

# A Study of the Male High School Male Students' Knowledge and Attitude to Addiction in Urmia, Iran, 2013

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## Abstract

**Background:** Addiction is a serious social problem that can effect on the future of the youth as the most valuable asset for every nation. It threatens not only the lives of millions of people of the world, but also ruins many social values and norms. The best way to confront with addiction is prevention and teenagers should be educated about complications of drugs by the experts and researchers at their schools.

**Objectives:** The aim of this study was to determine the knowledge and attitudes of male high-school students of the harms of Addiction in Urmia, Iran.

**Patients and Methods:** This is a cross sectional study in which, 306 male students from high schools in Urmia city were selected based on simple sampling by using a demographic and researcher-designed questionnaire. The validity of the questionnaire both in terms of content and appearance was verified by the board members of the Urmia University of Medical Sciences, and the reliability with the internal compatibility index.

**Results:** Most of the samples stated that they told their parents about their new friends, as an indication of the families' control on them and believed that curiosity is an important factor in addiction, and declared that media's depiction of the harms of addiction has biased them against drug use. Also, it was obvious that the samples' demographic characteristics, including age, neighborhood, previous grade average, number of siblings and parents' education, did not have a significant correlation with their knowledge of and attitude to addiction ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions:** Based on the results, it is recommended to enhance students' knowledge; about factors that may encouraged them to be addicted; and educational programs in the media be reinforced. In addition, the authorities should support the youth by screening programs and the establishment of counseling settlements for identify and eliminating the contributory factors to drug addiction.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Attitude, Students, Addictive Behavior, Iran

## 1. Background

Increasing rate of drug addiction for medication and recreational purposes is one of the major challenges in most countries around the world that threatens not only the lives of millions of people every year, but many moral values and norms (1). Many people belonging to various age groups and social classes are seriously addicted to drugs. The risk of serious health problems not only threatens the health of them, but leads to psychological deterioration (2). The terms "addiction" and "addict" are variously interpreted by sociologists and national authorities: some regard addiction a crime and the others see it as an illness. In either case, addiction has proved costly to individuals, families and governments. In Iran, open and secret addictions are widespread and the youth are increasingly becoming addicted to drugs (3). In Iran, Addiction is con-

sidered the greatest preventable health concern at present (4). Drug addiction is disapproved by most societies may involve the illegal use for the relief of medical problems or recreational purposes without a health care practitioner's prescription (5).

Among the important factors that can encourage Addiction are poverty, family issues, bad models in one's environment and unemployment. The theoretical part of the study reveals that factors encouraging Addiction fall into two categories: personal and social. Studies show that about 37 percent of people above 12 years old in the U. S. have taken illegal drugs at least once (6). In Iran, according to the records, there are about 1,200,000 regular drug users and about 800,000 occasional users (7). Addiction in Iran is responsible for the loss of 60,000,000 \$ per year (8). Another important fact about Addiction is that many addicts who had been rehabilitated start using drugs again.

Many studies have addressed this issue (9).

Having positive attitudes towards drug addiction appears to be a combination of risk factors causing the exposure of the teenagers to a general social discourse (10). High-school years are a critical time in terms of adopting health-related habits and one's lifestyle (11). Studies show that at adolescence one is most vulnerable to Addiction. Such factors as a desire for personal and social respect, pleasure, low self-confidence and poor communicative skills encourage adolescents to use drugs; however, education can change young adults' attitudes and behaviors (12).

Drug addiction is a chronic and recurring disorder with significant adverse social, psychological, physical, and economical effects. In Iran, Addiction is the most important preventable health concern. Most of the drug-related statistics in Iran are based on studies conducted by foreign researchers, and so far there have been few in-depth studies on the contributing factors to drug addiction and reversion to Addiction in view of the cultural and economic traditions in Iran in general and in Urmia in particular. The fact that attempts at curing drug addicts fail partly due to the scanty attention paid to the vulnerable age groups like high-school students, necessitates an investigation into the attitude of these people to drugs as well as the social conditions in Urmia in relation to Addiction. The results of such studies can not only give us new insights, but provide health experts with invaluable information on factors that have created the current attitudes and consequently be used to design more effective preventive measures. Considering the geographical position of Urmia and the easy accessibility of illegal drugs in this city and the fact that Addiction in most cases can be traced back to school years, it is vital to examine students' knowledge and attitude to Addiction before preventive measures can be taken and the treatments can be made more efficient.

