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The Prevalence of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in Algerian Society: Ways of Combating Them and the Role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments in This Regard

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Abstract

The phenomenon of the prevalence of drugs and psychotropic substances is one of the most serious phenomena that poses a challenge to states because of the threat it represents to their security and social peace. This study highlights the seriousness of this phenomenon and its destructive effects on physical and psychological health, as well as its serious political, security, economic, psychological, and health dimensions. It also clarifies the effective role played by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments in combating this phenomenon and its contribution, as a partner in building the nation, to consolidating its security and stability. The study further emphasizes the crucial importance of religious discourse in protecting all segments of society from becoming involved in the problem of drugs.

Introduction

The phenomenon of the prevalence of drugs and psychotropic substances has become a threat to societies and individuals alike throughout the world because of its negative effects on all state facilities and sectors, whether health, social, economic, or psychological. This prompts states and governments to allocate substantial budgets to mitigate these negative effects. Algerian society is an example of such societies in which drugs have become widespread and have emerged as a matter of concern for all state institutions because of their rapid spread and the social ills they cause, which threaten security and social peace. They also contribute to the emergence of many diseases and moral deterioration, thereby sounding the alarm and requiring concerted and intensified efforts at all levels to avert the danger of this phenomenon, strengthen social security, preserve the country's unity and cohesion, and enhance its strength and resilience in the face of all the threats surrounding it.



Problem Statement

The phenomenon of the prevalence of drugs and psychotropic substances is well known to researchers, who have investigated its causes and methods of treatment. However, its rapid spread in recent times, the various ways in which it reaches addicts, and the development of methods for smuggling and distributing it call for renewed attention to the developments that have affected this phenomenon in terms of its distribution, ease of access, and the diversity of methods used by its promoters. This requires researchers to identify new causes that have contributed to the rapid spread of drugs and psychotropic substances among different segments of society.

Hypotheses

There are multiple causes underlying the spread of drugs and psychotropic substances among different segments of Algerian society, including unemployment, difficult living conditions, distance from religion, parents' neglect of their children, and students' leaving educational institutions without supervision or follow-up, in addition to other known causes that often lead to addiction. However, the emergence of social media in people's lives has been considered one of the strongest factors accelerating the promotion of drugs and encouraging young people, particularly minors, to purchase and obtain them. These means have also been exploited by international networks operating to promote drugs and psychotropic substances and facilitate their smuggling and transportation between different regions. This calls for greater vigilance both at the level of state institutions and among families and individuals regarding what is disseminated through these means by users who seek to immerse society in this phenomenon, whether for financial gain or for purposes that may be intended to threaten social peace and security. This suggests that those promoters may be working for international entities that use them to pursue their destructive aims and purposes.

Importance of the Topic

This topic has acquired considerable importance, particularly in recent times, during which the prevalence of drugs and psychotropic substances has accelerated. It has become remarkably easy for a middle-school or secondary-school student to obtain these psychotropic substances because of their lightness and ease of carrying them, often without the knowledge of the educational system and away from parental supervision. Educational institutions have even become targets for drug promoters, who assume that educational settings are less likely to be monitored by security authorities. The number of addicts has increased rapidly across different age groups, including among females. This calls for greater efforts to identify the causes of their rapid spread and the diversity of methods used to promote them, so that emerging generations, which constitute the building blocks and foundation of the nation's development, can be protected.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Clarify the nature of drugs and psychotropic substances and the religious ruling on their use.
2. Identify the main causes of the use of drugs and psychotropic substances and addiction to them.
3. Clarify the ruling of Islamic law regarding their use, sale, and distribution.
4. Identify effective means of protecting and preventing young people from using drugs and psychotropic substances.
5. Examine the dimensions of the phenomenon of the prevalence of drugs and psychotropic substances, including its political, security, social, economic, health, psychological, and moral dimensions.
6. Clarify the role played by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments in combating the spread of drugs and psychotropic substances through awareness-raising and sensitization, as well as through cooperation with civil society in protecting against this phenomenon.

