

ANALYZING THE PREVALENCE OF ILLICIT DRUG USE IN JORDAN'S RURAL TOWNS: THE GOVERNORATES OF JERASH AND AJLOUN AS CASE STUDIES

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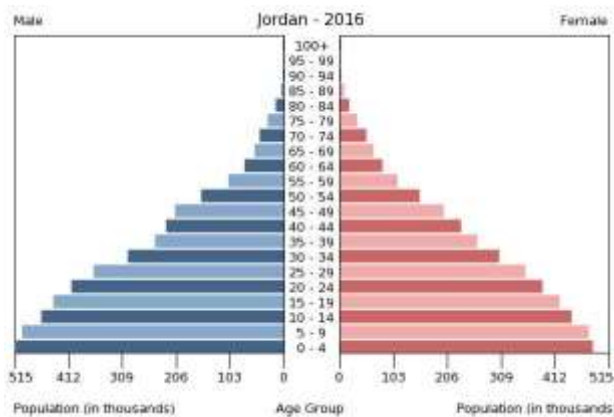
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ABSTRACT: *Jordan is not typically at the center of global concern regarding illicit drug prevalence. However, in recent years – and presumably since the onset of the Syria Civil War – the prevalence of illicit drugs in Jordan has become an important issue. While the question regarding whether this presence is due to Jordan historically being used by traffickers as a trafficking hub – or whether illicit drugs have indeed gained a foothold amongst Jordanian youth – remains, analysis of this issue is necessary in order to better understand this contemporary issue. Interestingly, rural areas such as towns within the governorates of Jerash and Ajloun (in northern Jordan) are at least anecdotally said to have a high prevalence of drug use within them. While no official government data is available to illustrate the prevalence of illicit drugs per governorate, and social stigma associated with addiction prevents the opportunity for extensive interviews to take place with those struggling with addiction, a plethora of media reports are available that provide insight into this pressing issue, in addition to limited anonymous interview access with individuals struggling with addiction. Accordingly, this research article will use interviews and content analysis as methodologies to both analyze available media excerpts to better determine whether illicit drug use is indeed becoming more prevalent amongst Jordanian youth or whether the rise in the presence of illicit drugs in Jordan is due to increased trafficking as a result of border security issues related to the Syrian Civil War.*

KEYWORDS: Youth, Jordan, Jerash, Ajloun, Drugs, Epidemic

INTRODUCTION

This research article uses content analysis of contemporary media excerpts to determine whether the increasing presence of illicit drugs in Jordan is a result of such drugs having gained a foothold amongst Jordanian youth or whether their increasing presence is a result of a lack of border security resulting from the Syrian Civil War which perpetuates drug traffickers' historical use of Jordan as a trafficking hub (with Anti-Narcotics officials stating that over eighty-percent of confiscated illicit drugs are in transit to bordering territories; Maayeh, 2009). Moreover, this article seeks to answer the question of whether illicit drugs are more prevalent in rural areas such as the governorates of Jerash and Ajloun. While it was hoped in undertaking this research that interviews with those struggling with drug addiction would be possible, social stigmas attached to addiction in Jordan prevented the opportunity for extensive interviews to take place. Accordingly, only interviews with ten individuals were able to be implemented for the purposes of this study. Therefore, the question of whether illicit drugs are more prevalent in rural areas in Jerash and Ajloun than in other areas will be answered according to the prevalence of media excerpts surrounding illicit drug use in these areas.



Jordanian Youth by Age, CIA World Factsheet*

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Briefing on the Anti-Narcotics Directorate: A Subdivision of the Public Security Directorate

A key component of the Public Security Directorate's structure is the Anti-Narcotics Division. On the Anti-Narcotics Division's website, the Public Security Directorate gives a briefing about the authorities' recognition of drug abuse in Jordan. Thus, this epidemic is not something that is hidden. Rather, it is a problem that is being actively combated by the authorities in order to protect Jordanian youth. The Global Information Network About Drugs cites the United Nations as stating that Jordan accounts for twenty-percent of seizures of amphetamine in the Middle East – the fifth-highest rate in the world (eight percent of the total; GINAD, 2009). On their website, the Anti-Narcotics Division discusses how from a very long time ago it has sought to bring public attention to this rising issue. In fact, the department was established in 1968, and seeks to pursue a prevention approach so as to prevent drug use and abuse before it becomes possible. Previously, however, it was tied to the Criminal Investigation Department, with correspondence being undertaken through the Customs Department. The criminal investigation department would then transfer any drug seizures through police stations to the civil courts. It was not until January 4, 1973 that a royal decree led to the establishment of an official Anti-Narcotics Department within the Public Security Directorate. This decree was established as a result of the Arab Security Chiefs and Police Conference held in Abu Dhabi. This made the Jordanian Anti-Narcotic Division only the second agency combating drug use in the Middle East. In fact, the first unit of the Anti-Narcotics Division was created in Northern Jordan, in Irbid, near the Jerash and Ajloun governorates which are the subject of this study. This was done so even before the Southern (Aqaba, Jordan) unit was established. It is thus interesting that the governorates of Jerash and Ajloun would thus face such issues. Subsequently, another unit was established in Al-Abadali, Amman to target Central Jordan. Later, the Anti-Narcotics Division would eventually span out to envelope the main cities and all governorates of Jordan, and would also create a treatment center for those battling drug addiction. The most prominent of these units was then created in 2002 in Dhahiyat Al-Yasmeen, Amman, and was equipped with the latest technology to allow for the employees to track drug-trafficking processes and to combat these processes accordingly. The establishment of these units highlights the level of royal attention given to this epidemic, illustrated by the

