



An Analysis of the Economic Value of Substances of Abuse Seized in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Introduction: As one of the largest oil exporters in the world, Saudi Arabia carries 18.1% of the global oil reserves and the fifth largest natural gas reserves. This unrefined wealth, in addition to numerous other natural resources, makes Saudi Arabia a logical destination for drug smugglers and dealers aiming to make fast illegal profits. Based on recent statistics, this article focused on the economic value of drugs of abuse seized in Saudi Arabia during the period between 2009-2012.

Methods: Four years of data (2009–2012) related to the economic value of drugs of abuse seized in Saudi Arabia were analyzed. This data was obtained by Saudi Customs and other governmental entities responsible for the monitoring of drug smuggling.

Results: The recent financial boom coupled with the numerous nationalities and cultures present in Saudi Arabia has led to an associated increase in the smuggling and promotion of narcotics, accompanied by illegal monetary gain, with consequent detrimental effects on the Saudi economy. This is evident by the Saudi Arabian market value statistics during the years from 2009–2012.

Conclusion: Statistically, smuggling and drug trafficking in Saudi Arabia has increased, particularly regarding amphetamines, cannabis, and khat. Economic, security, and social programs aimed at raising youth awareness of the dangers of substance abuse should be implemented to address this ongoing problem.

Keywords: Drugs of Abuse; Economic Value of Drugs of Abuse; Substance Abuse

Introduction

Saudi Arabia is located in the southwestern corner of Asia, bordered by the Red Sea to the west, by Yemen and Oman to the south; by the Arabian Gulf, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar to the east; and by Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait to the north. The coast of the Red Sea lies east of the Arabian Gulf and is about 1760 km long, covering an area of 560 km². Saudi Arabia's terrain is varied because of the vastness of the Kingdom, which extends over an area of 2,150,000 million km², therefore representing about 70% of the entire area of the Arabian Peninsula [1-5].

The current population inhabiting Saudi Arabia stands at about 33,413,660 million, of which 72.9% are Saudis and 27.1% are non-Saudis. The age group under 30 constitutes about 67.1% of the total population, with Saudis under the age of 15 constituting 37.2%. This demographic distribution over the great expanse of the Kingdom and its religious importance as the epicentre of the Islamic world, as well as the presence of a large number of foreigners coming from different cultural and religious backgrounds for employment in various international companies or as domestic workers, thereby providing a certain degree of open-mindedness coupled financial abundance, are all factors that make Saudi

Arabia an attractive target for the smuggling of banned substances to be sold for illegal profit. This is evidenced by the number of seizures made by security and control services [6-9].

The most important drugs seized in Saudi Arabia are amphetamines, cannabis, khat, heroin, cocaine, and crack. The government is working to fight these substances not only due to their harmful effects on the abuser both as an individual and as part of society, but also due to the economic damage consequent to the actual purchase of these substances. It should be noted that there are both direct and indirect costs of substance abuse, the direct cost being the actual value paid by the user to buy the drug, while the indirect cost consists of several variables borne by the community. These include, most importantly, the disruption of the productivity of the individual abuser; the cost of treatment and rehabilitation; and the costs incurred by the control, investigative, and judicial bodies. Overall, the economic cost of drug abuse, therefore, far exceeds the monetary value of drugs seized [10-16].

Methods

It is important to analyze data on the economic value of drugs of abuse seized in Saudi Arabia, where their use has grown tremendously among youth within the Kingdom. Therefore, an analysis of data collected over the course of four years (2009–2012) was performed. The data was obtained from Saudi government entities responsible for preventing the promotion and smuggling of drugs and reflected, namely, the prices of these drugs of abuse between users.

