



Drug Use from a Psychosocial Perspective

Mezeghrani Halima

¹University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology and Speech Therapy (Algeria)

Abstract

This study aimed to highlight the psychosocial aspects of drug use, including family relationships, parental drug use, peer group influence, deviant behaviour, drug availability, levels of decline, smoking and alcohol consumption, and the conditions that lead to substance use. It also considered communication and the media, as well as other factors such as societal perceptions that affect drug-related sexual behaviour, current education, poverty, urban decay and psychological disorders. Additionally, a series of recommendations were discussed to address issues of addiction and drug use.

Keywords: Drug use, Psychosocial factors, Peer group influence, Family relationships, Deviant behavior, Addiction

Introduction:

Drug use is one of the most serious health, psychological and social problems, affecting users' lives and having repercussions for their families and communities. It impacts users' stability, mental security and degree of compatibility with others, particularly those close to them. This necessitates an in-depth analysis of the circumstances surrounding the user and their family, as well as their psychological and social characteristics. According to estimates from global health institutions, approximately 230 million adults aged 15 to 64 had used drugs at least once in 2010, 27 million of whom faced significant addiction problems.

Substance addiction entails an intense and compelling desire to seek out the drug by any means, increasing the dosage over time and making it difficult or impossible to quit due to psychological or physical dependence. This dependence manifests as a compulsive internal drive that compels the user to continue using. Therefore, collaborative efforts at both global and local levels are essential to denounce the dangers of drugs and confront and address their consequences as much as possible, involving various political, economic, and social factors.

Drug use poses serious threats to society and the individual, leading to significant psychological, social and economic losses. The greatest danger of this scourge lies in its widespread prevalence among young people, who are a vital human resource in any society. This age group is crucial because it is at this time that individuals reach the peak of their capabilities for contribution and productivity. Furthermore, the danger is exacerbated by the fact that individuals often use multiple substances simultaneously.

The spread of a drug-consuming culture through social media and other media outlets, which mimics the lifestyles of certain celebrities in fields such as art, literature and sports, has made young people more susceptible to adopting such a culture. Young people are the most active users of social media and consequently the most likely to use drugs. A British study found that drug use among 20- to 24-year-olds is about 12 times higher than among 55- to 59-year-olds. In the United States, it is estimated that drug use among 18- to 25-year-olds is seven times higher than among those aged 50 and over, reaching a rate more than 16 times higher in 1995 (World Drug Report, 2012).

A significant proportion of young people are in late educational stages, particularly university, where they may face academic and social failure accompanied by feelings of frustration and disappointment from family and friends. This situation may cause students to withdraw from their studies and seek activities that alleviate their psychological stress, helping them to escape reality both consciously and unconsciously and steering them towards various forms of deviance. This problem is prevalent across different social classes and families with varying economic and social backgrounds.

At a national level, drug use hinders the pace of development and progress in Algerian society and has implications for individual behaviours. The individual becomes less effective in various social situations. Consequently, like other countries, Algeria strives to combat this scourge and mitigate its severity by activating and enhancing various community and educational units, such as services for treating addicts and agencies for combating drug use and addiction (Boubidi, 2012: 42).

Problem Statement:

The phenomenon of drug use is a serious issue that has begun to spread widely in recent times across all societies, posing a threat to their very existence and signaling potential collapse.

Due to the expansion of the drug trade, the prevalence of drug use has increased significantly, placing a considerable burden on families, communities, and nations in the form of addiction and trafficking.

The expansion of the drug trade has led to a significant increase in the prevalence of drug use, placing a considerable burden on families, communities, and nations in the form of drug consumption, addiction, and trafficking. If this issue is not addressed, it will undoubtedly become a direct and rapid factor in the destruction of societal structures and stability. There is little hope for young people who are addicted to drugs, especially when they begin to exhibit symptoms of addiction, illness, and psychological and social disorders. They may end up living the rest of their lives in isolation, marginalised from society and lacking purpose or hope.

Communities of all levels of development suffer from the consequences of drug use. It destroys individuals, disintegrates families, weakens societies and hinders progress. Drug use is a direct and indirect cause of many crimes against humanity, such as murder, theft, and rape. Therefore, it is essential to confront this issue and raise awareness within the community to prevent it, by identifying the causes of its spread and negative consequences, and implementing treatment plans for those suffering from addiction.

