

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

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The manuscript provides a critical and insightful analysis of Iran's historical approach to substance use policies. It highlights various policy strategies employed by the Iranian government and underscores their motivations and implications beyond the surface. It sets the stage by mentioning the diverse array of policies Iran has experimented with over time, such as nonintervention, regulation, legalization, prohibition, and criminalization.

The study extensively reviews the literature, however, it seems that the review might be aligned to support a predetermined theoretical framework. Methodological transparency is lacking, notably in elucidating the search strategy, raising concerns about potential bias introduced by the authors to substantiate their viewpoint.

Furthermore, the study falls short in contextualizing drug use and drug use control policymaking within the broader landscape of overall public policymaking and the societal environment, disproportionately emphasizing the role of foreign entities. Notably, the study overlooks key social movements within Iran, starting from the constitutionalism movement, which significantly influenced overall public policy, including drug use policies. This bias is particularly pronounced in the analysis of policymaking post the Islamic Revolution.

The authors posit that policy decisions based on criminalizing drug use stem from a linear assumption—that criminalizing the trade and consumption of illegal and controlled substances would reduce their prevalence among the populace. However, this analysis overlooks a nuanced understanding of the nature of the drug smuggling trade and its ramifications, notably the potential price escalation and increased benefits to smugglers, factors that likely influence policymaking.

Additionally, while the authors rightly acknowledge the negligence towards successful initiatives like self-help groups and harm reduction programs, they fail to adequately address the underlying root causes. Specifically, the conflicts of interest within and outside the health sector are significant factors directing policies toward supply reduction or in favor of coercive approaches such as boot camps.

The authors accurately acknowledge the practice of scapegoating drug users and assigning blame to them, linking it to the concept of safeguarding societal social integrity. Iranian society has been examined by numerous sociologists and is often characterized as an insular society with limited social integrity. The prevalent tendency to hold individuals accountable and attribute responsibility to them for various societal problems, including environmental degradation and inflation, is widespread in Iran and by the authorities. Consequently, it is imperative to contextualize the prevalent blame directed at drug users within the broader framework of Iran's public policy.

In summary, this study is thought-provoking; inviting the reader to engage with the historical analysis of Iran's substance use policies and their broader implications. The concluding statement encapsulates the main argument succinctly, pointing out that Iran's substance use policies have predominantly favored politically expedient and oppressive options over medical approaches. However, the findings are tinged with bias, oversimplifying the issue through a narrow and limited lens.