



Opium Addiction and COVID-19: Truth or False Beliefs

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The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has estimated that there are 16 million opioid users globally (1). Since December 2019, when coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) emerged from Wuhan city and rapidly spread throughout China (2), this disease has many psychiatric aspects (3), and some false beliefs and rumors have been spread in social media and the community regarding the protective effect of opium consumption against COVID-19 (4).

In this regard, our pilot survey in a COVID-19 referral hospital shows that the rate of opium addiction in 93 hospitalized patients was 10.8%, and calculation of the odds ratio for mortality resulted in 3.59 (95% CI, 0.9 - 14.5). The mean age of patients was 56.3 ± 15.2 years old, and 54.8% of patients were male. There was no significant difference ($P = 0.503$) between addicted males (7 cases, 13.7%) and females (3 cases, 7.1%).

According to our findings, it seems that the rate of mortality in the opium-addicted population is higher than the normal population. In regard to opium consumption, the study of Noori et al. has indicated that 2.4% of 6,027 participants from the general population of Iran's Capital, Tehran (1), were addicted to opium. Hence, it seems that such people are more susceptible to novel Coronavirus. All these would be due to the lack of personal hygiene, sharing personal accessories, and disregarding social distancing. Nevertheless, this effect on mortality in patients with COVID-19 addicted to opium needs more attention, considering a wide confidence interval.

Moreover, the etiology of mortality in patients with

COVID-19 is related to cytokine storm due to elevated levels of Interleukin-6 (IL-6) in these patients (5), which has been investigated by Nabati et al. regarding the effects of opium on cytokine secretion. This study showed elevated levels of IL-6 in plasmas were taken from opium-addicted subjects (6). In conclusion, this claim needs more comprehensive research to be proven; however, society has to pay more attention, which will come true by the health system authorities.

Footnotes

Authors' Contribution: All authors contributed equally.

Conflict of Interests: There is no conflict of Interests.

Ethical Approval: The pilot study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Mazandaran University of Medical Science (IR.MAZUMS.REC.1398.7296).

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