

Towards a Comprehensive Strategy to Counter the Spread of Drugs in Raqqa

Sokrat ALalou



Justice for Life Organization

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This paper is part of a series of policy papers in which the Justice for Life organization provides procedural recommendations to improve the performance of local institutions.

The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Justice for Life organization

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JFL's mission is to collaboratively promote human rights, dialogue, and freedoms in Syria through documentation, advocacy, access efforts, and capacity building for communities and organizations. JFL operates on two strategic tracks, which are reviewed and adjusted every three years. These tracks focus on enhancing justice and defending human rights in Syria, and advocating for the right of Syrians to participate in political and civil life.

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INTRODUCTION

The drug trafficking in Syria has become one of the most significant economic and social challenges that have intensified during the years of conflict. Since the outbreak of armed conflict, drug trafficking has become a key component of Syria's war economy, involving various factions, including the Syrian government, armed opposition, and extremist groups. This trafficking has been essential in funding military operations and covering war-related expenses, leading to its rapid and unprecedented growth¹.

After the Syrian government regained control of most opposition areas in 2018, particularly the border crossings with Jordan and Iraq, drug trafficking witnessed significant inflation as the scope of drug distribution expanded, not only inside Syria but also towards neighboring countries and global markets². The follow-up of the seizure of Captagon pills in Arab countries, mainly manufactured in Syria, indicates the seizure of one billion pills between (2019 and 2022)³, which proves that the drug business in Syria generates profits amounting to billions of dollars annually, which made Syria one of the largest drug production and distribution centers in the world, in light of the involvement of people and civilian and military entities close to the Damascus government directly in the manufacture and trafficking of drugs, as indicated by the US and European sanctions regulations⁴.

In addition to being a manufacturer, Syria has also become a significant transit point for various drugs originating from Lebanon and Iran. Syrian territory is used as a hub for distributing these drugs to markets in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Several reports suggest that the Fourth Division, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Iranian militias are involved in this regional drug trafficking network. The distribution of Captagon factories in Syria indicates that these militias aim to establish the drug industry within their controlled areas, particularly near Syrian border crossings and along the front lines with opposition territories and the Autonomous Administration, to facilitate trafficking activities⁵.

With neighboring countries, particularly Jordan, tightening control over the Syrian borders and a decline in trafficking operations by sea to Europe from Latakia Port,⁶ drug traffickers have turned to offload excess supply within the local Syrian market. This has been done by significantly

¹ Jones, S. G. (2020). *The Drug Economy in Syria: Trafficking, Production, and Trafficking Networks*. Center for Strategic and International Studies, pp: 45-60.

² COAR. *The Syrian Economy at War: Captagon, Hashish, and the Syrian Narco-State*. <https://coar-global.org/2021/04/27/the-syrian-economy-at-war-captagon-hashish-and-the-syrian-narco-state/>

³ Shaar, K. (2023, August 24). *No quick fixes for the Middle East's captagon crisis*. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/middle-east-captagon-crisis/>

⁴ America: The Assad regime is the main producer of Captagon and earns significant financial revenues from it, Syria TV website, 26/06/2024. <http://rb.gv/rodw9v>

⁵ Sponsored by the "Fourth Division"... «Captagon» turned Syria into a «drug state», Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, 03/11/2022. <http://rb.gv/rvqaij>

⁶ Rose, C., & Shaar, K. (2024, May 30). *The Captagon trafficking from 2015 to 2023*. Newlines Institute. <http://rb.gv/zexg09>

lowering prices and making drugs more accessible across various income levels. This shift has led to a notable increase in addiction rates among Syrian youth, exacerbated by the challenging economic and social conditions in the country, including high youth unemployment rates⁷.

