

Investigating the Extent and Type of Inclination Towards Industrial Drugs Versus Traditional Drugs and the Factors Affecting It among Women and Men (Case of Study: Addicted Women and Men Referring to Addiction Treatment Centers in Golestan Province in 2024

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Abstract: The present research was conducted with the aim of comparing the extent and type of inclination of substance abusers towards traditional and industrial drugs and identifying the effective factors among individuals who were substance abusers in the first half of the year 2024 in Golestan province and were undergoing addiction treatment in intermediate-term rehabilitation centers and addiction treatment clinics. Background information was collected from 350 individuals through a researcher-made questionnaire, and supplementary information was obtained through semi-structured interviews with 177 of them. The results showed that approximately 90% of the subjects suffer from industrial substance abuse. Among the types of industrial drugs, the use of crystal methamphetamine (Shisheh) and cannabis (Gol) had a noticeable acceptance rate compared to other drugs. Finally, five factors—low price, virtual agency/activity (Koneshgari-e Majazi), peer social pressure, functional accessibility, and psychological and aesthetic well-being—each having sub-components, were identified as the most important factors influencing individuals' inclination toward substance abuse, in that order.

Keywords: Substance Abuse, Industrial Drugs, Traditional Drugs, Virtual Agency, Peer Social Pressure.

Introduction

Addiction, as a primary and chronic neurobiological disease, is influenced by various hereditary, psychological, social, and environmental factors (American Pain Society and colleagues, 2001: 28), and is the result of maladaptive consumption patterns or substance misuse (Mohammadi et al., 2010: 86). This misuse, characterized by features such as impaired control over use, compulsive use, continued use despite harm, and craving (American Pain Society and colleagues, 2001: 28), is not a new or rare issue, and the misuse of opioid substances has long been considered an antisocial and unacceptable habit in all human societies. However, despite this unacceptability, various social classes are seriously engaged with this issue. So much so that many men and women, especially from adolescence to middle age, currently use and have become dependent on drugs. This has made it one of the significant social harms in all societies. approximately 275,000,000 people (5.6% of the world's total population) had used drugs at least once in the year. In other words, approximately 1 in every 18 people used illicit drugs, and in 2023, 20,000,000 people were added to this population. This statistic becomes more alarming when considering that approximately 11% of those who use drugs suffer from substance use disorders. Furthermore, the rate of direct drug-related deaths increased by over 60%, rising from 105,000 people in 2000 to 167,750 people in 2023. To this figure, we must also add the 282,250 indirect deaths in 2023, resulting from illnesses such as AIDS, Hepatitis, etc. In another statistic, in 2024, 35% of all female prisoners globally and 19% of all male prisoners globally had drug-related offenses.

Based on the report by the country's Drug Control Headquarters Council (2024), there are currently 4,400,000 people (about 5.5% of Iran's total population) who are regular users and occasional drug users, and 30,000 to 50,000 homeless addicts in the country. Additionally, 4% of high school students

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and about 5.6% of the university population have experienced drug use. The number of addicts in the country in 2024 has approximately doubled compared to 2011, and unfortunately, the age of initiating drug addiction has dropped to 15 years old. Furthermore, the UNODC (2024) stated in its report that Iran ranks tenth globally in terms of the percentage of young people and adults who use drugs, and is positioned above all other countries in the world in terms of drug use prevalence. Golestan Province also has 228,000 people who are regular and occasional drug users (Golestan Province Drug Control Headquarters Council, 2024). This statistic is concerning because, while Golestan Province constitutes approximately 2.34% of the country's total population, it accounts for 5.18% of the country's total addicts. Moreover, according to the latest addiction prevalence study by the country's Drug Control Headquarters Council in 2023, the average prevalence rate of addiction among those aged 15 to 64 in the country was 5.3%, while this figure in Golestan Province stood at 13.81%, giving it the second national rank in drug use prevalence (IRNA, July 10, 2023). A report provided by the General Directorate of Correctional and Rehabilitation Measures of Golestan Province in 2024 also shows that 69% of prisoners are directly or indirectly related to narcotics. Of this percentage, approximately 56% have a direct connection to drugs (smugglers, street dealers, etc.), and approximately 44% are indirectly related to addiction, meaning the addict committed offenses such as theft, murder, etc. Thus, the initial analysis of the provided statistics leads the present research, in its first step, to focus on studying substance abuse in Golestan Province."

