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**SUBSTANCE ADDICTION AND MEDIA AS AN
EDUCATIONAL TOOL**

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Abstract

The importance of the role of the media in substance addiction is discussed today. While the media can have positive effects, it can also negatively affect addicts and their families. In this study, it is thought that it will be useful to reveal how the media can be used as an educational tool to prevent substance addiction. It is known that many stakeholders are effective in both the prevention and treatment processes of addiction. In this study, it is aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the media, which is one of the stakeholders in question. Perceptions will be sought to the questions "What role should the media play in awareness raising or awareness activities for addiction?", "What are the wrongs and truths of the media in dealing with addiction?" In this study, a literature review will be carried out. In the literature review, a conceptual framework will be drawn by accessing current sources. In particular, it is aimed to use current reports, theses and articles. The article will include sub-headings on the basis of research questions. It should be said that a critical approach will be adopted. According to the results of the research, the subject of substance addiction is examined in the media under six themes in the literature. One of the learning of substance addiction environments is the media. The media encourages drug use. In the media, drug use is reflected as a sensational and magazine issue. Media mostly focus on crime in substance addiction news. By labeling substance addicts, the media causes them to be excluded from society. Drug marketing (Narcomarketing) is done in the media. As a result, suggestions were presented on how the media can play a preventive and awareness-raising role based on the literature.

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1. Introduction

Substance addiction is a multidimensional public health problem that concerns not only the individual who uses it, but also his family, close environment and society in general. Substance addiction, which has biological, psychological and social components, brings with it many economic, political and social problems as well as physical and mental problems. An interdisciplinary approach is required to reveal the causes and solutions of this problem (Karasaç-Gezen, 2018). Substance use is an important problem and should be evaluated with all its dimensions and risk factors, as in Cyprus, Turkey and other European countries. These dimensions are; medical, legal, educational, social and security dimensions (Ulusoy, 2017). The media has a great responsibility in the functional use of all these dimensions.

The media plays an important role in sharing the scientific developments related to substance abuse to the public and informing people accurately and reliably. In the field of health, the media is among the primary news sources that the society applies to get information (Karasaç-Gezen, 2018). As long as the need for information about health in the society cannot be obtained from reliable and competent sources, people try to get these needs themselves. They mostly provide information with easily accessible media. Therefore, today, media are in a very important position in transmitting information about public health to large masses and in directing people to positive health behaviors (Karasaç-Gezen, 2018).

Drugs have always been a newsworthy topic in the media. Since it occupies such a place on the media, the issue of how it is presented has always attracted attention. When we look at what is on the agenda in the media about drugs; drug trade, drug-mafia relations, operations by law enforcement officers, the amount of drugs seized and their monetary value, deaths as a result of drug use are seen to be on the agenda. It is observed that the issues such as the entry of these illegal substances into the country, how they are easily accessible, the harms of drugs, the causes of addiction, how addiction occurs, how to prevent addiction, what parents should pay attention to in terms of addiction in their children, and the treatment of addiction are not covered enough in the media (Karasaç-Gezen, 2018).

It is known that the media, as one of the socialization tools, is a tool that encourages addiction. It is stated that especially in recent years, by using the themes of "fear" and "anxiety", it has become an exclusionary tool rather than an incentive. Therefore, as in other social issues, it should be taken into account that the media is a very powerful tool in influencing and directing the society on substance abuse. The meaning of the perception created in the society and the messages given should be questioned meticulously, and social goals should be pursued instead of worrying about increasing the circulation and rating (Özgür et al., 2011).

2. Research Questions and Methodology

The importance of the role of the media in substance addiction is discussed today. While the media can have positive effects, it can also negatively affect addicts and their families. In this study, it is thought that it will be useful to reveal how the media can be used as an educational tool to prevent substance addiction. In the study, two research questions were determined and tried to be answered. These two questions are:

- i. How are addictions and addicts reflected in the media in Northern Cyprus and Turkey?
- ii. How should the media be used as an educational tool to prevent substance addiction?
- iii. It is known that many stakeholders are effective in both the prevention and treatment processes of addiction. In this study, it is aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the media, which is one of the stakeholders in question. Perceptions will be sought to the questions "What role should the media play in awareness raising or awareness activities for addiction?", "What are the wrongs and truths of the media in dealing with addiction?"

In this study, a literature review will be carried out. In the literature review, a conceptual framework will be drawn by accessing current sources. In particular, it is aimed to use current reports, theses and articles. The article will include sub-headings on the basis of research questions. It should be said that a critical approach will be adopted.

