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PROMOTING ADDICTION PREVENTION INITIATIVES IN IRAQ: LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPACT

Abstract: This document delves into the prevalent issue of drug misuse and addiction, particularly focusing on Iraq's experiences and initiatives in youth drug abuse prevention. By examining governmental organizations, NGOs, and law enforcement efforts in this realm, it becomes evident that collaborative programs are being implemented to address this pressing concern. The narrative underscores the global challenge of substance abuse, emphasizing the need for comprehensive preventive strategies rooted in understanding adolescence and societal risk factors. Various levels of prevention strategies are explored, shedding light on the complexity of combating addiction. Additionally, the Abstract touches upon the interconnected nature of sexual addiction with other forms of substance abuse and explores emerging therapeutic interventions like virtual reality exposure therapy.

Keywords: Drug misuse, addiction, Iraq, youth drug abuse prevention, governmental organizations, NGOs, law enforcement, preventative strategies, adolescence, risk factors, sexual addiction, prevention levels, virtual reality exposure therapy.

Introduction

Addiction is a condition in which a person uses a certain drug compulsively on a regular basis and repeatedly to the point that he feels as though he must keep using it. He must experience uncomfortable physical, mental, and social symptoms at the appointed moment. To utilize this article, one must look for it (Medhat Abu Al-Nasr, 2008).

Addiction and Abuse: A Problem Drug abuse is one of the biggest issues of the day for all types of cultures, especially considering the glaring rise in the number of addicts in established and developing nations alike. Recent studies have shown that drug usage and addiction, particularly among certain young people, have become widespread in contemporary Arab countries.

Up until recently, Iraq was one of the drug-free nations, but in earlier times, it was always a significant drug transit country. This fundamental role in preserving the prohibition against the use of drugs may be played by the rich cultural norms, historical religious beliefs, and moral principles of the Iraqi population. The former regime left Iraq in dire economic straits and in total isolation, which discouraged drug traffickers from expanding their business because most of the population was impoverished and lacked access to necessities. Additionally, the judiciary was strict regarding drug-related laws, and all these factors combined to prevent the spread of narcotic substances in the nation. (United Kingdom HM Customs and Excise, 2003) The "Supreme National Committee for Combating Drugs and Drug Abuse" was set up in 2004 under the direction of the Ministry of Health and by a decision of the Governing Council. The decision was validated by the new drug-fighting law, which also defined the committee's new organization. The minister of health, representatives of the National Security System, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of



Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Judicial Council, the Minister of Youth and Sports, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, the Intelligence Service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Amanat Baghdad, and representatives of the Shiite endowment serve as the committee's chairpersons. (Inciardi.J., 2007)

Iraq has created security, health, social, economic, and legal strategies to address the issue of drug misuse and addiction in a sound scientific and professional manner. Iraq is conducting preventative and curative measures to address this issue. (Li, H., 2012)

Topics dealing with the issue of drug addiction and abuse

The following are some of the most significant dimensions in the process of addressing the issue of drug misuse and addiction: (Martin Bloom, 2017)

A proactive approach

Examine and research the issue: (from various aspects, such as: its causes, size, characteristics, effects and results...).

Reducing supply: (by, for instance: international cooperation to stop drug cultivation, manufacture, and transportation in the exporting and manufacturing countries, and international cooperation to bust international trafficking and promotion gangs, and to tighten control over ports, airports, and borders...). (P.L. Brantingham & F.L. Fausi., 2016)

Decreasing demand: (through, for example: awareness programs about the dangers of drugs and their destructive effects, and programs for occupation or leisure time,...) (Mostafa Soueif, 2009).

To facilitate therapeutic entry: (programs and institutions for the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts and aftercare for them...).

The legal strategy: (issuing related laws and increasing penalties to achieve the element of legal deterrence...)

