



## **Addicted people's experiences of the consequences of substance abuse on their lives: a phenomenology study**

Abbas Rahmati<sup>1</sup>, Fahimeh Zeraat Herfeh<sup>1</sup>, Seyed Omid Hosseini<sup>2</sup>

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1. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman, Kerman, Iran

2. Department of Psychology, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Hormozgan University, Hormozgan, Iran

**Correspondence to:** Abbas Rahmati, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman, Kerman, Iran  
Email: abr288@gmail.com

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### **Abstract**

Addiction is one of the biggest predicaments in today's world which inflicts negative consequences upon individuals and communities. The aim of the present study was to examine the consequences of substance abuse on the life of women and men during recovery. The study was conducted with a qualitative approach using phenomenological method. Forty Participants recovering from addiction (20 women and 20 men) were selected through criterion sampling out of drug addiction treatment centers across the city of Kerman, Iran. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Data collection was continued to achieve data saturation. Following data analysis, 149 codes and 16 subthemes were identified. We also finalized two major themes, individual consequences and individual-familial consequences. The findings further highlighted the negative consequences of addiction in men and women populations. Highlighting these consequences can help inform individuals and the society about the hazards of drugs. Furthermore, officials in charge of education and prevention of addiction across the nation can obtain knowledge out of these findings.

**Keywords:** Consequences, Drug Users, Qualitative Research, Substance-Related Disorders

### **Introduction**

One of the biggest catastrophes of today's world is addiction which along with natural disasters, epidemics, illnesses, and war is among the top four threats in today's world [1]. Addiction or substance dependence, also known as substance-related disorders in psychiatric categorizations, is the second prevalent mental disorder [2]. Addiction can be defined as a primary, chronic, and neurobiological disease with genetic, mental, social and environmental roots which affects its development and manifestations.

It is characterized by behaviors such as uncontrollable substance use, compulsive use, and continued use despite the impairments it has caused and craving [3,4].

Drug dependence is harmful both for the person using it and their families, as well as the society they live in [5], needless to mention that world health organization has named drug addiction as a threat to the safety of society, public health and has labeled it a major risk to all communities around the

world [6]. Severe addiction engenders changes in behavior, causing individuals to behave in a harmful way towards themselves and others [3,7]. Continuous and ever-increasing drug abuse leads to deleterious and sometimes tragic events, leaving individuals with unfavorable outcomes, drug overdoses, physical injuries, impulsive illegal behavior [8,9], divorce [10], disruption in the quality of marital life [11], and child abuse and neglect [12].

Nowadays, substance abuse is a shattering plight affecting behavior, self-esteem, nutrition, profession, and social life of individuals [13]; moreover, it brings social, financial, health-related, and juridical challenges for them [14]. Substance abuse can devastate an individual's life through shifting his/her thought, mood, personality, and behavior [15]. In addition, substance users experience several issues such as contracting infectious diseases, mental and behavioral disorders, as well as vocational, financial, and legal problems [16]. Therefore, substance abuse inflicts a whole gamut of adversities, including harm to health and social problems and it creates worries for the families and friends, which in extreme cases ends up in psychological problems and considerable reduction in the quality of life [17].

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of substance users, among both male and female populations, and statistics show that the prevalence of substance abuse is ever increasing [18]. Studies also indicate an exponential tendency towards substance abuse over the past 30 years in Iran [15]. Furthermore, although men have been mainly the focus of addiction-related studies, addiction is growing rapidly among women populations as well and they are even more endangered in the cycle of addiction [19]. Hence, with regard to the prevalence of the phenomenon of addiction in both women and men populations, it is essential to identify the consequences of addiction in order to take appropriate preventive and curative measures. Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to cultivate drug abuse first hand experiences among addicted women and men. Identifying these outcomes and scrutinizing them from

the viewpoint of substance users can help plan effective curative programs. We used qualitative method for the present study because it can explore human behavior more profoundly and will provide the researchers with ample information from a limited number of participants [20,21]. Since qualitative research provides rich findings, it seems that phenomenological qualitative methodology was the appropriate method for the present study, as it could give us precise details about the real life of substance users. We focused, here in the present study, on the details and life experiences of individuals and our aim was to see what effects substance abuse can have on the life of women and men.

