



## Examining High Risk Behaviors Among Students of Zahedan Universities

Mahvash Raghbi<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, IR Iran

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Iranian communities have experienced substantial changes in recent years. Free time and pleasure-seeking have been transformed, increasing the risk of unhealthy and dangerous behaviors, leading to increases in well-known diseases.

**Objectives:** This study was performed to examine high-risk behaviors among students of Zahedan Universities.

**Patients and Methods:** The current study adopted a descriptive survey method. Given the focus on Zahedan universities, the present sample was drawn from the male and female students of the universities of Sistan and Baluchestan, Islamic Azad University, Quran sciences, and Payamm-e-Noor (distance learning). Of those, 361 subjects were selected for participation using stratified random sampling. Data collection consisted of a questionnaire investigating risk behaviors. The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by university researchers and lecturers. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was  $\alpha = 0.93$ , indicating strong reliability. Two methods, descriptive statistics and inferential (deductive) statistics, were used to describe and analyze the data. The indices were based on percentage estimations using single-variable and multi-variable chi-square tests. The present research investigates the epidemic of disorderly behaviors including deliberate violence, unintentional losses and damage, inappropriate diet, lack of physical activities, lack of knowledge concerning dangerous diseases, suicidal thoughts, absence from the dormitory, stealing, smoking (cigarettes or hookah), and alcohol or drug abuse.

**Results:** The research indicates that 45.2% of students sometimes, mostly, or always have an improper diet, 56.5% have no physical activity, 62.3% have experienced unelaborating damages and losses, 59.3% of them are not aware of dangerous diseases and the symptoms of infection, and 46.9% have suicidal thoughts. In addition, 15.8% of subjects have been absent without permission from the dormitory or their home, 12.2% have behaved violently on purpose, 15.3% often smoke (cigarette or hookah), 6.9% have committed theft, and 6.4% of the participants are alcohol or drug abusers.

**Conclusions:** These results indicate that the epidemic of risk behavior varies in subjects according to factors including gender, the university where one studies, parents' occupation and their income, and the number of family members.

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### ► Implication for health policy/practice/research/medical education:

This research investigates the epidemic of disorderly behaviors in Zahedan Universities. In general, the findings of this research are indicative of (highly) risky behavior prevalence among the students of Zahedan University, so it is worthy to note that much more behavioral factors are widespread among students. Both risky behaviors and the origin of risky behaviors are seriously harmful. Preventive factors may include making a safe environment, optimizing mental health and establishing aim full workshop.

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\* Corresponding author: Mahvash Raghbi, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, IR Iran. Tel: +98-2416143, Fax: +98-5412416120, E-mail: Ma\_Raghbi@edpsy.usb.ac.ir

## 1. Background

Iranian communities have experienced substantial changes in recent years. Shifts in sexual and social criteria, as well as communication technologies, have caused substantial changes and disrupted traditional values. Free time and pleasure-seeking have been transformed, increasing the risk of unhealthy and dangerous behaviors, leading to increases in well-known diseases. In the last two years, the crisis of addiction and suicide among the students, as underlined by the Central Department of Consultancy for students in the Ministry of Science and Technology, has proposed some preventive plans and research programs. Addiction to narcotic drugs is regarded as the most predominant and complex problems in the human community. The addict population is estimated to be about two million people. However, it seems clear that the real number is much larger than that reported (1). In a study entitled "Personality disorders and committing suicide," Hosainian and his colleagues (2) stated that personality disorders such as avoidance, antisocial, schizoid, borderline, paranoid, and passive-aggressive personality disorders are among factors that increase the chance of committing suicide among Iranian. It is worth noting that integration of these factors with alcohol and drug abuse further increases the likelihood of committing suicide (2). Another study investigating the prevalence rates of different categories of youth risk behavior by age, sex, and parental education using 26,111 Hong Kong students found that less than one-third of the participants consumed an unhealthy diet frequently, 18% had tried smoking, and 14.5% had seriously considered attempting suicide (3). Solaimani (4), in his article "Risky behavior and prevention from AIDS in adolescents," stated that the risk behaviors increasing the chance of being infected with HIV in adolescence include the following: 1) Having many sexual partners and unsafe intercourse, 2) Drugs and narcotics abuse by injection, 3) Abnormal sexual relations, 4) Abuse of alcohol and hallucinatory drugs, 5) Tattooing, 6) Lack of information and awareness in accordance with age 7) Family problems and leaving home, 8) Poverty and financial problems, 9) Being ejected with contaminated blood or blood products, 10) High-risk or dangerous jobs, 11) Being infected with other diseases through sexual relations, and 12) exposure to HIV from the mother at the time of delivery (4). Panahandeh (5) in a study investigating levels of student awareness about HIV and Hepatitis B in Iranshahr universities revealed that 9% had good awareness, 74% had an average awareness, and 17.3% had a poor awareness (5). According to the researcher, health care training and providing essential information play a critical role in establishing this knowledge. Taghipoor (6) in her research examining the level of student awareness in Islamic Azad University-Zahedan asserts that 86% were aware of the epidemiology of HIV, 60% know the signs of the disease, and 14% were aware of methods of prevention. She concluded that general student knowledge about the epidemiol-