3. Examining Media and Substance Addiction Issues

Within the scope of this title, six themes reached as a result of the literature review are presented and briefly explained.

3.1. Learning about drugs through media

Balseven et al. (2002) emphasize that drugs and their usage patterns should not be shown directly in the news in the media. In a study conducted by Austin and Nach-Ferguson, it was determined that children between the ages of 7 and 12 learn about alcohol knowledge and experiences first from television and then from their families. Yedekçi (2017) reveals that most people, who have no knowledge or idea about drugs, have knowledge through media. In his study, Türkmen (2019) revealed that although the time spent on social media did not have a significant effect on drug, the use of YouTube and Twitter affected the information process about substance use. It has been observed that seeing drug and substance-related posts on social media platforms is effective in obtaining information.

In Şekercioğlu's (2018) research, it was revealed that the subject of drugs was frequently included in the media contents, but it was emphasized that it was not treated with care. Some experts argue that the content published in the news is created in a superficial and careless way. This situation causes young people to acquire wrong information about drugs and substance use. In Tieberghien's (2014) study, it was revealed that the information presented in the media in health news and substance abuse news is inaccurate and does not have scientific information value.

In the media news, details about the use of drugs (with syringes, cigarettes, pipes, etc.) and the place of use (deserted buildings, empty lands, parties, etc.) are often included, which can be attractive and encouraging for risk groups. In addition, giving details about the street, like street name or places, could give an idea to people who are willing to use (Eşitti & Işık, 2019).

3.2. The media encourages drug use

Media is one of the important factors affecting the curiosity factor. Scenes or visuals seen in media such as television and cinema can affect the person when the idea of using drugs is not in his mind. Not

showing the bad side of the drug in the media and showing it as something that gives pleasure and relaxes may encourage people to use drugs (Odhiambo, 2014; Yedekçi, 2017).

Media can play an active role in substance use and addiction. It is known that the first reason adolescents try the substance is to witness the substance use of others. This witnessing can be in the family or among groups of friends, as well as through the media, sometimes with a stronger impression. Considering the role model in adolescence, the use of any addictive substance in a movie by a beloved actor can create a positive impression of substance use (Yavuzer, 2018). Similarly, Bahar's (2018) research revealed that many TV series and movies that can be watched online without any age restrictions contain encouraging content that normalizes drugs and generates sympathy. Another important issue is the promotion of drugs through games accessed via the internet. The engineers of the virtual environment are trying to place drugs in the subconscious of children and young people through internet games. In a study conducted with teachers (Ulusoy, 2017), it was revealed that social media has an effect of encouraging addiction. It is a very problematic situation that the characters seen in the media are shown to be happier and able to do whatever they want when they use substances. In a study conducted in the USA, it was found that between 1990 and 1996, the increase in substance use among young people was associated with a decrease in anti-addiction messages from the media, an increase in recreational addiction messages, and an increase in cigarette and alcohol advertisements (Ericson, 2001).

The media uses different frameworks in their substance abuse news coverage of ordinary people and famous people. While the theme of "victim" was prominent in the news involving ordinary people, it was seen that the concepts of "promoting creativity" and "justice" came to the fore in the news about famous people. It has been emphasized that famous people use substance in order to get out of the routine and move to a different dimension in their jobs that require creativity. It is thought that the presence of such news in the media can create an encouraging situation especially for young people. This news has the potential to create an affirmative (inspiring, etc.) perspective on drugs (Karasaç-Gezen, 2018).

3.3. Drug use is reflected as a sensational and magazine issue

Today, the media mostly focuses on the magazine and sensational dimensions in the news about drugs. In a study conducted in 2018, the websites of the three most read newspapers in Turkey were examined and it was seen that poison dealers who smuggled large amounts of drugs were called "barons" in the media. In such news, drug trafficking is presented as a very profitable, adventurous business that provides the opportunity to rapidly rise to the upper socio-economic level, gain wealth and fame. Instead of focusing on the social problems created by the news about substance use, the problem is taken away from its real context by giving information about the individual success stories of drug smugglers, the extent of drug trafficking, their cunning, how they escaped from prisons or how they were caught (Eşitti & Işık, 2019). Similarly, in Karasaç-Gezen's (2018) study, which aims to reveal how drug addiction is represented in the print media, it has been revealed that addiction is separated from its social context and presented in a sensational way, dramatized and presented in individual frames. In the study carried out by Hughes et al. (2011) in Australia, it was emphasized that the subject of substance abuse in the media news was created in a narrow framework that includes sensationalism, prejudice, and negatively affects the public.