### **Method**

We have picked phenomenological qualitative methodology, among the various types of qualitative methods for the present study. Since phenomenology studies provide the researchers with the possibility of reaching out for the first hand experiences of individuals' and enables them to access, as well as understand, how and why one experiences a particular experience [22].

Our aim was to examine the consequences of substance abuse on the life of women and men during recovery. We used semi-structured interviews to collect data. Interviews were done with 40 participants (20 women and 20 men) who were receiving treatment in drug addiction treatment centers across the city of Kerman, Iran [23]. Required arrangements to enter the treatment centers were made with the officials in charge of the centers in the first place. Then we met with the participants in person, explained the aims of the study to them clearly and apprised and assured them about the secrecy of the collected information they shared with the research team. They were also assured that they can leave the study at any time for any reason. Finally, in both centers (one center specialized for treating women and one specialized in treating men), we interviewed participants who were in complete agreement to take part in the study

and they also didn't have any mental disorders. Criterion sampling was chosen to select the participants who met our defined inclusion criteria since this kind of sampling increases the chance of selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the issues under study [24]. Being able to speak in Farsi, having willingness to participate in the study, and being honest in stating the consequences of drug abuse on various aspects of their lives were our main inclusion criteria. Individuals diagnosed with psychotic disorders were excluded. Data collection was continued to achieve data saturation.

Each participant was interviewed individually inside the counseling room in the rehabilitation center and each interview was recorded for later analysis. We used voice recorder to collect the data in the present study. Once all the interviews were recorded, they were transcribed and analyzed. Before recording their voice, however, participants were informed about the aims of the study and were assured of the secrecy of their information. Hence, we didn't ask for the names of the participants, neither did we ask for any other private information subject to disclosure. Only then did the participants agree for their voices to be recorded and their informed consent was achieved on that. Furthermore, at times when the participants didn't feel comfortable to share their experiences with the researchers

during the study, no obligations were forced upon them and only those experiences were recorded which didn't make the participants uncomfortable. The Ethics Committee of Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman approved the study (E.A.96.05.22.01).

Data were collected over 5 months (May to September 2017) and each interview lasted from 40 to 60 minutes. Open coding was used in the analysis of data [25] since we didn't have any pre-conceived constructs in mind. Colaizzi's seven-step method of data analysis was used in this study. The advantages of this method are as follows: reading and re-reading the descriptions, frequently referring to the narratives and extracting significant statements, formulating meanings (in order to infer hidden meanings over a miscellaneous range of phenomena), categorizing themes into clusters and validating, describing, returning and incorporating any changes according to the information [26]. In some instances, codes were merged or removed because there was too much similarity in the viewpoints of the participants. In other cases, those codes with little or no support to represent the whole sample were removed [27]. Themes were derived from the codes, and those were the constructs reflected in the viewpoint of most participants [28]. In addition, we made great use of the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA-12.

**Table 1** *Participants' characteristics*

| Characteristics              | N (%)                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Women                        | 20 (50%)                       |
| Men                          | 20 (50%)                       |
| Mean age, years (SD) (women) | 29.85 (SD=6.50)                |
| Mean age, years (SD) (men)   | 31 (SD=6.0)                    |
| Education                    |                                |
| Illiterate                   | 3 (2.5% females, 5% males)     |
| Elementary school education  | 4 (5% female and 5% male)      |
| Guidance school education    | 17 (22.5% female, 20% male)    |
| Diploma                      | 16 (20% female and 20% male)   |
| Marital status               |                                |
| Single                       | 9 (2.5% female and 20% male)   |
| Married                      | 23 (37.5% female and 20% male) |
| Divorced                     | 8 (10% female and 10% male)    |
| Profession                   |                                |
| Employed                     | 1 woman (2.5%)                 |
| Self-employed                | 20 men (50%)                   |
| Housewife                    | 19 women (47.5%)               |

In order to verify the accuracy and trustworthiness of the research data, we applied Guba and Lincoln's recommended criteria, including credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability [29,30].