"However, what has caused greater concern for officials, experts, and social custodians in Iranian society and Golestan Province in recent years, alongside the increase in addiction rates and the lowering of the age of inclination towards drug use, is the change in the pattern of drug use among addicts, especially youth. Based on statistics and reports from international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), parallel to societal progress, the needs, inclinations, and behavioral patterns of youth have also undergone change and transformation. The pattern of substance abuse among young people, including in Iran, is rapidly shifting from traditional to synthetic drugs (Yousefi & Khaleghian, 2012: 78). According to available statistics, the number of people who used industrial drugs such as methamphetamine (crystal) in the year 2009 comprised only three percent of addicts. However, this figure reached a worrying 67 percent in 2023. Furthermore, based on statistics provided by the Golestan Province Drug Control Headquarters Council (2024), approximately 57 percent of the addict population in Golestan Province consists of synthetic drug abusers. Therefore, considering the above description and understanding this critical point, this research seeks to provide a scientifically sound and comprehensive answer regarding the extent and type of inclination towards synthetic versus traditional drugs and the effective factors influencing this among women and men.

Research Literature (Background and Theoretical Foundations)

- Arvey & Johnson (2024), in a qualitative study of 13 consumers aged between 19 and 24, conclude that the initiation of drug use is mostly influenced by peer drug use in social settings. This facilitates exposure, access to substances, motivation for use, and creates an environment conducive to initiation. Moreover, creating a mindset regarding the perceived better effects of these substances—such as feelings of euphoria and calmness, relief from emotional distress, and reduced anxiety—is also influential.
- Petrozelka et al. (2021), in a qualitative study conducted in the Czech Republic, identified family and peer groups as the most effective factors in youth drug use. These researchers conclude that the family, through tense family relationships and coping with difficult life situations related to family issues, and the peer group, through the presence of friends who use drugs, can drive young people towards substance abuse."
- "Ebrahim Maghimi Sarani et al. (2020), in their study examining the sequential patterns of methamphetamine use in Iran among 302 methamphetamine users, assert that there is a noticeable shift in the consumption of drugs from traditional to synthetic among young people. These researchers concluded that the use of these types of drugs begins with the consumption of tobacco and alcohol at younger ages. Furthermore, family history of use, age of initiation,

low family income, and low education were considered the most significant factors influencing the use of synthetic drugs.

- Habcik et al. (2016), in a qualitative study titled 'A qualitative study of methamphetamine initiation in South Africa,' investigated the factors contributing to the prevalence of synthetic drug use. The researchers concluded that peer pressure, lack of employment and recreational opportunities, curiosity and hearing about the positive effects of synthetic drugs, poor economic conditions in deprived communities, and the lower cost and lifestyle that facilitates the use of these types of drugs are among the most important factors that cause young people to gravitate more towards synthetic drugs than traditional ones.
- Basu et al. (2012) conducted a study titled 'Changing Pattern of Drug Abuse among Patients Attending a De-addiction Centre in North India' over three decades, from 1978 to 2008. The research focused on patients attending the de-addiction center of the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research in Chandigarh, utilizing data recorded at the center and semi-structured interviews with patients and their families. A total of 6608 patients were studied: 555 in the first phase, 1885 in the second phase, and 4168 in the third phase of seeking treatment.
- The research results indicated a decrease in the percentage of individuals addicted to alcohol, from 57.3% in the first phase to 47.8% in the third decade. Conversely, the percentage of individuals involved with opiates increased from 36.8% in the first decade to 53.2% in the third decade. Furthermore, in the first decade, 47.4% of all individuals dependent on opiates used natural (traditional) opioids. However, this figure declined to 18.3% in the third decade. In contrast, the second decade showed a significant dependence on cough syrups containing buprenorphine and codeine, and the third decade indicated a severe dependence on dextropropoxyphene.
- According to the research findings, a significant increase in the number of drug abusers, a decrease in the age of drug abusers, an increase in the ratio of opiate users to alcohol-dependent individuals, a shift in the pattern of drug use from natural (traditional) to chemical (synthetic/pharmaceutical), and an increasing trend of polysubstance dependence are considered serious concerns.
- Momeni et al. (2024), in their mixed-methods study on 8 elites, identified factors influencing the use of cannabis and new psychoactive substances (NPS) among youth. Lack of education and unawareness of problems and harms were identified as the most important individual factors. Mental and psychological disorders and low self-esteem were the most significant psychological factors. The presence of friends who use drugs and poor social skills were the most important interpersonal factors. Weak family relationships, family conflicts, and the presence of addicted individuals in the family were the most significant family factors. Low drug prices, financial poverty, economic pressures, and easy access to drugs were the most important social factors. A positive attitude towards synthetic drugs was the most significant cultural factor, and the place of residence and geographical environment were the most important environmental factors influencing individuals' inclination towards new psychoactive substances compared to traditional drugs."
- "Ahadi et al. (2022), in their study aimed at identifying the social factors affecting addiction to synthetic drugs, conducted on 100 citizens of Zanjan, concluded that the inaccessibility, lower euphoria/high, high cost, and the difficult and time-consuming nature of consuming traditional drugs have led youth to gravitate towards synthetic drugs. Alongside these factors, family monitoring and supervision, use among peers, and a history of use among family members were other contributing factors.
- Rezagahi et al. (2020), in their study, categorized the factors influencing methamphetamine (Shisheh) use among women aged 20 to 30 into individual, familial, environmental, and cultural factors. Lack of purpose in life was identified as the most effective individual factor, lack of affection in parental emotional relationships as the most effective familial factor, the prevalence and availability of synthetic drugs as the most effective environmental factor, and living in polluted neighborhoods as the most effective cultural factor.
- Boustani & Karimizadeh (2017) conducted a study titled 'Conditions and Strategies for Methamphetamine Use Among Addicted Women' using the Grounded Theory method on 12

