

# The Reasons of Tendency toward Hookah Smoking among Teens and Youth in Iran - A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract:

With the dramatic growing trend toward hookah usage and increased morbidity and mortality caused by smoking, we started a study to research regarding the causes of hookah smoking among teenagers and youth living in Bushehr city. This is a qualitative study. Research environment is considered to be all public places and the research population comprised of all teenagers and youth of Bushehr. 12 participants were selected by purposive sampling. The method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with Participants that were recorded concession and immediately rewritten and analyzed. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data. Data analysis resulted in three main themes including: “the influence of culture”, “prone context”, and “difficulty of quitting”. The most common reasons of increasing use of hookah in Bushehr are: “common culture of using hookah among family and friends”, “lack of enforcement of prohibiting laws about the use of hookah in public”, “lack of knowledge about hookah complications and having the wrong belief about hookah: (being less harmful than smoking)”, “desirable taste and smell of fruity hookahs” and “having no better fun” and “social stress between young people”. The results suggest the public health officials should consider this problem as an urgent priority and along with using effective methods for making the culture and educating people; they should start planning to reduce the consumption.

**Key words:** Hookah Smoking, Teens, Youth, Qualitative Research.

## INTRODUCTION:

The use of hookah in the world has long known as a traditional method of smoking tobacco, but its use has dramatically increased in recent years [1, 2]. Tobacco use is a widespread problem in modern societies [3], And if this trend continues, the number of deaths due to smoking will increase to approximately 8 million people a year by 2030 [4]. The young people's increasing interest in smoking hookah to the false understanding of them about hookah being harmless than other methods of smoking tobacco. So, with the increasing popularity of hookah, it is a new method of smoking tobacco in the 21st century [5]. Hookah history returns to 400 years ago and has its roots in ancient India. Hookah term generally refers to the use of tobacco smoke the way that the smoke passes through water before entering the lungs [6]. The popularity of hookah especially in teens is increasing who assume it as a social behavior and having fun on them. Hookah smoke contains condensed carbon monoxide, nicotine, tar and heavy materials therefore it is a greater risk for disease and cancers of the respiratory system [7]. Reduction of hookah smoking age to childhood is the reason to attract attention to this problem and doing many epidemiological studies, particularly in the East Mediterranean region [8]. In a study conducted in Karachi, Pakistan, 27% of school students and 54% of university students were reported to smoke hookah on a regular basis [9]. Also a study in Turkey revealed 28.6% use of hookah among medical students, and 37.5% among non-medical students. Moreover, in this study, sex, smoking hookah and cigarettes among Family and friends

were reported as the most important factors affecting tendency to tobacco use while the residence of the parents and family economic status had no significant impact on the pattern of tobacco use [10]. Another study was conducted in Lebanon, according to which factors such as achieving a degree of dysphoria, enjoyment, achieving the respect of others, peace of mind and improving the mood affect the tendency to smoke hookah [11, 12]. In many studies conducted in the world, the changing patterns of tobacco smoking, particularly among female students were observed [13, 14]. Most of the studies in Iran have investigated the prevalence and pattern of smoking cigarettes and less attention has been paid to hookah. On the other hand, given the high rate of deaths caused by tobacco use, its proven effectiveness in causing various diseases, adverse social impacts, increasing the tendency towards hookah, high cost of tobacco and considering the fact that the use of smoking hookah is increasing among over 15 teens in our countries [15, 16]. Due to the many hazards of hookah in Public Health and engagement of more people in the community, researchers sought the pattern and causes of tendency to smoke hookah among teens and youth of Bushehr city in Iran.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS:

This is a qualitative study. The purpose of the study was to explain the causes of hookah smoking among adolescents and youth in Bushehr. Given that this phenomenon was complex and had roots in the beliefs of people, therefore the use of qualitative research can be helpful in acquiring