fact that on June 23, 1999, His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan visited the Anti-Narcotics Division, stressing the need to support the unit as much as possible in helping to combat drug use in Jordan (Briefing, n.d.). Below are examples of the pamphlets that the division uses to combat drug use. These are useful especially in schools and health clinics (belonging to the Ministry of Health) in order to illustrate and reiterate the dangers of drug use. Translations are available below each pamphlet's image:

Image 1



Translation: "Drugs: your road to exhaustion."

Image 2



Translation: "Drugs and bad friends."

Image 3



Translation: "Drugs: Straight to Hell"

Image 4



Image 5

Translation: "Drugs: Drug Magazine"



Translation: "Awareness Brochures"

Image 6



This image depicts an Anti-Narcotics helicopter in service in chasing down drug traffickers.

Image 7



Translation: "Hand in hand for a drug-free society"

It is clear from the translations of the images above that these pamphlets are mostly targeting youth, who would most likely respond to the cartoonish images depicted thereon. Obviously, the images seek to instill a type of fear within the youth who would read these pamphlets, and thus divert them from the path of drug use. At the same time, other pamphlet covers, such as the last one (Image 7), which depicts an image of hands held together seeking a drug-free society, aim to target parents and partners seeking to combat this epidemic together (Briefing, n.d.). To gain better insight into this epidemic, the following section will discuss some of the instances in which drug trafficking has occurred in Jordan, with particular emphasis on the Syrian border, and will aim to see if there is an increase in the media content surrounding the drug epidemic since the Syria Civil War began on March 15, 2011. Important to note before moving on to the media analysis, however, is that the Jordanian Government has also supported another initiative for the Badia area – namely, the Drug-Prevention Program / Drug's negative effects on the Badia. This program's aims are to increase awareness amongst youth, parents and educators on the dangers of drug use, in addition to highlight current drug-trafficking trends. It does this through three major discussion points: 1) prevention through awareness, 2) how to help drug addicts and connect them to free-of-charge treatment via the Anti-Drug Department and 3) how the whole society can battle drug use (Programs and Initiatives, 2017). Importantly as well, in the National Council to Fight Drugs' "National Strategy to Fight Drugs," the Council makes a strong connection between human development and anti-drug activities in stating that the productivity of any given population is directly linked to countries' ability to prevent disease – in this case, drug abuse (National Strategy to Fight Drugs, 2009).

Social Factors and Causes Influencing the Rise of Drug Use in Jordan

While it is difficult to determine the exact causes of instances of drug use amongst Jordanian youth, previous research indicates that although there is a high level of awareness amongst Jordanian youth regarding the harmful effects of drug use, in-depth awareness of the long-term effects of drug use was lacking (Haddad, Shotar, Umlauf and Al-Zyoud, 2010, p. 143). Haddad, et al.'s study also revealed that youth who responded to the study's survey claimed that they expect that those who use drugs do so to deal with anxiety and depression. Youth stages of experimentation were also cited as contributing factors to drug use, in addition to familial breakdowns of communication as a result of increasing pressure demands (Haddad, Shotar, Umlauf and Al-Zyoud, 2010, p. 144). Interestingly, Haddad, et al.'s article also cited higher levels of access to media as a factor contributing to awareness of the dangers of drug abuse (Haddad, Shotar, Umlauf and Al-Zyoud, 2010, p. 148).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research article uses interviews and content analysis as methodologies to both analyze available media excerpts to better determine whether illicit drug use is indeed becoming more prevalent amongst Jordanian youth or whether the rise in the presence of illicit drugs in Jordan is due to increased trafficking as a result of border security issues related to the Syrian Civil War. Due to the social stigma attached to drug addiction in Jordan, however, limited interview access was available throughout this research, with interviews requesting strict anonymity.