Research Plan

This study is organized into three sections, detailed as follows:

Section One: Definition of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, the Ruling on Their Use, and Means of Prevention and Treatment

Subsection One: Definition of Drugs

Subsection Two: Definition of Psychotropic Substances

Subsection Three: Causes of the Spread of Drugs

Subsection Four: Definition of Drug Addiction and Characteristics of Addicts

Subsection Five: Causes of the Use of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and Addiction to Them

Subsection Six: The Islamic Legal Ruling on the Use and Trade of Drugs

Subsection Seven: Means of Protecting Young People from Drug Use

Section Two: Dimensions of the Phenomenon of the Prevalence of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances

Subsection One: The Political Dimension

Subsection Two: The Security Dimension

Subsection Three: The Economic Dimension

Subsection Four: The Social Dimension

Subsection Five: The Psychological and Health Dimension

Subsection Six: The Moral Dimension

Subsection Seven: The Spiritual Dimension

Section Three: The Role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments in Combating the Phenomenon of the Prevalence of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and Drug Addiction

Subsection One: Awareness-Raising and Sensitization through Religious Discourse

Subsection Two: Field-Based Role

Subsection Three: Agreements and Partnerships

Conclusion

The conclusion presents the main findings and recommendations.

Section One: Definition of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, the Ruling on Their Use, and Means of Prevention and Treatment

Subsection One: Definition of Drugs

Linguistically, the Arabic term for drugs, *mukhaddirāt*, is the plural of *mukhaddir*, derived from *khadar*, meaning weakness, lethargy, lassitude, and relaxation. It is said that a body part becomes *mutakhaddir* when it relaxes to the point that it can no longer move. *Khadar* is also

used to denote the darkness and obscurity of a place. Thus, one says *makān akhdar* or *khadir* when referring to a dark place. Extreme darkness is likewise called *khadrah*. Anything that prevents one's sight from seeing something and conceals it from view is described as *akhdarah* (Ibn Manzur, 1993; al-Zabidi, 1965; al-Azhari, 2001; al-Fayruzabadi, 2005).

Terminologically, al-Qarafi, may God have mercy on him, defined drugs as substances that obscure the mind and the senses without being accompanied by euphoria or pleasure (al-Qarafi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 217).

Ibn Hajar al-Haytami defined them as the covering of the mind without the intense pleasurable effect that characterizes liquid intoxicants (Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 212).

Some specialists in sociology have defined drugs as any "substance that causes a form of euphoria and relieves pain, whether raw or manufactured, and that affects an individual psychologically, physically, and socially when dependence on it develops" (Darfil, 2011, p. 17).

Some specialists in psychology have defined them as "a group of drugs that affect the mental activity and psychological state of the user either by stimulating the central nervous system, slowing down mental activity, or causing hallucinations or fantasies" (Eid, 1988, p. 1).

A comparison of the linguistic and terminological definitions shows that they agree that a drug causes weakness and lassitude in the user. This is evident in drugs and psychotropic substances, which impair mental functioning to the point that users lose control over their actions and behavior. The terminological definition also indicates that drugs can cause addiction, making it difficult for users to free themselves from them and prompting them to obtain them by various means and methods, even when doing so involves violating the money and property of others.

Subsection Two: Definition of Psychotropic Substances

Psychotropic substances are defined as chemical substances, whether natural or manufactured, that directly affect the central nervous system, causing changes in brain functions, psychological state, perception, or behavior. They are used outside their intended medical purposes to induce euphoria or sedation and are legally classified as dangerous and narcotic substances whose circulation or use outside the medical context is prohibited (United Nations, n.d.).

Subsection Three: Definition of Drug Addiction and Characteristics of Addicts

First: Definition of Addiction

Some define addiction as a physical and psychological need for a substance, whereby the addict experiences a compulsive desire for it and is compelled to increase the dose in order to achieve the desired effect. In the absence of the substance, the addict experiences physiological pain known as withdrawal symptoms and, when continued drug use persists, generally causes harm to both the individual and society (Ghabari, 2007, p. 12).

Addiction creates a state of need in the user that makes the drug seem inseparable from the body. When deprived of it, the person may experience a form of mental disturbance and loss of control, resulting in behavioral instability in interactions with others.

Second: Characteristics of Addicts

Among the most important characteristics of addicts are:

- Persistent laziness and lethargy.
- Significant neglect of personal care and appearance.
- Pallor of the face, redness of the eyes, excessive sweating, and tremors in the extremities.
- Significant weight loss and severe constipation.
- Frequent isolation and avoidance of social interaction.
- Irregular attendance or performance in education or work.
- Resorting to deception and lying or violating the property of others through theft or sexual assault in order to obtain more money to purchase drugs (Qamar, 2008, p. 72; Sami Tawfiq, p. 137).