women addicted to methamphetamine in Kerman. The researchers categorized the conditions affecting the use of methamphetamine among the studied women into three groups: causal, contextual, and intervening conditions. Curiosity was influenced by components such as friends' descriptions and the belief that methamphetamine is non-addictive, tensions resulting from divorce or forced marriage, and the acquisition of pleasure from the resulting causal conditions. Contextual conditions included experiencing tragedy (death of loved ones, such as parents, which provided the basis for their separation from family and increased inclination towards friends), learning methamphetamine use (through friends and an addicted spouse), a family background of addiction (history of addiction in the paternal family and spouse, and the individual's own history of addiction), and acceptance among friends. Furthermore, the ease and lack of odor of methamphetamine use, its low cost, and facilitating beliefs about methamphetamine use (that it is not addictive, curing heroin and opium addiction by using methamphetamine, and leading to thinness and beauty) were the effective intervening conditions in the methamphetamine use of the studied women. The women in this study employed strategies for methamphetamine use, such as the simultaneous use of two substances (to achieve euphoria), increased sexual activity (sexual relations with a spouse and illicit sexual relations), and funding material costs through obtaining money from acquaintances, using subsidies, parasitic or barter use, prostitution, and selling or pawning household items. Finally, this research, considering the prominent role of friends, the lack of sufficient information and awareness, facilitating beliefs about synthetic drug use among the individuals themselves, and the non-specialized nature of addiction treatment centers, suggests the need for producing content for mass media, implementing life skills training programs to reduce demand in schools and universities, and establishing specialized methamphetamine treatment centers.

Now, if we seek a theoretical explanation for behavior change (drug use), it must be noted that in the first stage, theories of human behavior change, especially health-oriented behaviors, are divided into two categories: the Social Cognitive Theory and the Stage Model Theory. The Social Cognitive Theory, introduced by Albert Bandura in 1986, provides a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior, with its primary focus on cognitive concepts (Green & Pihl, 2010: 223). The core assumption of this approach is based on the principle that human behavior is explained by the interaction of three elements: the person, the person's behavior, and environmental factors, which is termed reciprocal determinism (or triadic reciprocal causation). According to Bandura (2011: 36-37), individual behavior is influenced by several cognitive and affective factors, such as individuals' capabilities or knowledge of the current and future situation, positive and negative reinforcement, self-regulation (self-control) meaning the person's activeness and effective role in controlling and managing themselves and their environment, the perceived outcomes of performed behaviors and the values and merits inherent in those results, and self-efficacy, which means the belief in one's own capabilities to succeed in a specific situation. According to this theory, an individual who does not know how to change their behavior, for whom the consequences and results of participation hold no value, and who doubts overcoming obstacles will not achieve behavioral change (Locke & Latham, 1990: 243).

