

Exploring the Relationship Between Life Experiences and Early Relapse Among Imprisoned Users of Illegal Drugs in Oman: A Focused Ethnography

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Abstract : Background: Illegal drug use is a rising problem that affects Omani youth. This research aimed to study a group of young Omani men who were imprisoned more than once for illegal drug use, focusing on exploring their lifestyle experiences inside and outside the prison and whether these contributed to their early relapse and re-imprisonment. This is the first study of its kind from Oman conducted in a prison setting. Methods: 19 Omani males aged 18-35 years imprisoned in Oman Central Prison were recruited using purposive sampling. Focused ethnography was conducted over 8 months to explore the drug-related experiences outside the prison and during imprisonment. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the participants yielded detailed transcripts and field notes. These were thematically analyzed, and the results were compared with the existing literature. Results: The participants' voices yielded new insights into the lives of young Omani men imprisoned for illegal drug use, including their sufferings and challenges in prison. These included: entry shock, timing and boredom, drug trafficking in prison, as well as physical and psychological health issues. Overall, imprisonment was reported to have negatively impacted the participants' health, personality, self-concept, emotions, attitudes, behavior and life expectations. The participants reported how their efforts to reintegrate into the Omani community after release from prison were rebuffed due to stigmatization and rejection from society and family. They also experienced frequent unemployment, police surveillance, accommodation problems and a lack of rehabilitation facilities. The immensity of the accumulated psychophysiological trauma contributed to their early relapse and re-imprisonment. Conclusion: This thesis concludes that imprisonment is largely ineffective in controlling drug use in Oman. Urgent action is required across multiple sectors to improve the lives and prospects of users of illegal drugs within and outside the prison to minimize factors contributing to early relapse. Key Words: illegal drugs, drug users, Oman, addiction, Omani culture, prisoners, relapse, re-imprisonment, qualitative research, ethnography.

Keywords : illegal drugs, Prison, Omani culture lifestyle, post prison life

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