

## Issues and Challenges of the Level of Readiness to Change and Religiosity among Adolescent Drug Addicts

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### Abstract

One of the issues that has been getting worse in the community until now is drug abuse. Drug abuse causes a deep impact on oneself and others. This article is intended to identify the issues and challenges of the level of readiness to change and religiosity among adolescent drug addicts. Tracing from the point of readiness to change, every individual has a different level of motivation, readiness and capacity to change. Return of drug use or intake resumption of the drug after one of the former addicts quit using it in a certain period, more commonly known as the "relapse", is a highly alarming situation. The phenomenon of relapse is an issue that often happens to former drug addicts after the expiration of the treatment prevention and recovery process. Individuals who experience a relapse when they are stuck with the crisis of the extension, which involves symptoms such as looking at simple things, not being able to plan their time well, often acting recklessly, thinking that every problem is complex and not able to be solved, easily inflamed, often forgotten and distraught, not being able to control emotions and often giving a reaction to the excessive effects of not being able to think with the good. Prevention programmes of drugs is seen as a need against empowerment because prevention is less effective and needs to be enhanced. The programmes should be implemented through a more interesting approach, in addition to the content of the programmes of prevention, which need to be more systematic and updated to encourage adolescents to get involved in every activity. This study suggests that the approach of spirituality in Islam is used as a strategy for recovery drugs. This is because a powerful spirituality can lead to a strong and long-term recovery.

**Keywords:** Issues, Challenges, Readiness to Change, Religiosity, Drug Addict

## **Introduction**

One of the issues that has been getting worse in the community until now is drug abuse (Daud & Sulaiman, 2021). Substance abuse means using materials that are forbidden by the method and certain way up to give a deep impact on oneself and persons around, for instance, drugs or narcotic substances, alcohol, and any other prohibited substances in the amount that can harm themselves and other people (Ismail, Ahmad, Ibrahim and Nen, 2017).

On the other hand, to provide effective recovery treatment to drug addicts, particularly adolescent drug addicts, we must study and identify their level of readiness to change because their willingness to change is significant to be known before carrying out any counselling sessions because of the readiness of this change is like a measure to assess their degree of willingness to change and usually it greatly affects some treatment process to be given (Lam & Hilburger, 1996).

Subsequently, to produce an individual with a good personality and noble morality, a person must be emphasized from a religious point of view or religiosity. This is because every treatment or action that a person will perform should be motivated by religion. After all, religion is the most critical element in forming a good self from the inner corner (Salleh, Tamuri & Amat, 2017).

Tracing from the point of readiness to change, every individual attending a counselling or psychotherapy session has a different level of motivation, readiness and capacity to change. Most counselling practitioners consider that each client is heterogeneous from the point of the demand ability of each. It is widely acknowledged among counsellors and psychotherapists that the client's willingness to change their behaviour significantly impacts the success of the treatment process and outcome (Krebs, Norcross, Nicholson & Prochaska, 2018).

In the early stages of a study conducted by Lam and Hilburger (1996), it was found that the success of a rehabilitation treatment is linked to the readiness level of the person undergoing the treatment. Every treatment received by the individual must be congruent with their level of readiness. This is because when different levels of preparedness are involved in rehabilitation treatment, only a few individuals are aware of the behaviour that needs to be changed and have a willingness to change, while other groups behave differently and may end up receiving treatment forcibly.

According to Johnson (2020), the willingness to change is a key factor in the success of a person's comprehensive recovery treatment. This is because a strong awareness and willingness to change enables the treatment and recovery process to run smoothly and effectively. Each client has a different level of readiness to undergo recovery treatment and this readiness is often associated with positive social change implications that can transform an individual's lifestyle.

Furthermore, Garrisi (2011) defined willingness to change as an individual's awareness of the need to change and the extent to which they have made the necessary adjustments. Individuals in the early stages of change may not accept or be able to make the needed changes to meet their needs. As they progress to the final stage of change, they will go

through two situations either have made the desired adjustments or be in the process of making them.

