based on their effects:

- **Stimulants:** These increase activity, focus, and energy, but excessive use may lead to addiction and neurological disorders (Ali Ismail Abdul Rahman, 2006, p. 79).

- **Depressants:** These reduce neural activity to alleviate anxiety and stress, yet they may cause addiction and impair concentration (Abdul Raouf Al-Rawabdeh, 1988, p. 126).
- **Hallucinogens:** These alter sensory perception and consciousness, potentially causing hallucinations and euphoria, but they carry significant risks to mental and social health (Adel Al-Damardash, 1982, p. 13).

Despite the regulated medical use of these substances, their illicit consumption—especially among youth—has led to the spread of addiction and the emergence of various social and behavioral problems. This underscores the urgent need for strict regulatory policies and effective awareness strategies to mitigate their dangerous consequences.

3.2. Pregabalin: Between Therapeutic Use and Addiction

Pregabalin is considered one of the most effective medications for treating nervous system disorders. It is commonly used to manage epileptic seizures, chronic nerve pain, and anxiety and depression disorders (Mylis Dufau, 2020, p. 36). The drug works by inhibiting excessive electrical activity in the brain, helping to reduce pain, control seizures, and improve the patient's neurological condition (Denis Richard, Jean-Senon & Marc Valléur, 2009, p. 365).

Despite its medical importance, the increasing misuse of pregabalin—especially among young people—has made it a controversial substance. Once a reliable therapeutic agent, it has increasingly become a drug of abuse consumed without medical supervision, resulting in rising addiction rates and associated health and social problems.

A. Medical Uses of Pregabalin

Pregabalin is classified as a prescription drug that requires strict monitoring due to its potent effects on the nervous system. Its main medical applications include :

(Mylis Dufau, 2020, pp. 37–38)

- **Epilepsy treatment**, by reducing the excessive neural signals that trigger seizures.
- **Relief of chronic neuropathic pain**, especially from diabetes or spinal cord injuries.
- **Management of anxiety and stress disorders**, by calming the nervous system.
- **Alleviation of withdrawal symptoms** in individuals recovering from opioid addiction.

Although effective in treating these conditions, unregulated use or exceeding the prescribed doses can lead to adverse outcomes. Therefore, strict medical supervision is essential when administering this drug.

B. Misuse of Pregabalin and Its Spread Among Youth

In recent years, cases of pregabalin misuse have surged, particularly among young people, as it has increasingly been used as a cheap alternative to traditional narcotics. Several factors have contributed to its illicit spread:

- **Easy accessibility** through forged prescriptions or the black market (Farah Belkacem & Ghallab Tarek, 2015, p. 145).
- **Low cost** compared to other drugs, making it accessible to broader social groups (Adel Al-Damardash, 1982, p. 28).
- **Sedative-like psychological effects**, such as feelings of relaxation and euphoria, which increase its appeal (Dhiab Mousa Al-Budainah, 2012, p. 25).
- **Social and economic pressures** that drive some individuals, especially youth, to use it as a means of escaping reality (Abdullah bin Abdul Mushrif & Riyadh bin Ali Al-Juwadi, 2011, p. 89).

The spread of pregabalin reflects the worsening of both health and social crises, especially in environments plagued by unemployment, family disintegration, and weak oversight of the pharmaceutical market.

C. The Negative Effects of Pregabalin on Individuals and Society

The adverse consequences of pregabalin misuse are wide-ranging, affecting individuals' health, psychology, and social integration, while also causing broader disruptions within the community.

► *Health Effects:*

- Neurological disorders such as dizziness, muscle weakness, and impaired concentration.
- Gastrointestinal issues including nausea, constipation, and appetite disturbances.
- Increased risk of addiction due to both psychological and physical dependence on the drug.

► *Psychological and Behavioral Effects:*

- Severe mood swings ranging from depression and anxiety to irritability.
- Decline in academic and professional performance due to memory and focus impairment.
- Social withdrawal and a higher likelihood of marginalization and exclusion (Mylis Dufau, 2020, p. 40).

► *Social and Security Impacts:*

- Rising crime and deviant behavior associated with addiction.

- Increased traffic accidents due to drowsiness and lack of focus while driving.
- Strain on healthcare resources due to the growing number of addicts requiring treatment and rehabilitation (Fathi Dardar, 2001, p. 20).

Pregabalin emerges as a **dual-effect substance**: on one hand, a vital medication for treating several medical conditions; on the other, a growing threat due to its misuse. Tackling this phenomenon requires a comprehensive response that includes strengthening pharmaceutical regulation, intensifying awareness campaigns, and enforcing stricter penalties against illegal distribution. Coordinated efforts among health, social, and security sectors are essential to address this crisis effectively and to safeguard public health and societal stability.

4.2. Youth and the Trade in Psychoactive Substances: A Sociological Perspective

The phenomenon of psychoactive substance use among youth has become a prominent issue that demands comprehensive sociological analysis, due to the complex interplay of social, cultural, and economic factors shaping it. Youth, as the most dynamic segment of society, are particularly vulnerable to a range of variables that may lead them to experiment with or become addicted to narcotic substances (Majid Al-Zayoud, 2005, p. 37). In the context of digital globalization and the informal economy, the trade in psychoactive substances has become increasingly widespread and complex. This calls for an in-depth examination of the social and psychological trends associated with the phenomenon, the influencing demographic factors, promotion mechanisms, and the role of social media in its proliferation (Dhiab Mousa Al-Budainah, 2012, p. 26).

A. Social and Psychological Trends in Youth Drug Use

The prevalence of drug use among youth is attributed to a complex interaction of social and psychological factors. Key social determinants include life stressors, family disintegration, shifting values, and unemployment, all of which significantly contribute to the spread of this issue (Abdullah bin Abdul Mushrif & Riyadh bin Ali Al-Juwadi, 2011, p. 95). Youth who lack familial and social support often turn to drugs as a means of escaping daily pressures, while others succumb to collective influence and peer pressure.

From a psychological standpoint, the pursuit of pleasure or new experiences, the desire to rebel against traditional values, and feelings of existential emptiness are among the primary motivations that drive some young people toward psychoactive substance use (Adel Al-Damardash, 1982, p. 55). Studies indicate that some individuals use these substances as coping mechanisms for depression and anxiety or to enhance social performance, thereby creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break.

Understanding these trends is a crucial step toward developing preventive policies based on a comprehensive **psycho-social approach** that addresses the underlying causes of drug use among youth.