The Stage Model Theory was proposed by Prochaska and DiClemente through research on 872 smokers (Ghorbani, 2002: 21). Based on this approach, formal treatment programs for smoking cessation often fail, and success in quitting behavior can only be hoped for when smokers are themselves ready for this task (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983: 390). Therefore, this approach views the process of behavioral change as any activity an individual undertakes to help correct their thoughts, feelings, or behavior (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1994: 20). In essence, this theory seeks to explain how conscious decisions are made and subsequently reach the action stage, and it considers six stages for this behavior change (Moore, 2005: 398):

"Stage One; Pre-contemplation: The individual in this stage has not yet made a decision to change their behavior. In this stage, individuals do not perceive their behavior as a problem.

Stage Two; Contemplation: In this stage, the individual constantly evaluates the pros and cons of taking action to change their behavior. In other words, individuals in this stage are inclined to change their behavior but have not yet committed or obligated themselves to making this change.

Stage Three; Preparation: In this stage, the individual proceeds with planning.

Stage Four; Action: In this stage, the individual executes the treatment plan and tries to change their behavior.

Stage Five; Maintenance and Treatment in Abstinence: In this stage, the individual focuses on consolidating the process of treatment implementation and the change achieved in their behavior.

Stage Six; Termination: In this stage, the individual has a full commitment to the change achieved in their behavior, to the extent that abandoning the new habit is difficult for the individual (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983: 390-392).

However, it must be acknowledged that human behavior change is not entirely in accordance with the claims of the above theories and solely dependent on individual cognition, because human actions are based on a kind of value-laden world in which role standards and values assigned to actors have meaning, and humans learn how to classify and understand the world through interaction with others, understanding what kind of behavior others expect from them in this world (Ritzer, 1995: 309). Thus, human behavior, or more accurately, human action, is the result of the dialectic between personal information processing ability and the social framework, and George Herbert Mead is the best thinker who explains this process. Mead's main emphasis was that the 'Self' emerges from social experiences and the capacity for reflection. Mead believed the self does not exist at birth, and the structure of the self is formed during primary and secondary socialization. According to Mead, social experience involves communication and the exchange of symbols, and individuals understand each other's main intentions by recognizing symbols. Mead argues that what is unique in humans is the ability to grasp intentions, which individuals achieve by imagining themselves in another person's position; by putting yourself in another's place, you can see yourself as that person. This process of self-awareness is vital because it allows individuals to see beyond themselves, internalize expected norms, values, and behaviors, and move towards a more functional society (Macionis & Plummer, 2005: 163). This ability of the self to absorb another's perspective and act accordingly indicates that the self has distinct components. Mead named these components the 'I' and the 'Me'. The 'I' represents the active element of the self, while the 'Me' represents the self in the object position, allowing us to shape our perceptions (Seronk, 1973: 317).

Mead focuses on the nature of childhood as an important time in the emergence of the self. He believed there are four important stages in the formation of the self. The first stage is the 'Preparatory Stage' (or Imitation Stage). Mead believed that during this stage, small infants are only capable of imitation, mimicking the actions of others without understanding the meaning or intentions of such acts. Therefore, according to Mead, the infant does not have a self in this stage, but this stage of imitation is the key to progress (Shepherd, 2007: 98; Macionis & Plummer, 2005: 165). As the infant is exposed to more experiences, these experiences constitute the 'Play Stage'; a stage where they learn to use language and symbols. They can then orient themselves towards significant others, usually their initial caregivers, for example, by playing with 'Mom' and 'Dad.' Thirdly, upon entering the 'Game Stage,' the child learns to take on the roles of several people in the same situation. The fourth stage is the 'Generalized Other,' which relates to the cognition of the surrounding environment, which Mead believes occurs from about the age of 8. Mead concludes that it is important for individuals, as members of society, to see themselves in the ability of others and thus be able to take on the roles of others in many different situations. According to Mead, individuals do this by recognizing behavioral patterns. Therefore, Mead refers to the term 'Generalized Other' as the broader cultural norms and values that we use as a reference in evaluating ourselves (Macionis & Plummer, 2005: 165). "Every society relies on a number of these socialization agents and brokers, who serve as guides for the members of society. At the micro-level, socialization agents include parents and guardians, extended family members, peers, religious leaders, managers, teachers, and other school personnel. At the macro-level, socialization agents include the geographical, livelihood, and social environment of neighborhoods, economic and political organizations, and mass media. Each of these socialization agents plays a different role in the process