Content Analysis of Instances of Drug-Trafficking in Jordan as Identified through Media and other Resources

On February 22, 2014, three thousand packs of "Joker (a concoction of various chemicals)" were found in East Amman (Husseini, Feb 22, 2014). These were believed to be meant to remain in the locality as opposed to being trafficked to bordering territories. On July 21, 2014, Anti-Narcotics officers detained six individuals who were involved in trafficking one million Captagon pills to neighboring countries. Anti-Narcotic officials stated that although there are increased monitoring efforts on the borders, some individuals still manage to successfully traffic narcotics such as Captagon across the border, which in many cases is destined for neighboring countries (Husseini, Rana, July 21, 2014). On March 4, 2015, one-hundred and sixty-five thousand Captagon pills were found after suspected dealers were arrested in Amman and Mafraq (Jordan Times, March 4, 2015). On August 22, 2015, two hashish dealers were arrested with one kilogram of hashish in the rural area of Kufranjah, Ajloun. On October 4, 2015, a suspected Joker-dealer was detained in Kufranjah, Ajloun in possession of the illicit drug (Jordan Times, Oct 4, 2015). On March 18, 2016, thirty-eight thousand Captagon pills were seized on their way to a bordering territory hidden in a stove (Ammon News, March 18, 2016). On April 13, 2016, the Minister of Interior commented on the fact that the Kingdom remained a corridor – as opposed to a manufacturing hub – for drug-trafficking, with around four thousand hash cases and over three and a half million pills of Captagon having been seized by the border patrol (Jordan Times, April 13, 2016). On April 28, 2016, six suspected Joker-dealers were arrested in Kufranjah, Ajloun and surrounding areas (Husseini, April 28, 2016). On September 7, 2016, thirteen million pills of Captagon were seized coming from Syria on their way to Jordan's bordering territories (Al-Arabiya, September 7, 2016). On September 8, 2016, Anti-Narcotics officers seized slightly over thirteen million Captagon (amphetamine) pills in Amman. An Anti-Narcotics official blamed the increased smuggling trends on the effects of the Syrian crisis, stating that since the crisis began, drug-trafficking trends have greatly increased over the last few years, with smugglers storing drugs (especially Captagon) in baby cribs, tiles and staple foods such as olives and desserts (Jordan Times, September 8, 2016). On February 22, 2017, an individual was detained in Ajloun with Joker (Jordan Times, Feb 22, 2017). On June 6, 2017, thirteen thousand Captagon pills and one-hundred-twelve cases of hash were seized from individuals who were attempting to smuggle drugs in illegally from the border (The Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2017). On June 8, 2017, approximately nine million Captagon pills were seized while they were being prepared for transit to a bordering territory (Jordan Times, June 8, 2017).

Interview Data

Anonymous interviews were taken with twenty individuals struggling with drug addiction throughout Jerash and Ajloun (ten in Jerash Governorate and ten in Ajloun Governorate [Kufranjah]). Ten of these individuals live in Kufranjah, a small rural area located in Ajloun

Governorate, with the remaining ten individuals living in the outskirts of Jerash (including Sakeb and Raymoun, both rural towns between Jerash and Ajloun). Questions were open-ended rather than being pre-determined, although they generally elicited family history of drug abuse, socioeconomic status, family income and perceived hopes regarding the interviewee's future. Fourteen of the twenty interviewees stated that they come from a poor economic background and that they are obligated to take care of their families as a result of parental disabilities or unemployment. Therefore, they struggle to attain the funds necessary to sustain their family's dependents, which increases their daily pressure. Interestingly, five of the individuals come from middle-class backgrounds, and entered the world of drug use recreationally through school friends. One individual did not give a clear answer regarding their familial socioeconomic background. Regarding perceived hopes towards their own futures, only six of the twenty interviewees were considering seeking medical attention to help the overcome their substance abuse issues – and even they were hesitant due to fear that their parents would find out that they were struggling with addiction.

Purpose of this Study / Research Implications

The research undertaken in this article is significant because it highlights an emerging issue within the Jordanian context – that of illicit drug use amongst Jordanian youth. It is also significant because it connects the rise in illicit drug use amongst Jordanian youth with the element of border security as associated with the Syrian Civil War. Importantly, the issue of illicit drug use amongst Jordanian youth is a topic that has only slightly been researched globally, as it is contemporary. In this sense, this article helps set the stage for further research that should be taken in order to better understand this new phenomenon. Such research, as will be discussed further below, should target underlying causes such as unemployment and the breakdown in familial communication along with the accompanying weakening of communal ties.

CONCLUSION

This research undertook a content analysis of contemporary media excerpts in order to determine whether the rise in illicit drugs in Jordan is simply a perpetuation of historical trends of Jordan serving as a corridor for bordering territories, or whether there is indeed a rise in illicit drug use amongst Jordanian youth. Moreover, this article sought evidence to support anecdote regarding the prevalence of illicit drugs in rural areas of Jerash and Ajloun. Accordingly, the majority of excerpts that were analyzed illustrated that three main drugs were being trafficked in to the country – 1) Captagon, a drug that is being shipped primarily to bordering territories, 2) hashish, a drug that is being shipped primarily to bordering territories, and 3) Joker, a drug that is primarily being used within localities. Interestingly, among all of the media excerpts that were available throughout this research, Ajloun (and Kufranjah in particular) were singled out as having a significantly higher presence of illicit drugs than other areas outside of Amman. Limited interview access to twenty individuals confirmed that poor socioeconomic familial backgrounds and opportunities contributed to the propensity for drug use, with only a minimal number of individuals hoping to seek medical attention to help the battle their drug addictions. Further research is suggested to determine why this is the case. Such research should focus presumably on the levels of unemployment in these areas and the prevalence of youth activities.

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