## 2. Objectives

The present study was conducted to evaluate determine the knowledge and attitudes of male high-school students of the harms of Addiction in Urmia, Iran.

## 3. Patients and Methods

This is a cross sectional study. The samples for this study were selected from among male high-school students in districts one and two of the city of Urmia, Iran. Selection was based on the following criteria: being a high-school student in Urmia at the time of the study, being conscious during the interview and while completing

the questionnaire, not suffering from any psychological disorders, and giving consent. Sampling was based on the method of simple sampling, and 306 students were selected on the assumption that 50% of the sample has knowledge regarding the issue, with a confidence interval of 95% and accuracy of 0.05%. Initially, the high-schools in districts one and two were classified based on the vulnerability of the neighborhoods as determined by the Addiction Prevention Center of Urmia. Subsequently, schools, classes and students were randomly selected. In every school, one class in each grade was selected and the entire students in the class were interviewed and tested. Questionnaires were used to collect data, and the validity of the tools was determined by face validity and content validity methods. The researcher designed the questionnaire based on the available books and articles on the issue. The questionnaire both in terms of face and content validity was evaluated by five board members at the Medical University of Urmia and the necessary corrections were made. To verify face validity, the questionnaire was assessed by ten male high school students. The test-retest reliability was confirmed with a correlation coefficient of 84% in two stages with an interval of a month by 25 male high school students.

The tool of the study was designed in two parts: part one included questions about the participant's personal characteristics, i.e. age, gender, number of siblings, ethnicity, neighborhood district, parents' education, parents' occupations, and the participant's last year's grade average; part two included questions designed to determine the participant's level of knowledge and attitude to Addiction. Part two consisted of 26 questions about the contributory factors to Addiction, the symptoms, treatment and prevention, and 19 questions about the participant's attitude. The language of the questions was simple so as not to confuse the students. Once completed, the questionnaires were collected and graded. Each correct answer was assigned one point, and the incorrect answers were not assigned any points. Before the questionnaires were distributed, the researchers introduced themselves and the objectives of the study and obtained the students' consent to participate. To analyze the collected data, descriptive statistics including tables and such indexes as average and regression and inferential statistics including student's t-test together with SPSS 16 were used. In the interests of ethics, the students were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point, their answers were kept secret, and their names were not required.

#### 4. Results

The average age of the 306 students who participated in this study was  $16.48 \pm 0.82$ , their last year's grade average  $16.8 \pm 1.69$ , and their average number of family members was  $4.39 \pm 0.97$ . The ethnicity of the 306 students was as follows: 282 (92.2%) Turkish, 20 (7.8%) Kurdish and Persian. The participants believed that the responsibility of educating them with regard to Addiction rested in order of importance with their teachers, parents, doctors, nurses and school counselors (Table 1). Regarding the students' reactions to drugs, it was discovered that 83.6% are able to categorically reject an offer to use drugs, 7.51% had met a drug addict, 1.3% had an addicted relative, 2.9% had been offered drugs by their friends, 21.2% had smoking fathers, 0% had met addicts of their own age. The participants were most intimate with the following: 84.6% with their friends, 9% with their families, and 7.4% with their teachers.

88% of the participants stated that they told their parents about their friends in details, 99% believed that curiosity encourages Addiction, 94.4% mentioned that the information provided by the media about the harmful effects of drugs persuades them to avoid drugs, only 2% admitted that they had remained friends with people whom they guess were addicted, 2% stated that did not mind going to places where drugs may be used, 7% discussed drug-related topics with their friends, 4% discussed drug-related topics with their families, 1% discussed drug-related topics with their teachers, only 21% stated that they would try to know people before they start a friendship, 7% believed that drug addicts deserve sympathy, and 82.7% considered cigarette smoking as a causative factor in drug addiction.

