A Social Analysis of the Role of Informal Labeling on Students’ Attitude towards Drugs

Akbar Aliverdinia*
Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Mazandaran University, Babolsar, Iran

Heidar Janalizade Chobbasti
Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Mazandaran University, Babolsar, Iran

Azadeh Jafari
M.A. in Sociology, Mazandaran University, Babolsar, Iran
* Corresponding author, e-mail: aliverdinia@umz.ac.ir

Introduction
The problem of drugs is one of the most important and serious issues which has attracted attention from different economic, social, political and psychological perspectives at international level. Statistics also indicate that the rate of drug abuse has increased among different communities, especially adolescents and the youth in recent decades (Malekyvar et al, 2007). According to the UN Office for Prevention of Drug Abuse and Crime in 2005, Iran has the largest number of drug addicts in proportion to the population in the world and there is a high rate of prevalence of drug abuse (8/2%) in Iran (Ziaie, 2009). According to Iran Drug Control Headquarters, the number of addicts has been 1.2 million in 2007, including 1,137,600 men and 62,400 women. (The annual book of Drug Control Headquarters, 2009: 8). In addition, in 2009, 231,908 individuals were arrested in connection with drug-related offenses of whom a total of 10,378 individuals come from Mazandaran province (Ibid. 51). Also, studies have shown that there is a correlation between behavior and attitude. In other words, attitudes are considered to be antecedents of behavior. Positive attitude towards drugs reduces the negative aspect of drug abuse and normalizes its use and distribution. Since negative effects of anything are usually more visible than its positive effects, it seems that we are experiencing a wide range of cultural chaos in our universities (Serajzadeh Javahery, 2003; Serajzadeh and Babaei, 2009). In such a context, study of attitude towards drugs among students (male and female) would be an important issue and deserves serious attention. In addition, a relatively neglected area of research related to students’ deviant behavior is theories of social interaction and the role that stigmatizing views play in shaping deviant behavior and favorable attitudes of students towards these behaviors. Labeling approach has mainly focused on reaction of social observers towards individuals and their behavior and consequences of this reaction and has paid less attention to the deviant behavior itself. In addition, labeling theorists claim that the way of dealing with offenders is more related to the way that significant others regard their actions rather than the behavior themselves. In this study we try to find an answer for this question: how does informal labeling, conducted by parents, friends and teachers, may lead to favorable attitudes towards drugs among students? In addition to measuring the attitudes of students towards drugs, this research examines labeling theory and its explanatory power to realize students’ attitudes towards drugs.
Materials and Methods
Research Methodology of this study is a cross-sectional survey that is done by questionnaire technique. Research population includes all students in Mazandaran University in the academic year 2010-2011, from whom 384 individuals were selected using stratified sampling method. However, to avoid reducing the sample size, a total number of 450 questionnaires were distributed and after excluding flawed questionnaires, 425 questionnaires were analyzed. The data was analyzed using SPSS software. We performed multiple regression analysis. In this study, attitude towards drugs is considered as dependent variable having three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and behavioral, which was measured in the form of Likert scale. In fact, a total of 18 items was used for assessing and measuring attitude towards drugs as the dependent variable. The design of these items to measure attitude towards drugs abuse is based on previous studies (Aliveverdina: 2009). Informal labeling is considered as independent variable. It is composed of such dimensions as deviant behavior, negative evaluation of one’s parents, negative evaluation of one’s teachers, negative evaluation of one’s friends and one’s own negative evaluation. Theoretical framework for this study is based on labeling theory and the hypotheses that are derived from it are as follows:

- It seems that informal labeling has a positive effect on favorable attitude towards drug abuse.
- It seems that there is a direct relationship between the history of deviant behavior and favorable attitude towards drugs.
- It seems that there is a direct relationship between negative evaluation of one’s parents and favorable attitude towards drugs.
- It seems that there is a direct relationship between negative evaluation of one’s teachers and favorable attitude towards drugs.
- It seems that there is a direct relationship between negative evaluation of one’s friends and favorable attitude towards drugs.
- It seems that there is a direct relationship.

Discussion of Results and Conclusions
According to the results, 53/6 percent (228 individuals) of respondents had no history of deviant behavior and 2/44 percent (188 individuals) stated that they had a history of deviant behavior. When it comes to parents’ evaluation, girls received better evaluation from parents and teachers in comparison to male students. But in the case of the friend's assessment of the person, boys have been expressed better assessment in comparison to the girls. Also, 76/6 percent (330 individuals) of respondents had a negative attitude towards drugs. However, positive attitude was higher among boys than among girls (9/1% vs. 1/4 percent). Furthermore, with regard to the result obtained from multiple regression analysis, it can be said that dependent and independent variables are in a 0.62% correlation relationship. Also, 0.39% of the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by independent variable which is consisted of five elements of informal labeling theory (history of deviant behavior, negative evaluation of one’s parents, negative evaluation of one’s teachers, negative evaluation of one's friends, and one’s own negative evaluation). Among five variables entered into the model, three (history of deviant behavior, negative evaluation of one’s parents and negative evaluation of one's teachers) have shown a significant relationship with dependent variable. According to standardized regression coefficients, it can also be said that deviant behavior variable was the strongest predictor of attitude towards drugs, with a coefficient regression of 0.47%. In the second level, negative evaluation of one's
teacher (0.16 %) and negative evaluation of one's parents (0.15%) influence dependent variable.

In general, the main hypothesis regarding the positive effects of informal labeling on favorable attitude to drugs has been approved. Likewise, research sub-hypotheses regarding the positive effects of deviant behavior, negative evaluation of one's parents and teachers and one's negative evaluation are approved with clear and strong relationships. Labeling theory is based on the view that the reason of deviation in a society is the perspective, impression, and the way that people approach certain individuals and groups in society. According to this view the formal and informal reactions to drug addicts can influence the behavior and attitudes of society at large. This theory argues that labeling process can bring about negative effects; for example, the labeled individual can accept a role in which he or she is assigned a label, and act accordingly. When an individual is defined as a special kind of person by others, social pressure to change one’s perceptions of themselves and their behavior will be exerted according to this definition. It seems among students who have a positive attitude towards drugs, the risk of becoming addicted is more than among those who have a negative attitude towards drugs. The strength of attitude depends on several variables. Direct experience is the most important one. Another way to acquire a positive attitude towards drugs is to use them. There is substantial evidence that attitude obtained in this way is much stronger than second-hand attitudes. Therefore, because attitudes of students who have a history of drug abuse stem from personal experience and not pattern or example taking, it is more difficult to change. In order to make convincing communication effectively with those who have positive or neutral attitude towards drug, it is necessary to consider factors that are important in attitude change. In Iran there is no reliable qualitative information regarding the status and attitude towards drug abuse. Also, strategies to deal with this problem are still unknown.

**Keywords:** Attitudes Towards Drugs, Informal Labeling, Self-Concept

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