Causes and factors leading to the use of psychoactive substances by women university students in Algeria

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Abstract:

This study aims at finding out the factors and causes that push the university female students to consume drugs. In so doing, we reviewed the literature and referred to some scientific and field facts. This topic has a high academic importance, mainly in the empirical research. For data collection, we designed a questionnaire of 34 items and administered it to 112 female students at the University of Oran 02, using the snowball method. Findings show that there is no single cause for the female university student to consume drugs. In this context, the personal factors rank first, followed by the familial and the socio-cultural causes. In the end, the study provides recommendations to limit this phenomenon.

Keywords: University Female Student; Drugs; Addiction; Causes And Factors Of Consuming Drugs; Social Stigma.

Introduction

1- Problematic of the study:

Lately, drugs use and addiction turned into one of the major issues for the human society all over the world, as it causes negative health effects and harms the social relations. In addition, drugs increase social scourges and phenomena. All studies and reports on human health confirm that the rate of using drugs is increasing, pushing the international organizations to launch alerts, mainly that drugs consumption is no more limited to the males, as we are witnessing an increasing trend of female consumption of drugs. Like the other states, Algeria suffers this phenomenon. The Algerian National Office for Combating Drugs and Addiction stated that the use of drugs raises health issues, and that due to its geographical transition position, Algeria turned into a consumption region. In addition, the demand on drugs is increasing annually. This phenomenon invaded the Algerian society and its institutions, even the schools and universities. The Office adds that the female consumption of drugs, which used to be a taboo, is increasing. Moreover, the number of drugs addicted in the treatment centers reached 8658 in the 1st term of 2023; 74.39% of them are females between 16 and 35 years old (The report on the activities against drugs and its addiction).

These statistics do not represent the real number of women who use drugs because women fear the social stigma and neither admit consumption nor seek treatment. This goes with the findings of the UN report on drugs and crime, which showed that despite women still mark the inferior gender in the drugs users, their consumption rates and addiction troubles are more increasing than the male rates. The report adds that females represent 45 to 49% of the users of amphetamines, steroids, opium, and sedatives without prescription. In addition, there is a big treatment gap for women all over the world because despite they represent almost half of amphetamine seekers, they make only 01 out of 05 treatment seekers. In this context, it is necessary to tackle the question of stigmatizing women who use drugs, as stigma hinders treatment and marks unequal established norms against women (Becker, McClellan, & Reed, 2017, pp. 136-147).

Some psychological studies showed that since women are more subject to depression, stress, psychological shocks, and male aggressions, they resort to sedatives for unmedical uses more than men. Furthermore, even if women do not use drugs as much as men do, studies proved that the female use of drugs increases the potentials of addiction more than for men. Thus, the authorities must set strategies to limit this phenomenon (Stocco et al., 2000). A field study by the National Center for Promoting the Scientific Research in Algeria showed that 13% of the university female students use drugs, 18% smoke cigarettes, and 09% drink

alcohol in the university campuses. In addition, the spread of weed and opium in the familial atmosphere in Algeria made women more subject to the use of drugs than in the past.

We notice that the diagnosis of the female consumption of drugs in Algeria is theoretically tackled and discussed in the educational meetings through descriptive studies that are limited to providing recommendations and theoretical solutions, but without academic focus on empirical investigations. In this regard, the empirical research in the humanities in the Arab world faces difficulties due to the Arab environment and culture. The use of drugs by females is one of the complicated questions and taboos. This issue started increasing and turned into a normal thing. Such normalization is the outcome of a deficit in the educational and familial system, and of socio-cultural transformations that were imposed on the Algerian society without any prior readiness.

The local and international reports on the female use of drugs is alarming, as the issue invaded even the schools and universities. Thus, we believe it is necessary to think about this question and shed light on its negative outcomes because the woman is the cornerstone of the society. Based on what was said, we shall shape a scientific research frame that helps diagnose the causes and factors that pushed the female university student to consume and addict to drugs. In so doing, we raise the following questions:

- What are the causes and motives that pushed the female university student to consume and addict to drugs?
- What are the characteristics of the female university student who consumes drugs?
- What are the drugs used by the female university student?
- What are the strategies that can be adopted to limit this social scourge?