Although drug production and trafficking are widespread across Syria, the areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration in northeastern Syria see relatively less activity in terms of drug production and trafficking. There are no reports of industrial drug production facilities in these regions; instead, cannabis cultivation for local use is more common. The key cultivation areas include Amuda and Al-Yarubiyah in Al-Hasakah Governorate, along the Euphrates River in Deir Ezzor Governorate, and Ain al-Arab (Kobani) in northeast Aleppo Governorate. However, like other parts of Syria, these regions are still markets for manufactured drugs, which enter from opposition-controlled areas, especially Manbij, Ras al-Ain, and Syrian government-controlled areas adjacent to the Autonomous Administration's territory, and from Iraq through the Al-Yarubiyah crossing.⁸

Data from the Autonomous Administration on drug seizures over a year highlights the volume and variety of drugs trafficked in its regions. The seizures included 3,092,742 Captagon pills, over 41 kilograms of crystal Methamphetamine, more than 272 kilograms of cannabis, over 16,000 narcotic syringes, 275 cannabis cigarettes, and more than 70,000 assorted narcotic pills. Additionally, authorities confiscated 570 kilograms of heroin, more than 35 kilograms of cocaine, 541 cannabis seedlings, along with other quantities of various illicit substances.

According to the Public Administration for Drug Control in the Autonomous Administration, it worked for a year on (2387) files related to drugs, during which (3485) people were arrested⁹. These figures do not reflect the actual volume of drug trafficking within the areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration, as the international bodies specialized in combating drug trafficking consider that the actual volume of drug trafficking in a country or region is between 5 and 10 times the volume of seizures¹⁰. These percentages may be much greater in the case of the Autonomous Administration because of its weak capabilities and experience in dealing with this type of trafficking, in addition to the presence of collusion between drug traffickers and dealers and some workers in the security and military apparatus of the administration in its various areas of control, as many reports and testimonies indicate¹¹.

Moreover, drug abuse has surged to unprecedented levels in areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration, with a strong link between this phenomenon and rising crime rates.

⁷ Syria: Drugs are available as any ordinary commodity in the market, Asharq Al-Awsat Newspaper, 16/03/2024.

<http://rb.gv/pebuxl>

⁸ op.cit.

⁹ Self-Administration reveals its seizures of drugs within a year, Enab Baladi Newspaper website, 27/06/2024.

<http://rb.gv/rvf0jv>

¹⁰ Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2023, pp. 120-130. https://unis.univieenna.org/unis/uploads/documents/2024-INCIB/2325540A_INCB_Annual_Report.pdf

¹¹ Drugs in Raqqa: Prevalence among young people and limited efforts to combat it and treat addicts, Syria Direct Website, 29/11/2022.

<https://rebrand.ly/942u8rg>

The parts of Raqqa Governorate under Autonomous Administration control are particularly impacted, with drug abuse posing a significant threat to the younger generation and endangering civil peace due to related criminal activities.

As a result, this paper aims to examine the drug abuse phenomenon in Raqqa, assess its prevalence, analyze the underlying causes, and evaluate its impact on the governorate's community. The goal is to offer practical recommendations from the perspective of civil society and local community, contributing to the development of a comprehensive strategy to combat and mitigate the effects of drug abuse.

SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this paper lies in its connection to the broader Tawasol project initiated by the Justice for Life Organization. The project aims to address service and administrative challenges, along with mechanisms for administrative reform, through multilateral dialogue in northeastern Syria—a particularly crucial endeavor given the current conditions in the region. The northeastern areas of Syria have experienced instability across security, political, and economic spheres, further complicated by external military interventions and internal conflicts. In response, the Autonomous Administration has implemented several reform measures, such as restructuring committees and councils and enacting new laws. While these measures are theoretically positive, they often lack sufficient engagement with community stakeholders, potentially exacerbating challenges instead of resolving them.

Therefore, the project seeks to enhance citizen participation by creating a safe space for inter-community dialogue, facilitating the development of detailed policy papers that address existing challenges, identify priorities, and propose actionable recommendations. These in-depth discussions will encourage collaboration between local experts, civic leaders, civil society organizations, and local authorities, helping to ensure that the reform process is effective, inclusive, and sustainable.

As part of the project, this paper highlights the seriousness of the phenomenon of the spread of drug abuse in Raqqa, which has become a major concern for the local community in the absence of a clear strategy for the Autonomous Administration to confront it. This requires the concerted efforts of civil society with the Autonomous Administration to formulate an effective strategy to combat this phenomenon through dialogue and proposing the most appropriate solutions based on the community's point of view.