In addition, return to drug use or intake resumption of the drug after one of the former addicts quit using it in a certain period, more commonly known as the "relapse" is a highly alarming situation. This phenomenon of relapses is a common problem for former drug addicts after completion of preventive and rehabilitation treatment (Azizul, Khir & Jaafar, 2018) person experiences a relapse when he is trapped with an advanced crisis that involves signs such as neglecting something, being unable to plan the future well, often acting overly, having the thought that every problem is difficult and unresolved, easily inflamed, forgotten and sloppy, not able to control emotions and often giving overreactions the effect of not being able to think well.

In other words, the change that is caused by an individual's awareness and willingness is very important in ensuring that they do not relapse after undergoing treatment and recovery programs. This means that the willingness to change is an individual's awareness of making changes within themselves and their readiness to make changes to achieve a desired goal or objective that involves motivation or internal factors that can influence someone to engage in certain behaviour.

The involvement of a person in the drug scene is also related to the extent of their religious beliefs. Hamid, Ishak & Hashim (2017) explain that spiritual and religious elements in life are no longer seen as obstacles, but rather play an important role as a catalyst for personal change. Manap, Krauss & Suandi (2013) believe that religiosity or religious life is very important in a person's life because it has a significant influence on behaviour, personality, emotional stability, self-confidence, and overall happiness.

In Islam, religiosity is associated with a lifestyle or system of life-based on Islamic teachings (al-Din), as stated by Mahmood (2006). This system consists of three stages: Islam, Iman, and Ihsan. Each stage is related to how much a person evaluates and examines Islamic teachings and faith in their daily lives. This concept can be identified in detail through the term (al-Din) itself, as it makes Islamic teachings a complete way of life (hayyanah mutadaniyyah) that is approved by Allah SWT. This clearly explains the relationship between a person's faith, religion, and the morals they display.

In the same tone, this situation portrays that religion is very important in influencing human life, especially because it has a great influence on behaviour, personality, emotional stability, and human self-confidence, as well as seeking happiness in life. Religion is also seen to have a very deep effect not only on followers of Islam but also on followers of other religions.

In 1996, the Malaysian government established the National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK) under the Ministry of Home Affairs to address drug-related issues. Since then, the government has been focused on combating the drug problem by creating the National Drug Policy in 2004 (Shafie et al., 2018) followed by the "Youth Against Drugs" campaign in 2005 (Wazir et al., 2020) and later, the "Drug-Free Malaysia" campaigns in 2015, and most recently, the "Controlled Drugs 2025" target (Utusan Malaysia, 2021).

One of the treatments that can be carried out to reduce addiction problems is to organize continuous drug prevention programs and activities by the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA). Among the drug prevention programmes that are implemented include community-based programmes, public awareness programmes and also programmes that are organized every year by schools such as the Drug Prevention Education Program (PPDa) which is implemented comprehensively through four main strategies, namely management, leadership, curriculum and co-curriculum to raise awareness and knowledge from the school level itself (Ibrahim & Zakaria, 2014).

According to Mohamed, Din and Othman (1993), the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA)'s approach to providing recovery for drug users involves applying supply reduction and demand reduction strategies. Researchers believe that using recovery as the main basis for this approach can reduce drug demand, which explains why intervention, treatment, and drug user recovery programmes, including counselling and psychological approaches, can have a more effective impact.

Additionally, one of the types of treatments provided by a non-governmental treatment center known as the Association of Former Drug Addicts, commonly known as "Rumah Pengasih" (RP), is through an alternative treatment program that uses the Therapeutic Community (TC) approach, which is a recovery modality used by 4227 facilities in 65 countries. The five main pillars when conducting this treatment are the concept of family (family milieu concept), the guidance of peers (peer pressure), undergoing a session of group therapy (therapeutic session), increasing the understanding of the religion (religious session) and example (role model) (Murad, Ahmad & Hamsan, 2016).