2- The study aims:

This study aims at:

- The identification of the causes and factors leading the female university student in Algeria to use drugs.
- The identification of the most common types of drugs used by the female university student.
- Contributing to the provision of data and information on the phenomenon of the female university student's use of drugs to help those in charge of combating drug use and addiction.

3- The theoretical chapter:

3-1 The study concepts:

3.1.1 The drugs:

Drugs are substances that change the state of consciousness. They have an effect of the perception, thought, feelings, and actions. According to WHO, they are any psychoactive or psychotropic substance, which due to its chemical nature, affects the work of the central nervous system (feeling, perception, humor, emotions, and motor skills) or changes the state of consciousness. WHO did not make any distinction between the legal or illegal substances (World Health Organization, 2016). In addition, the Algerian law defines drugs as any natural substance or synthesis of substances listed in the 1st and 2nd tables of the Drugs Convention of 1961 in its form amended by the Protocol of 1972. In addition, it is any substance nationally classified as a drug (Law 23-05 that supplements Law 04-18 of 25 December 2004, of 07 May 2023 on the prevention of drugs and combating their illegal use and dealing).

3.1.2 The female university student:

In this paper, this expression refers to the female students at the University of Oran 02 (Faculty of Sociology, Faculty of Laws and Political Sciences, Faculty of Languages, Faculty of Economics and Commercial and Management Sciences, and the Faculty of Earth) during 2023/2024, who use drugs at the university. These students are aged 18 to 26 years old (it is the age adopted by WHO since 18 to 24 years old is adolescence and 18 to 26 is youth and marks the students' university graduation).

3.1.3 psychoactive substances:

The DSM-5 recognizes substance related disorders resulting from the use of ten separate classes of drugs:

1. Alcohol
2. Caffeine
3. Cannabis
4. Hallucinogens (phencyclidine, similarly acting arylcyclohexylamines, and other hallucinogens such as LSD)
5. Inhalants.
6. Opioids.
7. Sedatives
8. Hypnotics.
9. Anxiolytics
10. Stimulants (including amphetamine-type substances, cocaine, and other stimulants).

Some major groupings of psychoactive substances are specifically identified. The use of other or unknown substances can also form the basis of a substance related, or addictive, disorder (World Health Organization (WHO), 2016). In this context, we must point that in Algeria, the most psychoactive substances used by young people are Hashish, amphetamines, and alcohol, according to the report of the National Office for Combating Drugs and Addiction. As for smoking, even if it is one of the most used substances, it remains, socially, outside the circle of drugs. However, female smokers are seen with a negative image because female smoking is socially unacceptable and one of taboos.

3.1.4. Addiction:

The diagnostic of addiction (or dependence) relies on precise criteria set by international mental health organizations in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). These criteria include the loss of self-control, the penetration of consumption in the school and professional activities, or the continuous consumption even aware of the troubles. To make a diagnosis, the medical teams refer to DSM-5, which was designed by the American Psychiatric Association. This work shows important criteria to diagnose addiction:

- Irrepressible need (craving) to consumer the substance.
- Loss of control on the quantity and daily time of consumption.
- Devoting much time to look for the substance.
- Increase tolerance to the substance.
- Showing withdrawal symptoms, i.e., the symptoms provoked by the stop of consumption.
- Inability to make the necessary obligations.
- Consumption despite the physical risks.
- Persistent efforts or desire to decrease the dose or the activity.
- Decreased activities on behalf of consumption.
- Continuous consumption despite the physical and psychological damages.

These criteria allow the characterization of the addiction degree:

- 2 to 3 criteria: low addiction.
- 4 to 5 criteria: moderate addiction.

- 6 and more: severe addiction (American Psychiatric Association, 2015).