Subsection Four: Causes of the Use of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and Addiction to Them

The causes of the use of drugs and psychotropic substances can be divided as follows:

First: Family and Social Factors

These are factors related to the user's environment. Their danger lies in their close and continuous presence in the individual's life, which makes their influence on the user strong and significant. The most important of these factors include:

1. Peer Group

Peers influence the user when the individual seeks acceptance within the group and consequently submits to what they demand. This behavior is particularly common among adolescents. The user may therefore feel compelled to conform to their behavior without considering the consequences of their actions.

2. Family Disintegration and Poor Upbringing

This occurs when severe conflicts exist between parents or between parents and children, resulting in parents' failure to monitor and follow up on their children. The child may turn to drugs as an escape from the disintegration occurring within the home. An individual may also develop a drug-use problem when they do not receive sound upbringing capable of protecting them from drug use.

3. Bad Role Models

This occurs when one of the parents or another family member uses drugs, thereby facilitating the individual's access to them and making drug use appear to be a normal matter.

Subsection Three: The Economic Dimension

Among the most important economic dimensions are the following:

1. Reduced Individual Contribution to the National Economy

An individual's level of contribution to the economy of their country is linked to their physical and mental readiness, which enables them to perform their work fully and effectively. Drug use has a direct impact on physical and mental health, thereby limiting the individual's occupational efficiency.

2. Abandonment of Employment

Many drug users and addicts eventually abandon their jobs because of the psychological, moral, and social deterioration caused by drug use and addiction.

3. Drain on the State Budget

Drug addiction places a significant burden on the state budget because of the costs associated with treating addicts, including the provision of specialized psychological and healthcare clinics and hospitals, as well as the employment of physicians and specialists in this field.

4. Increased Security Burden on the State

The state must increase the number of border-security forces and monitoring agencies in order to prevent drug smuggling. This inevitably requires additional allocations from the state budget.

5. Traffic Accidents

Drug use is among the major causes of numerous traffic accidents, in which many vehicles are damaged or destroyed. This has an adverse impact on the national economy.

6. Increased Prison Expenditure

The spread of drugs and the growing number of users require the establishment of additional prisons and the provision of security personnel, services, food, accommodation, and other necessities for prisoners. This inevitably places an additional strain on the country's national income.

Subsection Four: The Social Dimension

Drugs have serious and destructive social dimensions whose effects extend to individuals, families, and society. The most prominent include the following:

1. Family Disintegration and Weakened Social Relations

Drugs contribute to family disintegration and weaken social relationships because of the consequences associated with their use, including divorce, neglect of children, and increased family conflicts.

2. The Spread of Crime and Social Problems

The rapid spread of drugs contributes to increased rates of crime and social problems, including theft, rape, murder, bribery, and prostitution, as individuals may resort to such acts to obtain the money necessary to purchase drugs. This contributes to the loss of security and spreads fear among members of society.

3. Decline in Educational and Productive Performance

The spread of drugs among students and employees adversely affects educational and productive performance. Schools frequently experience increased rates of school dropout, while institutions suffer from employee absenteeism, which may be attributable to drug use among those concerned.

Subsection Five: The Psychological and Health Dimension

Among the most important psychological and health dimensions are the following:

1. The Financial Burden of Healthcare

The state bears substantial costs in providing healthcare for addicts. These costs include establishing treatment centers, paying physicians and nurses, and providing the medications necessary for recovery from the effects of these substances. This places a considerable strain on public budgets.

2. Pressure on Healthcare Institutions

The spread of drugs places pressure on healthcare institutions because of the growing number of addicts who become victims of drug use, thereby consuming medical resources that could otherwise be directed toward other diseases.

3. Treatment of Addiction-Related Diseases

Healthcare facilities are not limited to treating addiction itself. They may also have to treat diseases associated with addiction, requiring prolonged and costly treatment for cardiovascular, liver, and nervous-system diseases, as well as psychological disorders resulting from drug use.

Subsection Six: The Moral Dimension

Morality is a fundamental component and an effective foundation for building any civilized society. Nations cannot be established without a moral foundation. Drugs are among the most serious social ills that destroy the moral dimensions of both individuals and society. In addition to their physical and psychological harms, they affect the fundamental values and principles upon which social cohesion is based. The most prominent moral harms of drugs, based on the findings presented, are as follows:

1. Erosion of Values and Individual Responsibility

Drug use itself constitutes an act that undermines individual responsibility, trustworthiness, and integrity. Drugs deprive individuals of the sound judgment necessary to regulate their conduct, resulting in degradation of character and misconduct. They deprive users of reason and willpower, which may lead them to engage in shameful behaviors and violate certain values and social norms when they lose responsibility for their conduct and actions. Addicts may consequently resort to theft, rape, and violations of other people's property without regard for the sanctity of people's wealth or honor.

