

# Iraq: Between Drug Dealers and Death Squads

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As a result of nationalised oil, during the 1980's the Government of Saddam Hussain had run literacy campaigns, which saw illiteracy drop to less than 10% of Iraq's entire population. UNESCO applauded the fact, that Iraqis were able to access free education and come out with qualifications and employment on the other side. It was stated in 1998:

“UNESCO said that Iraq was one of the only countries in the world where, even if you were born in absolute poverty, with illiterate parents you could come out of the education system either a brain surgeon, archaeologist or whatever you wished to become.”

What has tragically replaced education, stability and employment is an increasing subservience to alcohol and drugs, with “violence, unemployment and poverty” leading to a dramatic “increase in alcohol abuse,” according Younis Obeidi, a psychiatrist at the Ibn Rushd Hospital.

Kamel Ali, head of the Iraqi Health Ministry's drug and alcohol-prevention programme, stated in 2007

“the consumption of alcohol in Iraq has surprisingly increased”, with “every day more patients looking for help as their addiction begins to seriously affect their personal lives.”

“Iraq has one of the worst treatment and follow-up regimes for alcohol abusers in the Middle-East,” Ali states, with staff shortages further complicating the situation and denying patients access to consistent after-care.

That same year, the Iraqi Psychologists Association illustrated how an internal study had shown “the number of alcoholics in care had increased by 34 percent compared to the figure for June 2006” but a lack of funding, had prevented the study from being published.

Drugs have also become an alternative to the squalor of poverty, as the first three years of the US/UK occupation, saw over 2 million people “living below the poverty line”. In May 2005, the UN announced, that Iraq was about to become a transit station for heroine, “which is manufactured in Afghanistan and is heading towards Europe through neighbouring Iran”.

Having been made homeless due to sectarian violence and left unemployed, Abu Teif turned to the selling of drugs to “support his family - three children and a handicapped wife”, whose disability was caused by militants shooting her “for not wearing a veil”.

“At the beginning it was like a miracle. It was easy work and I had a lot of clients and I didn't

even know the effect of the drugs. I learned what the effects could be only after an addict tried to kill me to get heroin.”

“I started to see food in my home again. My grandchildren also started eating well and my wife was able to get proper treatment for her leg, but those days soon ended”, when drug dealers started to extort more money from him and then threatened to kill his wife and family if he tried to escape the drugs trade”.

“I don’t know how to escape this life” Abu Teif stated, “If I try to run away with my family they will find me”, his words echoing the same fears as those fleeing death squads, “I started to do wrong by selling drugs and now I’m paying the price.”

In a July article for news agency Al-Monitor, journalist Adnan Abu Zeed warned: “the negative effects of illegal drugs in Iraq are becoming more apparent” as Iraq “is being transformed from a country that exports drugs into a consumer of them”.

Zeed described a situation, where throughout Iraqi cities, growing numbers of young people are high on drugs, where this new generation of war’s children, are finding solace in the arms of these substances.

Drugs are also spreading like wildfire in places that use child labour, such as car repair shops, and road junctions where cheap goods are sold. Asaad Yassin is just one example, who at the tender age of 14, is also a drug addict.

Abu Sami, whose eldest son is addicted to drugs declared: “My fear is no longer about an explosive or a car bomb, but about the terrorism of addiction.” Ahmad al-Jubouri, a middle school teacher from Babel is unable to help his heroin-addicted brother, because the city has no drug rehabilitation centre.

At the end of 2012, an Iraqi parliamentary committee stated, “The security, the judicial and the health services are embarrassed about the spread of drugs”, and police sources claim “Investigating [those boys] is not part of [the police’s] daily duties”.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Ministry of Interior’s response has been to issue a statement, which simply states that drugs “cause a person to commit crime.”

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