ogy and pathology of this disease was at a desirable level (6). In another study, Musavi (7) examined the probability of an explosive increase in HIV in Iran by comparing sociological indices of two different groups of countries. The first group included countries that experienced an explosion in the cases of HIV (A countries) and those that experienced a slower growth of HIV (B countries). Musavi (7) states that B countries were considered different from A countries in along the following dimensions: 1) Being non-Muslim 2) Serving as a destination for immigration 3) Being a destination for the tourism industry 4) Experiencing ethnic conflicts 5) Experiencing intense economic crises 6) Undergoing complex social crises 7) Having issues in health care. The researcher believes that an explosion of the numbers of AIDS cases by at least 1400 is unlikely (7). Generally, due to the profound changes in social circumstances in recent years, adolescents typically engage in the risk and harmful behaviors (8). In a study entitled "Violence among high school students in Thailand," Sherer and Sherer (9) explored the prevalence and severity of violent behavior among high school students in relation to family, peers, schools, and neighborhoods. According to this study, males were more violent than females. The strongest predictor of violence was violence in the youth's environment followed by peer influences and personal characteristics (9). Toprak, Sadik *et al.* (10) examined factors associated with illicit drug abuse among Turkish college students, demonstrating that the major risk factors were contact with a person, such as a family member or a peer, who practiced substance abuse, poor school performance, being arrested or in trouble with the police, and burglary or theft (10). Toprak, Sadik *et al.* (10) examined self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts among college students. Their finding showed that tranquilizer abuse played a dual role as a correlate for suicide ideation and as a means of attempting suicide. Additionally, they found that drug abusers and adolescents who practiced self-harm presented the highest suicide risk (11). Serras *et al.* (12), in their study examining self-injurious behavior (SIB), substance use, and associated risk factors in a multi-campus probability sample of college students, found that drug use and frequent binge drinking were associated with higher rates of SIB. Among those who engaged in any SIB, those who used drugs had higher depression rates, higher prevalence of cigarette smoking, and higher rates of binge eating. In a multiple logistic regression model predicting SIB, depression, cigarette smoking, gambling, and drug abuse were significant predictors. Information about those at risk of SIB is critical in the design of prevention and intervention efforts as colleges continue to grapple with risk behaviors (12). With respect to the established studies, the present research aims to investigate the profile of drug abuse in students of all universities are under inspection by the Ministry of Science. Given the broader aim of determining student drug abuse patterns, the specific goals of the research include examining the correlations among the kinds of drugs, gender, and region

of residence. This study also seeks to examine the rate of legal involvement of students regarding drug abuse, comparing the patterns derived from different informational resources and comparing students on drug abuse patterns based on demographic variables.

## 2. Objectives

This study was performed to examine risk behaviors among students of Zahedan Universities.

## 3. Patients and Methods

The sample for the present study consisted of 361 students from the universities of Zahedan (194 male and 167 female) who were selected by stratified random sampling.

To gather the information related to the present aims, we designed a Likert-type questionnaire with responses ranging from “never” to “always.” In addition to demographic characteristics (gender, university location, parental occupation, parental income, and the number family members), the questionnaires also included variables assessing risk behaviors, deliberate and violence and harm, dieting for weight loss, lack of physical activity, tobacco abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, suicidal thoughts, awareness of dangerous diseases, absence from the dormitory or home, and stealing. To test the content validity, the questionnaire was evaluated by experts who then provided their recommendations. Based

on these recommendations, some questions were added and some were deleted. To test the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the questionnaire was completed by 20 persons randomly selected from a statistically appropriate population. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.909, indicating strong reliability. The questionnaire was then distributed to the final study sample. The Cronbach's alpha for the final sample was comparably strong ( $\alpha = 0.884$ ).

