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**AN ASSESSMENT OF ADDICTION RESEARCH ON STUDENTS
IN NORTHERN CYPRUS**

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Abstract

In this study, the research on substance addiction conducted in Northern Cyprus related to students at primary, secondary, high school and university levels by different researchers until 2022 were evaluated. The aim of the study is to classify and summarize the findings in the existing research in order to attain some general conclusions. Studies focused on this aspect undertaken in Northern Cyprus conducted to date have been found to be unrelated to each other and repetitive which can be a problem for researchers in this area. Thus, streamlining the findings of previous studies focussing on the Northern Cyprus sample was considered worthwhile. The research was based on a qualitative approach using document analysis of studies on substance addiction carried out in Northern Cyprus in the last 10 years. The document analyses comprised articles, theses and reports which were selected for analysis using purposive and criterion sampling. The data obtained in the research was summarized and presented in tables which display the themes and sub-themes that emerged through the descriptive analysis. The themes are briefly defined and explained in detail by citing scientific studies.

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1. Introduction

A number of regions around the world where life conditions are not satisfactory, with intense effects of migration, economic difficulties, and family problems can result in increased substance addiction among individuals. It has been observed that drug use, drug trafficking and related crimes in the world are generally concentrated in certain countries and are more identified with particular regions within these countries (Macleod et al., 2004).

Illegal substance use has been increasing in Northern Cyprus in recent years. The findings of the report prepared by the Anti-Drug Commission in Northern Cyprus (2021) reveal that substance use has increased in North Cyprus. Access to psychoactive substances is highly facilitated by the fact that Cyprus is a small country (Anti-Drug Commission, 2021). Research into understanding the dimensions of substance use in Northern Cyprus, as in the rest of the world, have gained momentum in recent years.

Considering that the use of cigarettes, alcohol and other psychoactive substances begins at a young age, the extent and danger of the problem in terms of both the future of the individual and the future of the society is clear. On the one hand, psychoactive substances affect individuals' position in society and on the other hand, they affect human health and cause many deaths. Since psychoactive substances can cause addiction even in a single use, it is a highly lucrative business and has become an important source of black money (Derdiman, 2006). This problem should be tackled with a multidisciplinary approach employing the forces of law, economy, medicine and education. In addition, prevention studies seem more rational when the treatment costs are considered. Young people who are at the forefront of risk groups are the main target of prevention studies (Karataşoğlu, 2013).

All societies have tended to take precautions against this problem, which threatens their own cultures, in recent years. In particular, recent studies have focused on adolescents, who are at the forefront of risk groups, and even earlier age periods, since substance abuse starts at an early age. Risk-taking behavior is especially common during adolescence, one of the developmental stages, and substance abuse emerges as one of the most important risk behaviors (Birhanu et al., 2014; Feldstein & Miller, 2006)

The best and easiest treatment for substance abuse is to avoid falling into the trap of substance abuse which once started, is very difficult to treat. Therefore, it is crucial to develop effective treatment programs as well as to take preventive measures to protect individuals and society against such substance abuse (Karaaziz & Keskindağ, 2016).

2. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to shed light on previous research undertaken on substance addiction among young people of different educational levels in Northern Cyprus to identify general trends that can help specify the most crucial aspects that should be studied by future researchers about substance addiction specifically targeting this population in Northern Cyprus.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, research on substance addiction conducted in Northern Cyprus on students at primary, secondary, high school and university levels were examined, discussed and evaluated. The aim of the study is to classify and summarize various aspects of the existing research and make general conclusions based on the evaluation of these aspects. The preliminary examination of this research reveal that they are not related to each other and are somewhat repetitive which can be considered a problem for future researchers. It is considered worthwhile to undertake this overview of the research undertaken of the Northern Cyprus sample to examine and describe the previous studies on substance addiction in depth.

In the context of the research examined in this study, the main research question aimed to uncover the findings that emerged out of the analysis of the research undertaken of the Northern Cyprus sample.

The qualitative approach was employed for this study as it was based on document analysis. For the purpose of answering the research question for this study, all studies, comprising articles, theses and reports, on substance addiction at all educational levels carried out in Northern Cyprus in the last 10 years was examined. While determining the materials to be selected for evaluation, purposive and criterion sampling techniques were employed to identify the appropriate studies that would answer the research question. Hence, the thesis, reports and articles were selected to be included in this research on the basis of purposeful sampling according to the keywords ‘substance use’ and ‘Northern Cyprus’. For this purpose, digital resources in the university libraries in Northern Cyprus (Near East University, Eastern Mediterranean University, Cyprus International University, European University of Lefke) were accessed. In addition, the national thesis center and Dergipark sites in Turkey were also included in the search based on criterion sampling of all research on substance use for the last 10 years.

