

# Review of: "The Hidden Aspects of A Century of Substance Use Policymaking in Iran"

Ramin Radfar<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tehran University of Medical Sciences

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The manuscript explores the problem of substance use in a historical context, and attempts to show the possible factors that influenced Iran's policies and actions in the field of drugs, mainly opium and opiates. Although the view is very interesting and can give the audience a more holistic view of substance use in the communities, there are some issues that need to be addressed, such as:

- The authors mention the Council Against Opium and Alcohol (CnAOA) as an active civil society in the decades 30-60, and also mention that the ministry of finance did not follow CnAOA's recommendations, which is completely true. However, the point is that, essentially, which NGOs at that time and even now have the power to effectively influence the government's policies in Iran?
- The paper includes many occasions, turns and U-turns in policies, which can be a bit confusing. My recommendation is to put a figure that includes times and changes in parallel with each other.
- The authors mention that neither MOH nor psychiatrists are happy with general practitioners as important players in the field of harm reduction and treatment (which for me as an Iranian is completely understandable), but from the methodology point of view, I recommend citing some references for this claim or mentioning that this is the perception of the authors.
- In table 2, HIV prevalence among PWID is mentioned as 14% in 2016-2020. This prevalence is much higher than what has been cited in at least one published article as 3.5%. The article is available here: Khezri, M., Shokoohi, M., Mirzazadeh, A. et al. HIV Prevalence and Related Behaviors Among People Who Inject Drugs in Iran from 2010 to 2020. *AIDS Behav* 26, 2831–2843 (2022).
- One of the main and maybe the most important players in the establishment and budgeting of harm reduction and treatment in Iran after the 1979 revolution, is Drug Control Head Quarter (DCHQ), which is unfortunately completely neglected in the article.
- Based on data in table 3, the authors conclude that fierce penalties have also not resulted in a reduced magnitude of smuggling. I think that for this conclusion, we need to consider many other factors. The most important factor is poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, which increased from 79,000 hectares in 1994 to 330,000 hectares in 2017 (UNODC. *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017: Challenges to Sustainable Development, Peace and Security*). I recommend adding the

percentage of seized drugs in Iran with production in Afghanistan.

- There are also some small typos, such as the affiliations of the authors (there is no NO6 affiliation for Dr.Razzaghi in text) or the spelling of reference for table 1 (Hensen or Hansen?)