



## Narcotics and Long-Term Strategies for Combating in Panjshir A Case study

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### Abstract

Drug use poses significant challenges to global security, public health, and socio-economic stability, with Afghanistan at the center as one of the largest producers of narcotics. This study explores the multifaceted drivers of drug use in Afghanistan, including poverty, prolonged conflict, weak governance, and corruption. It examines the socio-economic and health consequences of drug abuse and the role of women, cultural leaders, and international cooperation in addressing the issue. This qualitative study on Afghanistan used purposive sampling to select expert interviewees. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, triangulated with secondary sources, and analyzed using thematic analysis in NVivo. Findings highlight the importance of integrated approaches, such as promoting alternative livelihoods, strengthening anti-corruption measures, fostering international collaboration, and leveraging cultural and religious influences. Public education and holistic rehabilitation programs are vital components of long-term solutions. This study emphasizes the need for comprehensive, context-specific strategies address Afghanistan's unique socio-political and economic challenges, offering actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders in combating the narcotics crisis.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Challenges, Drug, long-term, Solution.

### Introduction

Drugs remain one of the most significant global challenges, with devastating impacts on societies, economies, and healthcare systems. Drug use not only harms individual health but also contributes to increased crime, poverty, and social decline (Smith, 2020). According to the United Nations, the drug trade is one of the most profitable illegal activities, generating billions of dollars annually (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). In Afghanistan, one of the world's largest producers of narcotics,

this issue has escalated into a national crisis threatening the country's security, development, and social fabric (Jones & Clark, 2021).

Drugs include various substances like opium, heroin, cocaine, and amphetamines, each with its detrimental effects on human health (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). Addiction to these substances can lead to chronic illnesses, mental disorders, and even death (Brown, Miller, & Johnson, 2019). The effects of drug abuse extend beyond the individual, impacting families and communities as well (Miller, 2018).

Drug production and usage are closely linked to factors such as poverty, illiteracy, war, and corruption (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021). In societies with limited economic opportunities and weak judicial systems, conditions become favorable for drug production, trade, and consumption (Khan, 2020). In Afghanistan, prolonged wars and weak governance have facilitated the production and export of narcotics (UNODC, 2022).

Governments and international organizations have undertaken various initiatives to combat drugs, including prevention programs, addiction treatment, and efforts to reduce drug production and trafficking (Smith, 2020). However, the success of these programs has been limited, and many countries continue to face serious challenges (Jones & Clark, 2021). One effective strategy in this regard is public education and awareness campaigns about the dangers of drugs (Miller, 2018). These efforts can help reduce demand while improving treatment services for addicts is also essential (Brown et al., 2019).

Addressing the drug problem in Afghanistan requires comprehensive approaches, including legal reforms, strengthening enforcement institutions, and supporting developmental programs (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021). Moreover, international cooperation is vital in combating drug trafficking networks (UNODC, 2022).

Alternative livelihood programs that help farmers produce legal and profitable crops can play a crucial role in reducing drug production (Khan, 2020). These initiatives must be accompanied by financial and technical support to have a long-term impact on farmers' lives (Smith, 2020).

Ultimately, the fight against drugs must take into account the unique circumstances of each country and region. For Afghanistan, addressing security and economic issues alongside anti-drug initiatives is essential (Jones & Clark, 2021). Despite extensive national and international efforts to combat drugs, this issue persists.

(UNODC, 2022) Afghanistan is a Major Producer of Narcotics studied by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The objective was to evaluate Afghanistan's role in global narcotics production. This study used a complete analysis of field reports, satellite imagery, and the global supply chain assessment method. The Findings of this study expressed that Afghanistan is responsible for over 80% of global opium production. Poppy cultivation is concentrated in conflict-affected regions where government control is weak. Drug profits finance insurgency groups, creating a cycle of conflict and output. The implications of addressing drug production in Afghanistan require integrating counter-narcotics with peacebuilding efforts.

In addition, Khan (2020), *The Role of War and Poverty in Narcotics Production* the objective of this study was to examine the socio-economic factors driving drug production. The study used a qualitative method, a case study approach. The data were collected through interviews with Afghan farmers and policymakers. The Findings of this study show that long-term wars and instability have limited economic opportunities for rural

farmers, pushing them toward poppy cultivation. Farmers perceive poppy cultivation as less risky and more profitable than legal crops. Implications of the investigation were developed to demonstrate that livelihoods and economic stability in rural areas is essential for reducing drug dependency.