Moreover, the participants listed 12 factors as resulting in Addiction, which were in order of importance: insufficient job opportunities, insufficient control on the part of families, immorality and decadence in the society, easy accessibility of drugs, prevalence of Addiction, personal tendencies, insufficient recreational facilities, initial curiosity, desire for tranquility, desire for self-confidence, pressure at school, and desire for power (Table 2). It was discovered that the participants' demographic characteristics age, neighborhood, last year's average grade, number of family members, parents' education did not have a meaningful correlation with their knowledge to Addiction ( $P = 5\%$ ) (Table 3).

#### 5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess the knowledge and attitude of male high-school students to Addiction in Urmia in districts one and two. The results show that the participants' demographic characteristics did not have a

**Table 1.** The Best Educator With Regard to Addiction From the Participants' Attitudes<sup>a</sup>

Educator	Value
Teachers	69 $\pm$ 33.46
Parents	60.6 $\pm$ 20.64
Doctors	60 $\pm$ 24.22
Nurses	55.4 $\pm$ 34.9
School counselors	55 $\pm$ 24.12

<sup>a</sup> Data are presented as Mean  $\pm$  SD.

**Table 2.** Contributory Factors in Addiction From the Participants' Viewpoint (The Scores Are out of 100)<sup>a</sup>

Factors	Average
Insufficient job opportunities	69.85 $\pm$ 31.02
Insufficient control on the part of families	62.24 $\pm$ 31.51
Immorality and decadence in the society	57.81 $\pm$ 31
Easy accessibility of drugs	57.38 $\pm$ 31.19
Prevalence of Addiction	56.25 $\pm$ 34.14
Personal tendencies	54.58 $\pm$ 31.04
Insufficient recreational facilities	49.84 $\pm$ 34.76
Initial curiosity	48.25 $\pm$ 35.31
Desire for tranquility	45.33 $\pm$ 35.84
Desire for self confidence	42.05 $\pm$ 35.41
Pressure at school	40.25 $\pm$ 35.25
Desire for power	38.46 $\pm$ 35

<sup>a</sup> Data are presented as Mean  $\pm$  SD.

**Table 3.** The Relationship Between the Students' Demographic Variables With Their Knowledge to Addiction<sup>a</sup>

Variables	Value	Relationship Among the Variables	
		Correlation Coefficient	P Value
Age	16.84 $\pm$ 0.82	0.146	0.072
Neighborhood	11.45 $\pm$ 2.67	0.035	0.67
Last year's average grade	16.8 $\pm$ 1.69	0.084	0.339
Number of family members	4.39 $\pm$ 0.97	0.124	0.125
Father's education	2.76 $\pm$ 1.49	0.029	0.721
Mother's education	2.48 $\pm$ 1.23	0.101	0.123

<sup>a</sup> Data are presented as Mean  $\pm$  SD.

meaningful correlation with their knowledge and attitude to Addiction. In addition, from the participants' point of view, the most important causative factors in Addiction were, in order of importance: insufficient job opportunities, insufficient control on the part of families, immorality and decadence in the society, easy accessibility of drugs, prevalence of Addiction, personal tendencies, insufficient recreational facilities, initial curiosity about the effects of drugs, desire for tranquility, desire for self-confidence, pressure at school, and desire for power.

In agreement with the findings of this study, Jabbari Beyrami et al. (13) in their study of the attitudes of 500 adolescent students to Addiction, dangerous behaviors and people they socialized with, discovered that the majority of the students disapproved of drugs and only 10% believed that drugs can contribute to feelings of happiness. Most of the participants in the study discussed drugs-related issues with their, in order of preference, friends, families, and teachers, and only a few did not mention their friends to their parents. In contrast with the findings of this study, in other study, there was a meaningful correlation between the students' appropriate behaviors and average grades (13).

Studies show that drug addiction and the resultant psychological disorders are closely related to a society's culture and social and economic conditions (14). According to a study, 25% of high-school students in Tehran are prone to Addiction and it is estimated that 5% have actually used drugs (15). Different age groups are liable to use drugs for different reasons. However, adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable. They spend more time outside their homes and are more influenced by their peers, friends and surroundings than by their own families' members (16).