Results

The following three steps were taken in order to determine the monetary value of the seized drugs:

A. The total quantity of narcotic drugs seized during

N	Drug	Seizures quantity (UNIT)	Rate of value in SAR (US \$)	The cash value SAR (US \$)
1	Amphetamine	224,810,361 (PILLS)	45 (12)	10,116,466,245 (2,697,724,332)
2	Cannabis	132,819,884.83 (g)	90 (24)	11,953,789,634.7 (318,877,235.92)
3	Kat	7,010,645 (Kg)	1376 (367)	9,646,647,520 (2,572,439,338.7)
4	Heroin	270,624.185 (g)	253 (67.5)	68,468,677,805 (18,258,314,081.3)
5	Opiates	28,811.39 (g)	150 (40)	4,321,708.5 (1,152,455.6)
6	Cocaine	35,620.512 (g)	1200 (320)	42,744,614.4 (11,398,563.84)
7	Crack	7,252.1 (g)	800 (213)	5,801,680 (1,547,114.7)
The total value of the seized drugs in SAR (US \$)				100,238,449,207.6 (26,730,253,122.027)

Table 3: The total value of the seized drugs between 2009–2012 amounted to more than 31.8 billion eight hundred million Saudi riyals, at an annual rate of approximately 7,959,559,830, amounting to approximately seven billion nine hundred and fifty-nine million riyals.

the period from 2009 to 2012 is shown in (Table 1).

N	Abuse of drugs	Quantity Seized
1	Amphetamine	22,48,10,361
2	Cannabis	13,28,19,884.83
3	Kat	7,01,06,45,552.21
4	Heroin	2,70,624.19
5	Opiates	28,811.39
6	Cocaine	35,620.51
7	Crack	7,252.10

Table 1: The total quantity of drugs seized from 2009 – 2012.

B. Determining the average purchasing value per unit of each type through the monthly surveys carried out by the Department of Statistics at the General Directorate for Combating Drugs. Therefore, the average prices of drugs of all kinds were obtained according to the price of trade between their promoters and users for October 2012, as shown in (Table 2).

N	Drugs	Unit	Rate of value in SAR (US \$)
1	Amphetamine	Pill	45 (12)
2	Cannabis	Gram	90 (24)
3	Kat	Kilogram	1376 (367)
4	Heroin	Gram	253 (67.5)
5	Opiates	Gram	150 (40)
6	Cocaine	Gram	1200 (320)
7	Crack	Gram	800 (213)

Table 2: Average purchasing value per unit of each drug.

C. Based on the previous two steps, the monetary value of the seized drugs is shown in (Table 3):

Discussion

According to statistical data obtained, amphetamines were considered the most popular drug in Saudi Arabia, with prices varying according to availability. Prices fluctuated throughout the year, with an increased price seen in February 2012, followed by a price drop during the months of March, April, May, and June of the same year, only to increase again during July, to become stable from August to November, and finally fall again in December 2012. This indicates that there is strict adherence to this substance, with prices ranging from 45–48 SAR, a fluctuation of only three riyals, an indication of stability in prices. Cannabis was the second most popular drug, with the average price of cannabis from February 2009 to February 2012 ranging from 78-90 riyals, a fluctuation of only 12 SAR. Khat demonstrated that average prices stabilized from November 2009 to April 2012, then increased in June 2012, stabilized from July to October of the same year, after which the price dropped in February 2012. The price range for khat was between 1300 and 1400 riyals, a fluctuation of only 100 riyals. As for heroin, the average price declined in April 2019 and then stabilized for almost the entire month of November 2012, with prices ranging from 250–400 SAR, a fluctuation of about 150 SAR.

The drug trade is global dilemma that can only be interrupted through the coordination and cohesion of different sectors. The financial abundance of Saudi Arabia makes it a major regional target for smuggling of these prohibited drugs for the purpose of illicit gain. Drug smuggling is potentially linked to crime, both individual and organized, money laundering, and terrorist activity. Furthermore, the harm attributed to drug abuse on individuals in a society contributes to its disintegration, destabilization of security, and lack of focus of that individual. Consequently, the addict becomes a burden on the society by becoming more likely to suffer from depression and isolation and increasing liable to commit crimes in order to feed the drug habit. As a result, a possible means of deterrence is for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to instate warnings to Saudi citizens of the penalty for drug smuggling and promotion that may amount to execution. In addition, embassies must request a criminal status certificate for anyone wishing to obtain a travel visa to the Kingdom in order to exclude individuals with criminal cases in their own countries.

Conclusion

This study attempted to highlight the real cost of drug abuse in Saudi Arabia. Amphetamines, cannabis, and khat were considered the most favourable drugs of abuse, while heroin, opiates, and cocaine were less popular drug alternatives.

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