



## Research Paper: Factors Associated with Relapse from the Perspective of Drug Abusers in Self-Referral Centers Affiliated with the Welfare Organization for Addiction Treatment

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### Abstract

Addiction is a complex and difficult issue, with relapses occurring in about 50 to 70 percent of addicts after quitting. To better understanding the factors associated with relapse, we conducted a study from the perspective of drug abusers in self-referral centers affiliated with the Welfare Organization of Bandar-e Anzali. Our sample consisted of 181 men referred to addiction treatment centers in Bandar-e Anzali in 1400. We used a researcher-made questionnaire to collect data on demographic information and factors related to relapse. Our findings revealed that associating with addicted and deviant friends (2.62%) was the most important factor associated with relapse from the perspective of addicts. Based on our results, we suggest that training and intervention for assertiveness (the skill of saying no) in front of friends and changing clients' lifestyles, as well as teaching interpersonal relationships and moderation to family members after quitting drug use, are necessary.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the various social harms that result from the malfunctioning of corrupt social systems is addiction. The United Nations declared in 1950 that addiction is a severe or chronic poisoning caused by the use of natural or industrial drugs, causing harm to individuals or society and increasing day by day. [United Nation Office for Drug \(2020\)](#) reports a 30% increase in drug users compared to 2009. According to this report, drug use among developing countries, including Iran, is on the rise, and there are approximately 6 million addicts reported in our country ([Madden et al., 2021](#)).

Drug addiction, as a psychiatric disorder with biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions, is one of the most significant problems of humankind in the present era. Numerous problems, including physical and mental health issues for individuals, families, and society, are caused by the second most common mental disorder. It will have a significant impact on cognitive and behavioral processes ([Kazemian Moghaddam, 2021](#)).

Currently, there is no accurate and reliable statistics in Iran on the percentage of individuals who have quit and recovered from addiction but have relapsed back to drug use. However, the increasing statistics of drug users and substance abuse can indicate the fact that various treatment methods and strategies used so far have not been successful or comprehensive in preventing relapse and recurrence and acting as a barrier to re-use ([Khammarnia & Peyvand, 2017](#)).

Among the individual factors affecting the return to addiction are psychological characteristics and physical problems: the temptation, enjoyment, pleasure-seeking, personal satisfaction, physical pain, and illnesses ([Ahmadpanah et al., 2018](#)), which can lead to a relapse into addiction. Additionally, other factors contributing to substance abuse relapse can be categorized as individual, family, social, geographical, and economic factors ([Nastizayi, 2010](#)).

Various studies have also referred to social factors that contribute to relapse into addiction. The collapse of social support resources, reduced social interactions, and limited social networks due to a history of drug use, experiences, and social stigmatization and ostracism by peers; family conflicts and inappropriate relationships between family members are factors that create psychological pressure and a sense of loneliness. These factors disrupt the continuity of quitting addiction ([Fouladiyan & Mohammadi, 2023](#)).

Several studies have investigated the causes of addiction relapse. [Fouladiyan and Mohammadi \(2023\)](#) compared factors related to relapse into addiction between two groups of individuals who had quit definitively and relapsed back into drug use. They found significant differences in variables such as family support, experience, social stigmatization and ostracism, drug-related friendships, and treatment facilities in favor of the group who had quit definitively.

[Nemati Sogolitappeh and Khaledian \(2022\)](#) found that factors influencing relapse include individual, psychological,

interpersonal, family, social, cultural, and treatment-related factors. The results of Kabisa et al. (2021) study showed that 40 to 60 percent of individuals generally relapse after completing detoxification and rehabilitation treatments. Relapse after successful detoxification and rehabilitation is a public health concern worldwide.

Andersson et al. (2019) results showed that relapse rates in addiction ranged from 40 to 75 percent and varied depending on the type of substance and use and in different individuals. Identifying the characteristics and features of the addicted individual and the type of treatment is important in preventing relapse. Emotional states such as anxiety, depression, severity of disorders, and psychological symptoms can predict relapse.

Based on the above, it can be inferred that addiction relapse is a multifactorial phenomenon that arises because of the interaction between personal, individual, environmental, social, and political factors. Generally, Iranian society considers individuals with substance abuse disorders, whether rehabilitated or not, as undesirables and does not readily accept them. In other words, the various aspects of addiction are not clear to people, and this issue is not addressed based on scientific principles.

There is a compelling need for a comprehensive and systematic review of prevention, treatment, and control of addictive substances to combat addiction. Addiction endangers human life, especially young people, as one of the social harms (Kabisa et al., 2021). Using the opinions of

individuals with substance abuse disorders can be an effective way to recognize the reasons for addiction relapse.

