

ROAD TO

RECOVERY

STORIES FROM YOUTH CANNABIS USERS

Authors: Mariyam Malsha Muneer, Aishath Nasheeda, Aishath Zara Athif, Mariyam Luhya Ismail, Abdulla Laisy

Affiliation: Villa College

Presenting Author: Mariyam Malsha Muneer

INTRODUCTION

The **drug use** population **under the age of 24 years** was about **72%**

The **age of onset** for consuming drugs is **15 years**

(United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC), 2013)

Addiction has either directly or indirectly affected every household in the Maldives

(Mortimore, & Stimson, 2010)

Drug users, prison officials, and drug workers collectively asserted that relapses are frequent occurrences and expressed dissatisfaction with the current system's inability to diminish demand

Templer (2019)



AIM

To explore the lived experiences of cannabis consumption, particularly young male adults who completed the National Drug Agency's (NDA) Program used for treating cannabis addiction in the Community Service Centre located in Male', Maldives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the initial experiences that contributed to the development of cannabis use?

What are the subjective experiences of individuals regarding NDA's Program?

NATIONAL DRUG AGENCY

The National Drug Agency (NDA) is a government establishment, tasked with tackling drug-related concerns; including demand reduction and drug rehabilitation.

The NDA runs a General Drug Rehabilitation Treatment Program for individuals **apprehended by court orders for cannabis consumption.**



THE PROGRAM

Stages

Stage 1 – 1 month duration, 5 weekdays

Stage 2 – 1 month duration, 3 weekdays

Stage 3 – 1 month duration, 3 weekdays

Stage 4 – 3 months duration, 2 weekdays

Signing in

Stage 1 – 20 signatures required

Stage 2 – 12 signatures required

Stage 3 – 12 signatures required

Stage 4 – 24 signatures required

Counselling sessions

Stage 1 – 1 session per week

Stage 2 – 1 session per month

Stage 3 – 1 session per month

Stage 4 – personalized accordingly

Family counselling: 1 session per stage

Classes - stage 1

Anger management

Stress management

Dealing with negative peer influence

Assertiveness and communication

Problem-solving and decision making

Conflict resolution

Values and norms

Building self-esteem

Relationship building and dealing with distress

HIV, AIDS, & STIs

Drug education and addiction process

Identifying warning signs and craving management

Process of relapse and relapse prevention

Dealing with stigma

4 classes concerning religion (Islam)

Classes- stage 2

Healthy lifestyle

Career development

Emotional management

Financial management

Repentance and forgiveness

Craving management (Islamic viewpoint)

Family responsibility (Islamic viewpoint)

Drug education (Islamic viewpoint)

Urine Analysis

5 days per week

M E T H O D O L O G Y

DESIGN

Qualitative approach

PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling

Inclusion criteria:

- English-speaking, Maldivian males aged 18-33, and have completed the NDA's program within the last two years

Exclusion criteria

- Does not understand English, is not a Maldivian, is female, and has not completed in the NDA's program within the last two years

INSTRUMENTS & MATERIALS

Semi-structured interview guide

Face to face & online interviews

Face validation of the responses was requested by sharing transcriptions with the participants

DATA COLLECTION PERIOD

May 2024

DATA ANALYSIS

Audio recordings went through verbatim transcription - codebook created- themes and subthemes identified

FINDINGS - LIVED EXPERIENCES

FIRST TIME EXPERIENCE

- **Life situation** lonely, small living space, need for escape
- **Motivations:** peer pressure, new experience, imitation
- **No consequences**
- **Form of escape from negative life events, described mostly as a good experience**

“

Growing up we **lived in a small place** in Male'. My family was **struggling**. As my house is very **crowded**, I spent more time outside with my friends. They are like family... hangout every day near our neighbourhood. We went to play football and swimming and became very close. Then as we grew up we started to use **cannabis together**

“

I got **dizzy** and was just stuck to the ground. Everything everyone was saying and doing was **funny**. It was a **good experience**. The emotions were all **funny**, and I wanted to **try it again**.

FINDINGS - LIVED EXPERIENCES

WHAT LED TO CANNABIS USE (INITIAL EXPERIENCE)

Smoking

Peer pressure

Ease of access

Psychological: to escape, stress relief, breakup,

Numbness

Physiological: to increase appetite, to help sleep

“....we finally **broke up**. This caused me to get into **smoking more**.

“

I **assumed** it was a **rolled tobacco cigarette** given to me.

“

But if youre always around your **friends who use** it around you, then psychologically you would think you **need to try it**.

“

Then sometimes when you're living your life and you get **stressed** about something... **stressed** about **work... cannabis** is the **solution** for the stress and anxiety... the solution is to use it, have a session.