In this report, the preventative approach to dealing with drug usage and addiction will be highlighted by examining some successful examples in Iraq in this area. (Savage. C., 2011)

When offering programs and services in protecting young people from the problem of drug misuse and addiction, it is feasible to learn from the experiences that will be shared and use them as a guide. It is also feasible to gain from these experiences when creating new institutions in this sector and when enhancing operations at those institutions currently in operation. In other words, the knowledge that will be gleaned from these experiences unquestionably offers a good and helpful feedback that may support the success of current or upcoming projects and programs aimed at preventing drug usage. (Shiffman.J., &Cooke, C., 2013)

Iraq's experience in the field of youth prevention from drug abuse and addiction

First: Primary youth prevention programs are provided in Iraqi schools

A model for youth primary prevention was created, and this model has four parts or stages: (Coalition Provisional Authority, 2020)

1. diffusion of information
2. Information about personalization
3. Acquisition of Skills
4. Results Analysis

This technique has been used to assist young people safeguard themselves from drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes. Middle and high school students in Iraq were used as the control group for this model's training sessions. The methodology was shown to have demonstrated efficacy in avoiding the majority of the goals come from the difficulties listed above. (Jinado HO, Salmiah MS, & Azuhairi AA. 2016)

1. diffusion of information

At this point, information about the issue from which the targets (training group) are to be protected is published or disseminated in order to clarify the situation, achieve a proper understanding



of the severity of the issue, serve as a springboard for developing sound preventive attitudes, and serve as a springboard for changing the incorrect trends that are centered around the issue to be prevented. Accurate, relevant, supported, recent, and adequate information must be shared. In the subject of avoiding consuming alcohol and smoking, the following methods have been employed to spread information: (Nkansah-Amankra, S. & Minelli, M. 2018)

Play videos with instructional messages about the negative effects of alcohol and smoking.

- Delivering succinct, engaging scientific presentations on the dangers of smoking and alcohol consumption.

- Talking about consuming alcohol and smoking in conversation.

- Group leaders distributed information regarding the harmful physical effects of alcohol consumption and smoking among the columns.

- He instructed the group's members to get in touch with local organizations like the Department of Preventive Medicine, hospitals, and clinics to learn more about smoking's negative effects, drinking alcohol's negative effects, smokers' and drinkers' health issues, and medical professionals' views on these topics.

- Then he instructed each participant to share the knowledge they had gathered along with their sources with the group.

2. Information about personalization

The next step is to make the general knowledge that pertains to all people a reality in the person's day-to-day life. In this step, the training group members were assisted in discussing the issues of alcoholism and cigarette smoking from their own perspectives, including the risks they have observed and their own opinions. (Mohammadpoorasl P, Nedjat C, Fakhari E, Yazdani N, Foroushani MJ, 2021)

At this point, the training group's members were instructed on how to translate knowledge or abstract facts into individual choices about the subject of drinking and smoking so that they would adopt a disapproving mindset. The significance of peer pressure on someone in the pre-smoking or pre-drinking period was also discussed. During this time, the following techniques were employed: (Lemstra A, Bennett WQ, Neudorf S, Kunst B, Nannapaneni I, Warren ZD., 2018)

- At this point, the group members were required to complete verbal exercises and write reports in order to apply what they had learned about alcohol consumption and its negative effects as well as smoking and its negative effects to make their own decisions about a variety of challenging future scenarios, such as: Do I smoke or not? consume booze or not? Should I accept a cigarette or a cup if someone gives them to me and smoke or drink like it, or not?

Should I drink or smoke to keep up if everyone in my circle of friends does it?

- Storming Brain sessions concerning potential issues faced by non-drinkers and non-smokers were organized for the participants of the training group. It is an effort to apply broad and abstract knowledge to actual social circumstances that arise in each member's day-to-day interactions with others. Following these discussions, the group's members came up with viable strategies to handle these potential issues.

- based on the identification of prospective issues and feasible responses to them The training group used this as a type of role-playing game and turned it into a straightforward farce. The three primary training techniques-lecture, observation, and participation-can be combined.

3. Acquisition of Skills

Here, the training group participants are provided the abilities to change their unfavorable attitudes regarding drinking and smoking.

Alcoholism (personal decisions) results in a clear and specific behavior, which is to not smoke, not drink, to not sit with those who smoke or drink among their coworkers, and to express their opinion honestly and courageously about the negative effects of smoking and drinking. This unquestionably calls for teaching members decision-making techniques. Advocacy Techniques



Verbal and nonverbal communication skills were also taught to the group members in order to assist them communicate their thoughts, feelings, and ideas frankly, shamelessly, and in two directions, i.e., cooperatively with others. (Tshitangano TG, Tosin OH., 2016)

4. Results Analysis

By contrasting the training and control groups with reference to the issues to be avoided in terms of preventing cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption, it was discovered that the training group performed better than the group control after using the model for six months. (Al-Hemiery T, Dabbagh Y, Hashim UY, Al-Hasnawi C, Abutiheen M, Abdulghani ZB, et al., 2017)