The drug trade, alongside the emergence of new types of drugs derived from traditional substances such as hashish and opium, has produced many addicts at all levels of society, particularly among young people, including university students. This represents a debilitating force that hinders their responsibilities towards themselves, their families and their communities, leading to social disintegration and psychological distress.

Social media is full of images and videos of students under the influence of drugs, as well as media reports of drug seizures and arrests of traffickers and dealers. This highlights the seriousness of the phenomenon and the sophistication of the networks involved in distributing and promoting these harmful substances.

Importance of the study:

The importance of this study is evident in several ways:

- Addressing a complex social issue: The study focuses on the multifaceted social phenomenon of drug use and addiction, which has reached epidemic proportions and affects the well-being of individuals and society as a whole, particularly young people. It is this concern that motivated the researcher to highlight this issue.
- Impact on youth: Drug use among adolescents and young adults can lead to a range of problems and disorders, including deteriorating mental and physical health, impaired psychological and social adjustment, and elevated rates of criminal and aggressive behaviour. This poses a serious threat to personal safety and social security. Most incidents of violence, theft, kidnapping, sexual harassment, rape and murder are observed to be committed by drug-using adolescents and young adults, often as a result of mental disturbances caused by substance use or the desire to obtain money for drugs.
- Increase in Drug Types: The proliferation of various drug types in recent years has contributed to an increase in the number of addicts and corresponding drug-related crimes.
- Lack of research attention: There is a noticeable lack of adequate focus on this topic in psychological and educational studies, as the researcher has noted based on the available literature. This study aims to address this research gap on this critical issue.

Definition of concepts:

Drugs: These are natural or synthetic substances that affect the human body by altering sensations, behaviours and bodily functions. Repeated use can lead to severe consequences for physical and mental health (Farouk Abdel Salam, 1977: 3). Legally, drugs are defined as substances that influence the mental state of users by either stimulating or slowing down the central nervous system or causing hallucinations. They can lead to addiction and many public health and social issues. Due to their harmful effects on individuals and society, the law restricts and prohibits physical and legal contact with these substances, except under specified conditions (Al-Humaidi, 2008: 11). Drugs can

also be chemical substances that alter an individual's normal state, causing sleepiness, loss of consciousness or pain relief. They affect the nervous system and can be found in various forms, such as plants, vapours, liquids, powders, tablets and capsules. They can be consumed by drinking, inhaling or injecting them. They can induce a state of altered consciousness, enabling users to escape psychological and social problems (Al-Ghareeb, 2006: 33).

Drug use:

refers to the unnatural desire that individuals exhibit towards drugs or toxic substances with sedative, narcotic or stimulant effects. This can result in addiction, which harms individuals physically, psychologically and socially (Rashad Abdul Latif, 1992, cited in Bousnah, 2009: 17). The World Health Organization (WHO) uses the term 'use' in a disapproving context to refer to the continuous or intermittent harmful and risky use of illegal substances, which leads to psychological and physical dependence. Repeated use can result in social, occupational, psychological or physical problems.

Forms of drug use:

- **Experimental use:** This initial phase involves trying drugs to discover their effects, which may lead to continued use or discontinuation.
- **Occasional use:** This is linked to specific events or occasions, such as parties and celebrations, and varies according to cultural and social contexts.
- **Regular use:** This involves the continuous consumption of a specific substance at regular intervals, driven by an internal rhythm rather than external events. This stage indicates a deeper attachment to the substance (Suweif, 1996: 19–20).

In the context of the psychosocial interpretation of criminal behaviour, it is important to highlight the various factors that influence drug use. Research indicates that drug use is a complex issue determined by several influential factors that vary in intensity from one society to another, and even among individuals within the same community.

Before addressing these factors, it is helpful to recognise the indicators of addiction. Soltman (1970) agrees with Wikler (1963) that addiction implies a physical and psychological dependence on the substance, whereby the addict experiences an intense and pressing desire for the drug, which often results in escalating dosages to achieve the desired effect.