2. Disintegration of Family Bonds

Drugs contribute to the breakdown and disintegration of families, resulting in increased domestic violence, whether directed toward a wife or another family member, because of the psychological and behavioral disturbances associated with drug use and addiction.

3. Spread of Crime and Aggressive Behavior

Drug use contributes to increased rates of crime, violence, assault, and theft within society, thereby threatening social stability and security.

4. Abandonment of Responsibilities

Addiction may lead addicts to abandon their family, occupational, and educational responsibilities, making them a burden on those around them.

Subsection Seven: The Spiritual Dimension

There is no doubt that the use and addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances distance individuals from their religion and its teachings. As a result, they become less inclined to attend mosques or Qur'an memorization circles and consequently lose access to a protective environment capable of strengthening their religious commitment. Instead of becoming productive members of society who benefit others and contribute to nation-building, they may become dependent on society, unsuccessful in their studies and education, and affected by idleness and unemployment.

Allah the Almighty has linked turning away from prayer and remembrance of Him with the consumption of wine and other immoral practices, saying:

"Satan only desires to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist?" (Qur'an 5:91).

This indicates that drug use may turn individuals away from the correct and sound path and that avoiding drugs and preventing their use constitute an essential part of righteousness and uprightness. As drugs spread among young people, society loses a substantial segment of the human foundation upon which its development depends, namely its youth. Young people constitute a fundamental building block in the construction and advancement of any society (al-Tayyar, 2011, p. 27).

Section Three: The Role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments in Combating the Phenomenon of the Prevalence of Drugs and Psychotropic Substances

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments in Algeria plays a prominent, central, and integrated role within the framework of the national strategy for combating drugs. As a partner in building the nation and preserving its cohesion and strength, the Ministry focuses its efforts on preventing drug use and its spread through awareness-raising and intellectual and religious protection against this social scourge. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments, through its various religious institutions, has actively engaged in combating the spread of drugs and psychotropic substances, particularly in light of the growing risks facing young people. This is achieved through the following mechanisms:

Subsection One: Awareness-Raising and Sensitization through Religious Discourse

Religious discourse constitutes a fundamental pillar in raising social awareness and sensitizing society through continuous education concerning the dangers of drugs and their destructive effects on individuals and society. The role of awareness-raising and sensitization can be demonstrated through the following means:

1. Friday Sermons and Religious Admonitions

Imams in mosques and those responsible for religious schools and *zawiyas* are assigned to prepare periodic sermons warning against the dangers of drugs and psychotropic substances to physical, psychological, and mental health. Through these sermons, imams explain the Islamic legal ruling concerning drug use and addiction, as well as the ruling on promoting and distributing such substances.

2. National Awareness Campaigns

The Ministry has regularly launched national awareness campaigns on various occasions in an effort to increase awareness and sensitization among members of society, particularly young people. Among the most prominent campaigns are "For an Aware Youth," "A Society Safe from the Scourge of Drugs," and "Ramadan: An Opportunity to Abandon Addiction." These campaigns target young people in educational and youth settings.

3. Use of Media Platforms

The Ministry makes use of media spaces, both audio and audiovisual, by providing interventions and participating in television programs and recording contributions for local radio stations. The purpose is to explain the dangers of drugs and addiction and the serious threats they pose to physical and psychological health.

4. Involvement of Female Religious Guides

The Ministry has also sought to involve female religious guides in its efforts to combat the spread of drugs by activating their role in raising awareness among women and families, given that the family constitutes the first line of defense in protecting young people.

Subsection Two: Field-Based Role

The field-based role involves imams going out into the community and establishing closer contact with different social groups, moving beyond the traditional approach to religious instruction that takes place inside the mosque. This is achieved through the following:

1. Awareness-Raising Caravans

Awareness-raising caravans travel throughout the provinces and across different municipalities, visiting educational institutions, including primary, middle, secondary, and university institutions.

2. Awareness-Raising in Correctional Institutions and Addiction Treatment Centers

Awareness and sensitization activities are also conducted in correctional institutions and addiction treatment centers in order to draw attention to the dangers of the drug phenomenon, which has come to threaten the social fabric, security, and stability of society.

3. Monthly Seminars and Seasonal Conferences

Monthly seminars and seasonal conferences are organized with the participation of academics, specialists, state officials, and security partners. Their purpose is to warn against the phenomenon of drugs and explain its dangers and potential consequences for the destruction and disintegration of society.

