



Factors Driving an Egyptian Adolescent Girl to Drug Addiction: A Case Study

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Received: 1 January 2018; **Accepted:** 9 January 2018; **Published:** 20 January 2018

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Abstract

Use of illicit drugs among women is rising worldwide. The problem usually stems during adolescence. Substance prevention and treatment programs targeting adolescent girls are essential. Little is known about the factors that drive Egyptian adolescent girls to use illicit drugs as well as what stimulates them to seek treatment. This case report describes qualitative findings from an interview with an adolescent girl who has been an inpatient in the females' substance abuse unit in Al Maamoura hospital in Alexandria, Egypt. Weak emotional ties with the mother and lack of family supervision as well as presence in a drug culture were main reasons for abusing drugs. Implications for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Adolescent Girls; Egypt; Risk Factors; Substance-Related Disorders

Introduction

Numbers of women abusing illicit drugs are dramatically increasing. The progression of the disease from the first experimentation to dependence is more rapid and severe in women than in men [1]. More,

abuse of illicit drugs in females is associated with serious physical problems such as severe menstrual pain and bleeding as well as miscarriage [2]. In addition, females exhibit severer psychological and social adverse

consequences for abusing illicit drugs either in smaller amounts or for fewer years compared with their male counterparts. Nonetheless, their lifetime probability of receiving treatment is less compared with men [3]. The first experimentation of illicit drugs usually starts during adolescence. Use of illicit drugs between ages 12 and 18 is expanding globally; 23% of youth less than 20 years old meet the criteria of substance use disorder [4]. Few girls seek treatment for illicit drug dependence [5]. Little is known about the factors that drive Egyptian adolescent girls to use illicit drugs as well as what stimulates them to seek treatment.

Materials and Methods

An 18-years old (high school) girl presented for the treatment of multiple drug use at the females' substance abuse treatment unit in Al Maamoura hospital in Alexandria, Egypt. She started smoking at the age of 15. She abused cannabis, alcohol, and tramadol over the course of 3 years. To develop a deep understanding of how Egyptian teen girls get into the trap of illicit drug use (i.e., first experimentation and continuation of abuse), the participant was interviewed during her stay using unstructured interview method. The participant was asked to describe in details how she became a drug user and what drove her to get into treatment. Probing was used to elicit more elaborations. The

interview was simultaneously transcribed by the interviewer.

Results

The participant noted that a number of factors were associated with her experimentation and abuse of illicit drugs. The story began by associating with drug using friends, and cigarette smoking was the gate for abuse of illicit drugs. "I was offered cigarettes by some of my classmates. I used to go to a coffee shop with them. There, we all smoked shisha—that was the first time for me to try cannabis". The practice of using fake names of drugs was deceitful for the young girl, particularly when they were offered by friends. For example, tramadol is a highly addictive synthetic opioid that is used by Egyptian youth [6], and it is known within the culture of drug users as "*Farawlah /strawberry*" or "*Abo salibah*/the cross carrier" (the meaning has no relation to addiction at all). "By time I drank alcohol, which my friends called "water". I was introduced to other drugs "*Farawlah*"; I didn't expect it to be something bad or ever addictive". The factors that contributed to the participant's continuation of drug use involved feeling lonely, emotional distance from the mother, and lack of supervision from the family. "To get the drug I spent my pocket money, sold my jewels, and began to steal money from my mother's purse. My parents

knew nothing about me. I failed my classes. I felt bad about myself. I thought I will never be normal like all other people. I was always in trouble, but I couldn't confide to my mother. When my father noticed that my jewels were missing, he severely beat me, and I had to confess everything. My mother kept crying "What a shame! How would people think of us?!" They decided to secretly send me to the hospital where I am now. I really need to change, I wanted a push forward, and I want myself back again".

Discussion

Although this case is not representative of Egyptian adolescent girls who use illicit drugs, this report sheds light on the need to explore the role of relationships in substance abuse among adolescent girls. Lack of support from the family and the poor relationship with the parents allowed the chance for socializing with drug using mates. The influence of a drug using peer as a main source of drug experimentation was pretty clear, which is consistent with the available literature [7,8]. Furthermore, despite the suffering of the subject, her emotional distance from the mother—which can signal a disturbed relation with the mother—was a barrier to safe disclosure and to a possible chance of receiving treatment. In addition, the reactions of both parents which involved violence

(beating) and criticism (shouting, and blaming) when they knew that their daughter was abusing drugs seemed rather frustrating. It is possible that girls' fear from parents' response to one's abuse status prevents any sort of discussion of problems ensuing from the abuse of illicit drugs, which might contribute to further continuation of drug use. Moreover, the mother's statement reflects fear of public's comments to the state of her daughter's abuse status: such a "shameful" behavior can prevent her from getting married [9]. Barriers to disclosure of one's drug use state and barriers to treatment seeking among drug using adolescent girls need further exploration.

Research documents that parental lack of awareness of children's warning signs of abuse is one of the family-related risk factors of continuation of illicit drug use in adolescents [10]. Lack of awareness was vivid in the current case as parents paid no attention to their daughter's warning signs of abuse (e.g., poor academic achievement and pilfering). This may preclude the chance of early treatment. There is a need to explore parental knowledge of warning signs of drug use among teen children to guide the development of culturally adapted education programs for parents. Smoking is common in the Egyptian media by the most famous movie stars (both males and females) which signals status, entertainment and excitement.

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Most of the Egyptian adolescents who start smoking early are affected by the smoking scenes in the media [11,12]. Starting to smoke paved the way for abuse of several illicit drugs which is consistent with the literature [13]. Further, teens use slang names to talk about drugs without being noticed by people outside their drug subculture [14].

It seems that the language used within the drug culture is bright, appealing, and fraudulent—of use of fake names for drugs is a successful method to mislead teen girls to use illicit drugs e.g., alcohol (which is prohibited by religion) was described as "water" and tramadol was described as "*farawlah*" a name which might be thought of by the naïve adolescent as candy. It is reported that drug marketers use colorful drug names to attract youth to try drugs [15]. Non-drug users have limited knowledge of such drug slangs compared with those some experience of drug use, which indicate a greater possibility of being seduced by the bright drug names [16]. A sound of assessment of common trapping methods that are used to invite the Egyptian youth to use drugs is necessary in order to develop effective drug use prevention programs for youth.

Conclusion

In summary, disturbed family relation, poor family supervision and support

as well as having drug using friends, and being offered drugs in their slang names may be factors that stimulate Egyptian teen girls to use drugs. Further investigation in representative samples are worthy of researchers' attention.

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