Identifying the causes and influential factors in relapse and return to addiction can play a significant role in treatment and planning to prevent relapse. Given the regional differences in people's thoughts, beliefs, and opinions, the aim of this study is to investigate the causes of addiction relapse from the perspective of individuals with substance abuse disorders who refer to addiction treatment centers affiliated with the Welfare Organization in Bandar-e Anzali County.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Statistical Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

This study was a descriptive research and the statistical population included men who had referred to the addiction treatment centers of Bandar-e Anzali County in 2021. They had been drug-free for at least three months after a period of drug use, had a history of at least three months of drug addiction treatment, but had relapsed and returned to drug use and sought treatment again. The approximate number of this population was 600.

The sample was selected using a purposive sampling method. The researcher obtained permission from the Welfare Organization of Bandar-e Anzali County and selected four addiction treatment centers using convenience sampling. Then, by visiting these centers and using purposive sampling method, 181 men who had been drug-free for at least three months, had

relapsed and returned to drug use, and sought treatment for drug addiction, were selected.

## **2.2. Instrument**

The researcher created a questionnaire as the data collection tool and restructured it into two sections: demographic information and factors related to relapse. They assessed the validity of the tool using content validity and measured the reliability using a retest with a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.81. The study examined factors related to treatment non-compliance under the headings of individual and environmental factors. It divided individual factors into physical and psychological factors, and environmental factors into family, social, and treatment factors. The researcher performed descriptive statistical analysis of the data using SPSS-27 software.

## **2.3. Entrance and Exit Criteria**

Ethical considerations included providing complete and transparent information to participants, their voluntary participation in the study, confidentiality and preservation of their rights, respect for individuals' rights, human dignity, and diversity of beliefs and opinions. The researchers also had to avoid harm and discrimination, maintain professional, scientific, and educational responsibility, obtain permission from participants, and keep their identities anonymous.

To participate in the study, individuals had to meet certain criteria. They had to be male and between the ages of 25-45. They also had to give their consent to participate. Participants needed to have a history of at least one three-month period of drug abstinence and be drug-free for at least three months or more. They also needed to be currently addicted to drugs. Participants had to have a file in addiction treatment clinics. Finally, they needed to have a history of drug use and addiction before a period of drug abstinence.

The exit criteria included being diagnosed with a disorder or disease, unwillingness or dissatisfaction with participation in the study, and having a contaminated questionnaire.

## **3. Results**

The study sample for this research consisted of 181 individuals who were drug users and had voluntarily referred themselves to addiction treatment centers. The average age of the participants was 35 years, with the youngest being 25 years old and the oldest being 45 years old. Overall, 41 participants (23%) were unemployed, 69 participants (36%) were self-employed, 58 participants (31%) were laborers, and 13 participants (6%) were employees. The average number of times that drug users had attempted to quit drug abuse was reported to be 2.73 (ranging from once to a maximum of 12 times).

Table 1

Frequency distribution of the most important inter-personal factors related to addiction relapse.

Interpersonal factors	Frequency
Association with addicted and deviant friends	62.2 % (102 people)
Relationship with addicted colleagues	29.9 % (49 people)
The prevalence of the use of specific opium substances in society	22 % (36 people)
Not being accepted by friends and society	15.2 % (25 people)

Table 1 shows overall, 62.2% of drug users identified socializing with addicted and

deviant friends as the most important inter-personal factor related to addiction relapse.

Table 2

Frequency distribution of the most important economic factors related to addiction relapse

Economic factors	Frequency
Cost of living	44.5 % (73 people)
Poverty	22 % (36 people)
Cheap materials	9.8 % (16 people)
Buying and selling materials for a living	8.5 % (14 people)

Table 2 shows that among economic factors, 44.5% of drug users identified the

cost of living as the main factor related to addiction relapse.

Table 3

Frequency distribution of the most important occupational factors related to addiction relapse

Occupational factors	Frequency
Overwork and exhaustion	28.7 % (47 people)
Unemployment	28% (46 people)
Lack of interest and satisfaction in the job	28% (46 people)
Occupational and professional problems	22% (36 people)
Long working hours	22% (36 people)
Lack of permanent employment	17.7 % (30 people)
Failure and defeat in occupational affairs	17.7 % (29 people)

According to Table 3, excessive and exhausting work was the most important occupational factor related to addiction

relapse from the perspective of 28.7% of drug users.

