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2016

### Drugs in Egypt: Between culture and crime audio documentary script

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#### Recommended Citation

El Dirini, Alaa, "Drugs in Egypt: Between culture and crime audio documentary script" (2016). *Papers, Posters, and Presentations*. 51.

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## **Drugs in Egypt: Between Culture and Crime**

**Lead-in:** This audio documentary is about drug use and abuse in Egypt, mainly Cairo. I want to discuss aspects of history, culture, and social norms regarding the use of different types of drugs in Egyptian society. This topic impacts all social classes and age groups as it poses a problem to the whole population. This documentary offers a critical approach to substance use and its social and cultural implications.

*MUSIC: FADE IN: "Look Up" by Tower Beatz (0:00-1:04)*

Living in Egypt you can't help but realize the duality in everything. Laws and religious values are often conflicting especially when it comes to society and culture. This ongoing conflict of viewpoints takes its toll on people's lives and behavior. This audio documentary is addressing drug use and abuse.

*Anonymous (MT): "My story with addiction started 4 years ago." (0:05)*

He wished to keep his name anonymous but his words will really help you see a different side to people suffering from addiction. Someone you can easily be crossing paths with.

*MT: "I'm a student, major accounting and I'm 23 years." (0:07)*

This is the first time he spoke about his addiction to someone and told his story and he really struggled to speak.

*MT: "I tried ecstasy, marijuana, weed, alcohol, sometimes heroin." (0:09)*

He mentions marijuana and heroin ... but nothing was strong enough to keep him from becoming a cocaine addict.

His use of drugs increased quickly ... like over a period of a few months, and it changed his life in ways that have been documented in research.

*MUSIC: FADE OUT: "Look Up" by Tower Beatz (0:00-1:04)*

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Sia - Chandelier by Moseqar (0:00- 0:41)*

Last year the Journal of Substance Use and Misuse found that Egyptian youth had access to and were actively using substances encountered in similar research worldwide, including tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs and pharmaceutical agents.

Peer pressure from friends stood out as the most common reason to start and continue using substances, followed by adverse life events.

*MT: "When you start taking such drugs you will always have to meet and know new people who will help you to find this stuff." (0:10)*

*NAT Sound: Crowded public area*

We need to attempt to define addiction, the reasons behind it and the main levels leading to it.

*Dr. Abdelhady Mesbah (AM): "It's a biological disease in the brain." (0:02)*

Dr. Abdelhady Mesbah is a professor of Immunology and author of two books on addiction and treatment.

*NAT Sound: Group of people talking*

*AM: "The first is the psychological dependence, second is the physical dependence, the third is the appearance of tolerance." (0:10)*

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Tesmahily by Hany Adel (0:05-0:41)*

The struggle seems to lie between the interpretations of faith, Egypt's archaic drug laws and the long-standing culture of drug use.

There is a normalization of drugs. Even though drug laws may be strict, corruption overrides them.

*SFX: Jail cell door closing*

The penalty to dealing drugs could go up to 25 years in jail as opposed to the maximum of a year for possession and use.

*NAT Sound: Police siren + traffic*

Law enforcement is not enough to find a solution. Outlawing drugs and drug use increases the social stigma and labels victims as criminals. There is no real and effective way of eradicating the problem.

Political circumstances and the security vacuum post-revolution is a direct contributor to the flood of illicit drugs.

*MA: "There's been an increase in the availability of drugs particularly pharmaceuticals like Tramadol after the January 25th uprisings and that made it more available to the general public as well as increasing use of hashish but it really hasn't been documented." (0:19)*

*MUSIC: FADE OUT: Tesmahily by Hany Adel (0:05-0:41)*

That was Dr. Mona Amer, a Psychology professor at The American University in Cairo.

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Dark Rap Instrumental "Savage" by Luxray Beats (0:06-0:59)*

Amer's first hand experience with drug treatment is community-based, and provides some understanding of the dynamics of drug use in Egypt. She has taken part in national and international rehab and treatment programs.

Focusing on this, the Egyptian Journal of Psychiatry claims Tramadol abuse is noted most frequently due to its wider availability without prescription, illegal smuggling, and cheaper prices than other types of abused drugs.

*Mamdouh Dorgham (MD): "My name is Mamdouh, and I'm 21 years old. (0:02)*

Mamdouh is a casual user of the more quote "acceptable" drugs in Egypt such as hash and Tramadol. The dosage that anyone uses to get by and chill for a bit as he put it. Accessibility is critical aspect leading to drug use in Egypt.

*MD: "Its very easy to get drugs." (0:02)*

*MD: "I'll probably just call someone and they'll call someone and I'll have my drugs, it's not a big deal." (0:07)*

Dealers are comfortable and daring, and they will openly linger around public areas and schools.

Tramadol became popular due to a ridiculously low price of 1 Egyptian pound per pill in the post revolution period. Today it hovers around 15 Egyptian pounds.

*MUSIC: FADE OUT: Dark Rap Instrumental "Savage" by Luxray Beats (0:06-0:69)*

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Drug Dealer (Cover Instrumental) by Macklemore feat. Ariana DeBoo (0:00-0:53)*

*MA: "I think that the drug use is probably similar across different classes but the types of drugs that might be used or abused might be different because of what you can afford...somebody else can only afford tramadol or something that's off the streets, so that's probably the difference in the class." (0:18)*

Not only is drug use related to class, but often drug users are consuming multiple drugs.