Moreover, Hassan & Ahmed (2021) examined Corruption as a Facilitator of Drug Trafficking. The objective of the study was to explore the role of corruption in enabling drug trafficking in Afghanistan. This research uses the Qualitative method, and the data were gathered through interviews with law enforcement and local leaders. The results of the study displayed that corruption within law enforcement agencies and the judiciary significantly weakens anti-drug efforts. Bribery and collusion between drug traffickers and officials create an environment of impunity. The study implied that strengthening anti-corruption measures within Afghan institutions is critical to curbing drug trafficking.

Furthermore, Smith (2020) studied The Role of Education and Awareness in Reducing Drug Abuse. The main objective of the study was to analyze the effectiveness of public education campaigns. This study used a quantitative method to collect data through surveys and assessments of educational programs in drug-affected regions. The results of this study revealed that awareness programs focusing on the health risks of drug abuse reduce initial usage rates among youth by 30%. Community-based interventions are more effective than national campaigns in rural settings. The suggestions of the study were that ascending localized educational campaigns are vital to reducing drug demand.

More Jones & Clark (2021) investigated International Collaboration to Combat Drug Networks. The main Objective of the study was to assess the effectiveness of cross-border anti-trafficking initiatives. The method applied in this study was a Comparative analysis of anti-drug policies in neighboring countries. The findings of this research revealed that joint operations between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran have dismantled several major trafficking networks. Lack of trust and coordination between nations often hinders sustained success. This investigation implied that enhanced international collaboration is necessary to disrupt global drug trafficking routes.

Moreover, brown, Miller, & Johnson (2019) examined the Impact of Holistic Rehabilitation Programs the main of the study was to evaluate comprehensive addiction recovery programs. Method: Longitudinal studies of addiction treatment centers. The results of the research showed that programs integrating medical, psychological, and social support show a 60% success rate in preventing relapse. The stigma around drug addiction remains a barrier to rehabilitation in Afghanistan. This investigation implies that reducing societal stigma and improving access to holistic treatment can enhance recovery outcomes.

Furthermore, Miller (2018) studied the Economic Costs of Drug Abuse. The main objective of the study was to analyze the financial burden of drug addiction on Afghanistan's economy. The method of the examination was qualitative, and the data were gathered through economic modeling and field data analysis. The results of the study showed that drug-related activities account for a significant portion of Afghanistan's informal economy. Government resources are drained due to healthcare costs, law enforcement, and loss of productivity. This study implied that redirecting funds toward sustainable development can mitigate the economic impact of drugs.

The literature highlights the complex interplay of economic, social, and political factors in Afghanistan's drug problem. Effective strategies must integrate education, economic

development, international cooperation, and institutional reform while considering Afghanistan's unique socio-political context.

Drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan, especially in Panjshir, not only fuel the global illegal economy but also threaten the country's internal security and stability.

This research aims to examine the causes and consequences of drug use in Panjshir.

Propose comprehensive strategies for long-term solutions to this issue.

1. What factors facilitate drug use in Panjshir?
2. What are the most effective strategies for reducing drug use and consumption?

## Material and Method

This study investigates the complicated factors contributing to drug use in Panjshir province. A qualitative research method was employed to gain in-depth insights into the issue. The study included 12 medical professionals from Provincial (Rukha) Hospital with 5–10 years of experience, selected to ensure diverse and relevant perspectives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting 30–40 minutes, guided by an interview tool consisting of a short demographic questionnaire (age, gender, role, and years of experience) and open-ended questions focused on the study objectives. Brief field notes were also taken during interviews.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis following Clarke and Braun (2006). Data coding, organization, and theme development were supported by NVivo to ensure systematic and rigorous analysis.

The thematic analysis provided a robust and flexible framework to interpret the qualitative data, enabling the identification of key insights across five primary dimensions: economic drivers, socio-political factors, cultural and gender dynamics, public health and awareness, and policy and international collaboration. These findings are critical for understanding the complications of the issue and formulating targeted interventions.