and application of various information throughout the members' lives. Furthermore, there is an interaction between micro and macro environments, as well as among micro or macro agents themselves, which either reinforces positive socialization or hinders it. In addition to this, several principles can be considered in the socialization process: First, primary socialization has a greater impact on the development of human capabilities than secondary socialization. Second, interaction in the socialization process with significant others is important; individuals who are emotionally significant to us—primarily parents and other family members and relatives, and secondarily, teachers and other school personnel, and peers with whom we feel closeness and intimacy—are more determinative in personality formation than contact with others in secondary groups, groups with which interaction is later and more formal. Fourth, long-term relationships with others have a greater impact on personality compared to short-term interactions (Turner, 1999: 160-163).

Given these points, the family and the school are two stable poles of socialization and child-rearing that contribute to the formation of children's personalities in specific ways. The family, in any type of society, is the first group with which the child interacts. The stages of their developmental growth are initially defined within the family, and it is the family that meets the social and psychological needs of individuals. It is the first integrated group that supports the individual in achieving various positions in society and is also the locus of unique relationships among its members (Petrovi et al., 2012: 9; Streiss, 1976: 134; Giddens, 1997: 104; Rafipour, 1998: 352). Moreover, most children spend about seven hours a day and 180 days a year at school. Although the official goal of the school is to transfer subject knowledge and teach various skills, students do not only learn from the curricula prepared by teachers and school administrators. Rather, through the hidden curriculum, they learn many social skills through interaction with teachers, staff, and other students. For example, they learn that to succeed, they must be quiet, be patient, and even sometimes do things they are not interested in. In addition, the school is a center for the formation of peer groups and friendships (Henslin, 1999: 77-78; Appelbaum & Chambliss, 1997: 120; Ship, 1995: 127; Giddens, 1997: 106).

The conclusion from the above discussion provides a new way of thinking about drug use prevention as a socialization factor. This means that preventive interventions should be considered as part of the socialization process to guide decision-making and provide the necessary skills for individuals to adopt social and healthy behaviors. This type of prevention program can focus on educating socialization agents to improve or advance their socialization roles through interventions aimed at enhancing the cognitive, behavioral, communication, and monitoring skills of parents, teachers, mentors, and other family and school members, considering the moderating power of peers, in accordance with social learning theory and social control theory." "According to social learning theory, an individual's attitude and behavior towards drugs during early life, especially in small, informal groups, is the strongest predictor of their attitude and drug use in adulthood (Petraitis et al., 1995: 70; Ahmadi, 2005: 95). Based on this theory, a teenager's involvement in drug use occurs in three sequential stages, beginning with observing and imitating attitudes and behaviors related to drugs, continuing with social reinforcement such as encouragement and support, and finally leading to the teenager's expectations of positive social and psychological outcomes from drug use in the future (Reid & Rowntree, 1997: 151). For example, in families that have a positive attitude towards drugs or consume such substances, or in schools where there is no negative attitude towards drugs and teachers and educators do not react negatively to this issue, there is a high probability that adolescents from such families and schools will have a favorable attitude towards drug use and begin to consume them themselves (Petraitis et al., 1995: 70; Moazzami, 2009: 181).

For instance, Sutherland, with his differential association theory, posits that attitudes and delinquent behaviors like substance abuse are as learnable as behaviors such as writing or painting. In this theory, Sutherland believes that learning occurs based on the frequency, duration, intensity, and priority of social interactions. If adolescents repeatedly associate with individuals who use drugs or have a favorable attitude towards drugs, they will develop a favorable attitude towards drug use. If these interactions occur over a long period, internalization of drug-related behaviors is more likely than when the duration of interaction is short. Also, learning is likely to be greater when the interaction is intense,

as opposed to when interactions are incidental, and such intense interaction occurs in specific groups like family, friends, and ultimately, schools (Moazzami, 2009: 181). In social learning theory, adolescents listen to and prioritize individuals they admire, and if those individuals have a favorable attitude towards drugs and also use drugs, adolescents are likely to imitate these attitudes and behaviors and internalize them (Bahr et al., 2005: 530).