OBJECTIVES

Given that the phenomenon of the spread of drug abuse represents a threat to the future of the young generation in Raqqa Governorate and the safety and security of its society, this paper, as one of the outputs of the Tawasol project, aims to achieve the following:

1. Estimating the scale of drug abuse in Raqqa and providing a comparative analysis of its prevalence during the periods of control by the Syrian government, the Islamic State (ISIS), and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). This aims to identify the periods with significant increases in drug abuse and the contributing factors.
2. Identifying the primary sources of drugs entering Raqqa and the most common types, along with assessing the risks associated with each type, their prices, and the mechanisms for selling and distributing them. This also includes evaluating the ease of obtaining drugs at present.
3. Offering a comprehensive demographic profile of drug users, including age group, marital status, income level, and educational background.
4. Identifying the key reasons that drive individuals to use drugs, including economic, social, and psychological factors.
5. Assessing the social, economic, and familial impacts of widespread drug abuse in Raqqa's society, as well as the effects of drug use on civil peace in the governorate.
6. Evaluating the efforts of the Autonomous Administration and its security apparatus in combating drug trafficking, identifying shortcomings in their work, and highlighting the challenges they face.
7. Evaluating the role of civil society in Raqqa in raising awareness and reducing drug abuse, as well as the extent of their cooperation with the Autonomous Administration in this regard.
8. Assessing the availability of treatment clinics and psychosocial programs in Raqqa to support addiction recovery and evaluating the role of social networks in supporting the recovery process.
9. Providing practical, results-based recommendations to reduce drug impact on the security, medical, and psychological levels and proposing policies and procedures that could effectively address the issue.

SOURCES OF DATA

To achieve the aims of the paper, two types of data were administered:

1. **Primary Sources:** The findings from focus group discussions, which consisted of three sessions conducted in Raqqa during July 2024. Each session included eight participants representing the local community (including notables and tribal leaders), civil society representatives (local organizations active in the region), doctors specializing in addiction treatment, and representatives from the internal committees of the Autonomous Administration. Gender representation was considered in each session.
2. **Secondary Sources:** Reports monitoring the drug trafficking and production in Syria, as well as the spread of drug abuse and related crimes in northeastern Syria. Additionally, press materials covering the phenomenon of drug abuse in Raqqa were reviewed. These reports and press materials were used to develop discussion topics for the focus group discussions.

FINDINGS

Through the in-depth discussions that took place in the three focus group discussions, the following findings were reached:

The First Theme: Assessing The Scale of Drug Abuse In Raqqa and Examining How the Phenomenon Has Evolved under the Various Control Authorities That Have Governed the City.

Through the focus group discussions, it was found that there are no accurate statistics or approximate estimates of the number of drug users in Raqqa or the prevalence of drug use among young people. However, the testimonies contained in the sessions and the follow-up of media reports on the spread of drug abuse, and what the Autonomous Administration publishes about the number of raids it conducts on drug trafficking dens indicate that this phenomenon has become very dangerous in the city of Raqqa, and a real threat to the future of its youth and social security. Based on some reports that estimated the volume of drug use in other areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration, such as Darbasiyah in Al-Hasakah governorate, which is considered one of the centers for cannabis cultivation, the percentage of drug use reaches about 10% among young people¹², knowing that Darbasiyah is not known for the spread of the phenomenon as it is the case in Al-Raqqa, in which the percentage may be greater, even if we consider that the percentage of use is similar. According to the World Health Organization, the percentage of drug use in a community, if it ranges between 5-10%, is an indicator of a serious problem that needs a comprehensive and integrated response¹³.

The Situation during the Control of the Syrian Government Forces (until 2011)

1. **Limited Prevalence:** During the period of government control, drug use in Raqqa was minimal. Alcohol was the primary substance available, while drugs like cannabis and sedative pills such as Captagon and Tramadol were scarce and not widely distributed. Strict laws and security measures contributed to the limited availability of these substances.
2. **Community, Culture, and Social Deterrent:** The affluent and conservative nature of the society fostered a strong cultural deterrent against drug use. A culture of "shame" and strict adherence to customs and traditions significantly helped to curb the spread of drugs.