Moreover, in order to increase the validity of the study data, researchers held several meetings together and the team decided for the encoding. Furthermore, data were shared with a qualitative researcher who was not originally part of the study and final corrections were made. We also shared the findings with some of the participants and they confirmed the veracity of the findings. Therefore, all the reported findings of the study represented the consensus of the participants. Demographic characteristics of male and female participants are shown in Table 1.

## Results

During data analysis, 149 codes were identified out of which 16 subthemes were derived. Finally, we came up with two main themes, individual consequences (consisting of 8 subthemes) and individual-familial consequences (consisting of 8 subthemes) (Table 2). Some consequences are common among women and men, reported by both groups, whereas some consequences were specifically reported by one group only (women or men). These consequences were as follows:

- Substance abuse had following individual consequences:

The participants mentioned 8 individual outcomes while reporting the consequences of addiction on their lives. One of them was losing trust. Some of the participants had lost the trust of their families ever since the start of their addiction. One participant said: "My brothers regarded me as inferior since the start of my addiction. They didn't treat me warmly. I had the key to my brother's house but he changed the locks after my addiction. I went to his house at 12 midnight but he had changed the door lock, so I had to stay in front of his house, just before I was arrested by the police the same night." (Woman, 32 years old, duration of abuse: 12 years).

Other participants, in addition to losing their

family's trust, had lost their neighbors' trust too. One participant said:

"I lost the trust of my family when I got addicted. I used to keep all my father's keys by myself, but when I was addicted, he put them under his pillow so that I wouldn't take them. I lost my respect, in a neighborhood where I was very much trusted." (Man, 39 years old, duration of abuse: 14 years).

Another consequence of addiction was imprisonment. Participants had tried different ways to supply their substance use expenses and some of these ways had brought about imprisonment for them. In order to have easier access to substances as well as making money, some of them had started selling drugs and other substances. They couldn't sell drugs for long however, as they were soon to be arrested and imprisoned. One participant said:

"I started selling substances and tried it for making money. I made good money but all the money would go for my own addiction. I sold heroin and I was imprisoned for 4 years because of selling substances." (Man, 27 years old, duration of abuse: 7 years).

A number of the participants had to work in the house of the drug dealers because they were too penniless to pay for their own drugs. Their wage was the substance they were given by the dealer in return for the work they did. Working in the houses of the drug dealers had created some problems for them however, for which they were sentenced to prison. One participant said:

"I was imprisoned 5 times for trafficking drugs and other substances which came up to a total of two years. I didn't have the money to pay for substances, so I worked in the house of a drug dealer and in return for what I did, I got substances. In one of the instances, the cops barged in the house, the drug dealer asked me to take responsibility of the substances and he would pay me for that. I did so and ended up in jail. Other times, it was either in the street that I was arrested or apprehended by DEA." (Woman, 38 years old, duration of abuse: 20 years).

A couple of times, the individual's schemes to get substances had backfired and ended in their imprisonment. A participant said:

"I had a house which was inherited to me but the deed had not been endorsed to me as of then. I sold the house for 5 million tomans (the real price was 150 million tomans) and smoked it away. It was a scheme which cost me a year in prison." (Woman, 29 years old, duration of abuse: 9 years)

For those whose addiction was contemporaneous with school, indifference to school tasks, educational decline, and finally educational failure were the consequences of addiction. The bitter effects of substances on school have been described by one participant:

"I was a top student before I get addicted to substances. But once I got addicted, I didn't feel like studying much and that's why I quit high school. It was difficult for me to continue school." (Woman, 20 years old, duration of abuse: 4 years).

Another participant, referring to the continuous absences at school and said:

"I used to go to school with some of my friends. They played hooky and I joined them. I used to steal the keys to our garden house in Sirch . We used to go there, drink, and use drugs. This was the reason I couldn't finish school." (Man, 29 years old, duration of abuse: 13 years).