Although banned substances are used for humorous purposes in Hollywood movies, they can cause adolescents to see substance use as normal in their minds (Borzekowski & Strasburger, 2011). A positive correlation was found between the use of substances such as marijuana and especially popular songs recently (Primack et al., 2010). Many studies (Pierce et al., 1998; Stacy et al., 2004) have shown that exposure to alcohol advertisements leads to more positive beliefs about alcohol use and guides alcohol addiction. In a study conducted in Turkey Sarıkaya (2020) revealed that the TV series *Narcos* and *Breaking Bad* set an important example in making sense of the society's perception of drugs.

A tabloid or sensational approach is also adopted in the language the media uses in news about substance abuse for the sake of rating. Moreover, the news is conveyed in a very encouraging language and exaggerated to the readers and viewers. For example, it should not be called a gold shot; because gold is a precious metal. It should not be called a pleasant substance, it should be called a poisonous and harmful substance. It is possible to increase these examples (Yavuzer, 2018). According to the "Communication Strategy Implementation Guide for the Action Plan in Combating Drugs" published by the Prime Ministry General Directorate of Press and Information in Turkey in 2014, the definitions about substance use such as "drug habit", "passion for drugs", "pleasure substance", "gold shot" is normalized and even encouraged (Eşitti & Işık, 2019).

3.4. Media mostly focus on crime in substance addiction news

Some studies in the literature show that the issue of drugs in the media is handled only around the theme of "crime", however, it should be informative. As a matter of fact, in his study conducted in Turkey, Babahanoğlu (2016) revealed that 34.8% of the participants have never encountered advertisements or promotional films about the harms of drugs in print and visual media such as newspapers, TV and radio. In the research, Chermak (2006) examined how much drug-related crimes are covered in the media, how they are presented, who the news sources are and how this news is framed. As a result of the research; drug-related crimes were the second most frequent news item, while police and court officials were the most frequently consulted news sources. Karasaç Gezen's (2018) study entitled "The Representation of Drug Addiction in the Written Media" examined six newspapers in Turkey and found out that the news about drug addiction in these newspaper articles mostly focused on crime. It has been revealed that addicts under the influence of drugs harm both others and themselves, in other words, they commit crimes. These crimes are; killing, wounding, violence, harassment and rape.

Özkılınç (2020) made a semiotic analysis of four cinema films in a study. Based on the films examined in the research, a link was established between the relationship between substance use and crime. It has been observed that addicted characters turn to crime as a result of substance use. These crimes include lying, disrespectful and bullying acts, fighting, swearing, injury, sexual deviance (illegal intercourse, sexual abuse of a minor), driving at a young age without a license, exceeding the speed limit, endangering traffic, damaging the environment and etc. Addicted characters have generally resorted to many illegal ways such as theft, prostitution, extortion, bribery, fraud and drug dealing in order to reach the substance in cases where they cannot reach the substance.

Geçer and Mahinay (2018) examined the representation and news frames of actors in anti-drug news in three main newspapers in the Philippines. As a result of the analysis, it was revealed that one of the

emerging themes was crime and justice. Journalists prefer to examine the crime in order to be objective rather than examining the political and economic causes of drugs. Yaşar et al. (2018) state that encouraging the use of drugs through the media is a type of crime that can be considered a new type of crime and they say that this type of crime will increase its importance day by day. Today, especially as a result of the use of social media reaching very high levels, it has become very easy to encourage substance use crime through the media. This crime has become easy to commit by anyone who wishes. The legal arrangements to be made at this point are closely related to the general health of the society, the fundamental rights and freedoms, especially the freedom of the media/art, and the principle of legal security. It is very important that the balance between art/media freedom and authority is handled meticulously.

3.5. Labelling of substance addicts by the media and causing them to be excluded from the society

Families of drug addicts are shown in shame and as victims. Friends of substance abusers are also often shown as dangerous and bad. This situation leads to the exclusion of drug addicts from society and their peers (Eşitti & Işık, 2019). Drug addicts are stigmatized and isolated in society. This situation causes disintegration in the family and social structure, deterioration of integrity, and the formation of an insecure environment (Özkılınç, 2020). In many studies (Griffin et al., 2013; Howell, 2015), drug users in the media are black, thinner users, addicts seem to be marginalized by such expressions. It is argued that such marginalizing content should not be included in the media. Aydın (2009) emphasizes that thinner users who are drug addicts and live on the street are presented as an object of fear in the news in the media. In many news headlines such as "The brutality of children using thinner", "The horror of children using thinner in Mersin" and "Monsters", are stated that children who are forced to live on the street and who are addicted to drugs are marginalized and labeled.

