

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

Catherine Comiskey¹

¹ University of Dublin, Trinity College

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Review

I was delighted to review this paper and to have an opportunity to learn something new in a region I know very little about. I have published on the Irish approach to drug policy making and was very interested in reading about other approaches. My training was initially scientific in quantitative methods and more recently in qualitative and mixed methods. My review comments may be influenced by this.

Abstract

It was amazing to see in your second sentence the range of policy approaches. To enhance this it would be good if you could insert the years the varying policies from non-intervention to criminalization were in operation.

Can you structure your abstract please? It would have helped me as a reader of the abstract to know before I read the findings that this was a historical review. Can you tell us more about how you approached this review, what period of time it covered, what and how articles or documents were accessed and assessed. Did you have an outline framework for example. The sentence, 'Exploring Iran's substance use policies suggests that the Iranian government has been more concerned with byproducts of policies such as financial revenue, promoting diplomacy, and maintaining power, rather than genuinely alleviating the substance trade and addiction', reads more like a conclusion and could be moved nearer to the end of the abstract.

Introduction

A very interesting read, thank you.

Where in reference number 13 is the sentence, 'Tackling the substance use problem, Iran has experimented with the widest variety of approaches and cycling paradigms including non-intervention, legalization, prohibition, and criminalization [13]', supported? Does this reference list these paradigms operating within Iran? I ask as I would like to read about this.

In the final paragraph of the introduction, you say that the current review 'strives to analyze the latent sociological dynamics', perhaps this aim could be stated in the abstract to keep the stated focus of the paper consistent across the writing. The second last sentence of this paragraph strays into findings, I would remove this sentence.

Section on: Revenue over Citizens Welfare: The Shanghai Conference and the Push for Regulation 1909-1930

I cannot comment here on the content as it is not my area of expertise but I love your provocative statement, 'Some scholars have even argued that Britain was acting as a narco-empire [22] and had to defend itself from the US prohibitionist approach.' I think this statement challenges all of us to examine our histories considering some current possibly entrenchment of attitudes.

I also thought that the last paragraph of this section was very thought provoking in terms today of the profusion of the prison economy and the incarceration of people who use drugs who likely have mental and other health challenges yet endure the lasting stigma of incarceration. This relates to your point on the historical need for finance for a hasty industrialization over the need of people who used opium.

Section: Medical Discourse: The Rise and Fall of Physicians 1930-1960

Again I cannot comment directly on the content but I enjoyed reading this section and relating it possibly to the present day practices for opiate substitution prescribing.

Discussion section: I am not sure the word 'hidden' is necessary or accurate in the first sentence. In my opinion you have provided a detailed historical analysis within the global context. This I think is a more powerful and useful way to frame what you have achieved.

I am not sure if the arguments you present in the paper support your claim that, 'the ministry of health in particular, are more concerned in quantities rather than qualities'. You haven't demonstrated this with quantities in your findings. Perhaps the ministries were more concerned with finance and professions were more concerned with power, would this be a more accurate statement given the evidence you present?

I really like your point on the responsibility of the state versus that of the individual and I think this is a strong point that is supported by your evidence. You could make this a more prominent point in your discussion where you state, 'Furthermore, while low socioeconomic status and unemployment are blamed as risk factors for substance use individuals who use substances are often regarded as fully responsible for their behavior and their dependence.'

Finally given that capital punishment has been used as part of the policies I think this needs to be given more detailed attention.

To conclude, I found this a most interesting and thought provoking paper. With some minor editing and perhaps the toning down of some value statements the points you make will actually be stronger. Let the evidence you have presented so well speak for itself.

Thank you.