One of the other consequences of addiction was missing the promising milestones of life. Many participants reflected upon the chances they had in life and which they had missed because of addiction. They were repentant as these chances were never to reoccur. Having wasted their youth and adolescence days as well as chances to get married with a right person were a couple of the things for which they were regretful. One participant said:

"I enjoyed nothing of my adolescence. My classmates would hang around and enjoy their time but I was counting the seconds for the class to finish so that I can go and take drugs. I want to quit to so that I can make up for the years I have wasted. My cousin loved me and I loved him so much but once he realized that I was addicted, he left me." (Woman, 20 years

old, duration of abuse: 4 years).

Another participant's sad story unfolded as:

"I lost my beauty and glamor when I got addicted. A lot of my peers are younger than me but they are married and have a life, whereas I have not thought of getting married as of yet. I am not even sure if anyone wants to get married with me." (Man, 22 years old, duration of abuse: 4 years).

All the participants of the study also reported that addiction had brought about loneliness and seclusion for them. They had minimized their participation in social events, gatherings, and fun activities to the least. A participant said:

"I have been so lonely ever since I have started using substances that I just want to stay home all the time, whereas I was an outgoing person who went park and mountain climbing at the weekends. I have been in my seclusion. My mother would ask me to buy bread but I was too shy to do that." (Man, 22 years old, duration of abuse: 4 years)

Some participants had cut off their relationship with their families after addiction. Reflecting upon the days when he was not addicted yet, one participant said:

"I used to be very much socializing before addiction. I would be the first to go to parties or gatherings. I used to be a source of relief for my friends and folks. But once I took drugs for 6 months, I cut off my relations with my own family and my husband's family. I didn't visit anyone or any place, and kissed sports goodbye too." (Woman, 34 years old, duration of abuse: 2.5 years).

Some of the male participants stated that addiction had incited suicide thoughts in them. One participant said:

"Lately I was so obsessed with suicide thoughts because when my daughters came home, I was sitting with my friends and we were taking heroin. My wife would ask me to give her 5thousand tomans for the school of children but I didn't have the money. That was the reason for my suicide thoughts." (Man, 40 years old, duration of abuse: 21 years).

Other participants referred to several

attempted suicide acts as a result of a substance abuse. Referring to scars on his body, one participant said:

“ I have attempted to commit suicide several times as a result of taking crack. The first time I committed suicide, I would have been dead now if they had not taken me to the hospital on time.” (Man, 29 years old, duration of abuse: 13 years).

Debilitation of religious beliefs was yet another consequence. Several female participants stated that, ever since the inception of addiction in their lives, they had quit doing many of the religious practices they used to do and that they sensed a strong debilitation of their religious beliefs. One participant said:

“I used to read Quran and I was a top student in its class. I loved Quran so much but addiction breaks your mood and drugs are all you think about.” (Woman, 35 years old, duration of abuse: 2 years).

Another participant said:

“Drugs weaken your religious beliefs and your connection with God wanes. I led a chaste and decent life. I used to go to the mosque and take part in religious ceremonies all the time. Now I cannot open the Quran and read it. After addiction, I didn't say prayers anymore.” (Woman, 29 years old, duration of abuse: 9 years).

Some participants also had extramarital relationships because of financial issues and in doing so, they had been supplied with their needed substances for free. In some cases; however, they were enticed to do so. This participant is an example of the latter consequence:

“My uncle hooked me up with a guy who visited my uncle's house to take drugs. He told me to be friends with him because I was a widow and this way he would supply our drugs (mine and my uncle's and his wife's drugs). Since it was difficult for me to get drugs on my own, I agreed. I was with him for six years and he supplied my drugs. He was so selfish. I wanted to marry him but I was wrong and I didn't marry him.” (Woman, 29 years old, duration of abuse: 9 years).