The definition of addiction can vary depending on the scientific discipline and the individual's cultural background. This is because everyone views the issue from their own perspective, which leads to different interpretations. However, addiction generally encompasses the following components:

- 1. Tolerance:** This refers to the body's tissues adapting to the presence of the substance, necessitating an increased dosage to achieve the same effects as before.
- 2. Physical dependence:** The continuous use of a substance makes its presence in the body essential for normal functioning. Severe physical or psychological complications can occur when the substance is stopped.
- 3. Withdrawal symptoms:** These are the effects that manifest in the body when use of a substance on which the body has become entirely dependent is stopped.

4. Physiological dependence: This involves a connection to the substance arising from its ability to satisfy an emotional or psychological need. This dependency does not necessarily require physical dependence, although physical dependence can strengthen it.

5. Habituation: This is the state in which a person becomes accustomed to or desires a substance, but does not develop physical dependence (Abdel Monem, 2008).

Psychosocial Factors in Drug Use

In this paper, we aim to shed light on some of the psychosocial factors that contribute to drug use. The study indicates that drug use is a multifaceted issue influenced by numerous variables. There is no single theory or factor that can comprehensively explain the reasons for drug use.

Several significant and influential factors exist, with their importance varying from one society to another, and even among individuals within the same community. The most prominent psychosocial variables related to drug use are as follows:

1. Influence of Peer Groups

Scientific literature generally indicates a strong positive correlation between an individual's drug use and that of their friends. This relationship is evident in several ways:

- Normalization of Use: When friends use drugs, it normalizes the behavior as acceptable. If drug use were only associated with deviants and criminals, young people would likely avoid it. However, the problem arises when drug use is linked to individuals who are respected and admired by youth, encouraging them to partake.
- Acquisition of Experience: Individuals often gain their initial drug use experience from friends, who may also be the source of the substance during their first encounter.
- Information Source: Friends play a crucial role in providing information about drugs, including how to use them. In many peer groups, drug use is not only accepted but also expected behavior.
- Decision-Making Influence: The role of peer groups becomes particularly important when an individual decides to use drugs, especially if this choice faces opposition from their family.

2. Availability of drugs:

The ease with which drugs can be accessed significantly impacts drug use. The more readily available these substances are, the more likely individuals are to use them, particularly in environments such as their homes, schools or workplaces.

Family influence: In early life, family plays a crucial role in determining drug availability. Studies have shown that a significant proportion of users first encountered drugs through family members or acquaintances visiting their homes. Direct exposure to drugs during childhood fosters familiarity, making future interactions with substances more likely (Al-Samari, 2011).

- Indirect environment: In schools and workplaces, friends and colleagues play a key role in facilitating access to drugs. Classmates or colleagues often serve as the main source of information about or access to drugs. Global studies indicate that acquiring drugs poses little problem for users.

Al-Samari's study corroborates this, revealing that individuals in the experimental group (drug users) were exposed to drug culture more frequently in both direct and indirect social environments. Notably, 68.5% of the control group (non-users) reported that obtaining drugs was easy when they wanted to buy them. Furthermore, 45.5% of this group explicitly stated that they were drug distributors or sellers, highlighting the dangers of easy access to drugs as a significant factor in encouraging substance use.

3. Deviant behaviour

Does drug use lead to crime, or does crime lead to drug use? Or are there other factors that link the two?

A. Drug Use Leads to Crime: According to this perspective, drug users often need money to purchase drugs, which can drive them to engage in criminal activity to secure funds. Numerous studies have shown that the rate of crime committed after drug use is higher than before use. Therefore, an individual may become a criminal due to addiction rather than becoming addicted because of criminal behaviour.

B. Crime leads to drug use: This viewpoint suggests that engaging in deviant behaviour can lead to drug use. For criminals, drug use may be seen as normal behaviour, or even a direct result of their lifestyle. Many studies indicate that drug use is a consequence of deviance, with higher levels of substance dependence correlating with increased criminal activity.

C. Mutual Influences: The third perspective posits that both crime and drug use result from a third factor or a combination of interrelated factors. Despite the strong statistical relationship between drug use and crime, the connection is not primarily causal. The co-occurrence of both may suggest the presence of additional underlying causes (Bayoumi, 1993).