Certainly! Here's a **professional and accurate English translation** of sections **B** and **C** from 4.2. *Youth and the Trade in Psychoactive Substances: A Sociological Perspective*:

B. Demographic Factors Influencing Drug Use

Demographic factors play a critical role in shaping patterns of drug consumption among youth. Research indicates that younger age groups—particularly during adolescence and early adulthood—are the most vulnerable to this phenomenon. This is linked to the transitional phase from childhood to maturity, during which individuals are engaged in identity formation and behavioral boundary testing (Fathi Dardar, 2001, p. 14).

In terms of gender, data show that males are more likely to consume drugs than females. This trend is attributed to cultural factors related to masculine identity, greater social freedom, and increased exposure to environments that encourage drug use (Mylis Dufau, 2020, p. 15). However, recent social changes have led to a noticeable rise in drug use among women, particularly in societies undergoing value shifts and transformations in traditional gender roles (Nicole Maestracci, 2011, p. 14).

Economic and social conditions also play a substantial role in either promoting or deterring drug use. Youth from impoverished backgrounds or fragile social environments are more likely to experiment with psychoactive substances—either as a form of escapism or due to involvement in informal economic networks that offer drugs as part of a marginal economy (Wahida Hadda Sayel, 2015, p. 67). Nevertheless, drug use is not limited to lower-income groups. Some youth from middle- and upper-class backgrounds also engage in drug use for different reasons,

including pleasure-seeking, imitation, or as a marker of belonging to certain social circles.

C. Mechanisms for Promoting Psychoactive Substances Among Youth

The spread of drug trafficking among youth is a structured social phenomenon that relies on sophisticated marketing strategies adapted to contemporary cultural and technological contexts (Dhiab Mousa Al-Budainah, 2012, p. 31). Drug promotion methods have evolved to encompass social media platforms, music events, and youth festivals, where substances are often presented as part of a modern lifestyle or as tools to enhance cognitive and physical performance.

Promotion networks employ targeted advertising techniques to appeal to young people by portraying drugs as sources of pleasure, social integration, or even as productivity enhancers in academic and professional settings. Drug dealers also exploit the lack of regulatory oversight on certain digital platforms to facilitate the sale of illicit substances. Encrypted applications have become common communication channels between dealers and consumers (Dhiab Mousa Al-Budainah, 2012, p. 43).

Cultural factors further contribute to the spread of drug use, as some substances are marketed as "harmless" or "natural," which reduces young people's concerns about their harmful effects. Dealers also capitalize on peer networks, using youth themselves as intermediaries to distribute substances within closed social circles, making monitoring and preventive intervention more difficult.

5.2. The Role of social media in the Spread of Psychoactive Substance Trade and Use

The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed how drugs are distributed among youth, with social media becoming a central platform for promoting and consuming psychoactive substances. The interactive features of these platforms are exploited to create informal networks for exchanging information on sales locations, usage methods, and even ways to bypass legal restrictions (Dhiab Mousa Al-Budainah, 2012, p. 47).

Promoters use advanced strategies like influencer marketing, where individuals indirectly promote such substances by showcasing lifestyles appealing to young audiences. Encrypted symbols and coded language are also employed on social media to evade regulation and conceal illegal activities (Dhiab Mousa Al-Budainah, 2012, p. 45).

Moreover, social media normalizes drug use by fostering digital environments that promote risky behaviors—depicting consumption as part of youth culture or a form of self-expression. The lack of effective regulation and delays in countermeasures intensify the issue, requiring new strategies to mitigate the influence of these platforms on drug dissemination.

In conclusion, the spread of psychoactive substances among youth presents a complex sociological challenge shaped by psychological, social, and economic factors. Digital transformation, shifting cultural values, and innovative marketing have reshaped consumption patterns, demanding a comprehensive response that integrates prevention and treatment strategies.

Tackling this phenomenon requires raising public awareness, developing targeted educational programs, imposing strict oversight on social media, and reinforcing the role of social institutions in offering psychological and social support to vulnerable groups. Governments must also address the informal drug economy through coordinated security and social policies to curb the spread and devastating impact of this threat on individuals and society.

3. Research Methodology and Procedures

This study relies on a precise methodological approach based on the analysis of official data related to the trafficking and consumption of psychoactive substances in the Skikda province, with the aim of monitoring trends and analyzing the factors influencing the phenomenon. The methodological design of the study involves the use of multiple research methods, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data, while adhering to ethical standards in data processing.

1.3. Research Methods Employed

a. Descriptive-Analytical Method

The research employs the descriptive-analytical method as the primary tool for understanding the phenomenon through the analysis of statistics and official data related to drug and psychoactive substance cases. This method provides a comprehensive picture of the scale of the phenomenon's prevalence, focusing on the social, economic, and behavioral factors that influence youth consumption of psychoactive substances.

b. Quantitative Method

The quantitative method was utilized to analyze statistical data related to the quantities of seized psychoactive substances, the age distribution of consumers and traffickers, and the types of cases processed. This method provides precise quantitative indicators regarding the evolution of the phenomenon over the three years under study, contributing to forecasting future trends and enhancing response strategies.

c. Comparative Method

Given that the study aims to analyze changes in the spread of drugs and psychoactive substances over three consecutive years, the comparative method is employed to monitor temporal changes in patterns of trafficking and consumption. Social and economic factors that may influence these trends are also taken into account.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

a. Secondary Data

The study primarily relies on official data provided by relevant institutions, including:

- Statistics and reports from the Skikda Security Directorate on cases related to drugs and psychoactive substances over the past three years.

b. Analysis of Official Documents

Official documents of registered cases were analyzed, including:

- Types and quantities of seized substances.
- Number of registered cases classified according to the type of offense (consumption, trafficking, smuggling).
- Age groups and professions of those arrested, enabling an examination of the socio-economic characteristics of individuals involved.

c. Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis techniques were used to process and classify data according to multiple variables, such as:

- The year in which the case was registered (Year 1 – Year 2 – Year 3).
- The age group of the individuals involved.
- The nature of the case (consumption, trafficking, smuggling).
- Types of seized substances, with a focus on pregabalin.
- Socio-economic and professional characteristics of those arrested.

Excel software was used to chart trends and analyze temporal differences between the studied years.

3.3. Sample Definition and Selection Methods

Since the study is based on official data rather than surveys or direct interviews, the studied sample does not consist of individuals but includes all registered cases during the three years covered by the research.

A. Sample Definition

- The sample includes all cases related to psychoactive substances registered with the Skikda Security Directorate during the specified time period.
- The sample encompasses all age groups and professions of those arrested in these cases.
- The sample also includes all types of seized substances, with a particular focus on pregabalin due to its widespread use among youth.