## 4. Results

Risk behavior research shows that due to the generational behaviors and characteristics of the evolving period, social-economic and health conditions, and psychological pressures in the environment, young people are more likely to participate in risk behaviors. Given these issues, the current study sought to investigate the extent to which university students are exposed to such harm and whether the learning sciences and living in an academic community could distinguish them from peers living in different conditions. Our questionnaire revealed some of the answers. The first question of the study, which addressed the epidemic epidemiological changes related to risk behavior among students (*Table 1*), revealed that 69.6% of males and 53.7% of females reported that they had sometimes, mostly, or always accidentally caused harm or loss. This finding is consistent with other research carried out in Iran and elsewhere.

The second question, which addressed the prevalence

**Table 1.** Gender-Wise Comparison of Accidental Harm and Losses and Prevalence of Improper Diet Among Students

	Never, $f_0$ (%)	Rarely, $f_0$ (%)	Sometimes, $f_0$ (%)	Mostly or Always, $f_0$ (%)	$\chi^2$	df <sup>a</sup>	P value
Accidental harm					13.67	3	0.003
Female	13 (7.8)	66 (39.5)	57 (34.1)	31 (18.6)			
Male	10 (5.2)	49 (25.3)	102 (52.6)	33 (17)			
Prevalence of improper diet					12.42	3	0.004
Female	53 (31.7)	30 (18)	21 (12.6)	63 (37.7)			
Male	92 (47.4)	23 (11.9)	31 (16)	48 (24.7)			

<sup>a</sup> Abbreviation: df, Degree of freedom

**Table 2.** Rate of Intended Harm and Violence, Lack of Physical Activity, Unpermitted Absence, and Stealing Prevalence Among Students

	Never, $f_0$ (%)	Rarely, $f_0$ (%)	Sometimes, $f_0$ (%)	Mostly, $f_0$ (%)	Always, $f_0$ (%)	Total, $f_0$ (%)
Intended harm and violence	149 (41.2)	168 (46.8)	35 (9.7)	8 (2.2)	1 (0.2)	361 (100)
Lack of physical activity	50 (13.9)	107 (29.6)	122 (36.6)	46 (12.7)	26 (7.2)	361 (100)
Unpermitted absence	160 (44.2)	144 (39.9)	41 (11.4)	11 (2)	5 (1.4)	361 (100)
Stealing prevalence	323 (89.5)	13 (3.6)	12 (3.3)	7 (1.9)	6 (1.7)	361 (100)

**Table 3.** Gender-Wise Comparison of Tobacco, Cigarette, Alcohol, and Drug Prevalence Among Students

	Never, $f_0$ (%)	Rarely, $f_0$ (%)	Sometimes, $f_0$ (%)	Mostly or Always, $f_0$ (%)	$\chi^2$	df <sup>a</sup>	P value
Tobacco and cigarette prevalence					21.32	3	0.000
Female	120 (71.9)	38 (22.8)	2 (1.2)	7 (4.2)			
Male	99 (51)	49 (25.3)	34 (17.5)	12 (6.2)			
Alcohol and drug prevalence					32.3	3	0.000
Female	136 (81.4)	24 (14.4)	3 (1.8)	4 (2.4)			
Male	105 (54.1)	73 (37.6)	12 (6.2)	4 (2.1)			

<sup>a</sup> Abbreviation: df, Degree of freedom

**Table 4.** Suicidal Thoughts Prevalence among Students of Different Universities

	Never, f <sub>0</sub> (%)	Rarely, f <sub>0</sub> (%)	Sometimes, f <sub>0</sub> (%)	Mostly or Always, f <sub>0</sub> (%)	$\chi^2$	df <sup>a</sup>	P value
University					34.02	9	0.000
SBU	4 (2.8)	65 (46.1)	52 (36.9)	20 (14.2)			
P. Noor	6 (12.5)	24 (50)	13 (27.1)	5 (10.4)			
Q. Science	13 (16.9)	17 (22.1)	29 (37.7)	18 (23.4)			
Azad U.	2 (2.1)	45 (47.4)	32 (33.7)	16 (16.8)			