deep and rich information from the participants [17]. All public areas of Bushehr such as parks, libraries and cafes were considered as the research environments. The study population comprised all adolescents and youth in Bushehr, who were perceived as smokers of hookah. Smoker was assumed as someone who used hookah one day or more during the past month [18] and are willing to participate in the study. These are the characteristics of those who played a role in the selection of research units. A purposive sampling was continued until data saturation. 12 participants were selected with age between 11-35. To do this after receiving permission from University research assistant, after explaining the aims and method of interviews, written consent forms were obtained from all participants and interviews were recorded with their permission. Method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. This kind of interview is suitable for qualitative research due to flexibility and depth of data [19, 20]. Interviews were open and semi-structured; they were recorded and rewritten with the consent of the participants and data gathering and analysis was done simultaneously. The interviews took 20-30 minutes and they were done in single. In order to analyze the data all the interviews were transcribed. Interviews were listened carefully by researchers several times and qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data. Qualitative content analysis was used to interpret the intellectual content of textual data, in this method, through a systematic classification, codes and themes are identified [19]. Therefore the codes were extracted based on the meaning perceived from the descriptions of the participants and then classified based on the similarity and difference. In semi-structured interview, although the researcher will prepare the issues that should be covered beforehand, but not all the questions are specified and the trend of interview is partially relies on the interaction between interviewer and interviewee [21]. Questions raised during the interview were such as: describe your experience of smoking hookah? What is your opinion about quitting hookah? What factors obstructs or facilitates quitting?. Trustworthiness of the current study was checked according Guba and Lincoln (1994) criteria including credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Credibility was confirmed through participants' checking the transcriptions and using two methods of data gathering. Also, researchers had experience in conducting qualitative research. Dependability was affirmed by two experts' audit. In addition, confirmability was determined through experts' audit. Transferability is about external validity. To obtain this criterion, researchers should provide sufficient descriptive data. So, readers can apply the data in their context. We struggled to create a meaningful text to use in other contexts [17].

#### RESULTS:

Data analysis resulted in three main themes including: "the influence of culture", "prone context" and "difficulty of quitting". The results also confirm the central role of prone context and it is even believed to have direct and two-way

relation with other themes. Themes and subthemes that were emerged in the study (table 1).

**The influence of culture:** Participants believed that hookah smoking culture had its roots in Bushehr since long and it is one of the most important factors of using it widely. This theme was emerged by 2 sub-themes including "look naturally" and "the impact of urban culture on family culture". Hookah smoking prevalence by close family members and friends was one of the factors that were expressed by the participants many times. Meeting so many hookah smoking people has reduced obscenity and evil of this issue and it is considered to be as a normal acceptable activity. One of participants said: "We have smoked hookah since birth. Kazerooni hookah smoke with Borajzani tobacco. We saw it is better to be smoking hookah. Yeah it's very fun....enjoying". Another one said: "From the first grade of guidance school until today there hasn't been a single day that my body wasn't in contact with hookah smoke. When one sees his family doing that all the time, it gets normal. It banal "Regarding the role of friends this participant stated: "The main role was for my friends. They are all smokers". Other participants also emphasized the role of hookah culture in the city of Bushehr and pointed to the changing in family culture in recent years: "The main reason I believe to be the culture. For example there is this culture in Bushehr. I have traveled all through west and north of the country but never been like here. Imagine a family with two 11 and 13 year old girls and a 10 year old son, the mother asks them to make the hookah ready for smoking and they do so. And the interesting part is that they all fight over hookah. I am now 20 years old and we haven't dared to smoke hookah in presence of our father. It means the culture has changed". According to the participants, family culture change means a change in the method of communication in the family, lack of respecting the parents and the views of elderly.

**Prone context:** The second theme is the prone context which itself consists of three sub-themes: "the availability", "psychological readiness of the person" and "social problems". Some Participants believed that hookah is widely common due to its availability in families and the community. Low price and high popularity among family members and friends led the kids to be familiar with it from very young age and have it available easily. Other participants also highlighted the role of friends in Hookah smoking and emphasized that being among friend who smoked hookah was the most important factor of their tendency towards using it. One of the participants said: "The first time I smoked hookah was the time I went out with my friends a lot. And I thought friends have no effect on you if you don't want to do something. After several times going out I watched them smoking hookah without offering to me. The first couple of times it was just fun and joke for me and then little by little I got used to smoking hookah. After that I went out with my friends to smoke hookah without my family knowing". The majority of participants stated that several factors cause a person to get used to smoking hookah among which we can point to: "Poor communication" and "lack of feeling loved in the