Since 2013, DSM-5 calls the dependence and abuse as the substance-related troubles. The different stages presented by DSM-4, like the use, abuse, and dependence disappeared in the new edition (MILDECA, https:/www.drogues.gouv.fr).

3.1.5 Social stigma:

Social stigma is the disapproval of, or discrimination against, a person based on perceivable social characteristics that distinguish them from other members of a society. It may also be described as a label that associates a person to a set of unwanted characteristics that form a stereotype. Social stigmas commonly deal with culture, gender, race, illness, and disease. Individuals who are stigmatized usually feel different and devalued by others.

Stigma may affect the behavior of the victims, as they often start to act in ways that their stigmatizers expect. It also shapes their emotions and beliefs, causes depression, and exposes the person's social identity to low self-esteem situations.(Social stigma. IAHPC Pallipedia). In this research, we use the term social stigma a lot when we talk about the desire of a female university student to be treated for Substance Use Disorder, and about her social incompatibility.

3.2 The causes and factors of using drugs:

They are the hidden and apparent social, economic, and cultural conditions of the individual. They affect his interaction with the society and push him to use and addict drugs. Besides, they are the belief that the events are expectable and that one event leads to another (Shepard & Green, 2003). In this paper, we tried to collect the most common causes mentioned in the studies on the youths' use of drugs.

3.2.1 The personal causes:

They are causes related to the personality and psyche of the drug user, mainly:

- The curiosity and desire for experience, mainly in adolescence.
- The sufferance of physical and emotional pains.
- The misuse of prescribed medicines (sedatives, amphetamines, etc).

- The high stress, anxiety, shyness, inferiority, and the social and psychological incompatibility.
- The misused free time.
- The low social awareness about the consequences of drugs.

3.2.2 The socio-cultural causes:

- The delinquency in the social environment.
- The low social regulation.
- The bad cultural values of the drug user.
- The bad peers.
- The pressure exercised by the drug dealers and friends on the youths.
- The work conditions.
- The high rates of drugs consumption.
- The low ethical values.
- The spiritual void.
- The attractive promotion for drugs online.

Despite the consequences, most of the youths, mainly the females, carry on consumption of drugs. In fact, the female drug users are less than men, but are more rapidly addicted when they start consumption (Stocco et al., 2000).

4. Methodology:

4.1 The study characteristics:

This study had been carried out during 2021 and 2023 on the university female students aged 18 to 26 years old, from different majors at the University of Oran 02. It aims at supporting the government efforts in combating drugs, as it provides field scientific data, because the studies on the female drug users are rare despite the remarkable increase of the phenomenon in the female milieu (Cambell, 2015). The stigmatization of the female drug users in the Algerian society raised a major issue in our investigation, obliging us to approach the informants using creative methods to avoid prejudice and not to face refusal of cooperation.

4.2 The study sample:

We opted for the snowball sampling method (intentional sampling), which is usually used when studying socially marginalized people who are difficult to reach, such as the homeless or users of drugs. We respected the good representation of the population. In this context, to approach such informants, a researcher must contact at least one appropriate person, conduct an interview with him, and ask him to name other people. Thus, we covered a sample of 112 female students from

randomly selected majors and cycles of study. The survey lasted 2 years (2021/2023), and allowed us to collect back 112 questionnaires (30 questionnaires were used to calculate the reliability of the tool and the 82 questionnaires were completed by the students who were the subject of our study).

4.3 The study tool:

The study aims at collecting data on the use of drugs by the university female students. Thus, we conducted some interviews with the informants and referred to the literature on the same topic and DSM-5. In addition, we used a questionnaire, whose face validity was confirmed by expert teachers, and, then, administered it twice, with an interval of 03 weeks, to a sample of 30 female students from outside the main sample. In the end, we had a questionnaire of 34 items divided on 03 axes, namely:

1. The personal causes axis, with 12 items.
2. The socio-cultural causes axis, with 13 items.
3. The familial causes axis, with 09 items.