Drug abuse has been studied in various fields such as research and medicine (Ahmad, 2019), pharmacology (Majid, 1997), and psychology (Sadiron, Kamaluddin, Sulaiman & Khairudin, 2019; Ismail, Anwar & Hamsan, 2010). When viewed from the point of view of treatment and recovery abroad such as in Britain and the United States, the first emphasis that is often used to recover drug addicts is to undergo consulting sessions and more focused on behavioural and psychosocial approaches. The focus will be on helping clients build skills in self-adaptation and problem-solving by managing day-to-day stress, improving coping skills and self-mastery (Ahmad & Mohamed, 2007).

### **Issue**

Out of every eight individuals in need of drug-related therapy, only one acquires it. Although women represent one in three drug users, they only make up one in five treatment people. Due to stigma and discrimination, minorities, immigrants, displaced individuals, and those incarcerated also encounter obstacles to receiving treatment. Out of the 11 million individuals who inject drugs, 1.4 million have HIV and half possess hepatitis C (United Nations, 2020).

In the first six months of this year, drug billing cases in the country increased by 27% to 118,920 addicts, up from 93,534 in the previous year. This increasing trend is seen as increasingly worrying when 50% of them are juveniles. At the same time, statistics show that Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu are the states with the highest rates of abuse per 100,000 people, while Selangor is the state with the largest number of addicts. Sutekno Ahmad Belon, the Director-General of the National Anti-Drug Agency, reiterated that one of

the reasons teenagers and adolescents are stuck in this crap is that their free time is not spent on any activities (BERNAMA, 2023).

According to Rahim (2022), in a raid in the capital in January 2022, 76 teenagers were arrested, including drug dealers and some who were still in school, and two of them were only 13 years old. The assault was carried out at 367 billing nests that recorded a total of 5200 drug dealers and drug addicts arrested. In Kedah, Zulkiffli (2022) said a total of 1006 drug addicts and traffickers had been arrested between January and June 2022. This data clearly shows that drug abuse is a very worrying figure, especially with the involvement of adolescents.

According to Salleh, Tamuri & Amat (2017), the increase in the number of teenagers involved in criminal activities is a worrying trend, especially when the crimes they commit pose a threat to the safety of others. Based on statistics and recorded data, it is clear that cases related to juvenile delinquency, particularly those involving teenagers, should be addressed urgently, as teenagers are the backbone of any society. The teenage years are also considered a period of great challenge, as they are marked by various changes and developments in their personalities.

Touching about teenagers, since recently, cases involving misconduct or juvenile delinquency have not slipped out of the press. This has a great impact on the country because youth is the milestone of a country and if this matter is not covered, then the power of that country collapses. In fact, in January 2022, a case of theft of a mosque tube in the Sungai Buloh involved a 19-year-old teenager who was allegedly stolen to cover his grandfather's medical expenses. The results of the police investigation revealed that the teenager was stealing to buy drug supplies. It is understood that the teenager was involved in drug abuse about a year ago before he was finally arrested (Ramli, 2022).

### **The Challenges**

Like other countries, Malaysia also faces challenges in curbing drug addiction among its citizens. Over the past decade, there has been a drastic increase in drug relapse cases among addicts. Statistics released by the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) show a significant increase from 25,922 drug addicts detected in 2017 to 128,325 in 2020, indicating an increase of 102,333 cases. This increasing trend is a major concern, especially as it also involves adolescents (AADK, 2020).

There has been a significant increase in the number of teenage drug addicts aged 13 to 18 years old. In 2017, there were 694 addicts, while in 2020 the number has risen to 2,556. This statistic indicates a worrying trend in drug addiction, which needs to be addressed more comprehensively. Despite various prevention programs, there are still some weaknesses in the approach. Therefore, it is crucial to provide more information and awareness to teenagers about the harmful impacts of drug addiction on themselves, their families, communities, and the country (Daud & Sulaiman, 2021).

