

SCRIPT: "Recovering Addicts :: A Behind The Scenes Look"  
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**Sound Cloud Link:**

<https://soundcloud.com/saraashraf3/recovering-addicts-a-behind-the-scenes-look-1>

The following audio documentary is an attempt to shed light on the social stigma recovering addicts face in Egypt due to their past addiction problems. It aims to expose the effects of such stigma on the lives of former addicts. Recovering addicts share their personal experiences and feelings towards such an issue.

***Recovering Addict #1 (RA): "I'm scared of people. I'm scared of the way they're gonna treat me. I'm scared of going back to my college." (:6)***

***MUSIC: FADE IN: "Taraf Talet" by Tamer Karwan [RT: 00:00:05-00:02:01]***

Everything often has a dark side, especially living as a recovering addict in Egypt. That was a 20-year-old addict who's been clean for 90 days. He started abusing Heroin at the age of 15. What he described is the everlasting struggle that he has to cope with through his recovery, and it was mainly the reason why he preferred to remain anonymous. The stigma of being a drug addict.

***RA: "They think they're people that are irresponsible. All their feelings, all their thoughts are just concentrated around drugs. He could have a relapse at any minute." (:10)***

It's the look in someone's eye when they find out he was an addict. It's the judgment in people's voices that excludes him from the rules that apply to non-addicts.

***RA: "It's kind of discrimination really. It shows how low you are. You're the lowest of the low man. It just makes you want to go back to drugs and just like turn off the feeling." (:11)***

This stigma is deeply rooted in our culture that it continues even in the face of the scientific evidence that addiction is a disease.

**Dr. Samir Abu Elmagd (SE):** “Addiction is a chronic illness having the ability to, to recur again” (:4)

Dr. Samir Abu Elmagd is an addiction psychiatrist and founder of the Nile Halfway Center in Egypt. Halfway houses are transitional homes for people recovering from drugs. They provide addicts with a place for recovery with a drug free environment.

**SE:** “And we can control the addiction by if the people, the addictive personality or the addictive patients, control and do certain things in their life. They can control avoiding the illness.” (:13)

According to Egypt’s National Council for Battling Addiction, the use of drugs in Egypt among people over 15 has jumped from 6 percent to 30 percent since 2011. This increase was mainly due to the social stigma that causes recovering addicts to return back to drugs. But we never really put ourselves in their shoes. So the question here is. Do we really know what it’s like to be a recovering addict?

**MUSIC: FADE OUT:** “Taraf Talet” by Tamer Karwan [RT: 00:00:05-00:02:01]

**PAUSE.** (:2)

**NAT SOUND: FADE IN:** recovering addicts dancing together and laughing (amplify then fade in under narration and sound bites). [RT: 00:02:03-00:02:33]

I’m now sitting in the common area of the Nile Halfway Center in Maadi. The majority of these halfway houses are managed by ex-addicts. And that’s what makes it so special. They all share the same problem. Drug addiction.

**MUSIC: FADE IN:** “El-Alamy” by Khaled Hammad (fade in under narration and sound bites). [RT: 00:02:10-00:04:10]

**RA:** “They know the way I think. They know the way I talk. You know even when we like joke about it. You know, he say I did that in the past and the other guy is like yeah I did it and we just all joke about it.” (:11)

**NAT SOUND:** recovering addicts dancing together and laughing (cross fade-out with next nat sound).

**NAT SOUND: FADE IN:** people chattering and laughing in the halfway common area (fade in under narration and sound bites). [RT: 00:02:33-00:04:02]

They're all required to participate in the 12-step Narcotics Anonymous Program or the NA Program. It was first developed in 1953 by a group of men and women that drugs became a major problem in their lives. It helps addicts learn to be productive citizens and practice real life triggers in a safe setting.

***NAT SOUND:** people chattering and laughing in the halfway common area (amplify then de-amplify).*

It was a special day for all of the fourteen recovering addicts in this halfway. One of them was graduating on that night. In the NA Program, graduation happens when an addict reaches the fourth step. It means that he or she can now leave the place and independently face the outside world.

***NAT SOUND:** people chattering and laughing in the halfway common area (amplify then de-amplify).*

They decided to celebrate by cooking a meal together and gather to reminisce about their past addiction experiences. For them, it's definitely something they cannot openly share with non-addicts.

***RA:** "But when you just chill with someone that is normal, doesn't suffer from addiction, and you tell them something like that, like for example like doing something sick. The first thing is can come to mind is just like this guy is a psycho, this guy is not normal." (:17)*

***MUSIC: FADE OUT:** "El-Alamy" by Khaled Hammad. [RT: 00:02:10-00:04:10]*

An important aspect of this program is attending daily NA meetings. It's the only place where addicts could freely share their personal thoughts. One of the most powerful things that helps an addict feel less inclined is the warmth and acceptance he or she feels from the fellow addicts who attend meetings together. We could call it a no strings attached relationship and the only requirement is the desire to stay clean.