Balseven et al. (2002) pointed out that messages that related to drugs may create prejudice and should not be given in the news. For example, the news about how substance use is more common in divorced families considered to be problematic. In the study of Özgür et al. (2011), in addition to the message of "addicted and guilty children" that should be feared or avoided, the message that substance-addicted children are "pathetic" and "children whose lives are exhausted" is also given. In this sense, it is ignored that children have rights over their own lives and the power to change their own lives. The negative aspects of substance addicted children are covered in the media, but the positive aspects of children who are rehabilitated from addiction are not emphasized much. Thus, the dimension that children can change and integrate into society is ignored.

In Tiger's study (2013), it was determined that individuals are labeled by using sexist and racist discourses in drug use and addiction in the media. In the examples that Tiger analyzed in his article, the black and female Whitney Houston is presented as an artist who uses drugs and cannot fully perform her talents because of this. However, drug use of Lanse Armstrong, who is male and white, is ignored, and it is stated that the reason for this behavior is hard work.

3.6. Drug marketing (Narcomarketing) is done in the media

Today, stories, photos and videos about drugs are shared, especially on social media, and drugs can be marketed (Thanki & Frederick, 2016). It is seen that the concept of "Narcomarketing" (Drug Marketing) is used in virtual environments and social media. It is witnessed that drug marketing is made through social media applications such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat. Multiple virtual environments are becoming an uncontrolled online environment that allows users to commit crimes without fear of being caught by hiding their real identities with an anonymity umbrella. Differences in the perspectives, legal norms and regulations of countries leave social media platforms unsupervised and turn drug dealers into virtual dealers (Bahar, 2018).

According to the United Nations' 2018 World Drug Report, there are 31 million drug addicts in the world. The concept of "darknet" came to the fore in the report, which also touched upon the effect of the Internet on drugs. The darknet, only allows its own users. According to the UN's report, annual sales of 170-300 million dollars were realized in drug marketing via darknet in 2016 (World Drug Report, 2018)

4. What should be done? The media should play a role in preventing the use of substance and raising substance abuse awareness

Today, children and young people acquire information under the influence of media such as television, internet and games rather than the teachings of the family. Especially in terms of substance abuse, media have to take all steps and carry out activities in order to take necessary precautions, follow up, increase awareness, develop reliable information sources, increase access to accurate information, and ensure security in communication (Bilir, 2017). Experts working in the field of substance addiction should be informed about the effects of social media factor in interpersonal communication. Thus, counselors can guide and help their clients more effectively in preventive and therapeutic studies regarding substance addiction and in the social adaptation process (Türkmen, 2019).

Countries and their states can impose all kinds of restrictions on drugs, make all kinds of laws, but these laws and restrictions cannot solve the problem if they do not pay attention to what is happening in the media, cinema, animation and music industry (Ömerova, 2020). This statement reveals the importance of the media. There are many suggestions in the literature about what the media should do to prevent substance addiction. The main emphasis points can be listed as organizing a campaign, creating public awareness, informing, creating public opinion, uniting the public on the social responsibility ground, appealing to the public's conscience, paying attention to the language of the news and images, not encouraging, not making it attractive, not affirming (Yüksel, 2017).

- i. Organizing campaigns in the media: The media should take an active role in drug prevention campaigns and take responsibility in keeping individuals and youth away from drugs, reducing drug consumption, and preventing to be addicts (Longshore et al., 2006; Romer, 1994). Babuna and Bayhan (2009) state that the responsibility of people loved by the public in drug prevention campaigns in the media can have a greater impact. Caldwell (2005) underlined that non-governmental organizations should carry out these campaigns. In order to prepare messages about specific drug addiction prevention, non-governmental organizations should study media trends,