In the World Drug Report of 2016, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime declared that the picture of drug use is blurred because both occasional and regular drug users utilize more than one substance at the same time.

Not only can you obtain different types of drugs quickly, but who you hang out with could lead to a worse type of addiction.

*MT: "First we started smoking hash, then our circle gets bigger our problems also get bigger, we didn't reach that pleasure from the hashish anymore." (0:10)*

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Drug Dealer by Macklemore feat. Ariana DeBoo (1:14-1:40)*

Mamdouh shares an experience of a commute in Cairo.

*MD: "I remember one time I was in a taxi and I asked a guy if I could smoke a cigarette, so I asked do you mind if I smoke, for some reason he thought I meant hash and was like if you have some you should give me." (0:20)*

*MUSIC: FADE OUT: Drug Dealer by Macklemore feat. Ariana DeBoo (1:14-1:40)*

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Ozuna Type Beat "Candy's" Trap Instrumental by Juanko Beats x Tower Beatz (0:01-0:42)*

So you have societal pressures from people you hang out with, and from strangers. On the other hand, cultural and religious barriers also play into this, and amplify the stigma against addicts.

Alongside genetic traits that make some people more predisposed to using drugs there are other aspects.

*MA: "There is probably also social and economic aspects, social in terms of peer pressure we know that the more that you have friends that use drugs the more likely you will use drugs period." (0:09)*

*MT: "I was honors, I became from 3.4 GPA to 2.5 in one year, I lost many friends." (0:10)*

*MT: "I lost my friends, I lost my girlfriend, I lost everything, I lost my respect." (0:05)*

*MT: "I need to quit, I can't... even if I get weak that I have to take the drug but I need to quit." (0:05)*

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Ozuna Type Beat "Candy's" Trap Instrumental by Juanko Beats x Tower Beatz (0:01-0:42)*

*MA: "There is a lot of treatment options available in Egypt especially for people who are more the socioeconomic elite as well as people who are very poor, it's mostly the middle class that doesn't have many options for addiction treatment." (0:16)*

Options exist out there both private and public, but there is a gap between them in terms of expertise, resources, and quality of the service that you get.

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Tardei by Rodrigo Amarante (0:02-0:24)*

He was lucky enough to find a private institution where he could get treated. However, this meant he would have to face the barrier of society.

*MT: "Some people, even when I got to my mind and I didn't and I quit for months they always didn't want to talk to me or to deal with me anymore." (0:12)*

*MT: "We become addicts because of the environment around us." (0:05)*

*MUSIC: FADE OUT: Tardei by Rodrigo Amarante (0:02-0:24)*

*MA: "Certainly, there are cultural barriers that affect the process of preventing and also intervening in drug use." (0:10)*

Even after leaving rehab, he struggled for months.

*MT: "Many many many bad memories came into my mind for awhile, I remember the people, my family, they think that I will never become a good person again." (0:12)*

*MT: "After the 8 months I went through in the rehab and home I want people to support me." (0:07)*

*MUSIC: FADE IN: Sad Trap Beat "Dark Days" by Ghost Beats (0:00-1:20)*

Today, after staying clean for 2 years he begs that society understands the problem and tries to tackle it differently.

There is another, more dangerous side to addiction in Egypt, as mentioned by Dr. Mesbah.

*AM: "HIV is transmitted through sharing needles in addicts." (0:05)*

*SFX: Heart Beat*

People who inject drugs are one of the groups of people vulnerable to HIV transmission in many parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

This poses yet another addiction issue. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of people suffering from HIV are those who inject drugs, that's a stat from the UN.

Since 2010 new infections among adults have increased by more than 40% in Egypt. We could tie this statistic to the parallel increase of drug use.

There seems to be a 'blind-eye' approach to the presence of the country's underlying and more problematic drug culture.

*MT: "You have to know that you have a problem, people here in Egypt always say I don't have a problem if I wanna quit anytime I will quit, no it's not easy like this." (0:10)*

According to Egypt's Ministry of Social Solidarity, Cairo currently has the highest rate of drug addiction in Egypt standing at (35 percent).

To tackle the city's ever-increasing drug problem, continuous awareness campaigns, and changes to the legal system are needed. There needs to be a new approach to solving the problem and encouraging equality. The stigma needs to be eliminated if we want addicts to reach out for help.

*MUSIC: FADE OUT: Sad Trap Beat "Dark Days" by Ghost Beats (0:00-1:20)*

**Credits:** This audio documentary was produced by Alaa El Dirini for the Audio Production course at the American University in Cairo taught by Professor Kim Fox. I'd like to thank my anonymous interviewee for sharing his story. Special thanks also go out to Dr. Mona Amer, Dr. Abdelhady Mesbah, and fellow student Mamdouh Dorgham.

The music used in this documentary is "Look Up" by Tower Beatz, Chandelier by Moseqar, Tesmahily by Hany Adel, "Savage" by Luxray Beats, Drug Dealer by Macklemore, "Candy's" by Tower Beatz, Tardei by Rodrigo Amarante, "Dark Days" by Ghost Beats, and Bas2al 3aleiky by Cairokee. Nat sound and sound effects were collected by me and from youtube.com.

*-- End of Script--*