The first paper of the questionnaire covered the personal information of the informant (age, address, social status, economic status, major, and used drugs). In answering the items, the informants had three options; yes, to an extent, and no. We confirmed the validity of the questionnaire using Pearson correlation coefficient for calculating the correlations between the degree of each axis and the degree of the whole questionnaire. In this context, the correlation between the degree of the 1st axis and the overall degree is 0.90, between the 2nd axis and the overall degree is 0.93, and between the 3rd axis and the overall degree is 0.90. In addition, we used Cronbach's Alpha to examine the consistency of the tool, and got a value of 0.94, which shows a high consistency.

5. Results:

5.1 Quantitative results:

5.1.1 The sample characteristics:

Table 01: The distribution of the sample according to the age

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
18 to 24 years old	68	82.93%
24 to 26 years old	14	17.07%
Total	82	100%

The table shows that most of the informants are between 18 and 24 years old.

Table 02: The distribution of the sample according to the major:

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Languages	29	35.36%
Sociology	14	17.07%
Law and political sciences	19	23.17%
Economics and commercial and management sciences	16	19.51%
Earth sciences	04	4.89%
Total	82	100%

The table shows that most of the informants study languages (35.36%), law and political sciences (23.17%), while the least ones are the students of earth sciences (4.89%).

Table 03: The distribution of the sample according to their residence

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
At the university campus	59	71.95%
Outside the university campus	23	28.05%
Total	82	100

The table shows that most of the informants (71.95%) reside at the university campuses.

Table 04: The distribution of the sample according to the social status:

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Single	79	96.34%
Married	0	0%
Divorced	3	3.66%

Table 07: The personal causes

Total	82	100%

The table shows that most of the informants (96.34%) are single.

Table 05: The distribution of the sample according to the economic status:

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	12	14.63%
Average	42	51.22%
Rich	28	34.15%
Total	82	100%

The table shows that most of the informants (51.22%) are from average-income families, followed by those from rich families (34.15%) and from poor families (14.63%).

Table 06: The distribution of the sample according to the drugs used:

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Cigarettes	25	30.49%
Hashish	5	6.10%
Alcohol	05	6.10%
Sedatives	10	12.19%
Steroids	12	14.63%
Two or more drugs	25	30.49%
Total	82	100%

The table shows that the most used drugs by the informants are cigarettes (30.49%), steroids (14.63%), sedatives (12.19%), and Hashish and alcohol (6.10% for each). Besides, 30.49% of the informants use more than a drug.

5.2.1 The factors leading the university female student to consume drugs:

The personal causes:

Number	Personal causes	Yes	To an extent	No	Overall weights	Weighted mean	Order
1	The misuse of drugs	70	10	02	232	2.82	**4**
2	Ignorance and low awareness about the consequences of drugs	63	12	07	220	2.68	**8**
3	Feeling of failure and depression	70	07	05	229	2.79	**5**
4	Feeling of loneliness and idleness	62	08	12	214	2.60	**10**
5	Belief that drugs improve the mood and increase activity	79	03	00	243	2.96	**1**
6	Intrusive to use	65	04	13	216	2.63	**9**
7	Curiosity for experience	80	01	01	243	2.96	**1**
8	Low self-esteem and trust	68	08	06	226	2.75	**7**
9	Feeling of severe sadness	74	05	03	235	2.86	**3**
10	To alleviate the emotional shocks	75	06	01	238	2.90	**2**
11	To alleviate the study pressures	35	02	45	154	1.87	**11**
12	Ignorance and low awareness about the consequences of drugs	68	10	04	228	2.78	**6**
Total		809	76	99	2672	32.6	
Mean		67.41	6.33	8.25		2.71	
Percentage		82.20%	7.72%	10.06%			
Proportional power		79.86%					
Degree of contribution		Very high					

The table shows that the personal factors of the female university student highly contribute to the consumption of drugs, as the proportional power is 79.86%. In this regard, items 05 and 07 about "Belief that drugs consumption improves the mood and increase activity" and "Curiosity for experience" ranked first, followed by item 10 "To **Table 08:** The socio-cultural factors

alleviate the emotional shocks". In the last ranks, we find items 04 and 11 about "Feeling of loneliness and idleness" and "To alleviate the study pressures".