Secondly: Al-Ataa Hospital for Addiction Treatment

The Peace Brigades (the military wing of the Sadrist movement) led by Muqtada al-Sadr announced today, Saturday, 6/18/2022, that the "Al-Ataa" hospital for the treatment of drug addicts, with a capacity of 150 beds, will reopen. This decision was made since the existing centers for addiction treatment and psychological rehabilitation are insufficient to treat the growing number of current drug users. In a joint press conference with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Hussein Al-Awadi, at the center's opening, Minister of Health Hani Al-Aqabi stated that the hospital has 150 beds, some of which have private rooms and special specifications to help drug users reintegrate and be productive members of society. (<https://saraya-alsalam.com/archives/127445>) The hospital's duties may be broken down into the following categories:

- Treating instances of intoxication and drug addiction, which you automatically apply to.
- Following up on the care of patients who desire to be discharged from sanatoriums.
- Providing social support for persons seeking treatment and their families while they are undergoing it.

- Treatment of social issues brought on by drug and alcohol addiction.

- Spreading knowledge about addiction and mental health

Third: The National Program for the Prevention and Treatment of Addiction to Alcohol and Other Drugs

The National Program for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in Iraq, which was established in accordance with Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law No. (50) of 2017, is a prime example of how community partnerships can increase the volume of benefits and help the program reach its objectives. Here is a quick synopsis of the program: (Global status report on alcohol and health. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018)

- Based on research and local and global phenomena that demonstrate the risks that society confronts from addiction and violence, a work team was established to carry out the development of the national program. The necessity to safeguard the young group has grown more important as a result.

- Immunizing children and protecting them from all influences on their futures and the futures of their countries, where the most

cutting-edge international scientific research have been conducted, is a shared national and societal obligation.

According to applicable programs that touch reality and are close to people concerned with the security personnel, it concentrates on the awareness factor in the first place.

The program's goal: is to train a conscious generation that is capable of choosing the optimal course of action to lead an addiction-free social existence.

The program's message: is to strengthen the idea of community partnership, remove barriers between youth and law enforcement, develop life skills, identify potential life challenges, determine the best solutions from them, and use a realistic methodology to give youth the ability to make good decisions.

The program's most crucial component:

- is that police are taught by worldwide professionals who specialize in how to impart the required knowledge and develop friendships with children of different ages.



- It is based on the global E.R.A.D. program, which has been implemented successfully for three decades in more than 62 nations.

- The policeman's ongoing attendance in the school all academic year, serving as a liaison between parents and teachers and advising and educating pupils.

- Strengthen the culture of citizenship and consolidate the principles of national identity.

- Educating young people about the hazards of addiction and how to handle them.

Fourthly: Ibn Rushd Hospital for Psychiatry and Addiction Treatment

It is one of the most well-known hospitals and treatment facilities with a wealth of expertise in the treatment of addiction. Iraq's capital city of Baghdad is home to Ibn Rushd Hospital for Addiction Treatment and Psychological Training. The Ibn Rushd Center for Addiction Treatment in Baghdad's resident patient program gives physicians and nurses around-the-clock care, giving you access to a session. As the phases of addiction encompass the following, daily work with your consultant psychiatrist, resident psychiatrist, psychologist, and sociologist will be supported by a comprehensive team of researchers, as the following are symptoms of the addiction stages: (Broman CL. 2021)

- Detoxification, the **initial phase** of addiction rehabilitation, involves ridding the body of toxins and addressing drug withdrawal symptoms. It takes two weeks to a month to finish this step, which has to be done at a detox center, and it entails getting rid of narcotics that have been connected to the body as well as treating withdrawal symptoms specialist.

- **The second phase:** of addiction treatment is psychological and behavioral rehabilitation, which is the primary and fundamental stage in the treatment of addiction. During this stage, work is done to rehabilitate the patient in order to correct behaviors, modify negative thoughts, and work to bring him back to practicing life once more, away from the fire of addiction.