¹² The Syrian Observatory sheds light on the issue of the spread of drugs within the various areas of control. The regime and its loyal militias take the lead, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 14/04/2021. <https://rebrand.ly/t18d7ub>

¹³ World Drug Report 2023 by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The Situation during the Control of ISIS (2014-2017)

- **Restriction and Prohibition:** Under ISIS control, there was a strict ban on most drug substances, as the organization viewed drugs as taboo. However, drugs were secretly distributed among members of the organization, who used them for personal reasons like pain relief or as stimulants.
- **Hidden Increase:** Over time, drug use began to spread among ISIS members, leading to increased drug use among civilians and worsening the security and social situation in Raqqa. It's important to note that ISIS did not rely heavily on the drug to finance itself, as it had other revenue sources, particularly from oil.

The Situation during the Control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (from 2017 to the present)

Widespread: Since the SDF took control of Raqqa, the city has seen a marked increase in the spread of drugs. Drugs have become widely available, leading to a marked rise in the number of users and dealers. After 2020, the spread of drugs accelerated due to insecurity and increased demand for these substances in the markets.

The Syrian conflict has seen widespread use of various drugs among fighters from different factions, with amphetamines, particularly Captagon, becoming widely known as the "drug of fighters" due to its common use among ISIS members.¹⁴ This drug is popular among fighters because it enhances activity, relieves pain, and boosts feelings of confidence and strength.¹⁵ According to focus group discussions participants discussing the worsening of drug abuse in Raqqa under successive authorities, the spread and intensification of drug use is linked to the presence of fighters, who have contributed to its dissemination among civilians. This aligns with the role of drugs in the conflict economy of various factions in Syria. As ground fighting subsided and drug supplies, especially locally manufactured ones, became more available, drugs shifted from being a stimulant for soldiers to a funding source for individuals, militias, and groups. Participants in focus group discussions indicated that drug abuse significantly increased in Raqqa after 2020. Observations from activists in Raqqa suggest that the phenomenon began with the SDF's control, where around 70% of its fighters were reported to be using various drugs.¹⁶

Factors Contributing to the Spread of the Phenomenon

- **Conflicts and Instability:** Persistent conflicts and instability have led to increased drug use as a means of escaping reality. This is in line with the typical effects of wars, which often see high rates of drug abuse. Additionally, international reports reveal that 60% of Raqqa's

¹⁴ COAR. (2020), op.cit.

¹⁵ Jones, B. (2021). The use of amphetamines in military conflicts: Historical perspectives and current practices. *JOURNAL OF MILITARY MEDICINE*, 45(1), 67-78.

¹⁶ "SDF" turns Raqqa into a drug market and the victims are young men and girls, Hurriya Press website, 13/12/2018. <https://rebrand.ly/7p0oqdi>

population has experienced severe psychological issues due to the ongoing conflict and destruction.¹⁷

- **Economic Pressures:** Poverty and unemployment have driven many to use drugs to cope with economic and psychological stress. In 2023, Raqqa had the second-highest inflation rate for food prices among Syrian governorates, at 136.6%. The region also had one of the highest poverty rates in Syria, with the poverty line set at 3.5 million pounds per month for a family.¹⁸ Unemployment in Raqqa reached 60% in 2023.¹⁹
- **Lack of Security Control:** Security instability has led to ineffective drug control measures, facilitating the spread of drugs. Reports from sources close to the Autonomous Administration indicate that drug abuse is widespread in their controlled areas. When drugs users are arrested, they are often released quickly without trial or rehabilitation due to a lack of specialized centers and control in prisons. Many drug addicts are reportedly war-wounded individuals and armed members in the region.²⁰

The Second Theme: Identifying the Sources of Entry of Drugs, Their Types, the Risks of Each Type, Their Prices, and the Mechanism of Selling Them.

Main Sources of Drugs Entering Raqqa

- **External Sources:** Drug trafficking into Raqqa is facilitated through crossings controlled by various parties, particularly the Syrian government. These routes, used primarily for trafficking drugs from Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon, often involve concealing drugs in empty diesel tanks coming from government-controlled areas. This is confirmed by numerous drug seizures conducted by the Public Security Forces in Autonomous Administration areas, including the confiscation of Captagon pills hidden in oil tankers from the Qatirji Company, which is subject to US sanctions.²¹
- **Internal sources:** Medicines sold in pharmacies and can be used for abuse, most notably (tramadol).

The Most Common Types of Drugs in Raqqa and Their Risks

- Crystal meth²² (H Bose): It is the most common type of drug in Raqqa. It is considered one of the most dangerous drug substances, as it causes severe addiction even from the

¹⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM) - Report on Psychological Impacts in Northeast Syria, 2021.