The socio-cultural causes:

Number	Personal causes	Yes	To an extent	No	Overall weights	Weighted mean	Order
1	Going to the events and places where drugs are consumed	66	13	3	227	2.76	5
2	The negative effect of media	14	12	56	122	1.48	9
3	Accompanying people who consume drugs	70	8	4	230	2.80	2
4	The coercive use of drugs	8	11	63	109	1.32	10
5	The bad social compatibility and the social stigma	75	5	2	237	2.89	1
6	The effect of internet	10	0	72	102	1.24	11
7	The exposure to social aggression	05	03	74	95	1.15	12
8	The low religious values	68	10	4	228	2.78	4
9	The social violence	28	0	54	138	1.68	8
10	The weak security control	19	28	35	148	1.80	7
11	The easy access to drugs	66	15	01	229	2.79	3
12	The high number of drug dealers	32	18	32	164	2	6
13	The spread of drugs in the university	67	11	4	227	2.76	5 repeated
Total		528	134	404	2256	27.45	
Mean		40.61	10.30	31.07		2.11	
Percentage		49.52%	12.56%	37.89%			
Proportional power		24.19%					
Degree of contribution		Average					

The table shows that the socio-cultural factors of the female university student averagely contribute to the consumption of drugs, as the proportional power is 24.19%. In this regard, items 05 about "The bad social compatibility and the social stigma" ranked first, followed by item 03 "Accompanying people who consume drugs". In the last ranks, we find items 06 and 07 about "The effect of internet" and "The exposure to social aggression".

The familial causes:

Table 09: The familial factors

Number	Personal causes	Yes	To an extent	No	Overall weights	Weighted mean	Order
1	The low income	49	20	13	200	2.43	5
2	The familial problems	65	12	5	224	2.73	3
3	The family division	74	5	3	235	2.86	2
4	One of the parents consumes drugs	5	11	66	103	1.25	9
5	The over-cruelty of the parents or siblings	12	8	62	114	1.39	8
6	The wrong family education	78	3	1	241	2.93	1
7	The spoiling	9	6	67	106	1.29	7
8	The parents' carelessness regarding children	25	11	46	143	1.74	6
9	The loss of one of the parents	62	14	6	220	2.68	4
Total		379	90	269	1586	19.3	
Mean		42.11	10	29.99		2.14	
Percentage		51.35%	12.19%	36.57%			
Proportional power		26.56%					
Degree of contribution		Average					

The table shows that the familial factors of the female university student averagely contribute to the consumption of drugs (a bit more than the socio-cultural ones), as the proportional power is 26.56%. In this regard, items 06 about "The wrong family education" ranked first, followed by item 03 "The family division". In the last ranks, we find items 05 and 04 about "The over-cruelty of the parents or siblings" and "One of the parents consumes drugs".

5.3 Discussion:

The field study results allow us to answer the study questions. For the 1st question on the characteristics of the female university students who use drugs, we found out that they are aged between 18 and 24, which is the usual phase of using drugs by the adolescents (Johnston et al., 2017; O'Loughlin et al., 2009; Richmond-Rakerd, Slutske, & Wood,

2017). In addition, most of them come from average-income, followed by rich, families and reside in the university campuses. Besides, most are students of languages and law and political sciences. These results agree with the findings of other studies, as the National Office for Combating Drugs and Addiction in Algeria stated that most of the female university students who consume drugs reside in the university campuses.

Regarding the age, they are between 18 and 24, what marks adolescence. Theories and studies prove that this phase is full of stress, depression, illegal actions, and attempts of showing off. These results are in line with the typical results on drugs spread and consumption by youths, which show the monopoly of drugs by men, the marginalized people, and the poor. In this regard, Taylor et al. point out that drug consumption knows no gender or category, as there are well-placed people and

women who take and sell drugs, without any marginalization or violence.