In some cases, like this participant, they were willing to do so:

“When I took drugs, my relationship with men would increase. I had to have these relationships because I was using substances.” (Woman, 22 years old, duration of abuse: 10 years).

- Substance abuse has following individual-familial consequences:

The other consequences of addiction to substances experienced by the participants were individual-familial consequences consisting of the following 8 items. One of the direst consequences most participants were afflicted by was having lost dignity and respect in their relationship with others. Some participants, after they got addicted, had lost the respect and dignity they had prior to addiction and they were treated with contempt and disrespectful behaviors. One participant said:

“Before addiction, when I visited my uncle or aunt, they used to respect me. But after I got addicted, they treated me like I was unwelcome. My uncle's wife would tell me that they don't want the neighbors to see me around their house and asked me to visit them at night time only. The reason was my dark skin and emaciated figure (as a result of substance abuse).” (Woman, 30 years old, duration of abuse: 16 years)

Not only had they lost their dignity in the eyes of their relatives as a result of substance use, this was true about their friends too, leaving them with few (true) friends. A participant said: “I lost my dignity and honor. When I took substances, some of my friends wouldn't receive me warmly anymore. They behaved differently, did not stop by anymore and called me addict and stuff”. (Man, 26 years old, duration of abuse: 12 years).

In some cases, the family had heard impertinent comments on the addiction of their child and felt disrespected. One of the interviewees said:

“The honor of my family was almost gone because every night I was using substances in the neighbors' house. My mother would tell

me that the neighborhood's drug dealers kept telling her I was addicted. So she wanted me to stay home and take drugs there, to prevent a family scandal." (Man, 22 years old, duration of abuse: 4 years).

Loss of dignity and respect of the individual's as a result of addiction was so painful for them that it became a source of transformation, in a way that this had become a motivation to quit. One participant said: "All I want is to quit so that I can live, because I have lost all my dignity in the (big) family." (Man, 29 years old, duration of abuse: 13 years).

Another participant's said:

"I have a brother who felt belittled in his relationship with his wife's family because of my addiction. He called me on that and wept deeply. For that reason and for the sake of my children and my husband, I have come to quit." (Woman, 27 years old, duration of abuse: 1 year and 3 months).

One of the outcomes of addiction, referred to by female participants only, was losing the support of the family. They had lost their family's support since the inception of addiction and wouldn't receive the attention of their family. One participant said:

"I was staying with my mom and dad, but they brushed me off. I got the cold shoulder when I talked to them. My dad would say 'you have started substance use on your own; you will have to quit it by yourself too'. When I wanted to tell them something, they would ignore me and I didn't feel the urge to change." (Woman, 35 years old, duration of abuse: 2 years).

For some of the participants, the case was different in that their families had explored every avenue to make their child quit addiction and since their efforts had gone in vain, they had lost hope in the person and given up. One participant said:

"Before I get addicted I was cared for by my family but, with my addiction, they washed their hands of me. They tried to help me quit 2-3 times but it was of no use, so they lost hope in me." (Woman, 20 years old, duration of abuse: 4 years).

Furthermore, several participants claimed that

addiction had made them aggressive and, as a result of this, they had ill-treated their spouse, children, parents, and friends both verbally or physically, especially before taking the substance or once taking the substance was being delayed, they had displayed aggressive behaviors. One participant said:

"I took substances for fun at first but in the long run it became inevitable. My mood would change drastically when I was home and once I was having troubles, substance use functioned as a painkiller for me. When I didn't take substances, I would curse my wife. But after taking a puff or two, I would love her madly. I cursed my children and broke things when I was not using substances." (Man, 40 years old, duration of abuse: 21 years).

In some cases, participants had assailed others verbally or physically. For instance, one of the participants recalls her inappropriate behaviors towards her mother after having taken crack:

"When I took crack I would get messed up and would attack my mom, or pull at her hair. I nagged her for no reason." (Woman, 25 years old, duration of abuse: 4 years).

