Attitudes, Beliefs, and Knowledge of Substance Use amongst Youth in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Systematic Review

JOSEPH EL KHOURY, PAUL NOUFI, AMANDA AHMAD, ELIE AKL, SAMER EL HAYEK

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INTRODUCTION

5.6% of the global population uses one form of illicit substance.

0.62% suffers from a substance use disorder.

One of the leading causes of years of life with disability:

37 million years of healthy life lost from substance use in 2015.

Afghanistan is thought to be a main provider of opiates to neighboring countries and accounted for 86% of global opium production in 2017.

The two major drugs of abuse are hashish and opium, the prevalence of any drug misuse being 11.4%.

Afghanistan

Cottler et al. 2014, UNODC 2018

How Afghan opium poppy farming has grown Cultivation in Afghanistan in hectares (1994-2015)

Source: UNODC / Afghan government / UNODC
Lifetime prevalence of any substance use: 7.25% - 14.5%

The 15-19 age group has the highest onset of use. Cannabis is the most commonly misused.

Prevalence of Tramadol use: 8.8%

Average age of onset of use: 16.5 ± 1.1 years

Egypt

Hamdi et al. 2012, Bassiony et al. 2015, Karam et al. 2008

The lifetime prevalence of substance use disorders in Lebanon was reported to be 2.2%

In December 2016, the government launched an "Interministerial Substance Use Response Strategy for Lebanon 2016-2021"

Morocco is a major producer of cannabis, supplying worldwide destination markets.

4.8% of the population have used psychoactive substances at least once in their life.

Morocco

UNODC 2018

INTRODUCTION

- Previous reviews have targeted the prevalence of substance use and related behaviors in this part of the world without addressing the triad of attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge.

- This is while the perception of substances is known to influence personal decisions to use.

- Many cultural aspects, including family, peers, religion, and belonging to a community play a critical role in the approach to the understanding, prevention, and treatment of this disorder.

INTRODUCTION
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With the growing interest in the global youth perceptions towards substance use, gaining insight into the specific situation within EMR countries that share similar sociocultural contexts has become a regional public health priority.

This systematic review investigates the available literature on the attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of substance use amongst youth in the EMR.

METHODS: Eligibility Criteria

Population:
- 13 to 25 year old individuals residing in the EMR

Outcomes:
- Attitudes: toward the acceptability of substance use
- Beliefs: about the perception of reasons for use
- Knowledge: of the side effects of substance misuse

Study Design:
- Restricted to include only quantitative studies

METHODS: Search Strategy

Databases:
- MEDLINE, PubMed, Cochrane, PsycInfo, and PsycArticles

Search strategy:
- Attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of youth towards all substances except alcohol and tobacco

Language:
- English only

METHODS: Selection Process

Screening:
- Two pairs of investigators screened articles independently.

Title and abstract:
- Included articles that assess the attitudes of youth in the world and published after 1990.

Full text:
- Included articles restricted to EMR countries and published from 2005 onwards.

METHODS: Data Abstraction

Participants’ age, gender, and country
Setting and sample size
Substance of interest
Methods: study design, sampling method, sample size calculation, and response rate
Instrument: administration method, validity of tool, and pilot testing
Outcomes: attitude, beliefs, knowledge, and correlation with intention to use
Results
Limitations
Funding

METHODS: Risk of Bias

The reporting of a sampling frame
The sampling method and sample size calculation
The response rate
The validity of the tool and its pilot testing
METHODS: Data Synthesis

- Although we planned to conduct a meta-analysis, we did not proceed with it given the nature of the included studies and the insufficient homogeneity in terms of the comparator.

- We narratively summarized the findings of the included studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study ID</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Age and Gender</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Setting and Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shafiq et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>18-25 y/o, Gender equally distributed</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Private medical university in Karachi (N=174)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haddad et al. (2010)</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>15-18, Gender equally distributed</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Schools from the educational directorate in a large urban area in Northern Jordan (N=400)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bashirian et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>14-17, Males only</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Four high schools in different regions in the city of Hamadan (N=700)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khalid et al. (2014)</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>22 ± 2, 60% males, 40% females</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Medical, business, and law schools from both private and public sectors in Karachi (N=150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalilian et al. (2015)</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>18-22, Males only</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Two medical universities (N=355)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS

Students' age and category

Senior students reported more awareness to substance use disorders and less associated benefits as compared to juniors.

Predominant anti-drug opinion in medical students

78% had no intention of ever using a drug

88.2% found no justification for cannabis use regardless of circumstances
RESULTS
Religion as modulator of attitudes and behaviors
- Reason to avoid use
- Coping strategy to maintain abstinence
- Treatment option for use

RESULTS
Societal influence as modulator of attitudes and behaviors
- Peer pressure
- Misuse of substances
- Maintenance of abstinence

RESULTS
Societal influence as modulator of attitudes and behaviors
- Misuse of substances
- Maintenance of abstinence

DISCUSSION
The five studies emanate from three countries out of twenty-two: Iran, Pakistan, and Jordan.
- They all target youth aged between 13 and 25 years old.
- Although these countries may differ in the form of government, language, and levels of education, they all share conservative official ideological dogmas and common values on major social issues.
- As such, they are broadly representative of the EMR.

DISCUSSION
Correlation between attitudes/beliefs and intention to use
- Attitudes and subjective norms towards substance use were statistically significant predictors of intention to use ($p<0.05$).
DISCUSSION

- Religious institutions were favored as treatment options for substance use, emphasizing the expected role of religion and its associated authorities in addressing social issues in this part of the world.

- The trust placed in religious institutions could be positively exploited by combining social and medical approaches.

A common finding was a predominantly negative attitude towards substance use that fails to account for previously reported prevalence rates.

- Misreporting of true attitudes, possibly a reflection of the conservative social context (religious prohibition), fear of personal repercussions (legal prohibition), or stigma.

CONCLUSIONS

Misuse of substances
Understanding attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge in the sociocultural context of the EMR
Elaboration of preventive measures

"You're going to fall down, but the world doesn't care how many times you fall down, as long as it's one fewer than the number of times you get back up."

Thank you!

Samer El Hayek, MD
PGY III, Department of Psychiatry, AUBMC
President of the Psychiatrists-in-training Section, Lebanese Psychiatric Society
Member of the Early-career Psychiatrists Section, World Psychiatric Association
E-mail: samer.elhayek@gmail.com