According to a study conducted by Ibrahim et al. (2011), lack of motivation is the primary cause of failure to implement changes. The self-determination theory suggests that human behaviour is influenced by both external and internal factors. When an individual is

internally motivated to make a change, the desired behavioural change is more likely to be sustained for a longer period, compared to being motivated solely by external factors (Deci and Ryan, 2000). In other words, the driving force behind a change is crucial in determining its longevity. Therefore, it is essential to consider the source of motivation when seeking to implement lasting behavioural changes.

Furthermore, an insightful study conducted by Frausto and Hejazi (2009) among drug-using patients aged 18 years and above from the emergency department revealed some concerning findings. The study found that a whopping 46% of patients were not willing to change their behaviour, indicating a significant lack of motivation to seek treatment. Another 21% were still in the contemplation stage, meaning they were unsure about seeking treatment. In contrast, only 33% of patients were ready to change and seek help. These results highlight the significant challenges in addressing drug addiction, as many patients may not be willing to acknowledge the problem and take action to address it.

Next, a research study conducted by Blanchard, Morgenstern, Morgan, Labouvie & Bux (2003) found that individuals who are currently undergoing addiction recovery treatment may not always exhibit the necessary motivation to make changes. Additionally, those who are mandated to undergo treatment by a court or employer may actively resist the treatment and provide reasons for changing their addictive behaviour. Essentially, individuals who lack intrinsic motivation to modify their addictive habits will face challenges in adopting positive behaviours and making progress toward recovery.

In the other hand, Melnick, DeLeon, Hawke, Jainchill and Kressel (1997) stated that most preparedness studies focused more on the adult population alone and less on treating adolescents with substance abuse problems. Next, research findings show that adolescents are seen to be less motivated and willing to change than adults to seek or remain in some kind of treatment and are seen as more motivated due to external factors such as orders from court officers or family members than adults (Hubbard et al., 1988; Pompei & Resnick, 1987).

Drug prevention efforts need to be strengthened and supported. Preventive efforts should be enhanced, according to Matokrem (2008), primarily by providing moral support and enthusiasm to individuals or groups. Additionally, Shah et al. (2015) stated that existing prevention programmes are ineffective and require improvement.

As stated by Fook, Sidhu, Hoe, Hamid & Hussin (2015), prevention programmes require both enrichment and continuous support as well as more innovative, economical and effective strategies. In order to encourage youth and youth to engage in every activity, programmes implemented should use a more attractive approach, and the contents of prevention programmes should be more systematic and up-to-date. In addition, Taharem (2004) suggested the use of Islamic spiritual strategies to stop drug use. This is due to his belief that a strong faith can be a strong and lasting defense.

Overall, the integration of spiritual elements is important as one of the drugs prevention measures. In it, a systematic and structured prevention program, as well as a more up-to-date approach, based on cost-effective and capable of yielding good results. Therefore, the researchers found that increased prevention efforts are important and priority should be



given to prevention strategies based on Islamic spirituality to give optimum results against the self of an individual. This can be proved by Islamic spiritualism it can restore the soul, realize spirit and increase endurance then produce a greater impact if practiced in an effort to prevent drug abuse (Khalid, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

The drug addiction treatment landscape has witnessed the implementation of several Western-based interventions and methods that cater to the unique needs of individuals struggling with addiction. While these interventions have been effective to varying degrees, addiction experts have recommended that they be augmented by integrating religious elements. This integration, when coupled with the strengthening of cognitive and behavioural skills, could potentially serve as a more effective preventive measure against relapse, particularly for adolescents.

Research studies have suggested that religious beliefs and practices could positively influence the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals, leading to a more successful recovery from addiction. Religious practices such as prayer, meditation, and spiritual readings can help individuals find meaning and purpose in their lives, providing the motivation and strength to overcome addiction.

Therefore, researcher have identified the need to develop a module and intervention to improve the existing module by emphasizing the religious element while strengthening an individual's cognitive and behavioural skills to prevent drug addiction, especially among adolescents, from returning to drug addiction. This module could empower individuals to reject drugs and embrace a more fulfilling life, leading to a more successful and sustainable recovery from addiction.

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