B. Sample Selection Method

- Comprehensive Sampling: All registered cases during the study's time frame are analyzed without resorting to random sampling, as the available official data allows for a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon.
- Comparative Analysis: Data is categorized according to specific variables, such as year, type of substance, age groups, and occupations, and then compared to monitor changes in patterns of consumption and trafficking.

4.3. Methodological Procedures and Ethical Standards of the Study

A. Methodological Procedures

- Extraction and analysis of official case data according to specified variables.
- Use of tables and graphs to illustrate temporal trends and changes in consumption and trafficking behaviors.
- Comparison of data across the three years to draw conclusions about the increase or decline of the phenomenon and the factors influencing it.

B. Ethical Standards

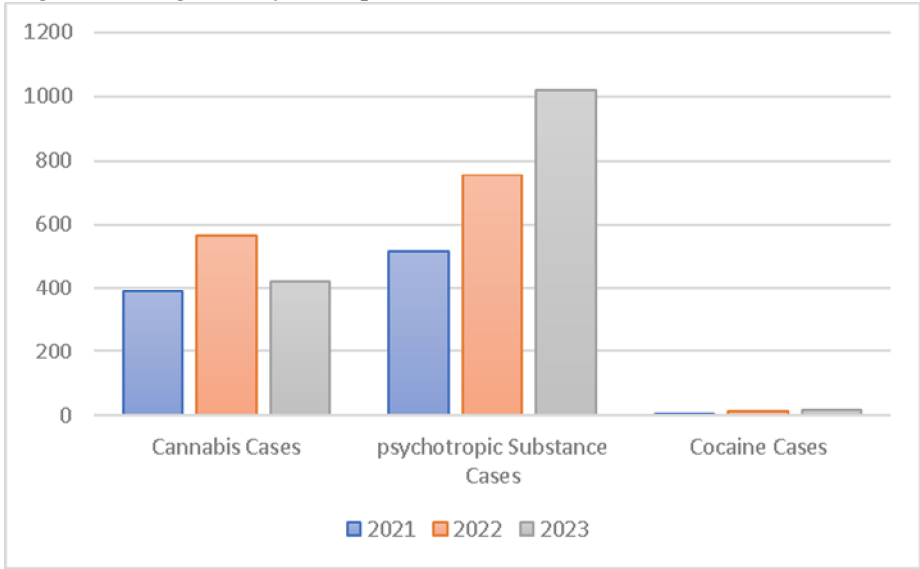
The study adheres to a set of ethical standards to ensure scientific credibility and respect for data privacy:

- Confidentiality of Data: All information used in the research is sourced from official reports, and no personal or confidential data related to the individuals involved is disclosed.
- Commitment to Credibility and Objectivity: Data is analyzed as-is, without distortion or unjustified interpretation, ensuring scientific objectivity.

- Source Documentation: Official sources used for data collection are clearly cited to ensure the study’s credibility and the reliability of its results.
- Adherence to Local Laws and Regulations: Data is used strictly within the framework of academic research, in compliance with laws related to information protection and privacy, with no unauthorized use of official data.

In conclusion, this research methodology provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of psychoactive substance spread among youth by combining quantitative and qualitative analysis and leveraging reliable official data. Adhering to strict ethical standards ensures that the study achieves its objectives without compromising data privacy or result credibility, thereby contributing to effective recommendations for addressing this growing issue.

Figure 1- Drug and Psychotropic Substance Cases Over Three Years



Source: Prepared by the researcher using the EXCEL program, based on the annual reports of Skikda Security Directorate’s activities in combating the illegal trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

The statistical data related to drug and psychotropic substance cases in the Skikda province during the period (2021–2023) reflect clear shifts in consumption and illicit trade patterns, allowing for sociological conclusions about the social and economic factors influencing the spread of this phenomenon. A notable decline is observed in cannabis-related cases between 2022 and 2023, both in terms of the number of cases,

arrests, and seized quantities. This may indicate a shift in consumer preferences or the impact of security efforts in curbing its circulation.

In contrast, there is a continuous increase in cases involving psychotropic substances, with a steady rise in the number of cases, arrests, and seized quantities over the past three years. This reflects the widespread use of these substances, particularly among the youth. This trend may be attributed to their easy accessibility and lower cost compared to other substances, as well as socio-economic factors such as high unemployment rates and psychological stress, which drive individuals to seek means of escaping reality.

Additionally, cocaine-related cases show a steady increase, albeit at a slower pace compared to psychotropic substances, indicating a diversification in consumption patterns and an expansion in the range of substances used. This supports the hypothesis that supply-and-demand strategies are constantly evolving, as users and traffickers adapt to changing security and economic conditions.

Studies indicate that younger age groups are most vulnerable to substance use, necessitating targeted awareness and treatment strategies for this demographic. The rise in drug consumption is associated with a noticeable increase in crime rates, including theft and violent acts, as addicts' resort to securing resources to obtain these substances. Therefore, addressing this phenomenon requires multi-level interventions, including prevention, strict legislation, and the enhancement of social and educational institutions' roles in raising youth awareness about the risks of substance use and its negative impacts on individuals and society.

Table 1 - Detainees by Gender

<i>Gender</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>
<i>Males</i>	878	1287	1427
<i>Male Minors</i>	20	26	19
<i>Total Males</i>	898	1313	1446
<i>Females</i>	12	15	10
<i>Female Minors</i>	0	0	3
<i>Total Females</i>	12	15	13
<i>Total</i>	910	1328	1459

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on the annual reports of the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate regarding anti-drug and psychotropic substance trafficking activities.

The statistical analysis of drug and psychotropic substance trafficking and consumption cases over the period 2021–2023 reveals a **notable increase**

in the prevalence of this phenomenon. The number of recorded cases rose from **910 in 2021 to 1459 in 2023**, marking an approximate **60% increase**. This trend reflects the growing spread of psychotropic substances, necessitating intensified security and preventive interventions. Cases involving **male individuals** witnessed a clear rise—from **898 cases in 2021 to 1446 in 2023**—representing an increase of around **61%**. In contrast, while the number of cases involving **females** remained relatively low, it showed slight fluctuation: **12 cases in 2021**, **15 in 2022**, and a decrease to **13 in 2023**. This disparity highlights the influence of **socio-cultural factors** on gender involvement in this phenomenon, along with potential differences in monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

The data also indicates a relatively **stable rate of involvement of male minors**, ranging between **19 and 26 cases annually**, with no clear upward trend. However, **no cases involving female minors** were recorded in 2021 and 2022, while **3 cases appeared in 2023**, possibly signaling emerging patterns that warrant further investigation into the influencing factors behind such involvement.