4. Activating the Role of Qur'an Schools

The role of Qur'an schools is strengthened by raising awareness among children and young people through religious and moral lessons that encourage them to stay away from social ills.

Section Three: Agreements and Partnerships

- The Ministry signed agreements with the National Office for the Fight against Drugs and Drug Addiction to strengthen collaborative efforts, with the aim of promoting social awareness and religious consciousness and conducting community-based activities. This was carried out on 23 January 2024. The National Office stated: "Within the framework of strengthening cooperation and joint coordination among ministerial sectors for the prevention of drug and psychotropic substance addiction, an agreement was concluded between the National Office for the Fight against Drugs and Drug Addiction and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments on 23 January 2024. The agreement aims to promote social awareness and religious consciousness among members of society through the contribution of mosques and religious institutions to developing, strengthening, and preserving religious and moral values by organizing preventive activities and programmes to confront this scourge" (National Office for the Fight against Drugs and Drug Addiction [ONLCDT], 2024).
- The Ministry also participates in coordination with security institutions, including the National Gendarmerie and National Security, to organize study days and awareness-raising meetings highlighting the danger posed by drugs to "social cohesion and national solidarity."

Through the contributions made by the Ministry to combat the spread of drugs, it can be observed that the Ministry is considered a key partner in the fight against drugs, as it regards this fight as an “educational and intellectual battle” that is no less important than the security dimension. It aims to build social awareness that protects individuals and society from the scourge of addiction.

Conclusion

The most important findings drawn from this study are as follows:

- The phenomenon of the spread of drugs and psychotropic substances has become a source of concern for states and governments because of its rapid escalation and the large number of victims and dealers involved, as well as its numerous negative effects that threaten individuals, families, and societies and contribute to the spread of social ills.
- Addiction is considered a dangerous phenomenon because addicts often face difficulty in easily overcoming substance use. Moreover, addiction places a substantial burden on state budgets through the treatment of addicts, the establishment of specialized rehabilitation facilities, and their provision with the necessary equipment, physicians, and nurses.
- Social media are among the most important factors that have contributed to a significant increase in the spread of drugs and addiction, owing to their widespread use and ease of access. This facilitates their exploitation by dealers to entice others into experimenting with drug use or engaging in drug trafficking.
- Addressing the spread of drugs and psychotropic substances and addiction to them requires concerted efforts across all sectors and in various fields in order to combat the phenomenon or, at the very least, mitigate its prevalence.
- The phenomenon of drug proliferation has numerous dimensions, including political, security, economic, psychological, and health dimensions. The security and political dimensions are particularly significant because they constitute a real threat to state security and stability, which in turn affects the security of individuals and societies.
- The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments plays a central and effective role as a partner in building the nation and preserving its cohesion and strength. The Ministry spares no effort in working with all agencies and sectors to combat the spread of drugs, which has become a source of concern for states and governments because of the threat it poses to security and social stability.
- The efforts of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments to combat this phenomenon have taken various forms, including directing religious discourse toward awareness-raising and sensitization through religious pulpits and various media spaces, whether visual or audio, in an effort to activate awareness-raising and sensitization discourse and produce tangible results in combating drugs and addiction.

- Religious discourse is an important factor in combating the spread of drugs and addiction. Its importance lies in its role as a strong protective barrier for young people and other segments of society against falling into the quagmire of drugs, owing to the spiritual awareness and religious sensitization it promotes. It strengthens religious consciousness and instills in individuals a comprehensive awareness of the dangers of drugs and their negative and destructive effects on the present and the future.

Recommendations

The most important recommendations are as follows:

- Intensify media efforts, particularly through digital communication platforms, given their broad impact in increasing awareness and sensitization regarding the dangers of drugs and addiction. These platforms address all segments of society, regardless of age or gender.
- Intensify seminars and lectures aimed at raising awareness of the dangers of drugs and drug use, given their destructive effects on the future of young people and their potential to undermine their capacities and competencies.
- Increase visits to educational institutions because they are among the settings most targeted by drug dealers, and organize regular visits and meetings in coordination with the educational community.
- Increase awareness and sensitization efforts in correctional institutions to ensure that addicts and drug dealers do not return to the quagmire of drugs, while working to transform them into constructive members of society and involving them in seminars where they can share their negative experiences in the world of drugs and discuss the adverse health and psychological consequences they have suffered.

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