family”, “feelings of worthlessness” and sometimes “lack of confidence”, “family problems”, “peer pressure” and “having weakness in problem solving skills and overcoming stress”. Some participants’ quotations are: “I smoke hookah to show off and not to chicken out”, “Sometimes I am proud of smoking hookah”, “Fathers and mothers must be careful about their children. They have to control their kids and be their friends, when the young teens go out of the house they are out of control. They voluntarily are attracted to smoking cigarettes and hookah”. “They say it kills you in young age. Well, what is the difference? You want to be 75? So it gets 65 or even 55. So what? Let it kill us and we will be at rest at last”. Young participants believed the people who imitate the behavior of others, are most at risk of smoking hookah. Another factor is ineffectiveness of life skills against stress, because they mostly described smoking hookah as the best way to deal with and forget the problems. “If I want to summarize, I mostly smoke hookah for refreshment and when I am under the pressure”. Social problems were another sub-theme of prone context. Participants believed that social problems included: “unemployment”, “lack of recreation”, “poverty” and “social pressures” that may provide the suitable context to use hookah. Also lack of social legislation to ban hookah was considered as another effective factor. One of the study participants said: “Now when you go to the beach you see everyone smoking hookah. How can you quit! You smell and you like to smoke again. And there is nobody to warn or ask you not to do it”.

**Difficulty of Quitting:** The last theme that emerged from data analysis was “difficulty of quitting”. The majority of participants indicated no desire to quit. They described quitting being very difficult. Especially because in order to quit you need to leave the friends who do it and not to enter the places where you may smell it, as they said. This theme includes the following sub-themes: “lack of knowledge”, “sensory appeals” and “psychological dependence”. Participants believed that the unawareness about the effects and the real consequences of hookah was one of the factors that prevent people from quitting. According to them, being aware is not sufficient and there should be a change in the attitude. “Hookah has no bad consequences, because all these years, our grandparents have smoked it and nothing

bad ever happened to them.” “If someone wants to quit, first he should leave his friends. If he thinks it is wrong to smoke he may quit. It also needs to be strong. The family can give this strong will by explaining how harmful it is not to force the person to quit it.” Another participant one said: “People's knowledge need to grow”. Sensory appeals refer to enjoying the flavor and taste, creation of soothing mood, feeling happy and dizzy, as well as satisfaction, curiosity and excitement. Participants believed that hookah is a good way to have fun in gatherings; they mostly assumed it as a group fun and stated that smoking hookah is not fun when you are alone. It can be entertaining when there is a group around. One of the participants said: “You feel happy when you smoke hookah. I feel lack of nicotine, my body needs nicotine it is a part of my life.” Another one stated: “Once I smoked hookah and I liked the taste. When you smell it...it lifts your spirit. It doesn't take to comma but your head gets heavy... when you smoke it seems you are exercising. You totally forget everything”. Participants also believed that dependence is another factor affecting the difficulty of quitting. One of the participants said: “Quitting is not difficult. But...how do I put it...when you see the guys, you like smoke again...Nicotine has entered your body so you can't quit it in a couple of days while you are dependent to it.” Another one said: “Hookah makes you dependent. It might not be physical but it is mental dependency. You keep telling yourself that you need to smoke and you can't quit. I tried to stop smoking several times but I did it again”. Other ways to quit as the participants mentioned are: chewing gum, leaving friends who smoke hookah, exercising and reading books, having strong will, Acknowledging people and changing their attitudes. Most of the participants named the consequences of smoking hookah as: getting respiratory disease, infections through mouth, drug addiction, and marital problems because of bad breath. Despite knowing these consequences, the majority of people were indifferent. The risk of addiction is one of the concepts that were frequently expressed by participants. They believed the first step of addiction is being in a community of smokers of cigarettes and hookah. They insisted that the taboo of women smoking hookah specifically in public declined in recent years.

**Table 1.** The reasons to tendency toward hookah usage among teens and youth

Themes	Sub-Themes
<b>The Influence of Culture</b>	Look naturally
	The impact of urban culture on family culture
<b>Prone Context</b>	The availability
	Psychological readiness of the person
	Social problems
<b>Difficulty of Quitting</b>	Lack of knowledge
	Sensory appeals
	Psychological dependence

