

مركز البيدر للدراسات والتخطيط

Al-Baidar Center For Studies And Planning



The Phenomenon of Drugs: The New Face of Terrorism in Iraq

Research Department

Introduction

Many countries worldwide are witnessing the spread of drugs. The proliferation of drugs in society, especially among youth, represents one of the most complex and difficult challenges faced by governments and states. The reasons contributing to the spread and use of drugs are diverse—economic, social, political, media-related, technological, and others.

Today, Iraq appears to have joined the ranks of countries suffering from drugs and facing this dangerous and deadly challenge of what can be called the “new terrorism”, especially among the youth of both genders. Although Iraq is not considered a drug-producing country, it has become a corridor and transit route for transporting drugs from exporting and producing countries to other neighboring and regional countries. Additionally, drug trafficking and promotion within Iraq contribute to the spread of addiction, as indicated by official and unofficial reports and statements about the expansion and growing threat of drugs in Iraq.

The consequences of the spread of drugs, in all their types and forms, are numerous and varied, affecting health, psychological, social, security, and economic aspects. Therefore, the responsibility for addressing this issue falls on everyone without exception, starting from families, schools, mosques, and community organizations, up to the state and its official institutions, which bear the highest level of responsibility constitutionally, legally, and ethically.

The spread of drugs, as a multifaceted and complex problem, requires serious and genuine theoretical and field research, not ceremonious or superficial, to determine its scope and identify effective ways to address it. It is also necessary to benefit from the experiences of countries and societies that have preceded Iraq in facing the drug challenge, and to use all available means, whether legislative,

punitive, or through the availability of appropriate reform and treatment institutions for those affected, consuming, and addicted.

This brief paper outlines the main aspects of the reality and dangers of drugs in Iraq, as indicated by some institutions and reports, most recently the Human Rights Commission's 2020 report on the reality of drugs in Iraq, which will be the primary focus of this paper, in addition to referencing available data and statistics on drugs and their spread in Iraq in recent years.

One: The Reality of Drugs in Iraq

Many indicators and data points to the clear and explicit presence of drugs in Iraqi society, regardless of the exact prevalence rates. The Human Rights Commission's report on the reality of drugs in Iraq confirms this, stating: "Iraq has become a thriving economic market for the sale and trade of drugs, with a notable increase in cases of drug users and promoters, especially among youth aged 10–15, including females. The Commission has documented a marked rise in the types and quantities of drugs, including crystal meth, narcotic pills, heroin, hashish, opium, tramadol, and cocaine. The worsening of this phenomenon necessitates an evaluation of its causes and the development of effective solutions and treatments, particularly as it has become a significant and dangerous issue affecting families and society. The Commission, through its documentation role, has conducted field visits to all prisons and detention centers and recorded many statements from detainees involved in drug cases."¹

Some specialists believe that before 2003, Iraq was a transit and passage country for drugs from producing and exporting countries to other countries, including Gulf states. The former regime used this as one of its policies against some Gulf countries by facilitating the transfer of drugs from Central Asia and

1. See: The Human Rights Commission report on the reality of drugs in Iraq: <http://ihchr.iq>

other countries where drugs are cultivated, such as Afghanistan and Iran.

Iraq is also among the West Asian countries where various types of narcotic substances and drugs are prevalent. There is widespread misuse of opioids, and until recently, problems and disorders related to drug abuse were mainly limited to the misuse of alcohol, prescription medications, methamphetamine (crystal), and Captagon pills, the prevalence of which has increased over the past three years, particularly in the southern provinces². After 2003, cases of drug trafficking and abuse in Iraq increased significantly, with different types of drugs spreading, establishing their markets, networks, dealers, cells, and promoters. A statistic issued by the United Nations suggested that, in the absence of sincere efforts to address and eliminate this phenomenon, the next ten years will be devastating for Iraqi youth, as 10% of smuggled drugs are used in Iraq. According to a statistic from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the approximate proportion of people with an addiction among Iraqi youth after 2003, as reported in its 2017 report, is that out of every ten individuals aged between 18 and 30, three are addicted to drugs³.

