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THE PUBLIC POLICY HUB

Policy Brief **12**

Children and Adolescents at Risk of Drug Addiction

2018

Drug Addiction in Egypt:

Illegal drugs have become a major problem in Egypt. Statistics show that 10% of the Egyptian population is addicted to drugs. Drug consumption accounts for 18.7% of road accident mortality in addition to 80% of unjustified crimes against children. Annually, over 400 billion pounds are spent on illegal drugs. Furthermore, Hepatitis C virus prevails at a high 10 % between 15-59-year addicts who are also found to be at a risk of HIV infection as a result of drug consumption using injections. Bango (cannabis herb) and Hashish (cannabis) are the main drugs abused. Substance use is mainly a male problem although females account for 27%. The onset age for drug use is 15-25 years. Between 2004 and 2005, Egypt facilitated drug money laundering due to lax regulations. However, ANGA dedicated resources to combat this problem. Despite the effort dedicated to curb the supply of drugs, poverty, low economic growth, lack of income alternatives and high unemployment rates, combined with a lack of awareness, have encouraged illicit crop cultivation in Sinai (Abd El Wahab, 2014, Kandeel et al., 2017, and Menawy, 2018).

Drug Addiction among Adolescents:

Adolescents make 17 million out of the Egyptian population. 8% of high school students are drug users. On the one hand, these young people are the future leaders of the nations. On the other hand, this vast population also serves as a significant demand for drugs and an opportunity for cartels to open new markets and attract new customers. Thus, the welfare of such adolescents has an integral effect on the growth and welfare of Egypt as a nation.

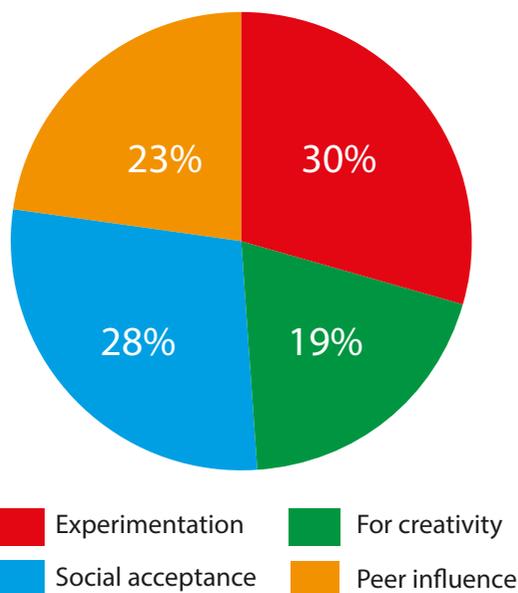
Tramadol pills are the most common drug among adolescents at 51.8 %, followed by heroin at 25%, and cannabis in the third place both in terms of spread and use. (Tramadol is the most common narcotic substance among drug users with 51% abuse rate, while cannabis is number one among drug users) (GINAD, 2017) (UNICEF, 2017).

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The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and or editors and do not reflect UNICEF or AUC policies or views. They are published to stimulate further dialogue on issues affecting children in Egypt in an attempt to expose young graduates to practical policy solutions.

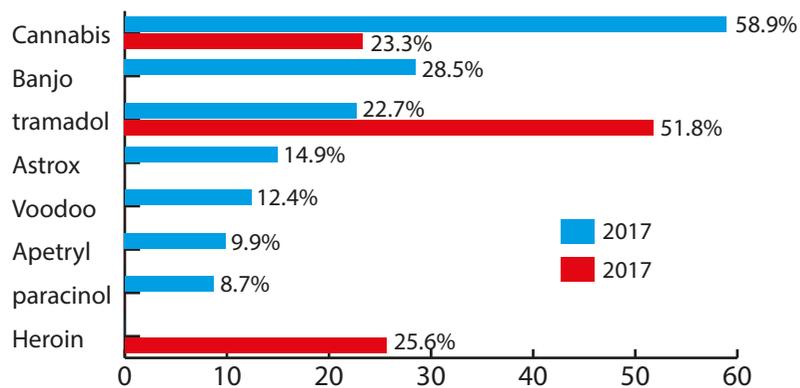


Direct causes of substance use among students.

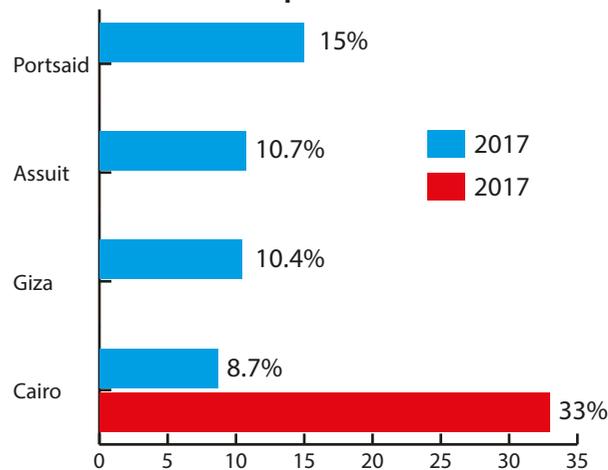


Source: Menawy, M. "Egypt fights a losing battle against drugs", Arab news, February 2018
<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1254306/middle-east>