<sup>a</sup> Abbreviation: df, Degree of freedom

**Table 5.** Awareness of Dangerous Disease Contraction among Students of Different Universities

	Never, f <sub>0</sub> (%)	Rarely, f <sub>0</sub> (%)	Sometimes, f <sub>0</sub> (%)	Mostly or Always, f <sub>0</sub> (%)	$\chi^2$	P value
University					20.54	0.015
SBU	8 (5.7)	73 (51.8)	51 (36.2)	9 (6.4)		
P.Noor	2 (4.2)	22 (45.8)	19 (39.6)	5 (10.4)		
Q.Science	15 (19.5)	6 (46.8)	25 (32.5)	1 (1.3)		
Azad.U	9 (9.5)	52 (54.7)	32 (33.7)	2 (2.1)		

of improper, diet-related risk behavior, *Table 1* showed a significant difference between males and females, indicating that gender is also an important factor. This is consistent with scientific research indicating that anorexia is more common in females. The number of family numbers may also serve as an indicator of economic and dietary problems. Related research shows that such problems are often rooted in childhood. Attention to training and education is also important.

The third question, which deals with intended harm and violence, showed that 12.2% sometimes or most often have laughed at fighting or the carrying of a knife or gun (*Table 2*). These findings suggest that committing risk behavior deliberately is significantly related to parental occupation. The location of upbringing and education were therefore considered important factors, with those students who are greatly influenced by social pressures and its effects typically committing these harmful behaviors. The fourth question addressed the lack of physical activity and showed (*Table 2*) that 56.5% of subjects were not active, consistent with the research of Hemati and Hossaieni (13, 14). Permitted absence from the dormitory or home was also considered in the fifth question of the research. The results show that 14% of students reported that they had left home or the dormitory without informing their parents or supervisors. According to the findings, the students whose mothers were public servants were more exposed to risk. In their research, Shareh and Bagheri and others focused on females who had run away from home (1, 15). The sixth question concentrated on stealing among students (*Table 2*), with the results showing that 6.9% of students acknowledged that they sometimes, most of the time, or always steal. The seventh question assessed the rate of tobacco and cigarette use. The results suggest that 33.7% of males and 5.4% of females sometimes, mostly, or always smoke. The effect of gender was also significant (*Table 3*). Children of employed mothers smoke more than children of homemakers, again consistent with previous research (16). The eighth question of the study examined alcohol and

drug prevalence, showing that 2.5% of males and females reported that they sometimes, mostly, or always abuse drugs and alcohol. There was also a significant difference between genders indicating that males abused drugs and alcohol more than females (*Table 4*). Paternal occupation was closely related to risk behaviors. In addition, children of employed mothers also experienced more problems. This result is consistent with research carried out by Mazlooman and Bahreinian (17, 18). Research in other countries also supports these results.

The ninth question investigated the prevalence of suicidal thoughts among university students. The findings indicate that 51.1% of Sistan and Balouchestan University students, 37.5% of Payam-Noor University students, 61.1% of Oloom-e-Ghorani University students, and 50.5% of Islamic Azad University students reported to sometimes, mostly, or always having suicidal thoughts (*Table 4*). Serious attention should be paid to this issue. These results are consistent with research carried out by Abbas Poor (19), and Mosavati (20). In the Tenth question, we examined student awareness of the ways of prevalence. The results of *Table 5* show that 42.6% of S.B. University students, 50% of Payam-e-Noor students, 33.8% of students in the Faculty of Quranic Science, and 35.8% of Islamic Azad University students had a reasonable knowledge about the subject. The results are consistent with the work of Panahandeh and Fateme Taghi Poor (5, 6)

Despite the small rate (6.9%), the results nonetheless imply risk behavior among students. In general, the findings of this research indicate that risk behavior is prevalent among the students of Zahedan Universities.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that high-risk behavior is prevalent among the students of Zahedan Universities. These behaviors require provincial and national planning. Although the findings indicate that family and economic issues play a key role, we believe that the findings of the current study indicate that risk behaviors are a more general issue. Society depends on such uni-



versity students and will plan its future according to the future experts among today's students. The most important fact is that problems persist. Although economic problems and family issues may be an underlying cause of this condition, the university is a good platform for planning, training, preventing, and treating high-risk behaviors. It is worth noting that the key behavioral factors are widespread among students. Both risk behaviors and the origin of risk behaviors are seriously harmful. Preventive factors may include creating a safe environment, optimizing mental health, and aiming to establish a full-time group that can serve as a therapeutic resource.

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## Authors' Contribution

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