- analyze public awareness, run campaigns in appropriate media formats, use new technologies and provide high-quality written materials.
- ii. Preparing public service ads: In Ulusoy's research (2017), teachers stated that more public service ads should be included in the media about substance abuse.
 - iii. Use of visuals, movies and TV series: When the issue of drugs, which has serious legal and health risks for individuals, comes to the fore, the media often puts visual elements ahead of the news in order to attract the attention of the public to this issue. When we look at the visuals used by the media in drug news, it is seen that images are used to reinforce addiction, panic or fear against drug marketing. In this context, although it is aimed to present the seriousness of the event in the news about substance use to the public, it is very important to use images that will not lead individuals to negative thoughts and feelings (Şekercioğlu, 2018). Yeşilay, who wants to take advantage of the power of the media to prevent the use of drugs and to draw the attention of young people and their families to this area, has prepared a series of films within the scope of anti-drug policies in Turkey. The subject of the TV series "Son Çıkış", the scenario of which was prepared by an expert team under the supervision of the Yeşilay Science Board Members in cooperation with TRT, is the lives of young people who use synthetic and similar drugs, which have caused deaths (Babahanoğlu, 2016).
 - iv. Participation of experts in the media and inform the community: Solmaz and Okumuş (2015) stated that the news about substance use were significantly included in the media as a result of their studies and there is content aimed at informing and educating the society in the news. However, they underlined that the media should give more space to expert views on informing the society. Similarly, in the study of Noto et al. (2006), the content of drug news in the media is not enough to include the opinions of health professionals. In this context, it is clear that giving more importance to the experts' opinions about the use of drug in the news will benefit the society.
 - v. Demonstrating the methods of getting rid of addiction in the media: In the study of Karasaç-Gezen (2018), it was revealed that the media showed the methods of getting rid of substance addiction under the following headings: health information about prevention from addiction, information about addiction treatment, information about treatment centers, diseases caused by substance use, stories of quitting substance use, alternative ways to recover from substance abuse.
 - vi. "Media Observatory" in fighting against drugs: With the media observatory, it is expected that the content presented by the media, which has a significant power, will be examined and a regular information and warning mechanism will be established for the media. A regularly functioning observatory will be able to review drug news, and provide warnings and information to reporters. Thus, it is aimed to minimize the negative effects of the media (Eşitti & Işık, 2019).
 - vii. Media literacy; Gaining the ability for children and young people to distinguish between the contents in the media: The most important point is to accept and trust the child as an individual with the ability to distinguish. It is necessary to talk to the child about the media and teach him/her to be selective. Precautions should be taken before becoming addicted to drugs, and children

should be aware of technology, not addicted on technology (Bilir, 2017). The primary precaution that can be taken is to protect people to use substances by turning them into individuals equipped with information about the media. In order to be less affected by substance use, especially young people should be given media literacy courses in schools so that they develop a questioning attitude towards information on media.

- viii. Taking precautions by the Radio and Television Council; Implementing and supervising the legislation: In the fight against addiction, it is very important for RTÜK to implement these two decisions and to inspect the media. i. Media and publishing services cannot encourage or deceive violence and ii. Programs with content that may harm the physical, mental or moral development of children and young people in radio and television cannot be shown in the time periods they can watch and without the use of protective symbols (Yedekçi, 2017).
- ix. Current situation analysis: The public's views, wishes and demands regarding drug news can be researched through a scientific study. In this way, it can be clarified how the drug news is perceived and evaluated by the public. According to the results of the research, media can complete their deficiencies and correct their mistakes (Şekercioğlu, 2018).
- x. Training media specialists on substance abuse: In Işık's study (2013), it was stated that journalists expressed their opinion that the publication of drug-related news within the framework of the rules set by the state harms the freedom of the press. In addition, it has been understood that there are many reporters who think that the media does not have a role in the fight against drugs. This shows us that the reporters, unfortunately, perceive the legal obligations regarding the health of the society as an attempt to restrict the freedom of the press. In this context, it should be said that it is important for media specialists to receive training on substance abuse.

5. Conclusion

It is seen that the legal regulations in the international conventions that must be followed in publications about addicted children are often ignored. In this case, the media causes child abuse. However, media news should be prepared and published on the basis of principles and legal regulations such as "privacy, protection and non-disclosure of private life and the principle of innocence".

The fact that the media is driven by commercial concerns such as tending to newsworthy events, working with limited financial resources, providing circulation or ratings, causes attitudes such as social responsibility or sensitivity not to be adopted. However, in terms of reaching and influencing, the media is one of the most powerful tools in the fight against substance abuse.

Although the use of smart signs in television and cinema visuals is a limitation, new regulations regarding substance use are required, especially in cinema screenings, since the act of watching is left to the discretion of the individuals. It should be known that the family cannot be the only protective element, and that the responsibility of all institutions, especially the media, which is included in the social support system in the education of children and young people, is common.

“Drugs” is the disaster of our time and the media should play an important role in combating it. The most important task of the media is not to be the focus of social problems, but to be an important actor in the solution of social problems. It is now a necessity to regulate the media in a way that will benefit society.

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