## Findings

This investigation presents the qualitative findings derived from semi-structured interviews with medical professionals in Panjshir Province. The analysis generated six major themes: economic factors, socio-political factors, cultural and social dynamics, health system limitations, policy and international influences, and mitigation strategies. The findings are presented below with illustrative participant narratives

**Table1.** Thematic Findings on Drivers and Responses to Drug Use in Panjshir Province

Theme	Sub-themes	Key Findings	Example from Interviews
Economic Factors	Poverty, unemployment, informal economy	Economic hardship drives vulnerability to drug use	"Most of the patients come from unemployed families and use drugs as an escape from financial stress."
Socio-Political Factors	Conflict, weak governance, corruption	Instability and corruption increase exposure and reduce control	"In areas where governance is weak, drugs are more easily available and less controlled."
Cultural & Social Factors	Family role, religious leaders,	Family and religious leaders play a protective	"People avoid hospitals because they fear being

	stigma	role, but stigma prevents treatment-seeking	labeled as addicts by society."
Health System Factors	Lack of rehabilitation, limited access	Weak rehabilitation services increase relapse and untreated addiction	"We do not have enough rehabilitation facilities, so many patients return again."
Policy & International Factors	Policy gaps, cooperation, stigma reduction	Weak policies and limited coordination reduce the effectiveness of interventions	"There is little coordination between local authorities and international organizations."
Mitigation Strategies	Rehabilitation, awareness, livelihoods	Integrated approaches are needed, combining treatment and prevention	"Both awareness programs and treatment services are necessary to reduce drug use."

### **Economic Factors and Drug Use**

Participants consistently identified economic hardship as a primary driver of drug use. Many respondents described how poverty and unemployment create conditions in which individuals turn to substance use as a coping mechanism. One participant explained: "Most of the patients come from unemployed families and use drugs as an escape from financial stress. "This reflects a broader perception that economic instability not only increases vulnerability but also reduces individuals' capacity to seek healthier coping strategies. Informal economic conditions were also linked to increased exposure to drug environments. The findings suggest that drug use is deeply embedded in economic deprivation, where substance use becomes both a coping strategy and a consequence of structural poverty.

### **Socio-Political Factors**

Participants emphasized that weak governance, conflict, and corruption significantly contribute to the persistence of drug use. Respondents noted that limited institutional control and insecurity facilitate access to drugs. One expert stated: "In areas where governance is weak, drugs are more easily available and less controlled." These accounts indicate that socio-political instability reduces the effectiveness of law enforcement and creates environments where drug markets can operate with minimal restriction. Drug use in the study context is not only a health issue but also a governance challenge, shaped by systemic weaknesses in political and institutional structures.

### **Cultural and Social Dynamics**

Cultural and social structures were identified as both protective and restrictive factors. Participants highlighted the important role of families and religious leaders in discouraging drug use. However, stigma was seen as a major barrier to treatment. One respondent noted: "People avoid hospitals because they fear being labeled as addicts by society." This suggests that while community structures can support prevention, social stigma may discourage individuals from seeking help. The findings indicate a dual role of culture: it can serve as a protective mechanism while also reinforcing barriers to treatment through stigma and social exclusion.

### **Health System Limitations**

A major theme emerging from the data was the inadequacy of rehabilitation and treatment services. Participants reported insufficient facilities and limited access to psychological and medical support. One medical professional explained: "We do not have enough

rehabilitation facilities, so many patients return.” This highlights concerns regarding relapse and the cyclical nature of untreated addiction. The findings suggest that weak health infrastructure significantly limits recovery outcomes and contributes to repeated cycles of addiction.

### **Policy and International Dimensions**

Participants also highlighted gaps in policy implementation and limited coordination with international actors. While some cooperation exists, it was described as insufficient. One participant stated: “There is little coordination between local authorities and international organizations.” This reflects concerns about fragmented responses and a lack of integrated strategies at national and international levels. The effectiveness of drug control efforts is constrained by weak policy coordination and limited institutional collaboration.

### **Mitigation Strategies**

Participants emphasized the need for a combined approach to addressing drug use. Rehabilitation services, public awareness campaigns, and alternative livelihood programs were repeatedly mentioned as key interventions. One respondent summarized: “Both awareness programs and treatment services are necessary to reduce drug use.” This indicates strong support for integrated strategies combining prevention and treatment. The findings suggest that no single intervention is sufficient; rather, a multi-sectoral and integrated approach is required to effectively address drug use. Overall, the findings demonstrate that drug use in Panjshir Province is a multidimensional issue shaped by economic deprivation, socio-political instability, cultural influences, health system weaknesses, and policy gaps. Participants consistently emphasized the need for integrated interventions combining rehabilitation, prevention, and structural reforms.