Another participant who was feeling great remorse for having treated his parents aggressively said:

"Drugs changed me so drastically that I assailed my father and insulted him. I really bothered my parents and I really wish they could forgive me". (Man, 29 years old, duration of abuse: 13 years).

Substance abuse had ended in divorce for some participants. Some of them had felt indifferent to their marital life, which in turn had coerced their spouse to apply for divorce. One participant said:

"My wife was my cousin and she divorced me only because of my addiction. I used to leave her alone at home and didn't come back overnight. When you take substances, your life is disturbed. If you have best nutrition, money, car, and the best of everything but no peace of mind at home, then your wife will walk away." (Man, 32 years old, duration of abuse: 12 years).

The interesting point in the interviews; however, was that female participants reported more cases of divorce in comparison to their male counterparts. Some of these female participants had taken substance surreptitiously, without their husbands knowing about it which had ended in their husbands' applying for divorce as soon as they had realized the fact that their wives take substances. One of the participants described the reason for her divorce as:

"When I got married, my husband didn't know I was addicted. I took substances secretly when he was at work but he suspected me and soon he realized that I was using substances, as I was so messed up and my looks was different. He didn't say anything, just shook his head in remorse and left. So, gradually he asked me to get divorced and I acquiesced." (Woman, 32 years old, duration of abuse: 12 years).

Sometimes the husband had asked the wife to choose between quitting addiction and divorce but, not very surprisingly, the participants had chosen the latter over their marriage. One participant said:

"My husband warned me that he would apply for divorce if I don't quit but I was so addicted to heroin that I couldn't quit it, so, instead of heroin, I quit my husband and divorced." (Woman, 38 years old, duration of abuse: 20 years).

In other cases, the women couldn't take the advantage of a second chance which was given to them by their husbands and therefore they had paved the way for their own divorce. In other words, the husband had allowed them to stay together on condition that the woman quit, but the individual, despite their short term quit, couldn't stay in a perennial recovery and relapsed. This had convinced their husbands to apply for divorce. One participant said:

"My husband didn't know I was addicted, went furious when he knew about it and he kicked me out of the house. Then I quit and we were good again for 4-5 months during recovery. But then I was tempted again after 4-5 months and wanted to try substances one more time. I went out of the house and took it. So again he kicked me out. I have been living in my mother's house over the past 4-5 months, away from my

husband. We have agreed upon a divorce, but our case is still open at the court." (Woman, 35 years old, duration of abuse: 2 years).

Adire consequence of addiction was vocational disturbance (disturbed performance at work). Almost all the male participants of the study reported that their jobs had been disturbed and that their commitment to their profession was no more like before. Addiction had ended in reduced working hours and disturbed performance of the individuals in a way that they had started work later than normal, and obviously, finished it before the usual timing. A participant said:

"I had to be at my workplace on time, but I was an hour late for work every day. I failed to follow my normal timing. Whatever way I would try, I couldn't be punctual. Even worse, if you didn't show up at work for two days, you would lose your job." (Man, 32 years old, duration of abuse: 20 years).

In some cases, these disturbances had ended in the person losing their job and getting sacked. One participant said:

"My employer sacked me when he knew about my addiction. The reason was that I started work later and wanted to leave earlier." (Man, 24 years old, duration of abuse: 12 years).

Failure in caring for the different, mainly basic needs of the children was one of the outcomes referred to by some participants. They had failed to pay attention to the physiological needs of their children. One participant said:

"I could care for my children's needs when I didn't take drugs. But when I did, I couldn't pay any attention to the needs of my child and I would put him to bed hungry." (Woman, 38 years old, duration of abuse: 20 years).

Another participant said:

"I was unable to realize the fact that I have to take care of my 2 children. I was totally neglectful of them. We would feed an egg to the child, saying this is the meal but one egg is really not the proper nutrition for a little kid." (Woman, 27 years old, duration of abuse: 1 year and 3 months).

Some of these participants had been neglectful of their children to the extent that they had

lost custody of their kids. One participant said: “I have 2 kids who are in the welfare organization. I have to quit so that I can get them back. I haven’t seen them for 8 months and I have no clue where they are.” (Woman, 35 years old, duration of abuse: 2 years).