¹⁸ Syrian Center for Policy Research, Annual Bulletin of Consumer Prices and Inflation in Syria for 2023 "A Failing Economy", Issue (2), June 2024, pp. 11-22.

¹⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - Situation Report on Northeast Syria, August 2023.

²⁰ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights,), op.cit.

²¹ The Ministry of Treasury Imposes Sanctions on the Petroleum Network, Senior Syrian Officials and Syrian Institutions, 09/11/2020.

<https://rebrand.ly/k4tm9um>

²² Crystal meth is a type of amphetamine known for its stimulant effects on the central nervous system and is produced transparently similar to crystals. Promotes alertness and increases physical activity, but causes serious side effects such as addiction, tissue damage, heart problems, and

first dose and has devastating effects on the central nervous system, which leads to the deterioration of the psychological and nervous state of the user.

- Captagon and tramadol pills: They are considered stimulants and painkillers and are also widely used and can cause addiction and negative effects on physical and mental health.
- Cannabis: It is considered a less harmful drug compared to crystal meth, but it still causes effects such as hallucinations and partial loss of consciousness.

Prices and Variations of Drugs

- Crystal meth (H Bose): \$30 to \$125 per gram, with price variation based on material availability and security grip.
- Captagon and tramadol pills: They are the cheapest, where the price of a packet containing 10 pills is about 45,000 Syrian pounds. These prices for Captagon are in line with what was mentioned earlier about the impact of its prices in Syria on the extent to which the borders of the Syrian neighborhood are controlled, and it is not possible to export it, as drug dealers significantly reduce its prices and target local markets to discharge production.
- Cannabis: The price of a piece with the size of a palm of a hand is about \$50.

The Most Common Mechanisms for Selling Drugs in Raqqa

- Distribution via cars: Used to distribute drugs widely.
- Women and children: These categories are used as intermediaries for drug dealing, where they are less monitored.
- Poor and ignorant people: They are exploited to sell drugs.
- Mafia and gangs: They hire beggars in the sale and distribution of drugs.
- Pharmacies: Used as illegal sources to sell medicines such as Captagon and Tramadol.
- Addicts: Drug dealers turn addicts into dealers in exchange for free doses.

How Easy it is to Get Drugs Currently in Raqqa?

- Accessibility: Drugs have become readily available in Raqqa. Anyone can have it, as dealers are present in every neighborhood and provide drugs openly.
- Broad distribution: Drugs are distributed via social networks and web pages, making them easily accessible. Some dealers also offer a free sample of the product to help addicts use them.

mental disorders such as psychosis and anxiety. Iran is a key point in the production and sale of crystal meth. For more: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. For more: *World Drug Report 2021*

The Third Theme: Demographic Characterization of Drug Users

Drug-user Age Group

The most vulnerable age group for drug use in Raqqa is between 16 and 25 years old, as this period is particularly susceptible to social and psychological factors that may lead to abuse. While drug use also affects older age groups, such as those in their 30s and 40s, the highest incidence is among younger individuals who begin experimenting with drugs at a young age. Although there are reports of female drug users, these percentages are often exaggerated, and widespread drug abuse among women is unlikely due to the conservative nature of Raqqa community.

Social Status

- **Single youth:** They represent a large percentage of users, perhaps due to social anxiety, psychological pressure, and experimentation.
- **Married:** Suffering from social or psychological problems that may lead to substance abuse.
- **Separated:** They also form a noticeable proportion due to the psychological and emotional challenges they face after a separation.

Income Level of Abusers

- **The rich:** This includes drug dealers and high-income individuals who could buy drugs regularly.
- **The middle class:** They regularly use drugs as they can afford them.
- **The poor:** Includes day laborers and beggars, who often spend all their income on drugs, reinforcing the vicious cycle of poverty and addiction.

The Most Common Educational Level Among Users

- **People with a low level of education:** They make up the majority of users, as they lack awareness and knowledge about the risks of drugs.
- **People who are educated but have psychological problems:** They can also be in the cycle of abuse because of curiosity or looking to escape from personal problems.
- **Undergraduates:** Although educated, they may also be exposed to drugs as a result of stress or desire to experience it.