Substance use among students for 2012 and 2017



Governorate consumption for 2012 and 2017



Source: 2012 and 2017 survey conducted by Fund for the Treatment and Control of Drug Abuse in the Ministry of Social Solidarity

This significant increase may be attributed to the use of Tramadol among adolescents which has increased over time mainly due to its availability and low cost. Furthermore, peer influence and the desire to follow new trends among the young, intellectual void, feeling of marginalization, being permanently in cafes and tea rooms and their isolation from their families are all factors that lead them to addiction. Internet pages like "Karakib Suez", "Cannabis for the Eid", "Planet Krypton" and "Weed" promote easy access to drugs, especially in Cairo.



Current Efforts:

In 2000 the Egyptian Government established “The Fund for the Treatment and Control of Drug Abuse” which is now operating under the directive of the Ministry of Social Solidarity. The fund aims at preventing and fighting drug addiction as well as financing drug prevention projects. Today, the fund’s counter-narcotic efforts to prevent drug addiction and treatment of those addicted are applied through various policies; creating awareness among young people about the damages of addiction through media campaigns, to reach the masses. Building capacities of social workers through establishing a new graduate diploma program on “drug addiction” in collaboration with Cairo University, establish a hotline (16023) for reporting addiction cases and make it available to Upper Egypt governorates to increase its outreach, working with Ministry of Interior to enforce Article 37 bis (d) of the Narcotic Law 122 of 1989, and carrying out surveys every 4 years to explore the impact of these policies.

WHERE IS THE GAP?

Despite the significant efforts invested by the Fund for the Treatment and Control of Drug Abuse, the percentage of drug addiction in Egypt (10%) remains double that of the global rate (5%). This is a result of paying more attention to the symptoms than the preventative measures of substance use, especially among the key population (street children, adolescents, and minors on the move).

Furthermore, very little effort is shown in spreading awareness through schools, universities and in poorer areas where access to information and education is limited. Awareness is clearly insufficient where we need it the most. Addicts are treated as criminals and/or convicts rather than patients. Adolescents should be perceived as victims, not criminals. Hence, there is a need to amend the enforcement of Article 37 of the Narcotic Law 122 of 1989.

A shift in the understanding of drug users, abusers and effects on society is much-needed in the current socio-economic context in Egypt.

Policy Alternatives:

- Shifting to a participatory, prevention-based, evidence-driven approach, instead of the current treatment-based approach of addressing the issue.
- Transforming the settings where children spend considerable time and are prone to peer influence.
- Educating and engaging the community in implementing programs and suggesting alternatives.

Recommendations:

Community Level:

Campaigns should be planned by the Ministry of Social Solidarity to target the main causes of child drug addiction by informing families about the issue, encouraging them to spend more time with the children, promoting the importance of extracurricular activities, and reactivating the role of parent meetings at schools.



Family Level:

The abuse of drugs by children from different backgrounds and socioeconomic classes have to be addressed using different strategies and channels:

- Families of children from urban areas and higher socioeconomic classes can receive intensive family skills training programs in drug abuse prevention to build skills for parents on the monitoring and supervision of their children's activities, communication and setting age-appropriate limits.
- Training programs for preventing violence through the development of safe, stable and nurturing relationships can be conducted for families of children from urban areas and higher socioeconomic classes.
- Families of children from rural areas and lower socioeconomic classes can be informed through awareness-raising programs implemented in mosques and churches, in coordination with the Ministries of Awqaf and Interior about issues related to drug abuse prevention such as child labor and child health and their effects on developing addictive behaviors.

Institutional Level:

Coordination among the Ministries of Education, Health, Social Solidarity, Youth and Interior mainly in sharing data and information that guide intervention, inform policy and embed awareness programs in school curricula.

Legislation Level:

New legislation that aims at limiting children's exposure to and use of drugs by setting limits for the outdoor time for unaccompanied children should be introduced.

"Addiction is a tough illness, and recovery from it is a hard but noble path. Men and women who walk that path deserve our support, encouragement, and admiration." Sheldon Whitehouse

The Public Policy HUB Where Rigour Meets Creativity

The Public Policy HUB is an initiative that was developed at the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy (GAPP) in October 2017. It was designed to fill in the policy research gap. It provides the mechanism by which the good ideas, plausible answers, and meaningful solutions to Egypt's chronic and acute policy dilemmas can be nurtured, discussed, debated, refined, tested and presented to policymakers in a format that is systematic, highly-visible and most likely to have a lasting impact.

The Public Policy HUB provides a processing unit where policy teams are formed on a regular basis, combining experienced policy scholars/mentors with young creative policy analysts, provide them with the needed resources, training, exposure, space, tools, networks, knowledge and contacts, to enable them to come up with sound, rigorous and yet creative policy solutions that have a greater potential to be effectively advocated and communicated to the relevant policy makers and to the general public.

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