Additionally, some of the women participating in the study stated that they had given birth to children with addiction as a result of their own continuous substance abuse. One participant said:

“I used to take crack when I was pregnant and so my children were born addicted. But their addiction is cured and now they are no more addicted.” (Woman, 35 years old, duration of abuse: 2 years).

Another participant laments the torture of her child at the time of birth:

“My baby was born addicted but I was too afraid of my husband’s reaction to allow the baby to have a puff, and unfortunately the baby was suffering like a grown up addict. He would cry, yawn nonstop, and had involuntary movement of limbs in sleep. He was like

this for three days and then got well. Our friends told me to give him a puff or two, because they knew I was using substances. But I resisted and told them that my husband doesn’t know I am using substances, how can I have the baby take it?!” (Woman, 32 years old, duration of abuse: 12 years).

And last but not least, another outcome referred to by women participants was the coldness they felt towards their spouse and their relationship. One participant said: “I didn’t allow my husband to sleep with me ever since my addiction. I would start fights or quarrels with him. If he delayed in supplying me with drugs, I would become aggressive and have quarrels with him. I was so agitated.” (Woman, 27 years old, duration of abuse: 1 year and 3 months).

Another participant said: “My husband felt so much sympathy for me but I couldn’t be the way he wished. He wanted to have sex but once I took drugs or substances, I didn’t feel like having sex anymore.” (Woman, 30 years old, duration of abuse: 12 years).

**Table 2** Summary of themes and sub-themes

| Themes                           | Sub-themes   | Percent | Frequency |
|----------------------------------|--|---------|-----------|
| Individual consequences          | Losing trust   | 10      | 4         |
|                                  | Educational decline and educational failure            | 12.5    | 5         |
|                                  | Imprisonment   | 15      | 6         |
|                                  | Missing the promising milestones of life               | 12.5    | 5         |
|                                  | Loneliness and seclusion                               | 100     | 40        |
|                                  | Suicide thoughts and suicide attempts                  | 7.5     | 3         |
|                                  | Debilitation of religious beliefs                      | 22.5    | 9         |
|                                  | Extramarital relationships                             | 7.5     | 3         |
| Individual-familial consequences | Reduced dignity and respect                            | 17.5    | 7         |
|                                  | Losing the support of the family                       | 17.5    | 7         |
|                                  | Aggression   | 54      | 18        |
|                                  | Divorce  | 15      | 6         |
|                                  | Vocational disturbance (disturbed performance at work) | 37.5    | 15        |
|                                  | Not attending to the basic needs of children           | 27.5    | 11        |
|                                  | Inborn addiction of children                           | 7.5     | 3         |
| Emotional coldness of partners   | 17.5   | 7       |           |

## Discussion

The statements of the participants delineated

that substance abuse effectuated a wide range

of negative consequences for the individual and the society. One of the major dire consequences was reduced dignity and respect of individuals and their family in the eyes of others. In another study which examined addicted women in Iran in 2012, humiliation and getting ostracized by the family were among the biggest problems referred to by addicted people [31]. Some of these participants had lost their respect and dignity, and yet worse, they had lost the trust of others, whereas some female participants had lost the support of their family. Other participants had experienced great aggression in their behavior as a result of taking certain drugs (crack) or due to a delay in taking the addictive substances. These aggressive behaviors can damage the individual, not to mention that they can create feelings of rage and fear in the family members [10]. Along with this, findings of some studies have shown that drug abuse increases the risk of violence, and as the addiction progresses and drug consumption increases, individuals will have less control over their violent behavior [32]. Another bitter outcome of addiction was divorce. In this study, female participants reported more cases of divorce than men. In other words, their husbands, especially the ones who were not addicts, when realizing that their wives were addicted to substances, more especially when they had tried to help them quit but had failed to do so, had applied for divorce. This was different in the case of men in that their wives had applied for divorce because the husbands were indifferent to them or they didn't care about the family. Previous studies support this finding, as some divorced couples stated that addiction to drugs contributed to the breakup of their marriages [10]. Addiction, therefore, does contribute to instability and lower qualities of marital life. In some cases; however, individuals react to divorce by increasing their intake of drugs [11]. A perfect catch-22 situation, addiction ends in divorce whereas divorce intensifies the severity of addiction. Male participants of the study reported vocational disturbances which had led to losing their job which in turn would end in worsened financial situation and