These findings underscore the escalating threats posed by psychotropic substances, highlighting the urgent need to develop **comprehensive strategies** that encompass **law enforcement**, **awareness programs**, and **social integration efforts**. The marked gender disparity also emphasizes the necessity of analyzing **social and cultural factors**, while bolstering **targeted preventive efforts**, particularly for **youth and minors**, to curb the growing risks.

Table 2 – Number of Cases by Age Group
Trafficking Cases

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Under 18</i>	8	12	10	30
<i>19–25</i>	141	191	247	579
<i>26–35</i>	249	252	255	756
<i>36–45</i>	74	97	97	268
<i>46–55</i>	19	16	9	44
<i>Over 55</i>	3	8	0	11
<i>Total</i>	494	576	618	1688

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Possession and Consumption Cases

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Under 18</i>	13	15	14	42
<i>19–25</i>	188	316	347	851
<i>26–35</i>	162	316	344	822
<i>36–45</i>	37	62	107	206
<i>46–55</i>	6	25	27	58
<i>Over 55</i>	4	7	1	12
<i>Total</i>	410	741	840	1991

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on annual reports from the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate concerning activities against the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

The data on illicit trafficking, possession, and consumption of psychotropic substances from 2021 to 2023 reveals a significant distribution based on age groups.

In terms of **trafficking**, the **26–35 age group** ranks highest with a total of **756 cases**, followed by the **19–25 group** with **579 cases**, and then the **36–45 group** with **268 cases**.

In cases of **possession and consumption**, the **19–25 age group** tops the list with **851 cases**, followed closely by the **26–35 group** with **822 cases**, and then the **36–45 group** with **206 cases**.

This distribution clearly indicates that **youth, particularly those aged 19 to 35**, are the most involved in psychotropic substance-related offenses, both in terms of trafficking and personal use. These findings emphasize the urgent need to focus awareness and prevention programs on these age groups, while also reinforcing **security and legal efforts** to curb the growing prevalence of this issue among young people.

Table 3 – Arrested Individuals by Occupation

<i>Occupation / Case Classification</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>Employee</i>	<i>Worker</i>	<i>Self-employed</i>	<i>Unemployed</i>
2021	16	11	91	71	719
2022	28	28	100	86	1075
2023	7	4	163	247	1037
Total	51	43	354	404	2831

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on the annual reports of the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate on activities against the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

An analysis of the data on drug-related offenses by occupation between 2021 and 2023 reveals that the **“unemployed” category consistently represented the largest portion of those involved**, with **719 cases in**

2021, rising to 1,075 in 2022, before experiencing a slight decrease to 1,037 in 2023. This trend suggests a strong link between unemployment or job instability and the likelihood of involvement in psychotropic substance-related offenses. It highlights the urgent need for **strategies to address social and economic vulnerability.**

In contrast, the **“worker” category has seen a notable rise**, with cases increasing from **91 in 2021 to 100 in 2022**, and then surging to **163 in 2023.** This raises concerns about the role of **work conditions and the nature of certain jobs** in contributing to potential involvement in substance-related activities.

The **“self-employed” group has also witnessed a sharp increase**, with cases nearly tripling from **71 in 2021 to 247 in 2023**, which may reflect **emerging patterns** of illicit activity driven by economic or social pressures.

On the other hand, the **“employee” category displayed fluctuations**, with cases rising from **11 in 2021 to 28 in 2022**, but then **dropping significantly to only 4 in 2023.** This decline may indicate the **effectiveness of regulatory frameworks and workplace oversight** in deterring involvement in such offenses.

Similarly, the **“student” group experienced a minor increase** from **16 in 2021 to 28 in 2022**, followed by a **drop to 7 in 2023.** This decline could point to the **success of targeted awareness campaigns or changing consumption behaviors among youth.**

Overall, these figures reflect a complex interplay between **economic, social, and occupational factors** in the spread of psychotropic substance-related offenses. The rise in cases among certain groups such as workers and the self-employed calls for deeper studies to understand the underlying contexts. Conversely, the decline in cases among employees and students emphasizes the **importance of preventive policies and monitoring mechanisms.**

In light of this, it becomes imperative to develop **integrated security and social strategies**, which include providing job opportunities, raising awareness of the dangers, and rehabilitating offenders, in order to mitigate this phenomenon and **enhance social stability.**

Trends in Trafficking and Consumption of Psychoactive Substances Among Youth in Skikda Province: Pregabalin as a Case Study

Table 4 – Quantities of Seized Drugs and Psychotropic Substances

Year / Type of Seized Substances	2021	2022	2023	Three-Year Total
Seized cannabis (kg)	62.08541	57.82899	7.797077	127.711477
Seized psychotropic substances (units)	81,486	97,541	80,692	259,719
Seized cocaine (grams)	0.6036	54.03	81.81	136.4436

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on the annual reports of the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate on activities against the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

The statistical data concerning the seizure of drugs and psychotropic substances from 2021 to 2023 reveals **dynamic shifts in smuggling and consumption patterns**, necessitating a deeper analytical approach to understand the underlying factors driving these changes.

A notable **decline in cannabis seizures** is evident, with the quantities dropping from approximately **62 kg in 2021 to under 8 kg in 2023**. This decrease may be attributed to **tighter security controls** on trafficking routes or a **shift among consumers toward other substances** that are more widespread and less targeted by law enforcement.

In contrast, **psychotropic substances** demonstrated **notable fluctuations** during the same period. The seizures peaked at **97,541 units in 2022**, followed by a decrease to **80,692 units in 2023**. This pattern may reflect **evolving distribution strategies** and the **adaptability of criminal networks** to new security measures. Furthermore, the figures suggest an **increased demand** for these substances, particularly among youth who may prefer psychotropics for their **ease of access** compared to traditional narcotics.

As for **cocaine**, the data reveals a **steady rise in seized quantities**, from a mere **0.6 grams in 2021 to 81.81 grams in 2023**. This escalation may indicate **growing criminal activity** related to this substance in the black market or improvements in the **efficiency of security forces in detecting trafficking networks**.

These field developments emphasize the need to **strengthen security policies** through the use of **advanced surveillance technologies**, intensified **inter-agency cooperation**, and the **expansion of prevention and public awareness programs**. Such measures are crucial to curbing the spread of drug-related phenomena and dismantling the societal drivers that fuel them.