The selected documents were then evaluated using the descriptive analysis technique where the findings in each of the articles, theses and reports selected for document analysis were examined. The findings were analyzed according to different keywords. The data obtained in the research was evaluated and summarized into themes and sub-themes which were then presented in tabular format. The themes are briefly defined and explained in detail by citing scientific studies.

4. Findings

Table 1. Sample of Addiction Studies

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Primary school students | İskender et al, 2019 |
| Secondary school students | Çakıcı et al., 2017c; Çakıcı et al., 2019a |
| High school students | Çakıcı et al, 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2017a |
| University students | Çakıcı et al., 2014b |
| Adults over 18 years old | Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2019b; Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020; İskender, 2020. |

Table 1 shows the research conducted in Northern Cyprus on addiction at all formal education levels. In addition, the document analysis reveals that studies have also been carried out on young people after the age of 18 (Çakıcı et al., 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2014b; Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı et al.,

2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2017c; Çakıcı et al., 2019a; Çakıcı et al., 2019b; Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020; İskender et al, 2019; İskender 2020).

Findings about the prevalence of use are found in these studies and the substances were classified as cigarette, alcohol and other psychoactive substances as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Prevalence of smoking

| Theme | Rate in % | Studies |
|--|-----------|--|
| Proportion of lifetime smokers in the society in which they live | 17 - 70 | Çakıcı et al., 2014a; İskender et al, 2019 |
| Smoking at least one-time in lifetime | 5 - 62 | Çakıcı et al., 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2017c; Çakıcı et al., 2018; Çakıcı et al., 2019a; Çakıcı et al., 2019b |
| Smoking in the past month | 1- 50 | Çakıcı et al., 2014b; Çakıcı et al., 2017b, Çakıcı et al., 2017c; Çakıcı et al., 2019b; Çakıcı Eş et al, 2020; Tekin 2018 |
| Smoking every day | 10 | Çakıcı et al., 2010 |

In addition to the themes in Table 2, studies (Çakıcı et al, 2017a; Çakıcı et al, 2017c) focused on why they started smoking which included out of curiosity and for fun.

Table 3. Prevalence of alcohol use

| Theme | Rate in % | Studies |
|--|-----------|---|
| Proportion of lifetime smokers in the society in which they live | 69 - 77 | Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al, 2017a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; İskender et al, 2019 |
| Alcohol use at least one-time in lifetime | 16 - 86 | Çakıcı et al., 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2014b; Çakıcı et al., 2017c; Çakıcı et al., 2018; Çakıcı et al., 2019a; Çakıcı Eş et al, 2020; Tekin 2018 |
| Alcohol use in the past month | 4 - 58 | Çakıcı et al., 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2017c |
| Home is the place where alcohol is used most often | 29 - 32 | Çakıcı et al., 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2019b |
| Alcohol use for fun | 56 - 64 | Çakıcı et al., 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2019b |

In addition to the themes presented in Table 3, other findings of the research are as follows: most of the students can easily find alcoholic beverages such as beer (80.1%), wine (72.7%) and raki (61.6%). (Çakıcı et al., 2010). One of the reasons for not drinking alcohol in Northern Cyprus is the opinion that alcohol is harmful to health (42.8%) (Çakıcı et al., 2014a).

Table 4. Prevalence of other psychoactive/illegal substances

| Theme | Sub-theme/Rate in % | Studies |
|---|--|---|
| Known psychoactive/illegal substances | cannabis, heroin, synthetic cannabinoid, cocaine, bonsai (71-94) | Çakıcı et al., 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; İskender et al, 2019 |
| Using other psychoactive/illegal substances at least once in lifetime | 6 - 11 | Çakıcı et al., 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2014b; Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2017c; Çakıcı et al., 2018; Çakıcı et al, 2019a; Çakıcı et al., 2019b, İskender et al, 2019 |
| First used psychoactive/illegal substances | marijuana (17.3) ecstasy (14.9) | Çakıcı et al., 2010 |
| Most used psychoactive/illegal substance | marijuana ecstasy | Çakıcı et al., 2017a, İskender 2020 |
| Source of information for psychoactive/illegal substance | Television (55) | Çakıcı et al., 2014a, Çakıcı et al., 2017b |

Apart from the themes displayed in Table 4, the following findings were obtained:

- the least heard of substances are LSD (16.9%) and codeine syrup (19.7%) (Çakıcı et al., 2017b).
- Some people do not know what the first Other Psychoactive Substances (OPS) is (Çakıcı et al., 2010).
- Psychoactive substances usage occurs mostly in groups of friends (13.1%) and elders (5%) (Çakıcı et al, 2010). The sample in the studies knew where to find an illegal psychoactive substance (Çakıcı et al., 2017b).
- The reasons for use of OPS are revealed as relieving nervousness, curiosity, having fun and relieving problems (Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2018)
- Many people stated that they had problems with the police when they used an illegal psychoactive substance (Çakıcı et al., 2017b).
- Places where substances are generally concentrated in low socioeconomic areas and where immigrants live (Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020; İskender, 2020; Tekin 2018)

The research findings on prevalence are followed by findings on risk factors.

Table 5. Risk factors for substance use in Northern Cyprus

| Theme | Sub-theme | Studies |
|---------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Age | Substance use (aged 18-25) | Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2017a |
| | Smoking (aged 11 and above) | Çakıcı et al., 2010 |
| | OPS/illegal substance (Below 25) | Çakıcı et al, 2017b; Çakıcı et al, 2019b; Çakıcı et al, 2019b; Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020 |
| Gender | Alcohol (aged above 18) | Çakıcı et al., 2017b |
| | Male (OPS, smoking, alcohol) | Çakıcı et al., 2010; Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2014b; Çakıcı et al., 2017a, Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2019b; Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020; Hacıosmanoğlu, 2021; İskender et al., 2019; Tekin, 2018; Tunçay, 2019 |

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Birth place | Turkey (smoking and OPS) Cyprus (alcohol) | Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2014b; Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020 |
| Income | Low income level (smoking, alcohol, OPS) | (Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020; İskender et al., 2019; Tekin 2018). |
| Education level | High school and University Secondary school and below | Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2019b; İskender et al., 2019; Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020; Tekin, 2018 |
| Academic success | Unsuccessful (alcohol and OPS) | Çakıcı et al, 2017a |

Significant variables related to risk factors are given in Table 5 followed by additional explanations.

It should be noted that there are different findings regarding age. One study found that substance use increased over the age of 25 (Tunçay, 2019). In another study, it was determined that OPS was used under the age of 11 years (Çakıcı et al., 2018).

In a small number of studies, no significant difference was found between males and females in terms of smoking (Çakıcı et al, 2010). However, gender is generally seen as a determining variable in substance use. It has also been determined that men use cigarettes twice as much as women (Çakıcı et al., 2014a). Similarly, men use alcohol more than twice as much as women (Çakıcı et al., 2014a). Men's lifetime smoking rate is much higher than women (Çakıcı et al., 2017b).

According to the results of the evaluated research, the place of birth variable displayed a significant difference in substance use. While alcohol use is high among Cypriots, smoking and OPS use are more common among Turkish people. In addition, those born in Turkey have a more positive view of the social relations and social status of substance users than Cypriots (İnan, 2019)

In terms of the education level variable, the results of the research are conflicting. In some studies, substance use is higher in those with higher education levels, while in some studies it is the opposite. These results need to be investigated in depth to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the issues.

The less emphasized factors compared to the risk factors in Table 5 are presented below.

- not caring about religion (Bayramoğlu, 2015; Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2019b).
- not living with family (Çakıcı et al., 2014a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b).
- living in the city (Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2019b; İskender et al., 2019)
- having a sibling (İskender et al., 2019)
- divorced parents (İskender et al., 2019; Tunçay 2019)
- faced with bad behavior and physical violence (İskender et al., 2019)
- being single (Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020)
- living in a rental house (Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020)
- being an immigrant (Çakıcı Eş et al., 2020)
- being married (Tekin, 2018)
- having a child (Tekin, 2018)
- being unemployed (Tunçay, 2019)
- absence of mother and/or father (Tunçay, 2019)

While analyzing the results of substance use according to certain variables, the results of the studies dealing with the relationship of multiple substance use were also obtained. Hence the following question emerged ‘Does using any addictive substances affect other substance use?’ These results are presented below as an annotation to Table 5.

In the evaluated studies, these important findings emerged:

- Smokers use more alcohol than non-smokers (Çakıcı et al., 2017a).
- Smokers use more OPS than non-smokers; those who use alcohol use more OPS than non-smokers, and those who are drunk use more OPS than those who do not (Çakıcı et al., 2017a; Çakıcı et al., 2017b; Çakıcı et al., 2017c; Çakıcı et al., 2018; Çakıcı et al., 2019b; İskender et al., 2019).
- The most commonly used substances after alcohol and cigarettes were found to be cannabis, pills, volatile substances, amphetamines, synthetic cannabinoids, cocaine, heroin, anabolic steroids and LSD, respectively (Tunçay, 2019).