4. Conditions for starting drug use

Al-Samari's Egyptian studies revealed that 6.5% of users first tried drugs before the age of 16. The majority began using between the ages of 16 and 22. Participants' drug use ranged in duration from two to 18 years, with an upper age limit of 30, highlighting the severity of drug use among young people. Most users started at around 17 years old, which is a critical age during adolescence, characterised by physical, intellectual and mental development.

The study also indicated that peer influence plays a significant role in initiating drug use, with 54.5% of participants citing friends as the primary motivation. Other reasons included seeking pleasure (21%), curiosity (13.5%), escaping personal or family problems (10%), and enhancing work performance (1%).

In terms of specific substances, the most popular among the experimental group was cannabis (94.5%), followed by heroin (44%), hallucinogens (32.5%), cocaine (17.5%), and opium (11.5%). For the control group, cannabis was also the most recognised drug (97%), followed by heroin (25%), opium (15.5%), hallucinogens (23.5%) and cocaine (7%).

5. Family relationships

Family relationships play a crucial role in drug use. Numerous studies have confirmed that family disintegration is a significant cause of social deviance. Dysfunctional families are a significant factor in drug use, as the breakdown of the family — whether functional or emotional — impairs its ability to fulfil its social roles.

When families exhibit positive, mutually supportive interactions, instances of drug use decrease. Effective communication within the family fosters successful interactions and behavioural alignment.

When opportunities to acquire healthy behaviours within the family diminish, children are more likely to seek out peer groups as alternative reference groups and adopt their norms and values, which may not necessarily be healthy.

Social studies reveal a strong correlation between unstable family relationships and an individual's likelihood of using drugs. When familial relationships are disrupted or collapse, the probability of drug use increases significantly. Key points relating to family dynamics and drug use include:

- Drug use rates tend to be higher among adolescents from broken families than among those from stable, positively interactive families.
- Adolescents living with only their mothers show higher rates of drug use than those living with both parents.

As the relationship between a child or adolescent and their parents weakens, the likelihood of them experimenting with or using drugs increases. Feeling unwanted by parents can lead children to join deviant groups.

Increased parental involvement and time spent with children correlates with a reduced likelihood of drug use.

The family remains a cornerstone of social control, particularly for firstborn children. Shortcomings in fulfilling this role have a negative impact on the child's behaviour and the effectiveness of social control mechanisms.

6. Parental Drug Use

The family's role in modelling substance use is crucial in understanding the issue of drug use. Studies have confirmed that having a family member who uses drugs is a fundamental factor that drives individuals towards using drugs themselves. Many addicts report that their role models — often their parents — used drugs openly without shame or justification for their behaviour. Indeed, these parents often encouraged substance use, involving their children in preparing for drug use sessions and sometimes implicitly or explicitly allowing them to try drugs in their presence.

7. Weak religious commitment

Most studies examining the relationship between religiosity and drug use indicate an inverse correlation between the level of religious commitment and drug use. The more an individual adheres to their religious duties, the less likely they are to use drugs. Al-Samari's study found that members of the control group (non-users) were more consistent in performing religious obligations than members of the experimental group (users). The

study also revealed that individuals in the control group perceived themselves as more religious than those in the experimental group.

8. Media and Communication

Media and communication channels play a significant role in socialisation, impacting individuals either positively or negatively based on the programmes they present. These programmes can influence personality development and behavioural patterns. Many educational and awareness programmes encourage individuals to learn lessons and recognise certain truths. However, some media content, particularly horror and sensationalist themes in films, can evoke strong emotions and lead to imitation, potentially resulting in anti-social behaviour, including drug use (Williams, Malek Shabi & Al-Samari, 1994).

Psychological Disorders and Their Relationship to Crime and Drug Use:

The degree of connection between psychological disorders and drug use or criminal behavior varies, both directly and indirectly. Certain forms of obsessive hysteria can manifest as compulsive urges that lead individuals to commit crimes or use drugs. Additionally, some manifestations of delusional hysteria, where individuals feel persecuted or believe in dangerous conspiracies, can drive them towards deviant behavior and crime as a means of escape from their circumstances.