Social control theory begins with the premise that deviance is natural, and conformity to social norms is what needs to be explained (Franzese, 2009: 71; Hirschi, 1969: 16). Therefore, all adolescents tend to deviate, and in the absence of control from social institutions like family and school, they act according to their own desires. Weakening of the bond between family and school with the individual increases the risks of joining a deviant social group and adopting deviant behavior. Thus, parental supervision is essential in preventing substance use (Shepherd, 2007: 186; Ahmadi, 2005: 86). Accordingly, social control is the ability of social groups or organizations such as family and school to influence rules and norms (Moazzami, 2009: 183). Therefore, when supervision increases, adolescents are deprived of antisocial behaviors because they think their parents or guardians (teachers, other family members, etc.) are watching them and expect them to comply. When supervision is at a low level or not done at all, adolescents feel that their guardians are not closely monitoring them and guide their behavior in a particular area, such as experimenting with drugs, according to their own preferences (Vitaro et al., 2000: 321). Based on studies conducted under similar supervision conditions, this effect is more effective and stronger for boys. The overall conclusion of these studies is that girls are more attached to their families and experience a higher level of parental supervision, which indicates a lower rate of delinquency among them (Svensson, 2003: 320-321)."

"The emotional bond of adolescents with their parents and teachers also plays an important role. When adolescents are close to their parents and teachers, they feel they must act in conventional and normative ways to please them. In this case, if their parents and teachers tell them so, they may refrain from drug use. When the emotional bond is lost, adolescents may feel no restraint in disregarding the wishes of their parents and teachers, and the likelihood of them experimenting with drug use becomes high (Vitaro et al., 2000: 322). In this sense, social control theory suggests that drug use results from low levels of emotional bonding and commitment to institutions such as family and school. Furthermore, the preventive program of the present research includes risk and protective factors, which have been the main basis of prevention since 1992. Risk and protective factors are indicators of a vulnerability-environment interaction. Petras and Sloboda (2014: 257) categorize risk and protective factors into two groups: social or contextual environment, and individual and interpersonal. Contextual factors include norms that support or make substance use intolerable, such as the accessibility and availability of substances, and neighborhood disorder and disarray. However, individual and interpersonal factors relate more to influences stemming from biological characteristics, family, substance use history and background, and academic failure.

Questions

1. Is the tendency of drug abusers towards synthetic drugs greater or towards traditional drugs?
2. Is there a significant difference in the tendency of drug abusers towards different types of synthetic drugs?
3. Into what categories can the factors influencing the abuse of synthetic drugs be divided?
4. What priority do the categorized factors influencing the abuse of synthetic drugs have?

Methodology

The research method was retrospective. The statistical population comprised all individuals in Golestan Province suffering from substance abuse who were undergoing addiction treatment in mid-term recovery and rehabilitation centers and licensed outpatient addiction treatment centers in Golestan Province during the first 6 months of the year 1403 (2024), totaling 2,476 people. Data collection was carried out using a multi-stage sampling method. Background information was gathered from 350 people using a researcher-made questionnaire, and comprehensive supplementary information was obtained through semi-structured interviews from 177 individuals who consented to be interviewed at

selected centers within the cities of Gorgan, Gonbad-e Kavus, Aliabad-e Katul, Azadshahr, and Bandar Gaz."

Findings

Table (1): Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Addiction to Synthetic and Traditional Drugs Among Men and Women

Type of Drug	Men	Women
	Frequency	Percentage
Synthetic	273	92.27%
Traditional	23	7.73%
Total	296	100%

The results of Table 1 show that approximately 90% of women and slightly over 90% of men are addicted to synthetic drugs. Therefore, it can be explicitly stated that the tendency of substance abusers towards synthetic drugs is much higher than towards traditional drugs and is not comparable in any way. Synthetic drugs hold an undisputed dominance among substance abusers.