## **Discussion**

Economic drivers are identified as the most significant factor influencing drug-related activities, reflecting the role of financial incentives and economic hardship in perpetuating this issue. According to Becker and Murphy (1988), individuals are often drawn to illicit drug economies when legitimate opportunities are scarce, as these activities offer quick financial returns in dire circumstances. This perspective aligns with the findings in Panjshir, where poverty and unemployment remain key challenges. However, Naylor (2004) argues that while economic conditions are crucial, they cannot be disentangled from socio-political structures that create and sustain these illicit markets, suggesting a multidimensional interplay.

Socio-political factors ranked second, emphasizing how political instability and weak governance exacerbate drug-related activities. Goodhand (2005) highlights the relationship between conflict zones and the drug trade, pointing out that instability allows such activities to flourish due to the absence of regulatory oversight. Similarly, the situation in Panjshir reflects this trend, where governance challenges and political instability create an enabling environment for illicit drug networks. This contrasts with economic drivers, which focus on individual motivations, as socio-political factors emphasize structural vulnerabilities. However, as Naim (2005) suggests, the interaction between governance issues and economic incentives often creates a reinforcing cycle that sustains the problem.

The role of cultural and gender dynamics, ranked third, highlights the influence of societal norms and gender inequalities. Cultural expectations around masculinity or the marginalization of women in certain societies often push individuals into drug-related activities or make them more vulnerable to exploitation (Kandiyoti, 1988). In Panjshir, cultural norms that stigmatize addiction or overlook women's unique vulnerabilities exacerbate the issue. This resonates with findings by Bourgois (1995), who argues that marginalized groups are often disproportionately affected by drug economies due to intersecting cultural and economic pressures. These dynamics add complexity to the conversation, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches that are often overlooked in policy responses dominated by economic and political priorities.

Public health and awareness, placed fourth, address the consequences of drug-related activities and efforts to mitigate them. Volkow et al. (2016) stress the importance of integrating medical, psychological, and social support to combat addiction effectively. The findings in Panjshir underscore this need, as public health responses are critical to addressing the individual and societal impacts of addiction. Unlike economic and socio-political drivers, which focus on causes. However, as Room et al. (2005) note, societal stigma often undermines these efforts, with cultural and gender dynamics that influence the effectiveness of awareness campaigns and rehabilitation programs.

Lastly, policy and international collaboration, ranked fifth, emphasize the importance of coordinated efforts to combat drug-related challenges. The role of international partnerships, as outlined by Mansfield (2006), is critical in addressing the transnational nature of drug economies. However, the effectiveness of such collaborations often depends on their alignment with local realities. In Panjshir, global policies must consider local socio-political and cultural contexts to achieve tangible results. While economic drivers and socio-political factors highlight root causes, public health and international collaboration focus on solutions. This mirrors the multidimensional approach encouraged by UNODC (2021), which calls for integrated strategies that address supply and demand while promoting societal resilience.

By comparing these categories and integrating insights from other writers, it becomes evident that addressing drug-related activities requires a holistic and context-sensitive approach. Economic, socio-political, cultural, and public health dimensions are interconnected, and solutions must reflect this complexity to be effective.

## Conclusion

The findings indicate that Afghanistan's drug problem is a complex and multidimensional issue requiring integrated and long-term responses rather than a single solution. Participants emphasized that poverty, unemployment, weak governance, and limited economic opportunities contribute significantly to drug production and use. Promoting sustainable livelihoods through alternative employment, vocational training, and rural development was identified as essential for reducing dependence on illicit drug-related income. The findings also highlight the importance of strengthening governance, reducing corruption, and improving law enforcement to disrupt drug trafficking networks. Public awareness and educational programs, particularly targeting youth, were viewed as important preventive measures for changing attitudes toward drug use. Furthermore,

participants emphasized the value of international cooperation in addressing cross-border drug challenges through coordinated policies and technical support. Cultural and social structures, including the involvement of religious leaders, community elders, women, and families, were also considered crucial in prevention and rehabilitation efforts. Overall, the findings suggest that effectively addressing Afghanistan's drug problem requires a coordinated approach that combines economic development, institutional reform, education, community engagement, and international collaboration.

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## Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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