Some psychological disorders, such as conversion hysteria, anxiety hysteria, and certain phobias, have a direct relationship with criminal behavior and drug use. These conditions can exacerbate psychological instability and a weakened sense of self, potentially leading to crime and substance abuse, especially if the individual is predisposed to psychological imbalance. In such cases, crime may be viewed as a form of self-defense. Individuals may develop mental illnesses due to suppressed desires and natural urges, responding to societal norms and traditions, which intensifies the link between their psychological and mental states and the inclination to engage in criminal behavior.

Neurotic needs stemming from internal conflicts are significant contributors to deviant behaviour. Individuals may believe that such actions are an honest expression of their inner selves (Hussein Fayad, 2007).

Neurotic needs stemming from internal conflicts can significantly contribute to deviant behaviour, as individuals may believe that such actions truly and honestly express their inner selves (Hussein Fayad, 2007).

Other contributing factors:

A. Popular perceptions: Common beliefs about the euphoric effects of drugs, particularly cannabis, have led to an increase in drug use.

B. Poverty: People living in poverty often experience more issues, and poverty creates an environment conducive to many social problems, including drug use.

C. Urban decay: Poor living conditions and deteriorating housing environments can erode social values, contributing to the psychological and moral degradation of individuals in these communities. The combination of overcrowding and poverty is a key factor in drug use (Abu Jado, 1998).

D. Education: While education alone is not a sufficient deterrent against drug use, it often fails to fulfil its expected positive role in preventing substance abuse.

Recommendations:

In light of the findings from the current study, the following suggestions can be made to help prevent addiction:

1. Develop preventive strategies in schools. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education should collaborate to implement preventive measures throughout the education system, from primary to university level. This should include working with psychological and medical support units to assist students at higher risk of substance misuse.
2. Promote a supportive school culture. Create a school environment that aligns with global technological advances in addiction prevention. Focus on developing students' skills from an early age to prepare them for the pressures and challenges of life.
3. Establish listening centres. Set up listening centres to address and resolve issues faced by individuals struggling with drug addiction.
4. Conduct awareness campaigns: Organise seminars and awareness campaigns to educate people about the dangers of drug addiction, its consequences, and effective coping strategies.

References:

1. Farouk Abdel Salam (1977). *Addiction*. Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, Cairo.
2. Hussein Fayad (2007). 'Psychology of Addiction', 1st edition. Al-Tayba Foundation, Cairo, Egypt.
3. Afaf Mohamed Abdel Monem (2008). *Addiction: A Psychological Study of Its Causes and Consequences*. Dar Al-Maaref Al-Jamiya, Suez Canal, Egypt.
4. Mohamed Ahmed Bayoumi (1993). *Social Problems: Theoretical and Practical Studies*. Dar Al-Maaref Al-Jamiya, Alexandria, Egypt.
5. Mohamed Adly Abu Jado (1998). 'Psychology of Socialisation', 1st ed. Dar Al-Maysara for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan.
6. Mohamed Mahmoud Al-Johari and Adly Mahmoud Al-Samari (2011). *Social Problems*, 1st edition. Dar Al-Maysara for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan.
7. Frank Williams III and Marlyn McShane, 'Translation and Commentary': Adly Al-Samari (1994). *Criminal Behavior: Theories*. Dar Al-Maaref Al-Jamiya, Egypt.
8. Lamia Boumediene (2012). 'The reality of drug use in Algerian society'. *Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, Issue 03, pp. 41–70.
9. World Health Organization. Accessed on 20/02/2019 from <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2012/06/161152>.
10. Khalid bin Abdul Rahman Al-Humaidi (2008). *Incitement to Drug Use Crime*. Master's thesis, Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, Criminal Justice Department.
11. Abdulaziz bin Ali Al-Ghareeb (2006): "The Phenomenon of Relapse to Addiction in Arab Society." 'The Phenomenon of Relapse to Addiction in Arab Society'. Center for Studies and Research, Riyadh.

12. Mohamed Bousnah (2009): 'Risk Factors and Prevention of Drug Use Among Youth'. Risk Factors and Prevention of Drug Use Among Youth. Master's thesis, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Mentouri University, Constantine.
13. Mustafa Suwaif (1996). Drugs and Society. Alam Al-Maaref, Kuwait.