Table (2): Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Prevalence of Various Synthetic and Traditional Drugs Among Men and Women

Type of Drug	Men	Women
	Frequency	Percentage
Methamphetamine	105	35.5%
Cannabis	60	20.3%
Crack	22	7.4%
Crystal	21	7.1%
LSD	41	13.9%
Ecstasy	9	3%
Angel Dust	9	3%
Opium	13	4.4%
Hashish	10	3.4%
Heroin	4	1.7%
Methadone	2	0.7%
Total	296	100%

The results of Table 2 indicate that among both women and men, in addition to opium having greater acceptability among traditional drug abusers, methamphetamine, cannabis, and LSD are the most prevalent synthetic drugs, respectively. These data suggest that there is a variation in the tendency and acceptability among different types of synthetic drugs. A noteworthy point is that among men, methamphetamine has greater acceptability than other synthetic drugs, but among women, methamphetamine and cannabis have a very high and almost identical tendency.

Table (3): Mean of the Variables in Question Among Men and Women Addicted to Synthetic Drugs

Gender	Mean Age	Mean Age of Onset	Mean Consumption History
Men	24.38	16.41	5.97 years
Women	21.19	15.27	2.92 years

The results of Table 3 show that the average age of men addicted to synthetic drugs is below 25 years, and among women, it is below 22 years. Furthermore, the age of onset for synthetic drug use in both groups is below 17 years, and the consumption history is approximately 3 years for women and approximately 6 years for men.

Table (4): Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Studied Population by Method of Synthetic Drug Use

Method of Use	Men	Women
	Frequency	Percentage
Inhalation	117	42.9%
Injection	79	28.9%
Oral	77	28.2%
Total	273	100%

The results of Table 4 indicate that the inhalation method is more common than other methods among both men and women.

Table (5): Prioritization of Factors Influencing Synthetic Drug Abuse, Differentiated by Men and Women

Components	Percentage of Enumeration	Priority
	Men	Women
Extensive and seductive advertisements regarding the absence of destructive effects of consumption	53.9%	53.6%
Low cost of these substances compared to traditional drugs and alcohol	93.5%	89.3%
Ease of obtaining these substances	40.9%	35.7%
Dominance of sellers of these substances in cyberspace compared to sellers of traditional drugs	60.4%	64.3%
Seeking pleasure and excitement	29.9%	25%
Achieving tranquility and freedom from problems	13.6%	21.4%
Lack of awareness of the extent of damages caused by consumption	77.3%	67.9%
Peer pressure	86.4%	57.1%
Maintaining beauty and thinness	1.9%	28.6%
Gaining identity within groups of friends, acquaintances, etc.	36.4%	60.7%
Availability of these substances at parties and their consumption in such events	15.6%	7.1%
Ease of consuming these substances compared to traditional drugs	32.5%	32.1%

The results of Table 5 show that the most important factors influencing synthetic drug abuse are: the low cost, peer pressure, lack of awareness of the extent of damages caused by consumption, cyberspace, and extensive and seductive advertisements in this space among men; and the low cost, lack of awareness of the extent of damages caused by consumption, cyberspace, gaining identity within peer groups, and pressure from peers among women.

Table (6): KMO and Bartlett's Test Results for Assessing the Factorability of Data Regarding Components Affecting Synthetic Drug Abuse

Tests	Value
KMO Test	0.715
Bartlett's Test	
Chi-Square	174.694
Degrees of Freedom	66
Significance Level	0.000

Table (7): Placement of Components Affecting Synthetic Drug Abuse in Extracted Factors

Components	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Extensive and seductive advertisements regarding the absence of destructive effects of consumption				0.614	
Low cost of these substances compared to traditional drugs and alcohol					0.763
Ease of obtaining these substances	0.545				
Dominance of sellers of these substances in cyberspace compared to sellers of traditional drugs				0.871	

Seeking pleasure and excitement		0.807			
Achieving tranquility and freedom from problems		-0.603			
Lack of awareness of the extent of damages caused by consumption				0.732	
Peer pressure					0.676
Maintaining beauty and thinness		0.811			
Gaining identity within groups of friends, acquaintances, etc.					0.825
Availability of these substances at parties and their consumption in such events	0.734				

Factor Analysis Interpretation (Based on Table 7)

The components influencing synthetic drug abuse were categorized into five factors through factor analysis:

1. **Factor 1: “Practical Accessibility” (Functional Accessibility):** This factor includes components related to the ease of obtaining these substances (Ease of obtaining), their availability at parties and social gatherings (Availability at parties), and the ease of consumption compared to traditional drugs (Ease of consumption).
2. **Factor 2: “Psychological Well-being and Aesthetics” (Psychological and Aesthetic Well-being):** This factor encompasses components related to seeking pleasure and excitement (Seeking pleasure), achieving tranquility and freedom from problems (Achieving tranquility), and maintaining beauty and thinness (Maintaining beauty/thinness).
3. **Factor 3: “Virtual Agency” (Virtual Activism):** This factor groups components related to extensive and seductive advertisements about the lack of harmful effects (Extensive advertising), the dominance of sellers in cyberspace compared to traditional drug sellers (Cyberspace dominance), and the lack of awareness regarding the extent of damages caused by consumption (Lack of awareness).
4. **Factor 4: “Peer Social Pressure” (Peer Social Pressure):** This factor includes Peer pressure (Peer pressure) and Gaining identity within peer/acquaintance groups (Gaining identity).
5. **Factor 5: “Low Price” (Low Price):** This factor solely includes the component related to the low cost of these substances compared to traditional drugs and alcohol (Low cost).

Prioritization of Factors

Based on the results from Table 5 and the factor analysis (Table 7):

- **Most Important Factor:** Factor 5, **Low Price**, is considered the most significant factor influencing the inclination towards synthetic drugs.
- **Second Most Important Factor:** Factor 3, **Virtual Agency**, is the second most influential factor.
- **Third Most Important Factor:** Factor 4, **Peer Social Pressure**, is the third most influential factor, closely following the second.
- **Fourth Most Important Factor:** Factor 1, **Practical Accessibility**, is the fourth factor.
- **Least Important Factor:** Factor 2, **Psychological Well-being and Aesthetics**, was identified as the least significant factor among those influencing the inclination.

Conclusion and Discussion)

The research findings highlight that the **low price** of synthetic drugs is the primary driver for individuals' inclination towards them. This low cost acts as a direct economic stimulant, significantly increasing the ability of youth to purchase and access these substances, removing financial barriers, and making them an easily accessible economic commodity. Psychologically, the low-cost positions consumption as a low-risk behavior, encouraging curiosity and experimentation. This factor alone can increase the motivation for consumption by reducing the financial barrier, thereby facilitating the spread of substance abuse.

Suggestion related to Price: Monitoring and limiting distribution networks that cause the low pricing, and developing media content that links the low price of these drugs to serious physical, psychological, and social consequences.

Virtual Agency was identified as another crucial factor influencing youth inclination. Cyberspace attracts youth with attractive, short, and varied content, providing quick and repeated access to information and advertisements about synthetic drugs. Social media algorithms expose users to promotional content and peer experiences, normalizing drug use as low-risk. Given the lack of scientific/educational awareness, youth fail to critically analyze these messages. This combination of repeated promotional messages, behavioral modeling, and lack of accurate information fuels curiosity and inclination towards synthetic drug use, normalizing the behavior through observing positive or indifferent responses from the virtual community.

Suggestions related to Virtual Agency

- Producing engaging, interactive content (infographics and short videos) conveying preventive messages in the audience's language.
- Creating media campaigns and educational pages on social networks to counter promotional advertisements.
- Designing interactive and attractive awareness and educational courses on the consequences of synthetic drug use, to be included as assignment-based tasks in the official school curriculum.

Peer Social Pressure emerged as one of the strongest factors. Its influence occurs through behavioral modeling, direct pressure/invitation from friends, the need for social acceptance and group belonging, normalization of behavior, and enhancing curiosity/experimentation. This pressure reduces individual resistance, increases curiosity, and ultimately leads to consumption inclination. This research scientifically demonstrates that youth inclination towards synthetic drugs is not merely an individual choice but a product of complex interaction between the individual, peer groups, and social norms.

Suggestions related to Peer Pressure

- Teaching resistance skills against peer pressure through practicing real-life scenarios where the individual is exposed to pressure, allowing for psychological preparation.
- Enhancing parental monitoring skills and parental involvement in children's social activities to reduce the influence of high-risk groups.
- Positive role modeling in media by showcasing successful and active youth who are not dependent on high-risk groups.

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