A United Nations statistic suggested that in the next ten years, Iraqi youth will be severely affected by drugs if there are no sincere efforts to address and eliminate this phenomenon, and that 10% of smuggled drugs are used in Iraq. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimated in a 2017 report that among every ten Iraqis aged 18–30, three are addicted to drugs.

Many official bodies, such as the Ministry of Interior and some civil society organizations concerned in drugs, as well as international offices and organizations working in Iraq, confirm that Iraq is facing a potent and deadly “drug storm” which represents one of the most significant current and future challenges for Iraq due to the dangers and dire consequences it brings to society and the state.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Second: Legal Organization of Drugs in Iraq

In 2017, the Iraqi Parliament issued the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Law No. 50 to regulate and address the drug problem in Iraq, replacing the previous law from 1965 (No. 68). The new law established the 'National Supreme Commission for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Affairs' within the Ministry of Health, which meets at least once a month at the invitation of its chairman. The commission develops a comprehensive national strategy to combat illicit drug trafficking and misuse of psychotropic substances and chemicals. It prepares plans and programs for implementation in the region and provinces through local committees.

The law also established the 'General Directorate for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Affairs' within the Ministry of Interior to combat crimes punishable under this law, apprehend perpetrators, seize narcotic substances, and cooperate with international and regional bodies concerned with drug affairs. Additionally, a 'Center for the Rehabilitation of Drug Users or Addicts' was established within the Ministry of Social Affairs to rehabilitate those released by judicial decision, with rehabilitation programs coordinated with the Ministry of Health.

The law prescribes a range of penalties for those involved with drugs, ranging from execution and life imprisonment to temporary imprisonment and fines, depending on the level, type, and circumstances of the offense ⁴.

Some specialists are critical of the Drug Law Number 50 of 2017, amongst the criticisms is that the law reduced penalties based on the type of seized drugs, which, according to them, is unjustified since the penalty should not be measured by the kind or quantity as long as the substance is narcotic. Some drug cases have

4. See: The Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Law No. 50 of 2017, Articles (27–37).

been referred to the Court of Misdemeanors, where sentences do not exceed five years, after being previously considered by criminal courts with harsher penalties relative to the seriousness of the crime committed. From here, the law needs to be reviewed and amended in a manner that corresponds to the imminent danger facing society due to drugs, and this should be reinforced legally ⁵.

The legislation that regulates the issue of drugs and the mechanism of their use, as well as the distinction between what is legal and illegal, and what relates to strict and deterrent penalties for unlawful use, in addition to the availability of other factors associated with the psychological and health treatment of those affected and people with an addiction, must all be considered. It is also necessary to benefit from all specialized opinions to address legal loopholes and deficiencies, and to consider all developments that indicate the problem of drugs, their spread, and the means of promoting and using them. This is because the issue of drugs is characterized by flexibility and expertise, which has enabled dealers and promoters to continuously update their methods and ways of dealing with drugs.

5. The official website of the Supreme Judicial Council in Iraq published ideas and proposals that emerged from a discussion session regarding the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Law No. 50 of 2017, along with the proposals submitted in connection with it. After comparing them with the articles of the law above, it was found that they are of significance, as they identified the points of deficiency and contradiction present in the law and ways to address them, especially after the issuance of Statement No. (236) of 2017 on 2017/10/9, published in the Iraqi Gazette, issue (4464) on 2017/10/9, by which certain psychotropic substances were added to the schedules annexed to the law. For more information, refer to Discussion Session 49/Studies published on the official website of the Supreme Judicial Council: <https://www.hjc.iq/index-ar.php>.

Third: Causes of Drug Spread in Iraq

The reasons for the spread of drugs are numerous and varied, and they differ according to the social, economic, political, and security conditions, as well as the rule of law, from one society to another. In general, some reasons may be common to the spread of drugs among countries.