Table 5 – Number of Psychotropic Substance Cases

Year	2021	2022	2023	Total
Annual Total	409	662	905	1976
Percentage (%)	20.70	33.50	45.80	100

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on the annual reports of the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate on activities against the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

The statistics indicate a **notable increase in psychotropic substance-related cases** in Skikda Province between 2021 and 2023. The number of cases rose from **409 (20.70%) in 2021** to **662 cases (33.50%) in 2022**, and further to **905 cases (45.80%) in 2023**, bringing the **total to 1,976 cases** over the three-year period.

This upward trend reflects **complex socio-economic dynamics**, where increasing **youth unemployment** pushes some individuals toward **drug consumption or trafficking** as a means of coping with economic pressures. Additionally, **family disintegration and weakened social bonds** contribute to a higher vulnerability to deviant behavior, including drug use.

From a theoretical perspective, the rise in cases can be interpreted through **social control theory**, which highlights the **declining capacity of societal institutions** to guide individual behavior toward conformity with prevailing norms. This decline helps explain the growing prevalence of psychotropic substance use. At the same time, **social learning theory** suggests that drug use is **acquired through interaction within environments** that promote such behaviors. Peer groups and **social media platforms**, in particular, facilitate the exposure and normalization of these substances among youth, adding further complexity to prevention efforts.

Given this reality, there is a **pressing need to adopt multidimensional strategies** to curb the spread of psychotropic substances. These should include **enhanced public awareness**, the **provision of alternative economic opportunities for young people**, and the **strengthening of family and community ties**. At the same time, **stringent security measures remain essential** to track down those involved in trafficking and promotion, alongside the development of **digital monitoring mechanisms**, as online platforms have become a key tool in expanding the reach of this phenomenon.

Trends in Trafficking and Consumption of Psychoactive Substances Among Youth in Skikda Province: Pregabalin as a Case Study

Table 6 – Distribution of Cases by Legal Classification

Case Type	2021	2022	2023	Three-Year Total	Percentage (%)
Trafficking Cases	225	340	392	957	48.43
Possession & Consumption	179	317	511	1007	50.96
Smuggling Cases	5	5	2	12	0.61

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on the annual reports of the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate on activities against the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

The distribution of psychotropic substance-related cases in **Skikda Province between 2021 and 2023** reveals the **predominance of possession and consumption cases**, which accounted for **50.96%** of the total, followed by **trafficking cases at 48.43%**, while **smuggling cases** represented a minimal **0.61%**.

This distribution reflects a **complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors** contributing to the spread of psychotropic substance use. The high rate of consumption suggests a **growing culture of drug use**, possibly driven by **social pressures, unemployment**, or the **desire to escape from reality**. This trend calls for in-depth studies to better understand the underlying motivations for such behavior.

The **high proportion of trafficking cases** is indicative of **active distribution networks** that exploit rising demand, highlighting major **security challenges** that necessitate **effective strategies** to combat this illicit trade. Although smuggling cases are limited in number, they **confirm ongoing attempts to introduce these substances into the region**—a phenomenon that may be linked to **geographical factors or weaknesses in border surveillance**. This underscores the need to **enhance security cooperation** and develop **more efficient monitoring mechanisms**.

These dynamics can be interpreted through **sociological theories** of crime and deviance. For instance, **anomie theory** explains such behaviors as the result of a breakdown in shared social norms and values, while **social learning theory** emphasizes the influence of the surrounding environment in shaping deviant behaviors. Based on these perspectives, the fight against psychotropic substance proliferation must move **beyond security measures** to encompass **public awareness, the strengthening of educational and religious institutions**, and the development of **effective rehabilitation programs** to ensure the reintegration of users into society.

Ultimately, combating this phenomenon is a **collective responsibility** that requires ongoing coordination between **security forces, social institutions, and civil society**. The containment of psychotropic substance abuse cannot rely solely on repressive measures, but rather must be addressed through **multi-dimensional policies** that target **prevention, treatment, and legal enforcement**, to achieve a sustainable and comprehensive solution to this escalating issue.

Table 7 – Quantity of Seized Psychotropic Substances

Year	2021	2022	2023	Total
Seized Quantity	81,486	97,541	80,692	259,719
Percentage (%)	31.37	37.56	31.07	100

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on the annual reports of the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate on activities against the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

The data on **seized psychotropic substances** over the past three years reflects **complex dynamics** between security agencies and trafficking/promotion networks. The **notable increase in seizures in 2022**, compared to 2021 and 2023, may indicate either a **heightened security effort** during that year or an **intensification of criminal network activities**. Conversely, the **decline recorded in 2023** could be the result of **effective security policies**, or potentially, **evolving smuggling and distribution tactics** among traffickers.

From a **sociological perspective**, the rise in psychotropic substance seizures is tied to an ongoing interaction between **law enforcement efforts** and the **social environment** in which these networks operate. Rising **unemployment and social marginalization** may drive up demand for such substances, while **cultural and technological factors**, particularly the **use of social media as a promotional tool**, have facilitated their spread. These factors point to the need for **comprehensive policies** that go beyond enforcement to address the **social and economic roots** of the problem.

On the **security level**, confronting the spread of psychotropic substances requires **coordinated efforts** among various **security and legislative bodies**, as well as **strengthened regional and international cooperation** to pursue trafficking networks, which often operate across national borders. Furthermore, the development of **preventive strategies** based on education and awareness, with the **involvement of community and religious institutions**, is essential in reducing the prevalence of this phenomenon.

In conclusion, the data highlights **ongoing challenges** in combating psychotropic substances, calling for a **holistic approach** that integrates **effective security oversight, supportive social policies, and preventive interventions**, to reduce the influence of these substances and protect society from their harmful consequences.

Table 8 – Comparison Between the Quantity of Psychotropic Substances and the Number of Cases

Year	2021	2022	2023	Three-Year Total
Total Annual Cases	409	662	905	1976
Seized Quantity	81,486	97,541	80,692	259,719

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on the annual reports of the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate on activities against the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

Psychotropic substances represent one of the most critical issues in modern societies due to their profound impact on individuals and social structures. These substances encompass a wide range of compounds that affect brain function and behavior, leading to **cognitive and psychological changes** with serious repercussions for both individuals and the broader community.

The abuse of psychotropic substances often results in family disintegration, as addiction weakens familial bonds and contributes to rising divorce rates. Additionally, the loss of productivity and the ability to work drives many addicts toward **unemployment and homelessness**, deepening their marginalization and increasing the **economic and social burdens** on society.