The Fourth Theme: Social, Economic, and Family Impacts of Prevalence of Drug Abuse

Impact of Drugs on Crime Rates

Increasing crime rates: The spread of drugs has led to a marked increase in crimes, such as murder and theft. Users who face financial difficulties in obtaining drugs may commit crimes to obtain money. Increasing incidences of drug-related homicide and theft are noted.

Effect of Abuse on Work and Productivity

Low productivity and leaving work: Significant decrease in job performance as a result of abuse, which leads to leaving work. Some users turn to stealing to ensure they have money to buy drugs, which directly affects their job stability and productivity.

The Impact of Drugs on Family Relationships

- **Family separation and domestic violence:** Drug use has led to divorces and an increase in domestic violence, with divorces related to drug use or unemployment being recorded daily. Family relationships have been significantly affected by abusers, with families breaking up and abusing children and some resorting to marrying off their underage daughters to get money for abuse. The use and dealing of drugs by some individuals also lead to social stigma for the family.
- **Impact on children:** Children in families of drug abusers are vulnerable to neglect and abuse, which negatively affects their psychosocial development and increases their likelihood of future drug use.

The Impact of Drugs on Community Peace

Destruction of community peace: The proliferation of drugs exacerbates societal disintegration and heightens tensions and conflicts within families and tribes. It also leads to a decline in moral values and undermines the social fabric, resulting in long-term instability and disruption of community peace.

The Fifth Theme: Evaluating the Role of the Autonomous Administration and the Internal Security Forces in Combating the Phenomenon

Evaluation of the Authority's Efforts in Combating Drugs:

The Authority's counter-drugs efforts are very weak, with limited oversight of smuggling and distribution activities. There are also possible accusations of the involvement of some members of the security authorities in bringing drugs into the area.

Deficiencies in the Work of the Internal Security Forces from the Point of View of the Populations:

- Weak control over crossings and cars transporting drugs from northern Syria to Raqqa.
- Lack of efficiency of prisons and judicial authorities.
- Individual work and lack of coordination between security agencies.

The Most Prominent Challenges Faced by the Security Forces from an Official Point of View:

- Prisons are full, and abusers cannot be accommodated.
- Judicial corruption within the courts hinders the enforcement of justice.
- Weak financial means to open treatment centers for addicts.

The Sixth Theme: The Awareness Role Played by Civil Society and Civil Society Organizations.

The Role Played by Civil Society Organizations in Raising Awareness of the Dangers of Drugs:

- Awareness sessions: Organizing awareness sessions, mobilization, and advocacy campaigns to educate the community about the dangers of drugs.
- Positive activities: Providing activities aimed at quitting drugs and highlighting the consequences of using them.
- Specialized support: Provide specialized assistance to help drug users quit.

Obstacles Faced by These Organizations in Their Work

- Lack of specialists: Lack of individuals or organizations specialized in treating addiction.
- Lack of trust: Lack of trust between people and organizations.
- Lack of cooperation: Lack of sufficient cooperation between the Autonomous Administration and civil society organizations.
- Lack of centers: Lack of specialized centers to treat users.

Cooperation between the Autonomous Administration, Civil Society, and Civil Society Organizations in this Field:

- Lack of cooperation: Lack of sufficient cooperation and coordination between community leaders, organizations, and the authority.
- Need for coordination: More work and coordination are needed to improve the effectiveness of counter-drug efforts.

The Role of Civil Society in Reducing the Spread of Drugs or Mitigating its Effects:

- **Limited role for tribes:** Although tribes can play a role, their influence is currently limited due to the lack of effectiveness in confronting drug-related crimes.
- **Absence of deterrence:** The absence of a strong tribal deterrent makes the influence of tribes less effective in addressing the drug problem.

The Seventh Theme: Availability of Aids for Recovery from Addiction

The Existence of Specialized Treatment Clinics for Addiction in Raqqa:

There are two clinics in the city of Raqqa: "Al-Nour Hospital" in the Al-Kasrat area and "Al-Amal Clinic." However, both sanatoriums/clinics operate at very high costs, making them unavailable to many individuals. According to the information, one treatment weekly session costs about 300 US dollars.