As for question two that revolves around the most used drugs, we found out that the cigarettes, the steroids, and the sedatives are the most used by the informants, and that some informants use more than one drug. Besides, in answering question three on the causes that push the informants towards this phenomenon, we found out that the personal causes and factors ranked first, with a rate of 79.86%, weighted means of 2672, and a general mean of 2.71. These results seem logical and consistent with the characteristics of the sample (the adolescents). In this context, the female university adolescent is more subject to stress and anxiety, and is in a phase of self-confirmation. Therefore, she tries to transcend all the social laws. The belief that drugs improve the mood and increase activity is the first cause, followed by the curiosity and desire for experience, which are the main two features of the adolescents.

Furthermore, the familial causes have an average effect, with a rate of 26.56%, weighted means of 1586, and a general mean of 2.14. In this context, the wrong family education is the first cause, followed by the bad social compatibility and the exposure to the social stigma. As the other societies, the Algerian does not accept the woman liberation and break of the typical image of a conservative woman. At this stage, the use of drugs is a cry of pain from the adolescents. In addition, the female drug consumers are considered mentally troubled, bad, disrespectful, unnatural, and unethical. This typical image is dominant in our societies, which exclude the drug users from healthcare due to stigma (Coscas, Karila, & Benyamina, 2022; Campbell, 2015).

Moreover, the accompaniment of drug users is the 2nd cause. This goes with the education theory's explanation of drugs consumption, which says that drugs consumption results generally from peers. One of the results did not appear in the statistical analysis because we had concluded it from the informal interviews with some informants. It is about the use of drugs for the first time under the effect of sadness. This pushes us to think about studying the role of the psychological state in the addiction to drugs.

The findings of this study are different than those of the international organizations and sociological studies because poverty, for instance, is not a main characteristic in drug using, neither is violence nor rape. Rather, the causes are personal, cultural, and familial, including the curiosity, the social incompatibility, the availability of drugs and

wrong information on their benefits, the family division, and the wrong family education. In this regard, the social status is an important variable that had not been analyzed in the literature that covered drugs because most of studies focused on the criminals and ignored the socially integrated people who have a social position but suffer in pain.

Sociology has contributed to fostering the typical image through limiting the causes of drug consumption to vulnerability and marginalization. However, our study proved that poverty and violence are not major causes for the use of drugs by the university female student. Regarding the last question on the strategies to limit the phenomenon, we suggest:

- It is necessary to establish listening and psychological care cells at universities.
- Making preventive and awareness campaigns to explain the risks of drugs on the health of women.
- Controlling the university campuses and tightening the regulations.
- Raising awareness about the risks of the family problems and division on the adolescents, mainly the females.
- Enacting stringent laws against drugs dealers.
- Encouraging the female university students to ask for treatment and help for social integration. Establishing entertainment and cultural spaces to absorb the negative energy and turn it into good deeds.
- Promoting the role of the student associations in raising awareness of students who use drugs and of their families about the dangers of this scourge.
- Raising the social awareness about the status-quo of women consumption of drugs, the methods of prevention, and the treatment through media outlets, including the social media.

Conclusion:

The phenomenon of drugs consumption by the university female student in Algeria is alarming and requires cooperation between different parties to limit it. Algeria is one of the targets of big drug dealers due to the high population, the big number of youths, and the geographical position that makes it a meeting and transition point. Undeniably, the Algerian authorities are working hard to face the issue. However, the efforts are still insufficient to reach the target results. Therefore, the experts must

work more to limit the effects of drugs, mainly for women. In this regard, the academics and researchers must provide the authorities with the scientific bases to build preventive and treatment programs. In addition, the Algerian universities must improve the education conditions and establish entertainment spaces to absorb the negative energies. In addition, the role of the family must be promoted to correctly raise and educate children, mainly the females. Finally, it is necessary to provide help for the female university students who consume drugs to overcome the social stigma and seek treatment.

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