The widespread use of psychotropic substances is also closely tied to rising crime rates, as users may resort to theft or violence to sustain their habits, posing a direct threat to public safety and social stability.

From a sociological standpoint, the spread of substance abuse can be explained through multiple theories. **Social learning theory** suggests that individuals acquire such behaviors through imitation and observation within their social environments. Meanwhile, **strain theory** posits that individuals turn to drug use as a coping mechanism in response to **psychological and economic pressures** they face in their daily lives. These perspectives underscore the importance of a deeper understanding of the **root causes** of this phenomenon in order to develop effective **preventive strategies**.

On the **legal and security front**, governments implement strict measures to reduce the spread of psychotropic substances by enacting legislation

that **criminalizes their production, distribution, and consumption**, with harsh penalties for violators. **Rigorous controls** are also imposed on healthcare institutions and pharmacies to prevent the misuse of prescription drugs with psychotropic effects. Furthermore, **international cooperation** is reinforced to combat cross-border trafficking, thereby weakening the criminal networks associated with this illicit trade.

Despite these efforts, **psychotropic substance abuse continues to pose a growing challenge**, especially among youth who seek to escape life pressures or pursue new experiences without fully understanding the consequences. Therefore, addressing this issue requires a **comprehensive approach** that integrates **prevention and treatment** by raising public awareness, providing **psychosocial support** for addicts, and developing **effective rehabilitation programs**.

Ultimately, **tackling this phenomenon is a collective responsibility**, demanding close cooperation between security, healthcare, and social institutions to ensure the construction of a **safer and more stable society**.

Table 9 – Distribution of Seized Psychotropic Substance Quantities by Legal Classification

Year / Quantity	2021	2022	2023	Three-Year Total	Percentage (%)
Trafficking Seizures	66,419	70,253	70,856	207,528	79.90
Possession & Consumption Seizures	1,086	1,607	1,632	4,325	1.67
Smuggling Seizures	13,981	25,681	8,204	47,866	18.43
Total	81,486	97,541	80,692	259,719	100

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on the annual reports of the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate on activities against the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

The analysis of **seized quantities of psychotropic substances** between **2021 and 2023** shows that the **majority (79.90%)** of these seizures were associated with **trafficking offenses**, followed by **smuggling cases (18.43%)**, while **possession and consumption** accounted for only **1.67%**.

This sharp disparity points to the **widespread presence of distribution and promotion networks** within society, driven by **complex economic and social factors**. In border areas especially, some individuals turn to trafficking as a **means of livelihood** in the face of rising unemployment and increasing living pressures.

The relatively **high smuggling rate** underscores **persistent security challenges** along borders, where criminal networks attempt to introduce these substances illegally. This situation calls for **enhanced border surveillance** and **regional coordination** to confront the issue more effectively.

On the other hand, the **low percentage attributed to possession and consumption** may suggest the **effectiveness of security efforts and legal deterrents**. However, this number **may not reflect the full reality**, as many consumption cases go unreported. This highlights the need for **comprehensive programs** focused on **prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation**.

The continued prevalence of psychotropic substance trafficking can also be linked to **cultural and media influences**, especially through **social media platforms**, which facilitate **indirect promotion and increased demand** for these substances. Meanwhile, the substantial quantities seized annually demonstrate the **efficiency of security and judicial systems**, though the figures also underscore the need for **more integrated strategies**.

Effectively addressing this issue requires a **holistic approach**, combining **legal deterrence, public awareness, and socio-economic support** to mitigate the conditions that fuel the spread of psychotropic substances. Such an approach is essential to protect individuals and communities from their serious consequences.

Table 10 - Possession and Consumption Cases with Seized Quantities

Year	2021	2022	2023	Three-Year Total	Percentage
Possession and Consumption Cases	179	317	511	1007	50.96%
Quantity of Seized Substances	1086	1607	1632	4325	1.67%

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on Excel data processing, using annual statistics from the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate on activities related to combating illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

The data indicates a marked increase in cases of possession and consumption of psychotropic substances in the province of Skikda between 2021 and 2023. The number of cases rose from 179 to 511, totaling 1007 cases over the three-year period. Although the quantity of seized substances increased slightly—from 1086 to 1632 units—this rise does not correspond proportionally to the sharp increase in case numbers, reflecting complex social and security developments.

From a sociological perspective, this upward trend can be interpreted through several interrelated factors. Demographic changes, such as the growing proportion of youth, may play a primary role, as this age group is most vulnerable to experimenting with psychotropic substances due to cultural and media influences that normalize the phenomenon. Economic conditions also play a significant role, with high unemployment and poverty rates driving some individuals toward substance use as a coping mechanism for daily hardships.

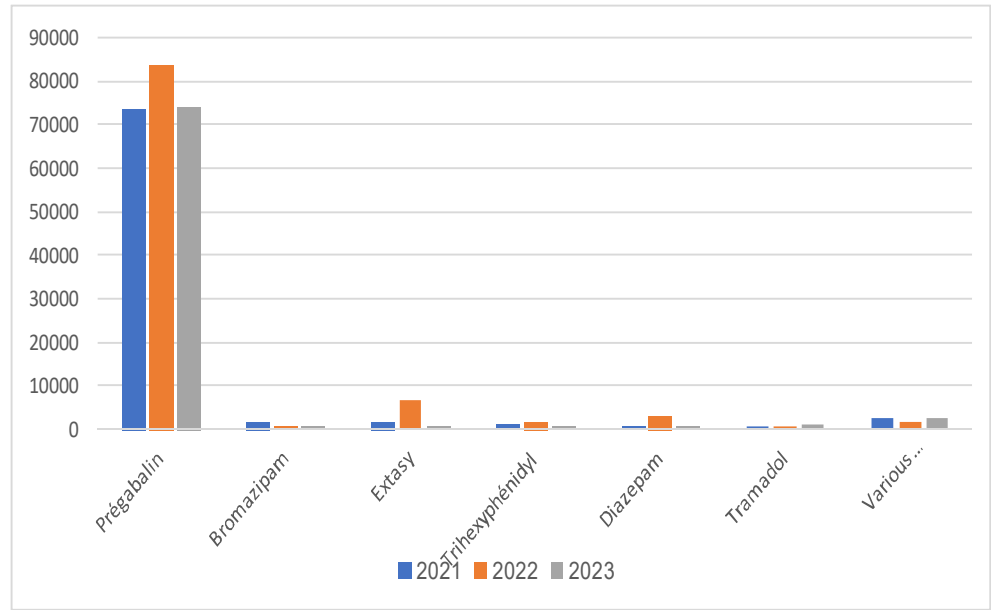
Psychologically, escalating daily pressures contribute to a search for means of anxiety and stress relief, making psychotropic substances a seemingly accessible option for some. On the security front, innovations in trafficking methods—particularly through social media—have broadened the scope of substance distribution, making enforcement more complex. Conversely, the increase in reported cases may also reflect intensified efforts by security forces to detect and apprehend offenders, revealing a dynamic interplay between the spread of the phenomenon and the level of enforcement.