Table 6 displays themes related to the reasons for using substances.

Table 6. Reasons for Substance use

| Theme | Sub-theme/Rate | Studies |
|---------------|--|--|
| Relationships | getting married, having sex, to love more deeply, shared life negatively affected while using substances | Çakıcı et al., 2019b |
| Personality | dangerous, rude, careless, lonely, neurotic, inextroverted, emotionally unstable, depressed, anxious, stressed out | Çakıcı et al., 2019b; Haciosmanoğlu, 2021, Tekin, 2018; Tunçay, 2019 |
| Social skills | Communicative incompetence, non-collaborative, hostile | Çakıcı et al., 2019b; Tekin, 2018 |

In addition to the findings in Table 6, other remarkable findings under this heading are as follows:

- substance use, especially in family and relatives, and close friends enhances the feelings of positive attitude towards the substance (İnan, 2019)
- Negative attitudes towards the adequacy of substance abuse treatment are dominant in Northern Cyprus (İnan, 2019). Substance addicted people have negative beliefs in the effectiveness of preventive education (Çakıcı et al., 2019b).
- As substance use decreases in Northern Cyprus, the individuals' personality traits including gentle, open-hearted and respectful attitudes emerge. In addition, it has been determined these people show positive approaches to solving problems (Tekin, 2018).
- People are aware of the illegality of substance abuse but it does not prevent them from substance abuse (Çakıcı et al., 2019b)
- Society is prejudiced against drug users and it is thought that drug users should be integrated into society (İnan, 2019)
- The police are considered to be competent in the fight against drugs, but it is stated that drug users are treated badly by the police (Çakıcı et al., 2019b)

5. Conclusion

The repetition of prevalence studies on substance abuse among young people in Northern Cyprus at regular intervals reveals the changes in trends of substance use rates and which topics should be emphasized in prevention programs by determining the preferred substances. Research generally measures the prevalence of substance use and risky behaviors and are mostly presented as compiling, collecting, summarizing and analyzing numerical data using descriptive statistics. One drawback of these studies is that they do not adequately discuss preventive and curative factors.

The methodology employed in these studies reveals that quantitative methods were employed for data collection mostly through questionnaires and self-report measures. The drawback of using such quantitative approaches is that the information provided by drug users would be limited to the items in the questionnaires which may not contain complete, accurate or in-depth data. Such data should be triangulated with qualitative measures like focused interviews with selected individuals, their carers/families and from institutions, their social environment, and health units. In this context, it must be understood that since there is no single agency dealing with drug prevention in Northern Cyprus, each institution keeps its own records. However, since these records do not contain sufficient information about individuals, it is impossible to get an overview of the real picture of substance use in Northern Cyprus. However, the systematic collation of records by all official institutions into a single dedicated database can play a major role in reflecting the truth of the actual situation.

Although this is dated, in the “Report on Drug Studies in Northern Cyprus” (2005), prepared by a university in Northern Cyprus, the following short and long-term recommendations are included.

Continuity and consistency in terms of structure, and expert teams that can work under an organizational chart should be institutionalised.

The readiness of the Turkish Cypriots as a community to implement a substance use prevention program (community readiness) should be studied.

The Ministry of National Education should include courses to strengthen the personal development of students which covers topics such as building self-esteem in the curriculum at all levels of education

Analysis of risk factors and protective factors should be undertaken for Northern Cyprus. These risk and protective factors need to be addressed individually as well as in terms of peer, family, school, community and society.

Educators who plan prevention studies should be aware of individual and social risk factors, implement scales to evaluate the results of the studies in this area with objective criteria. These educational planners should be equipped with accurate and effective information from both local and foreign sources to help them devise relevant and focussed plans. Studies should be carried out at regular intervals on the usefulness and effectiveness of such prevention programs so that remedies can be instituted as and when necessary to cope with changing trends in substance abuse.

The negative impact of media in glamourizing the use of substances should be controlled, the relevant agencies dealing with substance abuse in Northern Cyprus should undertake large-scale media campaigns to increase societal awareness of the negative results of substance abuse for individuals and society. Media, educational and religious institutions should be roped in to collaborate on long-term

preventive plans and programs in cooperation with non-governmental organizations. Foreign experts in this area can be invited to give talks and assist officials of all dedicated agencies to formulate appropriate plans and policies to combat substance abuse among the young.

It is imperative that such measures are undertaken swiftly as national development of any country, as well as the development of any community is dependent on physically and mentally healthy young people.

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