penury. Therefore, unemployment was another outcome of substance abuse. There are related findings which indicate that the inception of addiction can affect individuals' weak performance in different familial and social roles [33]. Some reports showed that women and men had taken up behaviors, after starting drug use, which had already paved the way for their imprisonment [34]. In the present study, selling drugs, working for drug dealers, and planning and practicing schemes to get money for drugs were also among the behaviors which had led to imprisonment of some of the individuals. For those individuals who had started substance abuse since high school, educational decline, and failure in school were the unstoppable outcomes of drug abuse. In similar vein, previous studies have shown that drug abuse correlates with reduced educational motivation and educational achievement [35]. Substance abuse had contributed to a loss of promising milestones in the life of individuals (e.g. right cases of marriage), for those who had started substance abuse when they were teenagers or in their early adulthood. Some participants had become neglectful of the needs of their children as their addiction had progressed, to the extent that they didn't even attend to the primary needs of the children, or if they did, it was in its worst condition. No wonder if some of these participants had lost custody of their children as a result and their children were sent to orphanages of the welfare organization. Much to their chagrin, children of some of these participants were born addicts. Although these female participants always worried about the health of their children, during pregnancy or after birth, but little had been done on their side to improve the situation. The reason for this can be that the reward system in the brain of addicts is damaged due to drug abuse which has weakened the motivation of a mother to take proper care of her baby or has made it an unpleasant activity for them [36]. As per the statements of the participants, almost all of them had experienced loneliness and seclusion as a result of drug abuse, having them quit most of the activities they used to do

before, and minimizing their social relationships to its least. For some of the male participants, drug abuse had triggered suicide thoughts and suicide attempts. Studies also have shown that drug abuse is correlative with suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts [37] and almost half of all committed suicides are done by people with drug use disorders [38]. Moreover, mainly referred to by women participants, religious beliefs and practices had been debilitated as a result of substance abuse among the individuals, in a way that, all they wanted was drugs. And finally, emotional coldness and extramarital affairs (mainly to get drugs in return) were another dire outcome brought upon the participants by addiction. Findings of a study conducted in the United States showed that 50 percent of women who had admitted for treatment, reported sexual intercourse in return for money or drugs [39].

As discussed in depth, addiction can bring about dire outcomes upon individuals, some of which are irreparable. Furthermore, the majority of these outcomes were common for both women and men, except for a few which were specific to one gender only. In addition, the acrimonious and unwelcome effects of drug use were not solely limited to the individual; rather it affected their families, children, and spouses and in a broader sense, the whole society, leading to other bitter consequences.

The utilization of qualitative methodology and unveiling various aspects and consequences of drug abuse on women and men were the strong points of the present study. Small size of the sample; however, as well as sampling from one city were among the limitations of this study. Hence, generalization of the findings has to be done with discretion.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the present study further highlighted the negative consequences of addiction in men and women populations. Highlighting these consequences can help inform individuals and the society about the hazards of drug abuse. In addition, officials in charge of education and prevention of addiction across the nation can obtain knowledge out

of these findings. Given the fact that these findings were first hand set of experiences of drug addicts, highlighting and bringing the outcomes into cynosure is a key factor in increasing the chance of reducing the potential risk of addiction to drugs in individuals; moreover, it will provide a secure source of motivation for the drug users to quit, especially in the early stages of addiction.

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Study design: AR, FZH

Data collection and analysis: FZH, AR

Manuscript preparation: FZH, AR, SOH

### **Conflict of Interest**

"The authors declare that they have no competing interests."

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