These transformations can be interpreted through sociological theories such as **Durkheim's theory of anomie**, which links the absence of clear social norms to rising deviant behaviors, including drug use. Likewise, the **rational choice theory** suggests that individuals weigh potential benefits and costs before deciding to engage in consumption. In environments lacking strong deterrents or sufficient social support, drug use may appear as a rational choice, highlighting the need for more comprehensive preventive strategies that integrate deterrence, social framing, and psychological support.

Figure 2 - Most Trafficked, Possessed, and Consumed Psychotropic Substances

Trends in Trafficking and Consumption of Psychoactive Substances
Among Youth in Skikda Province: Pregabalin as a Case Study

Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on annual statistics from the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate regarding activities to combat the illicit



trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

Statistics on seized psychotropic substances over the past three years reveal a dominant presence of **pregabalin**, which accounts for **89.41%** of total seizures—far surpassing other substances such as **ecstasy (3.22%)**, **various medications (2.43%)**, and **Parkinan (1.17%)**. This widespread prevalence raises questions about the factors that have made pregabalin the most commonly used substance among consumers. This can be attributed to its relative ease of access—whether through prescriptions or the black market—and its sedative effects, which provide an escape from daily pressures.

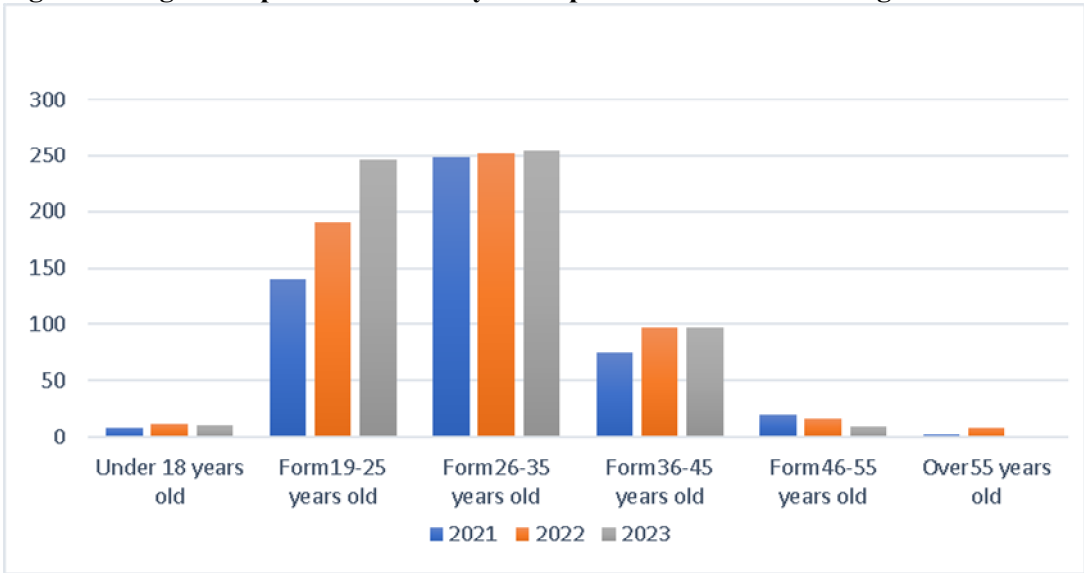
On the security front, the data shows fluctuations in the quantities seized across the years, with the highest amount recorded in **2022**, reaching **97,541 pills**. This variation may reflect either intensified efforts by law enforcement agencies or a surge in the activities of trafficking networks, warranting deeper analysis into the dynamics of the illicit market for psychotropic substances.

Sociologically, the widespread use of pregabalin can be explained through **social control theory**, which posits that the decline of social institutions and weakened family ties may drive individuals toward deviant behaviors such as substance abuse. Economic factors—particularly unemployment

and social marginalization—also play a fundamental role in increasing the appeal of such substances, either as a form of escapism or as a response to mounting socio-economic pressures.

In the Algerian context, the rising consumption of psychotropic substances represents a **complex challenge** impacting both **security** and **public health**. Addressing this phenomenon requires **comprehensive strategies**, including raising **community awareness**, strengthening **family ties**, improving **economic opportunities for youth**, and enhancing **security and judicial oversight** to confront the spread of this issue and mitigate its serious consequences.

Figure 3 – Age Groups Involved in Psychotropic Substance Trafficking Cases



Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on annual statistics from the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate concerning efforts to combat the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

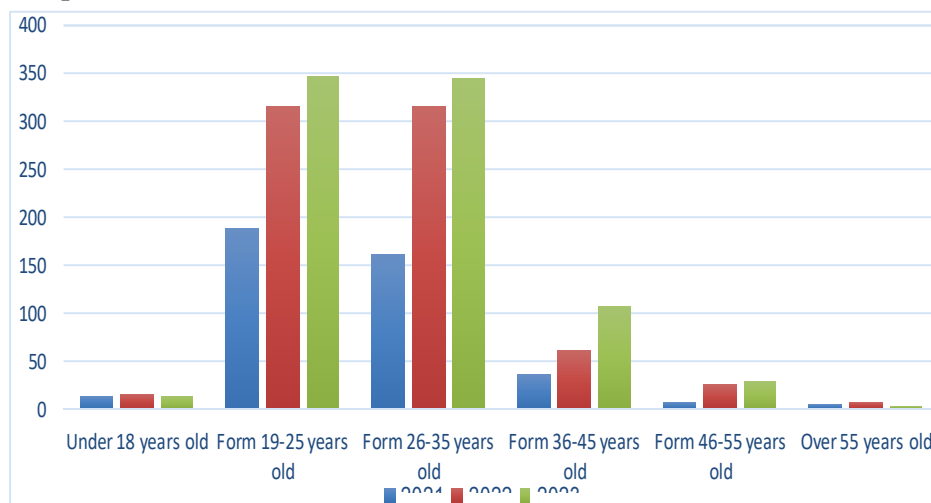
Statistical data indicates that the **26–35 age group** constitutes the largest proportion of individuals involved in psychotropic substance-related cases, followed by the **19–25 age group**. This distribution reflects complex sociological and security dimensions, linked to economic and social determinants that influence individual behavior during these life stages. For the older, more involved group, professional and family pressures may drive some individuals toward psychotropic substances as a means of coping with life’s demands. Additionally, engagement in

distribution networks becomes more likely due to the expansion of social and professional relationships.