- **The Third phase:** of addiction treatment is the follow-up stage, which happens after the addict completes the addiction treatment process and returns to his life in a new way and with a new personality. This stage is necessary so that the addict can maintain his recovery and stay completely away from the drug world and that there won't be a gateway to relapse. People who have been tricked into the road of addiction and have gotten caught in the abuse net are no longer allowed to be accommodated at Ibn Rushd Hospital. Because they offer the most affordable addiction therapy, Egypt's addiction treatment clinics and facilities are the other best options for recovery. (<https://www.new-awareness.com/>)

Fifth: cooperative relationship with the UN Office on Drugs

Iraq signed a memorandum of understanding to improve cooperation in the area of combating the illegal trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as to address emerging criminal phenomena, in persona of its Minister of Interior, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Chief Executive Officer of the Office on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna. The memorandum is part of the development and modernization plan for the Ministry of the Interior, and it intends to foster collaboration and offer advisory services, whether in the realm of legislation or institutions or via education and awareness in relevant domains. (Medhat Muhammad Abu Al-Nasr, 2022) Iraq is a signatory to three conventions: the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, and the United Nations Convention against Illicit 1988: Trafficking in Psychoactive Substances and Narcotic Drugs of 1988 in compliance with its commitments under international drug agreements. (Medhat Muhammad Abu Al-Nasr, 2022)

The pact, which has been signed, adds another link to the network that will improve coordination and collaboration between Iraq and the UN, as represented by the Interior Ministry and the UN Office on Drugs and Addiction. The agreement of the memorandum is made possible by shared communication and collaboration with regional and global bodies and organizations, which strengthens current relationships, broadens the ministry's scope, and gives it access to the greatest global knowledge. (Medhat Muhammad Abu Al-Nasr and Mahmoud Muhammad Radwan, 2019).



Sexual addiction in Iraq:

Alcohol, drugs, obsessive shopping, sports, work, and sex are just a few of the addictions we face today. Sexual addiction is a behavioral addiction that takes over a person's entire lives by robbing them of all other investments and providing no actual happiness. Sex addiction is referred to by a number of terms, including sex dependency, hypersexuality, dysregulation of sexual desire, and sex compulsion. These terms all refer to excessive sexual behavior (defined as between 5 and 15 sex acts per day, for at least 6 months, after the age of 15), and they all describe an excessive sexual behavior. Sex addiction is an interaction between the individual and a shared experience that lacks toxicity and compels them to repeat it despite the negative effects. Despite the subject's motive and effort to resist it, addiction is a behavior that is driven by a recurring and uncontrollable urge that cannot be controlled (Goodman, A., 2020). A non-paraphilic "excess" of sexual behavior is referred to as sexual addiction, and it may be accompanied by social morbidity, medical morbidity, or even emotional anguish. The person continues to use despite the painful repercussions and penalties.

Characteristics of sexual addiction

- lack of sexual restraint
 - Maintaining a behavior despite its unfavorable effects.
 - Obtrusive sex ideas
 - Compulsive sex (5–15 times per day)
 - Constant flirting
 - Recurrent usage of pornographic resources
- This addiction involves excessive and obsessive sexual behavior. Despite unfavorable outcomes for his behaviors (such as loss or altered decision-making), the person loses the ability to quit his abnormal conduct.

Repetition and a lack of control are characteristics of sexual addiction (Loonis, E., 2001). The symptoms of an excessive sexuality might include compulsive sex, addiction to sex toys, phone or internet sex, addiction to pornography, and addiction to drugs used for sex.

There aren't many statistics on the epidemiology of this addiction because most people who suffer from it don't seek treatment. Reynaud and Karila (Reynaud M, Karila X., 2008) estimate that 3%–6% of people worldwide struggle with sex addiction. We are aware that its frequency is higher in adolescents and young adults, particularly when the gender ratio is 3:1. (Kafka MP., 2019)

Four stages of the development of the addictive process are described by Reed and Blaine: (Reed RC, Blaine DA., 2018)

- **Preoccupation:** The individual seeks sexual adventure, new partners, and flirtation
- **Ritualization:** preparation rituals (sexual situations, visual cues)
- **Sexual compulsivity:** the person engages in excessive sexual activity with short-term satisfaction.
- **Desperation:** the perception that one cannot control one's conduct the experience of preventive activity in the treatment of sexual addiction in Iraq

Numerous sex addiction therapies have been used by researchers, however it is unclear how effective they are. Patients with sex behavior associated to depression, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorders responded well to therapy with selective reuptake inhibitors of serotonin (SRIS).

Likewise, the well-known cognitive-behavioral treatment approach to treating addictions, focuses on understanding what causes sexual addiction and on avoiding risky behaviors.