However, the factors contributing to the spread of drugs in Iraq are different, due to the unstable conditions and the changes that Iraqi society is experiencing politically, security-wise, and socially. The report of the Human Rights Commission, which was previously mentioned, indicates that the Human Rights Commission, through its field monitoring, visits to all detention centers and prisons, and the numerous interviews it conducted with users and drug dealers, has found that several reasons have led to the spread of the phenomenon of drugs in Iraq. The report mentioned five main reasons in this context, which are as follows ⁶:

- 1. Psychological reasons:** Feelings of failure, frustration, and the urgent need to forget problems, as well as boredom and loneliness.
- 2. Social reasons:** Broken family environments, poor living conditions, and association with peers who exhibit unethical behavior.
- 3. Economic Factors:** The deterioration of living conditions, worsening economic circumstances, and the increase in unemployment and poverty represent some of the most significant factors that drive this group to use, traffic, and promote drugs.
- 4. Weakness of Religious Influence:** Continuous religious education makes individuals less likely to deviate, become delinquent, or fall into the trap of drug use. Therefore, a lack of spiritual motivation is one of the main reasons

See: The Human Rights Commission report on the reality of drugs in Iraq: <http://ihchr.iq>

leading to involvement in drugs, as those who do not adhere to their religious principles are more susceptible to drug abuse. It is well known that all religions prohibit self-harm, with Islam being at the forefront of these religions.

5. **Technological and Media-Related Reasons:** The report also noted, in this context, that many studies indicate that the spread and use of drugs can be attributed to technological factors, such as the increase in scientific inventions of numerous toxic chemical substances that, in their properties, effectiveness, and impact, resemble naturally produced drugs. As previously mentioned regarding synthetic drugs, they produce a greater sense of euphoria than natural drugs. Additionally, there is the development of pharmaceutical compounds used therapeutically for pain relief, which some individuals may resort to using. Furthermore, the advancement of media and the dissemination, whether intentional or unintentional, of negative images, films, and programs contribute to educating individuals about drug use, especially in films and productions that address the topic of drugs. Some individuals, particularly youth, may be driven to imitate the characters portrayed in certain movies and series in how they use drugs, thereby contributing to the spread and use of drugs, as adolescents tend to mimic the actions of film protagonists.

Fourth: Indicators of Drug Spread in Iraq

It is necessary to mention an important fact about the reality of drugs in Iraq: the rates, statistics, numbers, and statements published in the media by the official authorities, institutions, and committees specialized in combating drugs are different and sometimes even contradictory, even though the relevant authorities in this field are united under a legal framework represented by the National Supreme Commission for Combating Drugs.

Accordingly, it is challenging to mention definitive or complete rates and numbers for the actual reality of the drug phenomenon in Iraq. This applies to most social studies and research as well, due to the absence of credible institutions specializing in statistical and numerical data in this field, which makes it impossible to rely on many official statements, either because of their differences and contradictions, as we have explained, or because they are not based on scientific and factual data, leading to simplification or exaggeration ⁷.

Therefore, we will rely on the official report of the Human Rights Commission previously mentioned, as it is issued by an accredited official body that communicates with specialized international organizations, and because it is based on documented interviews with more than 400 drug users and dealers in all Iraqi provinces through field visits to detainees and convicts in various prisons across the provinces.

1. **Gender:** The Commission indicated that males are more likely to use drugs, at a rate of 89.79%, while females constitute 10.2%.

2. **Age Groups:** The Commission indicated that the age groups most likely to use drugs are youth, specifically those aged 29–39 years, at a rate of 40.95%, followed by the age group 18–29 years at a rate of 35.23%.

7. The Iraqi Minister of Interior, Othman Al-Ghanimi, stated on the official Al-Iraqiya channel that the rate of drug prevalence among youth in Iraq is 50%. However, the minister did not clarify the data upon which he based this very alarming percentage in reality.

Table 1: Percentages of the Most Drug-Using Age Groups

Less than 18 years	years 29–18	years 39–29	years and above 40
8.57%	35.23%	40.95%	15.23%

3. Educational Level: The study showed that different educational levels use drugs at relatively close rates, except for those with university and higher degrees, who are the least likely to use drugs.