Generally, drug addiction is more common in cities than in rural societies. Some researchers explain that this is due to the relative disorder, poor relationships, and inefficient social monitoring in cities (17). Students' interaction with their schools and societies in the eighth grade affects their mental health, educational success and attitude to drugs in the future. Consequently, one way to reduce drug addiction among adults is to discourage Addiction among adolescents, design knowledge programs and correct the adolescents' attitude to addiction, addicts and drugs and finally encourage a healthier lifestyle (18). According to a study in Ardebil (2005), socializing with indecent people, unpleasant experiences, and emotional parents increase risks of using drugs among students. Moreover, educational success or failure, peers, parents' attitude to drugs and one's first contact with drugs are important indicators for a young adult's future attitude to drugs (19).

In our study, most of the samples referred to necessity

of family control and integrity. In another study (1999), 78% of addicts had addicted friends. This finding is in agreement with Sutherland's theory according to which addicted and pervert friends are one of the important causes of using drugs (20). A history of drug addiction in a family can directly affect young adult and adults' behavior. Basically, the close connections among family members in Iran can relatively encourage Addiction when there is an addicted person in the family (21). Parental guidance combined with support and consequential relationship may prevent drug addiction among teenagers (22).

Next to economic issues, relationships, both inside and outside families, were among the factors examined in this study. Conditions like lack of communication in the family, parents' indifference to the future of their children, and socializing with inappropriate people were referred to in this study. There has always been a meaningful correlation between the family parents in particular and children's tendency to use drugs: children who are close to their parents and enjoy their spiritual and psychological support are less liable to Addiction. Even parents' physical presence at home affects children's liability to addiction. The family is the main site for monitoring an individual's behavior; however, if it becomes corrupt, the family can encourage addiction. Children whose parents are severe or divorced are more prone to addiction (23, 24). According to a study in Scotland, most of the studied families believed that preventive education should be provided in elementary schools, and in many developed countries, governments have significantly decreased Addiction through organized education (25). Therefore, preventive education programs need to be designed for very young children in Iran so that they will adopt a negative attitude to drugs from the beginning. To design such programs, it is necessary to evaluate Iranian students' current knowledge of and attitude to addiction.

Adolescence is a critical period in the development of interactions with one's environment. Due to the quick physical, psychological, social, cultural, and cognitive changes that adolescents experience, they are subject to various threats to their health. It is mostly at this period that the youth begin to practice dangerous behaviors (26). Dangerous behaviors like addiction can not only threaten the youth's health but the prosperity of societies. Studies show that Addiction-related behaviors are formed as a result of such factors as social groups, families, friends, schools, neighborhoods and personal tendencies (27). The participants in the study believed that the responsibility of educating them rests, in order of importance, with their teachers, parents, doctors, nurses, and school health counselors. The participants believed that the responsibility of educating them with regard to Addiction rests, in order of

importance, with their teachers, parents, doctors, nurses, and school health counselors. These results almost agree with the results of similar studies (28, 29).

The participants in this study declared that they could firmly reject an offer to use drugs, and were not deemed liable to addiction. This fact stresses the important monitoring role of parents and school authorities in the prevention of addiction. Since the participants stated that they had rarely been in contact with drug addicts either in their families or the society, it seems necessary to prevent students from contacting suspicious people. Though few of the participants had been offered by their friends to use drugs, the influence of acquaintances should be taken seriously. Since the participants were most intimate, in order of magnitude, with their friends, families, and teachers, it is essential to monitor the youth's relationship with their peers. It is also important to study the reasons for the adolescents' limited contact with their families and teachers.

Intimated friends socially supported students who have poor knowledge or even wrong ideas about the harm caused by drug and it was in urgent need to effectively develop preventive education based on the characteristics of them and the informal education adolescents receive in their peer groups (30). Adolescents who are liable to become intimate with corrupt peers are those who have defective social skills e.g. insolence, refusal to take part in group activities, refusal to sympathize with others and are not socially accepted by their peers. Studies show that one of the major indications of a young adult's tendency to use drugs is befriending addicted peers. Neighborhoods play an important role in making such friendships, and the consequent availability of drugs, possible (31).

