



Methamphetamine use and treatment in Iran: A systematic review from the most populated Persian Gulf country



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 August 2014

Received in revised form 11 May 2015

Accepted 19 May 2015

Keywords:

Methamphetamine

HIV

Treatment

Asia

Iran

ABSTRACT

Aim: Methamphetamine use is a new health concern in Iran, the most populated Persian Gulf country. However, there is no well-documented literature. The current study objectives were to systematically review all published English and Persian studies of the prevalence of methamphetamine use, the general physical and psychiatric-related harms and the availability of methamphetamine treatment and harm reduction services for adult users in Iran.

Materials and methods: A comprehensive search of the international peer-reviewed and gray literature was undertaken. Multiple electronic and scientific English and Persian databases were systematically searched from January 2002 to September 2014. Additionally, English and Persian gray literature on methamphetamine use was sought using online gray literature databases, library databases and general online searches over the same period of time.

Results: Nineteen thousand and two hundred and eight studies, reports and conference papers were identified but only 42 studies were relevant to the study objectives. They were mainly published in 2010–2014. The search results confirmed the seizures of methamphetamine (six studies), the prevalence of methamphetamine use among the general population (three studies), drug users (four studies), women (nine studies) and opiate users in opiate treatment programs (five studies). In addition, methamphetamine use had resulted in blood-borne viral infections (one study), psychosis and intoxication (ten studies). Different reasons had facilitated methamphetamine use. However, the Matrix Model, community therapy and harm reduction services (four studies) had been provided for methamphetamine users in some cities.

Conclusion: The current situation of methamphetamine use necessitates more research on the epidemiology and health-related implications. These studies should help in identifying priorities for designing and implementing prevention and educational programs. More active models of engagement with Persian methamphetamine users and the provision of services that meet their specific treatment needs are required.

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1. Introduction

After cannabis, methamphetamine is the most widely used illicit drug in the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014a). Globally, in 2012, between 162 million (3.5%) and 324 million (7%) people aged 15–64 reported using an illicit drug, mainly cannabis, heroin, cocaine or Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) at least once in the previous year (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014a).

Iran also called Persia is a vast ancient Persian-speaking country with Indo-European roots in the south-west of Asia. Iran is the traditional user of opium. This is because of Afghanistan, a Persian-speaking country in the eastern borders which mass-produces opium and smuggles opium to Iran (Mokri, 2002). As the most populated Persian Gulf country, methamphetamine use has recently become a new health concern in Iran (Alam mehrjerdi, 2013a; Yoonesi and Ekhtiari, 2013). Because of stimulant effects, methamphetamine is used to enhance sexual performance and increase physical energy in Iran (Shariatirad et al., 2013). Methamphetamine use is associated with physical and psychological harms in the Persian community (Alaee et al., 2014; Mohajerin et al., 2013; Solhi et al., 2014a; Ahmadi-Joubari et al., 2014). However, some Persian people use methamphetamine and become dependent on it. There has been no previous systematic review of methamphetamine use and treatment in Iran. The current review study aims to address this critical gap.

2. Methods

The focus of searching was based on the prevalence of methamphetamine use, general methamphetamine-associated physical and psychiatric harms and the availability of methamphetamine treatment and harm reduction services for adult users in Iran. For addressing the study aims, we systematically searched Medline, EMBASE and Pub Med citation indexes for articles published in English between January 2002 and September 2014. Persian scientific databases and websites including Scientific Information Database (SID), Magiran, Iran Medex and the website of all scientific Persian and English conference presentations of Iran were also systematically searched over the same period of time.

Additionally, English and Persian gray literature on methamphetamine use was sought using online gray literature databases, library databases and general online searches over the same period of time. This included the annual reports of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), the annual conference abstract books of Harm Reduction Association (International conferences, Asia region), National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), College on the Problems of Drug Dependence (CPDD), the annual reports of American Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs on Iran, the annual reports of the Persian Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME), Persian Drug Control Headquarters and the Persian Police.

Years 2002–2014 were selected for systematic searching because of no published study on methamphetamine before January 2002. To be included in this review, studies must have

explicitly emphasized the prevalence of methamphetamine use, general physical harms, psychiatric harms and treatment and harm reduction services for methamphetamine use in Iran. The keywords methamphetamine, amphetamine, Amphetamine Type Stimulants, crystal, ice, ATS, its derivatives, physical and psychiatric harms, treatment and harm reduction were used for searching. Duplicates such as editorials and letters were eliminated from the final searching.

3. Results

Systematic searching resulted in finding 19,208 English and Persian studies, reports and conference papers but only forty two studies were relevant to the study objectives. Most of the relevant studies, reports and conference papers had been published in 2010–2014. The search results confirmed the seizures of Persian methamphetamine in domestic and international illicit drug markets (six studies) and the prevalence of methamphetamine use among the general population (three studies), illicit drug users (four studies), women (nine studies) and opiate users in opiate treatment programs (five studies). In addition, methamphetamine use had resulted in blood-borne viral infections (one study), psychosis and intoxication (10 studies). Different reasons had facilitated methamphetamine use. However, the Matrix Model, community therapy and harm reduction services (four studies) had been provided for methamphetamine users in some main cities (See Chart 1).

3.1. Methamphetamine seizures and prevalence

3.1.1. Methamphetamine seizures

According to a recent World Drug Report (See Fig. 1), Mexico, the United States of America, China, Thailand and Iran are the first countries in the world with the problem of methamphetamine seizures (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012, 2014a).

Methamphetamine is named “*Shisheh*” and “*Shabu*” (Alam mehrjerdi, 2013a). Pseudoephedrine is the main ingredient of methamphetamine in Iran (Khajeamiri et al., 2012). In 2005, methamphetamine was first smuggled from the south-east of Asia to Iran. At that time, methamphetamine was recreationally used by a few young adults. However, after a few years, methamphetamine production was initiated with cost-efficient and over-the-counter ingredients at clandestine laboratories in Iran (Alam mehrjerdi, 2013a).

There is no report of methamphetamine seizure in Iran before 2005. According to the World Drug Report, for the first time since 2005, Iran has seized increasing quantities of methamphetamine. In 2010, the Persian police reported a 50% decrease in seizing opiates and an increase of 54% in seizing methamphetamine compared to 2009. For the first time, six methamphetamine laboratories were dismantled in 2010 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010). The seizures of methamphetamine increased over 10 fold between 2008 and 2011. The Persian government has widely devoted its resources to confronting the illegal drug trade. Nevertheless, some methamphetamine trafficking networks have initiated supplying markets within Iran and

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