Table 2: Percentages of Educational Levels among Drug Users

Illiterate	Reads and writes	Primary	Intermediate	Secondary	University and above
18.51%	9.25%	40.74%	22.22%	5.55%	3.7%

4. Types of Drugs: The field study conducted by the Commission on samples of users in various Iraqi provinces showed that the most used type of drug is crystal (crystal meth) at a rate of 37.3%. Users, including employees in government departments or night guards, indicated that it helps them perform their work well and stay up for long periods. Still, their psychological state becomes extremely poor. Crystal is followed by the pills known as “Zero-1” at a rate of 28.35%.

Table 3: Percentages of Types of Drugs Used in Iraq

Zero-One Pills	Crystal	Sedative Pills	Captagon	Cypriot	Pink Pills	Other Pills
28.35%	37.3%	2.98%	7.46%	2.98%	5.97%	14.92%

The tables adopted in this paper are taken from the Human Rights Commission report on the reality of drugs in Iraq.

Conclusion

From the above, the following can be concluded regarding the reality of drugs in Iraq:

- Drugs have become a real problem facing the Iraqi state and society, and they are expanding and spreading rapidly in society, especially among youth, as the most targeted group.
- The lack of awareness, low levels of education, high rates of poverty, and the weakness of the religious factor, as well as the state of emptiness and frustration that young people usually suffer from, are among the most important reasons that help the spread of drugs in Iraqi society.
- Within the framework of responsibility and the nature of confronting the “terrorism” of drugs that is sweeping through society and leaving its destructive effects on everyone without exception, whether at the health, psychological, social, or security level, the responsibility falls on everyone, from the family to the state.
- There is a need to be aware of the fundamental responsibility and the seriousness of drugs, and to adopt a culture of prevention and treatment for the victims of drugs among youth, people with minor addiction, and those deceived and exploited by dealers and promoters for economic and financial purposes, as well as imposing the harshest and most severe deterrent penalties on promoters, traffickers, and the like.
- The phenomenon of drugs and their spread is a problem suffered by many countries around the world. Therefore, it is necessary to benefit from the experiences of other countries in this field and from the advanced means of confrontation they have reached, whether in the context of reform and

treatment or the field of legislation and deterrent punitive tools.

- While everyone bears responsibility for confronting drugs, the state and its institutions, with their legislative, financial, media, security, and treatment capabilities, are the primary party responsible for confronting the terrorism of drugs in Iraq, which is no less fierce than the terrorism of extremist groups.
- Despite the efforts made by some state institutions, such as the Ministry of Interior, in the battle against drugs, these efforts require greater coordination among the relevant parties, especially the 'National Supreme Commission for Combating Drugs,' and the development of methods and tools, as well as genuine seriousness in managing this file, far from administrative bureaucracy, slackness, and the mutual reliance among official bodies, which is characteristic of the general administrations in the state and its institutions.
- Drugs, as a problem, a crime, and a social scourge, cannot be confronted by a single approach or a specific method, such as security or punitive measures alone. Instead, it is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with various dimensions and backgrounds. Accordingly, comprehensive and effective confrontation and treatment require the coordination and integration of efforts from different sectors, including religious, legal, social, health, and educational aspects. This is a collective and shared responsibility, not the sole responsibility of the state, even though the state is the primary entity responsible in this regard.

About the Center

Baidar Center for Studies and Planning is an independent, non-governmental, and non-profit Iraqi organization established in 2015 and registered with the Department of Non-Governmental Organizations at the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. The Center aims to contribute to state-building by proposing visions and practical solutions to the country's main challenges, developing public sector management mechanisms, shaping public policies, and formulating strategic plans based on rigorous studies supported by documented data and information. This is achieved through regular meetings with relevant state agencies and international organizations.

The Center also supports economic reforms, sustainable development, and provides technical assistance to both the public and private sectors. It aims to support and develop the private sector, promoting job opportunities for citizens by training and qualifying youth, thereby reducing their dependence on government institutions and contributing to the country's economic growth.

Furthermore, the Center contributes to human development, considering humans as the wealth of the nation, by organizing programs for youth preparation and development, holding courses to create leaders capable of proposing, explaining, and implementing future visions and plans that advance individuals and society, while preserving the unique identity and value system of Iraqi society, which is based on moral commitment, virtuous qualities, and the rejection of all forms of corruption—administrative, financial, intellectual, ethical, and others.

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