***NAT SOUND:** people chattering and laughing in the halfway common area (cross fade-out with next nat sound).*

**NAT SOUND: FADE IN:** *NA meetings' discussions (cross fade-in with previous nat sound). [RT: 00:04:10-00:04:31]*

Through the NA program, they learn that they need serenity to be able to deal with life properly. At the end of each meeting, addicts gather around in a circle and say the NA serenity prayer that they believe makes them reach their inner peace.

**NAT SOUND:** *NA meetings' discussions (cross fade-out with next nat sound)*

**NAT SOUND: FADE IN:** *people reciting the serenity prayer during NA meeting (amplify between narrations then fade out). [RT: 00:04:31-00:04:52]*

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, and the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

**NAT SOUND: FADE OUT:** *people reciting the serenity prayer during NA meeting (cross fade-out with next music).*

**MUSIC: FADE IN:** *"Taraf Talet" by Tamer Karawan (amplify then fade in under narration and sound bites). [RT: 00:04:52-00:05:45]*

There's no doubt that the stigma against drug addiction doesn't only affect the addict himself. It crushes the family as well. The interviewee tells a story about his sister's fiancée that actually made him feel ashamed of his addiction.

**RA:** *"My sister's fiancée and my sister, they were arguing together. So, eventually, he asks to meet my mom and they talk about it. And the first came up to his mind is just to blame my mom about being irresponsible for raising up an addict." (:14)*

It's true that the stigma against drug addiction could be that painful. But for him, these mixed feelings of shame and guilt, makes his recovery even more difficult.

**RA:** *"Umm, it showed me that I'm really wrong in this family. All I want is just them to be happy and all I'm doing is just creating obstacles, I'm just creating a bad life for them." (:12)*

**MUSIC: FADE OUT:** *"Taraf Talet" by Tamer Karawan. [RT: 00:04:52-00:05:45]*

**PAUSE.** (:2)

**NAT SOUND: FADE IN:** *birds chirping while walking into grass with crunchy leaves (fade in under narration) [RT: 00:05:47-00:05:57]*

During my halfway visit, I met another recovering addict who decided to share with me her drug addiction experience, as long as her name isn't mentioned.

***NAT SOUND:** birds chirping while walking into grass with crunchy leaves (cross fade out with next music)*

***MUSIC: FADE IN:** "Bedoun Zekr Asmaa" by Tamer Karawan (fade in under narration and sound bites). [RT: 00:05:55-00:07:06]*

***Recovering Addict #2 (HY):** "I'm 26 years old. I've been clean for nine years now."*

She tells her story of managing to overcome the stigma by pursuing her dream of establishing her own business.

***HY:** "I was engaged, four years ago." (:2)*

They were engaged for three years until she decided to open up to him about her addiction.

At that moment, she was shocked from her fiancée's reaction.

***HY:** "He looked at me with this weird eye and weird look that I've never seen before." (:5)*

And he told her just one sentence and left.

***HY:** "I can never trust you raising my children." (:4)*

***MUSIC:** "Bedoun Zekr Asmaa" by Tamer Karawan (amplify then de-amplify)*

***HY:** "At this moment when he just left me, I felt like it was rock bottom one more time." (:5)*

In fact, a Journal of Substance Use report indicates that social stigma is the most powerful obstacle to future progress in an addict's recovery pathway.

***HY:** "So was this my reward? That you labeling me and leaving me for that one thing, one mistake. Like I'm sure he did many many mistakes, so what about me? Don't I deserve another chance?" (:8)*

It's clear now that the impact of the stigma on recovering addicts is usually the same. Social rejection.

**MUSIC: FADE OUT:** “Bedoun Zekr Asmaa” by Tamer Karawan. [RT: 00:05:55-00:07:06]

**MUSIC: FADE IN:** “Baheb El Cima” by Khaled Shoukry (fade in under narration and sound bites). [RT: 00:07:06-00:08:33]

Our day came to an end. By now, we may sense how harsh the society is on recovering addicts. People just consider the addict label and disregard the recovering part. While it might seem like a simple word, it IS actually a big deal to be recovering.

**RA:** “Being able to go out on the streets again facing life, arguing with people, that's also a big achievement. Because we never really wanted to do that because we thought it's really hard to do it and that's why we just go up and take the hit and turn it off.” (:17)

The reality is that recovering addicts are just like everyone else. They're parents, friends, brothers, and sisters.

**RA:** “Well, recovering addicts are the most powerful people in this world. Being able to stay away from drugs, that's a big achievement. Every day that passes without doing drugs, that's a big achievement. Being able to go back to school or college and doing their assignments, that's a big achievement.” (:15)

And here's a fact. If you attend any NA meeting, you can't help but notice the way recovering addicts introduce themselves among each other.

**HY:** “Someone can just disregard everything and everything you have achieved in your life only because that once in your life, you made a mistake and you will be just for it for the rest of your life.” (:10)

They say their name and refer to themselves as drug addicts to constantly remind each other of the disease they all share. So it's no coincidence that recovering addicts only find their inner peace during these meetings. Among people who genuinely accept them.

**MUSIC:** “Baheb El Cima” by Khaled Shoukry (amplify then slowly fade out) [RT: 00:08:33-00:09:25]

This audio documentary was produced by Sara Mohamed for the Audio Production course at the American University in Cairo, taught by Professor Kim Fox. I'd like to thank my

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