

# Review of: "The Hidden Aspects of A Century of Substance Use Policymaking in Iran"

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The article provides a compelling narrative of the most significant events in Iran's substance use policy in the previous 100 years. The piece comes across as comprehensive and a wide range of resources and historical markers have been utilized to justify the main arguments in the article. Overall, it is a really well written article and has huge significance in the scientific community. Some general comments and suggestions to the authors are given below (in no particular order):

- The article focuses primarily on 'opiates' only. For the article title to claim **substance use policy making..'** would be misleading. There are some brief mentions of other substances, but the majority of the content is related to opiate use only. This makes sense because cultivation of opium poppy seeds is indigenous to that region since centuries. Thus, it is no surprise that it remains the most widely used, trafficked and cultivated substance in Iran and many countries of the Middle East. Given the diversity in nature of substance use, intoxication effects, production/cultivation, legal status, etc., it would be incorrect to subsume 'opiates' as 'substances' in general. This can be clarified in the title and other parts of the manuscript.
- For a 'Historical' analysis, the article has to provide a better context apart from the 100 years covered. Opiates have been intricately related to those geographical areas in the Middle East for millennia, and there must surely have been few notable landmarks/events/individuals from the past, which would have been relevant for the current article. There are brief mentions of it, but it can be elaborated on to better contextualize the article. For a substance that is indigenous to the area for millennia, it would also provide some reflection of how the substance might be intricately embedded in the region's cultures, art, rituals, etc.
- Related to the previous point, the Introduction paragraph does not set the best tone for the entire article. The current version has three distinct parts: Opiates use rates, Current problem and policies, conceptual errors (error tolerance, linearity). Rather, the Introduction could provide the historical context of the present problem from a macro viewpoint, and provide the rationale for examining policies in this article. Apart from that, there are a number of ways to make the Introduction better to do better justice for the parts that follow (which have been written quite well).
- In describing the time period in Iran's history when the medical model had higher influence, the narrative seems to suggest a larger dynamic of power between institutions and ministries, and also motivations related to monetary profits of opiates. However, that was the period when the psychopharmacological model of substance use treatment came up in prominence not just in Iran but all around the world. It is still one of the most effective means of opioid dependence treatment and its rise in Iran can be credited to the natural progression of scientific understanding of drugs and substance addiction at that time. Lines such as '*medicalization of the problem could be described as clinging to power*

*by the health sector... (p.5)* seem to suggest lower efficacy of the medical model, which was entirely financially driven, at least in Iran.

- The authors have done well in describing and critically evaluating the various stakeholders and events in Iran's history in opiates policies, which have led to the current significant problem of high opiate use among Iranians. However, the manuscript ends abruptly without providing some considerations for the future. Given the detailed examination of trends in history and the pros and cons of the different approaches available, the article has to oriented towards solving the endearing problem. For that, some policy recommendations, suggestions, points for consideration, topics for research, etc. could have been provided in the Discussion section.
- Since historical events from 100 years were examined, some way of graphically representing the most salient points/landmarks on a scale could help readers follow the content better.