**DISCUSSION:**

The current study showed that three effective factors in young adolescents' tendency to use hookah in the city of Bushehr are: "the influence of culture", "prone context" and "difficulty of quitting". The first factor influencing the tendency of smoking hookah was the common culture in Bushehr. According to participants culture means positive attitude and the habit of smoking hookah in family of Bushehr since long ago. The norms, values and accepted patterns of a society is said to be culture which transfers to the next generation [22-24]. Hookah smoking culture emphasizes more on values, cultural role expectations and mass media. "Declined religious beliefs among the youth" is another reason of hookah being so common. Commitment to religion and religious teachings can act as a solid damp against social disorders, obliquity and the effects of cultural invasion. Religious commitment control individuals' behavior both directly and indirectly through raising self-esteem, improving relationships between family members and increased parental control and reducing the abnormal behaviors [25]. Culture affects through different ways, the mechanism of which is determined by examining the impact. Stigma phenomenon (scandal) is one of these channels. In theory of Goffman, Stigma is treated as a crushed identity attributed to an individual or a group due to which the members of the group or the individual lose their credit and become distinct. Now if smoking hookah is not considered to be a taboo in one country, it will help to spread it around. Therefore social problems such as suicide, drug or tobacco consumption can be influenced by the culture of the society [26]. Our traditional society has never stood up against smoking hookah because it has always been referred to as a national culture. Hookah has been a part of our culture since long ago the families have never taken it serious and they believe it to be harmless [27]. In the past few years, the gesture of smoking hookah is kind of classy for teenagers. Considering the fact that hookah can create a feeling of physical and psychological dependency but it doesn't stop there; it also draws the person towards addiction to cigarettes, marijuana and other opium drugs [28]. Therefore, for maintaining the health of the society the culture of not using hookah is essential. According to the participants the second factor affecting tendency to smoke hookah was "prone context". Low cost and availability of materials, psychological characteristics of individuals such as imitating others, low self-confidence, family problems and being under social pressures are all considered as the factors of pushing a person towards smoking hookah. The findings are consistent with research conducted in Canada [1]. In this research that was conducted with the aim of determining the reasons of youngsters' tendency toward hookah, the participants mentioned the following points as the most common reasons: the low cost of smoking hookah compared to other group recreation activities, positive attitude towards it, the false belief that there is a low risk of toxic substances because of the water. Also in a qualitative research conducted in Malaysia by my colleagues and I (2012) to determine the factors affecting the use of hookah,

availability, low cost, good smell and being non addictive were among the factors of tendency towards hookah. Moreover, the results showed that the false beliefs and lack of knowledge about the consequences of hookah are other factors influencing the prevalence of hookah. In most similar studies, participants believed that the use of hookah will have no serious harm to their health and Hookah smoke passing through water reduces the effects, and the law of prohibiting smoking in public places should be recommended [29]. Many studies have shown that the effects of smoking hookah are not only lower, but in cases more severe than cigarettes. One survey suggested hookah smoke contains condensed carbon monoxide, nicotine, tar and heavy materials therefore it has a greater risk of causing respiratory disease and cancer [3]. The results also showed that many of the participants mentioned the reason of their tendency to use hookah to forget the problems and relaxation they get from it. This result indicates poor problem solving and fighting skills against problems of life. Since smoking hookah doesn't solve any problems, prevention from addiction to hookah can be effective in reducing consumption [30]. In this study, the majority of participants described quitting hookah to be very difficult. Ignorance and indifference to the consequences and effects were other causes tendency to smoking hookah. Similar results were received by a survey conducted on medical students in Beirut [31], awareness of the harms of smoking hookah reduced its consumption to 20.6%, in Syria to 23.5% and in Turkey to 28/6% among medical students. it was noted that teaching and increasing awareness may reduce consumption [9]. The research done by Vanderhook in Canada (2013) suggests that teaching students isn't sufficient and only 10% of medical students use clinical guides to avoid addiction to tobacco, though the number of consumers is much less than European and eastern countries [30]. The research conducted by al-Jarrah (2009) showed the false belief that hookah is safer than smoking cigarettes. 58% of the samples showed they are the same [32]. Accordingly Mazyak (2011) in his study in America recommended that the problem of smoking hookah should be dealt with as a health priority [8].

**CONCLUSION:**

The most common reasons of prevalence of smoking hookah in Bushehr are: the common culture of using hookah among family and friends, lack of law enforcement of prohibiting smoking in public places, lack of knowledge and false beliefs of people about hookah being less harmful than cigarettes, desirable fruity smell and taste, having no better fun and feeling and having social pressures among youth. Therefore, based on these results it is recommended that the officials deal with this problem as an urgency and priority using effective methods to educate and inform people and families of the effects and consequences of smoking hookah along with planning a favorable entertainments for young people, reducing social pressures, providing happy environment for adolescents and youth, teaching life skills to cope well with stress, adhering to religious beliefs and forbidding the use of hookah in public. Limited sampling, confined to Bushehr city, was

one of the limitations of this project; therefore it is recommended that the study would be conducted in other cities of the country.

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