



Al-Kindy College Medical Journal (KCMJ)

Letter to editor

Iraq's Meth Crisis: Prioritizing Research to Combat Suicidal Ideation

Ahmed Al-Imam ^{1,2,3*}, Michal Michalak ⁴

¹ Department of Computer Science and Statistics, Doctoral School, Poznan University of Medical Sciences, 61-806 Poznan, Poland

² Department of Anatomy and Cellular Biology, College of Medicine, University of Baghdad, Baghdad 10047, Iraq

³ Alumni Ambassador, Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London, London E1 2AD, United Kingdom

⁴ Department of Computer Science and Statistics, Poznan University of Medical Sciences, 61-806 Poznan, Poland

* Corresponding author's email: tesla1452@gmail.com ahmed.al.imam@student.ump.edu

Article history:

Received 30 August 2023

Accepted 23 September 2023

Available online 1 April 2024

<https://doi.org/10.47723/f2m0tp28>

Keywords: Addiction psychiatry, crystal methamphetamine, life-threatening behaviors, psychostimulants and quasi-psychedelics, stimulant use disorder, suicide spectrum.



This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Dear Editor,

As dedicated readers of Al-Kindy College Medical Journal, we are writing to highlight a critical and profoundly concerning matter that requires urgent research attention: the alarming surge in suicidal ideation among users of Iraqi crystal methamphetamine. Expert psychiatrists at Baghdad Medical City and Ibn-Rushd Psychiatry Teaching Hospital have observed this worrisome trend. In tandem, previous studies regarding suicidal ideation among Iraqi medical students have revealed an unexpectedly high prevalence (64.9%) (1). The escalating global trend in amphetamine-type stimulant (ATS) abuse and the distinct challenges posed by crystal meth addiction necessitate comprehensive investigation into the resultant psychological toll.

According to the World Drug Report 2022, amphetamines' popularity and use, including methamphetamine, have surged globally, ranking as the second most commonly abused illicit substance after cannabis (2). This rise in ATS abuse has not spared Iraq, where illicit methamphetamine and captagon use have dramatically increased, notably in Al-Basrah governorate (3,4). The transition from opioid-related overdose deaths to the abuse of stimulants like methamphetamine signifies the urgency for novel strategies to monitor and combat this growing public health concern (5). As methamphetamine misuse becomes more prevalent, it is imperative to prioritize research that explores the mental health consequences of its abuse.

Substance abuse "epidemics" can have wide-ranging consequences on individuals, families, and communities, including health problems, and social instability. At the same time, the escalated use of crystal methamphetamine among Iraqis can potentially create significant economic challenges for the country. Individuals struggling with substance abuse might face reduced productivity and an increased likelihood of unemployment, thereby straining the workforce.

Moreover, healthcare systems could be burdened with treating drug abuse's physical and mental health repercussions, including suicidal ideation and attempted suicides, diverting resources from other

critical areas. Additionally, increased drug-related crime and instability could deter foreign investment and tourism, hindering economic growth. Furthermore, addressing the economic impact

requires costly rehabilitation programs, public health initiatives, law enforcement efforts, and community support systems.

Smoked crystal methamphetamine use has unique attributes, with a rapid and intense "high" for users, albeit with potential health risks (1,2,5,6). Understanding the interplay between the drug's pharmacological effects, the method of administration, and its impact on mental well-being is crucial for informed intervention strategies. On the other hand, the legitimate medical uses of amphetamines for conditions like narcolepsy, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and depression highlight the potential for therapeutic applications amidst the challenges of misuse (7).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria for stimulant use disorder provide essential guidelines for accurate diagnosis (8). However, understanding its etiopathogenesis is complicated. The intricate nature of substance use disorders, especially with crystal methamphetamine, emerges from the complex interplay of genetics, psychology, and environment. Genetic predispositions, familial impacts, personality traits, and psychological disorders have all been implicated (9). To effectively address the mounting suicidal ideation among crystal meth users, a comprehensive grasp of these multifaceted influences becomes imperative.

The urgency of this issue in the Iraqi context cannot be overstated. With the nation grappling with the devastating consequences of ATS misuse, including crystal methamphetamine, a comprehensive research approach is urgently required to uncover the underlying mechanisms linking substance abuse and the suicide spectrum (suicidal ideation, parasuicide, and suicide). By investigating the intricate dynamics between methamphetamine use and mental health outcomes, researchers can guide the development of targeted interventions and support mechanisms for affected individuals and communities. This urgent call for research can potentially mitigate Iraq's meth crisis and provide valuable insights to inform global strategies.

In conclusion, the growing crisis of suicidal ideation among Iraqi crystal meth users warrants immediate research. The unique challenges posed by ATS misuse, coupled with its rising prevalence, underline the importance of a comprehensive investigation into the psychological impact of substance abuse. This call for urgent research can lay the foundation for evidence-based interventions, thereby instilling hope among those impacted and propelling collateral endeavors to address the global epidemic of ATS misuse, especially concerning crystal methamphetamine.

Funding

The authors self-funded the study.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID

Ahmed Al-Imam [0000-0003-1846-9424](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1846-9424)
Michal Michalak [0000-0002-2852-3984](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2852-3984)

References

- [1] Al-Imam A, Motyka MA, Hoffmann B, Basil S, Al-Hemiary N. Suicidal ideation in Iraqi medical students based on research using PHQ-9 and SSI-C. *International journal of environmental research and public health*. 2023;20(3):1795. <https://doi.org/10.3390%2Fijerph20031795>
- [2] WDR 2022_booklet 4. United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 2022. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr-2022_booklet-4.html. Accessed 10 Dec 2022
- [3] Al-Imam A, Motyka MA, Hoffmann B, Al-Ka'aby H, Younus M, Al-Hemiary N, et al. Risk factors of suicidal ideation in Iraqi crystal methamphetamine users. *Brain sciences*. 2023;13(9):1279. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci13091279>
- [4] AL-Imam A, Santacroce R, Roman-Urrestarazu A, Chilcott R, Bersani G, Martinotti G, et al. Captagon: use and trade in the Middle East. *Human Psychopharmacology: Clinical and Experimental*. 2017;32(3):e2548. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hup.2548>
- [5] Ciccarone D, Shoptaw S. Understanding stimulant use and use disorders in a new era. *Medical Clinics*. 2022;106(1):81-97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mcna.2021.08.010>
- [6] Kish SJ. Pharmacologic mechanisms of crystal meth. *Cmaj*. 2008;178(13):1679-82. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.071675>
- [7] De Gregorio D, Aguilar-Valles A, Preller KH, Heifets BD, Hibicke M, Mitchell J, et al. Hallucinogens in mental health: preclinical and clinical studies on LSD, psilocybin, MDMA, and ketamine. *Journal of Neuroscience*. 2021;41(5):891-900. <https://doi.org/10.1523%2FJNEUROSCI.1659-20.2020>
- [8] Petry NM, Zajac K, Ginley MK. Behavioral addictions as mental disorders: to be or not to be? *Annual review of clinical psychology*. 2018;14:399-423. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032816-045120>
- [9] Uhl GR, Koob GF, Cable J. The neurobiology of addiction. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. 2019;1451(1):5-28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.13989>

To cite this article: Al-Imam A, Michalak M. Iraq's Meth Crisis: Prioritizing Research to Combat Suicidal Ideation. *AL-Kindy College Medical Journal*, 2024;20(1), 78-79. <https://doi.org/10.47723/f2m0tp28>