Therapeutic approaches to sexual addiction using virtual reality

Virtual reality is a novel technique to treating sexual addiction in comparison to conventional therapies. Virtual reality technology is becoming more prevalent in the fields of medicine and psychology. Virtual reality therapy has so far been used to treat pain, eating disorders, and drug addiction. (Cottraux, J., 2011)



Virtual reality exposure is currently being used by scientists and medical professionals for therapeutic, educational, and research objectives. Similar to a video game, virtual reality technology replicates real-world experiences. (Touati Youcef, 2013) Addicts, whether they have a behavioral or product addiction, react to stimuli that are related to their addiction (a heroin addict, for example, will react to needles and smokes). This strategy, known as "cue reactivity," is frequently used to expose users to their addiction product or stimuli in order to gauge how much they are seeking it and how it is affecting their physiology and emotions at the time. A strong urge to eat something or engage in a certain action is known as a craving. The benefit of exposure approaches comes from the fact that each patient's therapy may be individually tailored, allowing the therapist to exert control and alter the patient's appetites. Since 2000, a lot of researchers in Iraq have employed virtual reality software to treat different addictions. Many of them began experimenting with using virtual reality to treat addictions to cigarettes (Baumann SB., 2004), alcohol (Bordnick DE, Traylor N, Copp VG, Graap XY, Carter PO, Ferrer K, Walton EF., 2008), marijuana (Bordnick DE, Traylor N, Copp VG, Graap XY, Carter PO, Ferrer K, Walton EF., 2009), cocaine (Rothbaum VF, Hodges I, Smith X, Lee ER, Price N., 2020), methamphetamine (Culbertson S, Nicolas C, Zaharovits W, London BN, De La Garza B 2nd, Brody MX, Newton DW., 2010), heroin (Kuntze WR, Stoermer T, Mager O, Roessler M, Mueller -Spahn Q, Bullinger VE., 2011), phobias (Anderson KJ, Zimand R, Hodges WN, Rothbaum LK., 2005), post-traumatic stress disorder (Rizzo MM, Graap W, Perlman Q, McLay MH, Rothbaum JY, Reger D, Parsons U, Difede E, Pair E., 2008), and stroke rehabilitation (Lam UC, Man MS, Tam WA, Weiss BH., 2016).

The examination, treatment, research, and teaching of addictive illnesses, especially sexual addiction, can all be improved with the use of virtual reality.

Conclusion:

Beginning with, there is no shame in gaining knowledge from the experiences, knowledge, research, and studies of people who have gone before us in this profession. Learning from others' errors is one of the characteristics of a knowledgeable person. In order for the League of Arab States and its affiliated organizations to effectively coordinate efforts among the Arab nations, there has to be a constant flow of information, experiences, projects, programs, and successful initiatives. (Medhat Muhammad Abu Al-Nasr, 2022) By reading and examining Iraq's experiences in the area of youth drug abuse and addiction prevention, we can see that some of the relevant governmental organizations, some NGOs working in this area, and the police apparatus have recognized the significance of this issue and have put some programs into place programs. (Medhat Muhammad Abu Al-Nasr and Ahmed Saad Khaled, 2019)

1-One of the major issues facing the globe today is drug misuse and addiction, which affects most of its cultures. It is now all but apparent that no one nation, regardless of its size, strength, or social, political, or economic structure, can totally prevent the rise of such issues. This is an issue, and no civilization can think that it is completely protected from this terrible affliction.

2-The fact that certain trials considered the significance of comprehending adolescence and its features as a period of development as well as the present patterns of drug usage among teenagers while building their preventative programs is one of the reasons for some tests' effectiveness.

3-The majority of the tests aimed to pinpoint the risk factors and protective elements that lower the likelihood of drug use in Iraqi society, respectively. From there, relevant programs were created to strengthen the protective elements and lessen the influence of the addictive elements.

4-In terms of preventative levels, the great majority of experiments used what is referred to as First degree prevention. The second and third-degree prevention was used in several of these experiments. Sexual addiction is typically linked to other addictions. The border between satisfying pleasure and empty unhappiness is blurred by sexual addiction; as it progresses, this empty displeasure causes misery and problems on a personal, professional, societal, and familial level. Since



the virtual reality exposure therapy is still relatively new, it is too soon to make any firm judgments about whether it will be effective in treating sexual addiction. Nevertheless, we can draw the conclusion that this therapy may be considered as an extra treatment that might serve as a valuable adjunct to the conventional therapies for the treatment of sexual and other addictions.

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