Table 4

*Frequency distribution of the most important familial factors related to addiction relapse*

Family factors	Frequency
Inappropriate behavior of family members (father, mother, etc.)	24.4% (40 people)
Lack of proper communication in the family	17.7% (29 people)
Existence of discrimination in the family	14.6% (24 people)
Pressures resulting from being single	11% (18 people)
Absence or absence of father	9.8% (16 people)
Illiteracy or low literacy of mother	8.5% (14 people)
Crowded house based on the number of people	6.1% (10 people)

According to [Table 4](#), from the perspective of 4.24% of drug users, inappropriate behavior of family members

(father, mother, etc.) was the most important familial factor related to addiction relapse.

Table 5

*Frequency distribution of the most important psychological factors related to addiction relapse.*

Family factors	Frequency
Addiction of relatives	4.24% (40 people)
Lack of understanding with spouse	4.13% (22 people)
Inappropriate treatment by spouse's family	8.9% (16 people)
Differences arising from marital affairs	5.8% (14 people)
Bad treatment by spouse and children	9.7% (13 people)
Spouse not being committed to life	9.7% (13 people)
Forced marriage	1.6% (10 people)

According to [Table 5](#), 4.24% of drug users who were married identified addiction in family members as the most important familial factor related to addiction relapse.

exhausting work, bad family treatment, and addiction of relatives were reported in order of priority as other factors affecting the re-consumption of opium substances after initial quitting. Most of the patients were in the age group of 25 to 45 years.

#### 4. Discussion

The results of this study showed that most of the addicts studied were in the young age group, and from the perspective of addicts, associating with addicted and deviant friends was the most important factor in reusing drugs. Living expenses, excessive and

In this study, associating with deviant friends was identified as the main factor in returning to addiction. Essentially, being in polluted environments, associating with consuming and deviant friends, joining former friends' groups, and easy access to



substances are among the social factors affecting addiction and relapse into addiction that have been mentioned in various studies and are consistent with the present study (Fouladiyan & Mohammadi, 2023; Ahmadpanah et al., 2018 and Kabisa et al., 2021). The role of associating with consuming friends after quitting is so important that in the study of Mohammadpoorasl et al. (2012), it was the second most influential factor in relapse into addiction from the participants' perspective. Essentially, associating with friends and having access to substances and seeing objects and consumption tools creates a strong motivation for re-consumption (Fouladiyan & Mohammadi, 2023). Therefore, avoiding travel in former environments and avoiding associating with addicted friends has been mentioned as effective strategies for not returning to addiction in Nastizayi et al.'s study (2010).

According to the differential association theory, if an individual returns to their former group of friends after quitting addiction and does not associate with a new social network free of consuming individuals, a platform is provided that increases the likelihood of returning to consumption. Interacting with former friends can make the individual lack agency and shape their desire for consumption within the framework of stimuli. This can excite the individual and make associating with consuming friends after quitting play a role in providing a platform for returning to addiction. The result is placing the individual in the cycle of quitting and relapsing (Fouladiyan & Mohammadi, 2023). Additionally, living

expenses after quitting can cause individuals to return to drugs again (Khammarnia & Peyvand, 2017). In the field of addiction, most addicts in any society are individuals with very high living expenses. This could be due to poverty-related deprivations and drug producers and smugglers targeting these individuals as distributors because their numbers are higher than other economic-social classes (Amini et al., 2004).

In relation to other factors associated with addiction relapse, there is a close proximity between observed scores. It seems that individuals with substance abuse disorders have only chosen the factor of addicted and deviant friends. Officials and experts often mention this factor in educational and health issues, emphasizing the importance of having healthy friends. This option is usually the first thing people refer to justify their actions (especially addiction), resulting in other factors being marginalized (Namati Sougoli Tapeh and Khalidian, 1400). When explaining their research, researchers should consider this study's limitations. One limitation is relying solely on a questionnaire, which may have biased participants' responses. Using direct tools like interviews and clinical observation is recommended. The study only included men, so gender comparisons were not possible. Future studies should include both genders and have a larger sample size for comparison.

This study found that interpersonal factors play an important role in substance relapse. Associating with friends and deviant and addicted individuals is the main factor. Addiction specialists in camps or addiction treatment centers should set up ways of

assertiveness. They should teach skills of saying no and self-control to substance-dependent individuals. This should be one of the most important goals of educational programs and prevention of relapse.

### 5. Conclusion

The findings showed that the interpersonal factor (associating with addicted and deviant individuals) was the most important cause of relapse among the participants in the study. Based on the findings of this study, it can be said that training and intervention for assertiveness (the skill of saying no) in front of friends and changing the lifestyle of clients, as well as teaching interpersonal relationships and teaching moderation to family members after quitting drug use, seems necessary.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any organization. Also, this research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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