As for the younger group, early adulthood is marked by a greater inclination toward experimentation and a desire to explore new experiences. This increases the likelihood of substance use or involvement in trafficking, especially under peer influence and cultural motivations that normalize risky behaviors. In contrast, older age groups show lower levels of involvement, which may be attributed to increased awareness of legal and health risks, or greater social stability that discourages participation in such phenomena.

These trends can be interpreted through **social control theories**, which suggest that weakened family and professional bonds increase the likelihood of deviant behavior. They also align with **social learning theories**, which argue that drug-related behaviors are acquired through interaction with one's social environment. The figures reflect a reality that calls for more **targeted intervention strategies** focusing on high-risk groups—through awareness campaigns, the creation of economic opportunities, and the strengthening of social ties—to curb the spread of this issue and mitigate its security and societal consequences.

Figure 4 – Age Groups Involved in Psychotropic Substance Possession and Consumption Cases



Source: Prepared by the researcher using Excel, based on annual statistics from the Skikda Provincial Security Directorate regarding efforts to combat the illicit trafficking of drugs and psychotropic substances.

Statistics on psychotropic substance possession and consumption cases between 2021 and 2023 point to an alarming prevalence of this phenomenon among Algerian youth. The **19 to 35 age group accounts for over 84%** of all recorded cases, reflecting the influence of complex social and economic factors on this demographic. Unemployment and economic hardship play a central role in pushing young people toward drug use, with some seeing it as an escape from a difficult reality. Peer pressure also contributes significantly to reinforcing this behavior, especially in the absence of adequate awareness about the associated health and social risks.

From a security perspective, there is a noticeable increase in the number of cases—from **410 in 2021 to 840 in 2023**. This rise may suggest a broader spread of these substances or advancements in the methods used for their promotion and distribution. It can also be attributed to improved law enforcement capabilities and intensified surveillance efforts. However, relying solely on security responses is insufficient to curb the spread of the phenomenon without addressing its underlying social and economic drivers.

From a sociological standpoint, the spread of psychotropic substance use can be understood through **theories of social deviance**, such as the **differential association theory**, which posits that deviant behavior is learned through interaction with one's social environment. Structural factors such as **poverty** and **social marginalization** further exacerbate the tendency toward substance use, calling for integrated intervention strategies.

Such strategies should include :

- **Awareness campaigns** targeting youth through media and educational platforms
- **Improved economic opportunities** via vocational training programs and sustainable employment
- **Support for security forces** through adequate resourcing
- **Establishment of rehabilitation and treatment centers** for addicts, which are essential for helping individuals recover and reintegrate into society

Addressing this phenomenon requires a deep understanding of the underlying causes and **close collaboration between government**

institutions and civil society to develop effective, sustainable solutions that mitigate its negative impacts on individuals and society as a whole.

Fourth: Findings and Recommendations

Findings:

1. **Psychotropic substances constitute an emerging social phenomenon** with significant health, psychological, and economic dimensions that impact both individuals and society at large.
2. **Motivations for psychotropic substance use are diverse**, including the pursuit of pleasure, escape from problems, and pressures stemming from one's social environment.
3. **Substance use is concentrated among youth**, particularly in environments marked by difficult economic and social conditions.
4. **The misuse of psychoactive medications such as pregabalin** has become a common alternative to traditional narcotics due to their ease of access.
5. **Social media plays a key role in promoting psychotropic substances**, facilitating their spread, especially among younger demographics.
6. **Psychotropic substance use leads to serious physical and psychological consequences**, including addiction, cognitive impairment, and severe behavioral changes.
7. This phenomenon **contributes to rising crime rates, violence, and the deterioration of family and social relationships**.
8. **Legislation concerning psychotropic substances varies across countries**, yet there is a pressing need to align national laws with international standards to strengthen regulatory effectiveness.

Recommendations :

1. **Enhance awareness:** Launch awareness campaigns targeting youth and families about the dangers of psychotropic substances and their negative impacts.
2. **Strengthen regulation:** Enforce legal oversight on the sale and distribution of psychoactive medications to prevent their misuse.
3. **Combat online promotion:** Monitor social media platforms and restrict content that promotes psychotropic substance use.
4. **Empower educational institutions:** Integrate educational programs into school curricula that focus on drug prevention and awareness of psychotropic substances.

5. **Develop rehabilitation programs:** Establish psychological and social support centers to help addicts recover and reintegrate into society.
6. **Foster inter-agency collaboration:** Strengthen coordination between security, health, and educational institutions to develop integrated strategies to combat the phenomenon.
7. **Improve socio-economic conditions:** Provide job opportunities and development programs for youth to reduce the socio-economic factors driving substance use.
8. **Harmonize laws with international standards:** Update national legislation on psychotropic substances to align with global laws and conventions.

Conclusion

The widespread use of psychotropic substances among youth represents a **serious social and security challenge**, given its profound impact on the structure and stability of society. The study has shown that substance use is not solely tied to individual factors, but is also influenced by a combination of **social, psychological, and economic variables** that drive young people toward this dangerous behavior. The analysis further revealed the **role of social media in promoting these substances**, which has compounded the complexity of the issue and made its containment even more urgent.

By examining demographic trends, it became clear that **younger age groups are the most affected**, with unemployment, social marginalization, and life pressures contributing significantly to the rise in consumption rates. Official data also indicated that the **trade in psychotropic substances has become more organized and widespread**, with traffickers increasingly relying on modern marketing strategies and non-traditional means to attract youth.

In light of these findings, there is a pressing need for a **comprehensive strategy** that brings together the efforts of **security, health, and educational institutions**, along with the activation of civil society's role in **awareness and prevention**. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and enforcing strict legislation against drug traffickers, alongside offering **psychological and social support programs for youth**, are essential pillars for curbing the spread of this phenomenon.

In conclusion, addressing the issue of psychotropic substance use among youth requires a **holistic vision** that takes into account the **sociological and economic dimensions** of the problem. Emphasis must be placed on **building a supportive social environment** that shields individuals from falling into addiction and provides them with **positive alternatives** that enhance their active participation in society.

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