The Existence of Psychological or Social Support Programs Directed at Helping Addicts Recover:

Psychosocial programs exist, but they are inadequate and not well-qualified. Sanatoriums offer awareness and education programs, but high treatment costs and the lack of sufficient specialists reduce the effectiveness of these programs. There is a need to improve programs and make them more integrated and appropriate for addicts.

The Role of Social Networks (Family, Friends, Neighborhood) in Supporting Recovery from Addiction:

Social networks play a crucial role in supporting recovery, as they can provide psychological support and assistance. However, if a recovering person returns to the same social environment that encourages use, they may be at risk of relapse. The social network needs to be supportive and catalytic of positive change.

What Challenges Do the Currently Available Clinics or Programs Face?

Sanatoriums/clinics face many challenges, including:

- **Lack of funding:** Weak funding for awareness and treatment programs.
- **Lack of support and lack of continuity:** Lack of long-term support and effective follow-up.
- **Lack of confidence:** Lack of confidence in the credibility of programs and clinics.
- **Other priorities:** Focus on other issues rather than on problems of addiction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the extensive discussions in the three focus groups on the phenomenon of the spread of drug abuse in Raqqa, the following recommendations can be made, which reflect the suggestions of representatives of civil society and the local community about the desired solutions to confront the phenomenon and mitigate its social and security effects in a way that ensures the safety and wellbeing of society.

Enhancing Cooperation among Different Entities:

- **Integrated Coordination:** Improving collaboration among the Autonomous Administration, civil society organizations, and the local community to synchronize efforts and integrate strategies for combating drug abuse.
- **Facilitating Approvals:** Streamlining approval processes among various entities to expedite the implementation of relevant initiatives and projects.

Developing Therapeutic and Preventive Programs:

- **Establishing Treatment Centers:** Creating comprehensive addiction treatment centers that offer medical, psychological, and social services and provide thorough support to individuals in recovery to facilitate their reintegration into society.
- **Promoting Early Detection:** Implementing early detection programs for drug use within health and educational institutions and providing training for professionals in these fields.

Improving Security and Control Measures:

- **Control:** Strengthening control over border crossings to ensure that drugs are not smuggled and applying strict controls over illegal crossings.
- **Segregation of categories:** Separating abusers from dealers and addicts in prisons and directing them to specialized rehabilitation centers to deal with their problems according to their gender and needs.

Raising Community Awareness and Enhancing Psychological Support:

- **Awareness Sessions:** Organizing extensive awareness campaigns in schools and community centers to inform young people and families about the risks associated with drug use.
- **Supporting Families of the Recovered:** Offering psychosocial support services to individuals recovering from drug abuse and their families, with an emphasis on reducing stigma and boosting self-esteem.

Adopting Strict Legal Policies:

- **Enforcement of Laws:** Implementing stringent laws that impose hefty fines on drug traffickers and enforcing strong judicial penalties to deter drug-related offenses.
- **Fighting Corruption:** Enhancing transparency and addressing corruption within judicial and security bodies involved in drug enforcement.

Strengthening the Role of Civil Society and Organizations:

- **Work Independence:** Ensuring that civil society organizations can operate independently from the Autonomous Administration, allowing them to deliver their services effectively.
- **Effective Partnerships:** Establishing collaborations between international and local organizations, as well as official entities, to enhance anti-drug efforts and secure the necessary resources.

Improving the Means of Recovery and Support:

- **Program development:** Improving recovery programs so that they are available and accessible to abusers while providing clear information about treatment sites.
- **Creating alternatives:** Providing alternative job opportunities and developing health, social, and psychological integration programs to support the recovery and reduce the recurrence of abuse.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis highlights the multifaceted nature of drug abuse in Raqqa, linked to the violence, displacement, and destruction the governorate has endured over the past decade, along with its psychological and social impacts. The current situation reflects the economic and security challenges faced, underscoring the need for a comprehensive emergency strategy to address this crisis. The findings emphasize that this strategy should involve collaboration between the Autonomous Administration, civil society organizations, and the local community, incorporating integrated security, economic, medical, and psychological measures.

Additionally, there is a need to enhance awareness and psychological support and provide comprehensive assistance to those recovering and their families. Involving local community and civil society organizations in raising awareness and offering sustainable support will strengthen Raqqa's capacity to address addiction challenges. Effective prevention and treatment efforts are essential to achieve significant results on the ground.