FINDINGS - LIVED EXPERIENCES

WHAT LED TO CANNABIS USE (INITIAL EXPERIENCE)

Need for group belongingness

To imitate others

Smoking without knowing what it is

As a try-out

“

I chose **cannabis** because it was the most **easily available** back then.

“

It was **marketed** a lot **in school**, people would try to sell it to me...But I ended up smoking as my **friends kept telling me...** they really enjoyed it when I would smoke with them. They were **very involved** and wanted me to be a part of it

“

But whenever I have a headache about something - I mean when I get **stressed** about something I would **call a friend and smoke up.**

FINDINGS - LIVED EXPERIENCES

Lack of information before use

“

All i knew is that it (cannabis) was something people **use to get high**, and whatever **movies portrayed**.

“

You **don't** really **know** what it is, but you do it because it's fun.

“

It was safer compared to other drugs, I mean it is even called **medical marijuana**. It is the most widely used drug.

FINDINGS - PROGRAM PERCEPTION

POSITIVES OF THE PROGRAM

Support from counsellors

Classes being informative

Advantages if the client cooperates

Job offers

International aid

“

Counsellor was very **good**. She supports me - she is the **only one** who **supports** me from NDA. the only one who **encouraged** me from NDA. Well, the counsellor I got anyway. **Very helpful**.

“

The **information** they share is really **good**. They really **teach** you what **hash** is, and what **marijuana** is. For example, one who doesn't know and smokes, they would get **a lot of education** about what it is.

“

... if the **client cooperates**, then they will speak to the court and make things **easier** for the client...

“

...They told me that they get a lot of **international aid**, a lot of money...

FINDINGS - PROGRAM PERCEPTION

CHALLENGES OF THE PROGRAM

Program implementation

Program content

Negative experiences with staff

Clash of work and program timing

Financial aid not invested

Emotions of loneliness and scared

“ Is that what you would call a treatment? The person who goes to the treatment **doesn't** even **understand the treatment...When** you **finish** the **treatment**, you **should know** the **consequences** and the weight **of** your **addiction**, then that **can** even **motivate** you to **stop**. But here, currently we don't feel that

“ It **wasn't** a program **specialized for weed addiction...**And they are better specialized to deal with heroin users. They **don't** really **have** a **treatment** specialized **for cannabis** or other stimulants.

“ Then plus even **to start the program**, I had to **wait over a year** due to their backlog. I waited over a year after my court verdict... I **kept** calling and **calling them**

FINDINGS - ABOUT THE PROGRAM

MOTIVATIONS TO COMPLETE THE PROGRAM

To clear the police record

Seeing what friends are going through

Avoiding jail time

Wanting to stop

Change of perspective

Support from family

“

then I started to **see what** my **friends** were **going through** after smoking.

“

And you will have to serve 3-5 years in jail. Yeah, **only 2 options**. So of course, everyone would want to be labelled as an addict and that they need help... **who would want to go to jail if provided the opportunity**

“

Motivation was just how much **I wanted to stop**. I mean I went 3 times, but the last time, it really hit me. That I was **doing something not cool**. So I was very focused the last time.

CONCLUSION

Limited information on the drug

Young age for first-time use; as confirmed with previous studies

Smoking as a gateway drug

It is good that the program exists, based on their motivations, the program can be promising for users

LIMITATIONS & RECCOMENDATIONS

To include NDA staff perspectives

To include participants' family members perspectives

Longitudinal studies to capture the lived experiences in-depth

Mixed method

Based on findings, peer pressure resistance is important; schools can hold sessions to create awareness

Prevention is better than cure, more awareness is needed for our society; taboo topic in society.

Adequate resource allocation

Treatment personalized for cannabis addiction

REFERENCES

National drug use survey: Maldives 2011/2012. .(2013) ޤަނޯޅުގާއި ޖެނެރަލް ޕްރޮގްރާމް ޕްރޮގްރާމް ޕްރޮގްރާމް ޕްރޮގްރާމް ޕްރޮގްރާމް

National Drug Agency, Maldives. (2021). Situational Analysis of Drugs in the Maldives. World Health Organization. <https://health.gov.mv/storage/uploads/jo6xxlYr/mg4nsbtq.pdf>

Fallati, L., Castiglioni, S., Galli, P., Riva, F., Gracia-Lor, E., González-Mariño, I., ... & Zuccato, E. (2020). Use of legal and illegal substances in Malé (Republic of Maldives) assessed by wastewater analysis. *Science of the total environment*, 698, 134207.

Maldives Bureau of Statistics. (n.d.). Census 2022. [Census.gov.mv](https://census.gov.mv). <https://census.gov.mv/2022/>

Mortimore, G., & Stimson, G. (2010). A process and systems evaluation of the drug treatment and rehabilitation services in the Maldives. *South Asia: World Bank*.

National Drug Agency. (n.d.). NDA. <https://nda.gov.mv/en>