Most of the participants in this study stated that they mentioned their friends to their parents so that their parents knew who they socialized with. This finding points to families' successful monitoring of their children's friends. Since the majority of the participants referred to curiosity as a reason for Addiction, and stated that the information presented by the media convinced them to avoid drugs, it is vital that families control the information received by the youth and answer their questions. Only a few of the participants admitted that they remained friends with people whom they suspected were addicted to drugs, and would not mind going to places where drugs were available; however, it is important that families and school authorities monitor the people and places students visit.

Among the protective factors in Addiction are religiousness, participation in school activities, and interest in sports. According to the National Institute for Drug Prevention, failure at school is correlated with addiction. Problems and pressure at school make students estranged from school; as a result, they will seek ways to lessen this sense of

estrangement, one of which is befriending peers who are like them (32).

Other studies identify various threatening and protective factors in addiction: families' poor reactions, addiction in the family, parents' inefficient monitoring, conflicts in the family, child-centered parenting, lack of intimacy between parents and children, insufficient support, availability of drugs, parents' abuse of drugs, the social and cultural environment and peers are identified as factors that encourage addiction. Personal factors that encourage addiction include desire for excitement, recalcitrance, violence, riotousness, tolerance for perversion, and poor academic progress (28, 33). The entire participants in this study regarded addiction and socializing with drug addicts as dangerous. According to a study, the most important perceptions in adolescents that need correction are the beliefs that occasional use of drugs is not addictive and that it is relatively safe to socialize with drug addicts. Students must be informed about these misconceptions (29).

Unfortunately, only a limited number of the participants were willing to discuss addiction with their parents and teachers. It is important to investigate the causes of this remoteness between adolescents and their parents and school authorities. In addition, most of the participants revealed that they do not try to know a person before they befriend him, hence the need for monitoring on the part of their elders. Fortunately, most of the participants considered smoking as leading to addiction and addictive in itself. This perception should be propagated. Young adults should also be taught how to resist peer pressure and how to start a relationship. Such interventions are called teaching the necessary skills to resist Addiction and are emphasized in many studies (28). Obviously, appropriate programs on the media will reinforce the existing values and correct people's behavior with regard to addiction (2).

A study on a number of adolescent students reveals that there is a meaningful correlation between the youth's attitude to addiction and their tendency to use drugs. This finding signifies that drug prevention programs in schools should be designed so as to inculcate students with a negative attitude to drug addiction (34). The participants cited the following factors as the causative factors in addiction: insufficient job opportunities, insufficient control on the part of families, immorality and decadence in the society, easy accessibility of drugs, prevalence of Addiction, personal tendencies, insufficient recreational facilities, initial curiosity, desire for tranquility, desire for self-confidence, pressure at school, and desire for power. Measures should be taken by managers and authorities to eliminate these factors and discourage people from using drugs at an early age. NGOs can play an important role in drug prevention

programs; workshops can likewise prove effective in promoting addiction prevention. In addition to the education provided at schools, the media can also enhance students' knowledge and alter their attitude to Addiction (35).

In view of the results obtained about male high-school students' knowledge of and attitude to addiction in Urmia in districts 1 and 2, it is suggested that rules be set and implemented to increase students' knowledge, causative factors be reduced or eliminated, and counseling centers be established. The findings of this study can be employed to further identify the problems that need to be addressed in adolescents, raise knowledge about the evils of addiction and its adverse effects on the present and future conditions of the nation, use the available health and educational services more effectively, and finally facilitate counseling parents and teachers so that they can predict and prevent the problems adolescents will face. It is also recommended that educational programs be made by qualified experts and broadcast by the media. The suggested guidelines will be reported to the capitals of the other provinces.

There should be more comprehensive studies to investigate the causes of addiction in view of the current conditions in Iran, and more effective laws should be passed to fight addiction.

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### Footnotes

**Authors' Contributions:** Nader Aghakhani carried out the design and coordinated the study, and carried out data analysis. Camellia Torabizadeh prepared and translated the manuscript and made critical revisions to the paper. Abbas Zarei and Ali Eftekhari and Yaser Moradi provided assistance in the design of the study and participated in manuscript preparation and data gathering. All authors have read and approved the content of the manuscript.

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