



## **Pathways to Addiction: A Grounded Theory Field Study in Sidi Hammad Neighborhood (Algeria).**

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### **Abstract:**

*This qualitative social study employs a grounded theory methodology to explore the development of drug addiction trajectories among youth. Through in-depth interviews, a theoretical model was constructed, revealing addiction as a socially symbolic process rather than merely an individual deviation. The analysis uncovered four interconnected dimensions: predisposing social contexts; interactive dynamics of slippage; the negotiation of the addict's identity; and coping and relapse trajectories. Building on these dimensions, the study formulates a grounded theory centered on the core category of "interactive dynamics of slippage." According to this framework, addiction unfolds as a gradual, interactive process in which personal identity is continuously negotiated within contexts of social marginalization. In such conditions, addictive behavior emerges as a distorted form of social adaptation amid structural vulnerability. The study concludes that effective interventions must transcend purely medical or security-based approaches, addressing instead the underlying symbolic and social dimensions. It underscores the necessity of strategies aimed at fostering social reintegration and recognition.*

**Keywords:** *Addiction Pathways; Grounded Theory; Identity; Stigma; Relapse*

## Les voies de la dépendance : une étude de terrain basée sur la théorie ancrée dans le quartier de Sidi Hammad (Algérie)

### **Résumé:**

*Cette étude sociale qualitative adopte une approche de la théorie ancrée afin d'examiner le développement des trajectoires de dépendance aux drogues chez les jeunes. À travers des entretiens approfondis, la recherche a construit un modèle théorique qui révèle que la dépendance constitue un processus symboliquement social plutôt qu'une simple déviation individuelle. L'analyse a identifié quatre dimensions interconnectées : les contextes sociaux prédisposants ; les dynamiques interactives de glissement ; la gestion de l'identité du toxicomane ; et enfin, les trajectoires d'adaptation et de rechute. À partir de ces dimensions, l'étude a élaboré une théorie ancrée centrée sur la catégorie principale des « dynamiques interactives de glissement ». Selon ce modèle, la dépendance est un processus progressif et interactif où l'identité personnelle est continuellement négociée dans un contexte de marginalisation sociale, de sorte que le comportement addictif émerge comme une forme déformée d'adaptation sociale au sein d'une fragilité structurelle. L'étude conclut que des interventions efficaces doivent aller au-delà des approches médicales ou sécuritaires et aborder les dimensions symboliques et sociales sous-jacentes, en insistant sur la nécessité de stratégies favorisant la réinsertion et la reconnaissance sociales.*

**Mots clés:** *voies de la dépendance; théorie ancrée; Identité; Stigmate; Rechute*



## **Introduction:**

The contemporary world is experiencing rapid social, cultural, and economic changes that are reshaping how people live, think, and interact. This fast pace of modern life has led to new relationship patterns and different ways of adapting to, or withdrawing from, reality. Within this complex situation, addiction emerges as a major modern challenge. Understanding it goes beyond individual causes to see it as part of a broader social system, where behaviors are produced and reinforced through social forces. Consequently, addiction can be seen as a symbolic phenomenon, developed over time within social relationships governed by patterns of interaction, justification, and normalization. In the Algerian context, official reports indicate that this problem is continually worsening among the younger generation.

Since the establishment of the National Office for the Fight against Drugs and Addiction in 1997<sup>i</sup>, this office has been tasked with coordinating and implementing the national prevention and treatment policy. According to statistics published in 2024, the percentage of unmarried addicts undergoing treatment reached 69.23%, with the age group most affected being between 16 and 35 years old. The occupational status index also reveals that the unemployed constitute the group most vulnerable to addiction. Security data indicates that more than 148,000 cases were dealt with during the same year (smuggling, trafficking, possession and consumption, and even drug cultivation). This confirms the intersection of structural factors and local contexts in reproducing the pathways leading to addiction. The Sidi

Hammad neighborhood in the municipality of Miftah is a key example of this dynamic, where economic and social fragility, weak institutions, and limited job opportunities combine to create a social environment ripe for studying how addiction pathways develop. Within this context, the pressures of daily life and social relationships within drug-using groups lead to the normalization of addiction, making it part of the accepted social landscape<sup>ii</sup>.

Grounded theory is considered the most appropriate methodology for analyzing and deconstructing this social process. It does not proceed from preconceived assumptions or a specific model<sup>iii</sup>, but rather from the field to construct a theory based on empirical data revealed in addicts' narratives and life experiences. Rather than searching for the "causes of addiction," this research seeks to uncover the logic of its descent: How does it begin? How is it justified? How is it experienced and reinterpreted? And how are the addict's identity and relationships with others formed? The problematic of this research revolves around the following main question: How do paths towards addiction emerge?

## **1. Methods:**

### **1.1. Study population:**

This qualitative study analyzes and seeks to understand the pathways to addiction. The research was conducted in the Sidi Hamad neighborhood, which has a highly diverse population, representing most of the Algerian states and even including individuals of various foreign nationalities. The residents of this neighborhood were recruited from the Oued Smar area of the capital, where they lived in temporary informal housing. As is the case with most informal settlements, this residential community suffered



**Soumission : 10/02/2025    Acceptation : 12/05/2025    Publication : 15/07/2025**

from numerous social problems. Although these problems did not disappear after residents moved to the Sidi Hamad residential neighborhood, their severity has significantly decreased.

The study sample consisted of young neighborhood residents aged 19–35. Participants were selected through purposive sampling after observing them actively participating in a three-day awareness campaign organized by a charitable organization. Some participants whose attendance during these awareness days was limited and sporadic were excluded. The research sample evolved gradually according to the requirements of grounded theory methodology; it was not predetermined but shaped by the development of field analysis. Starting with three core participants, a process of constant comparative analysis led to the recruitment of additional participants to substantiate emerging understandings and expand the semantic ranges of the categories. This expansion continued until the sample reached ten participants, at which point theoretical saturation was achieved, as new data no longer contributed new properties or conceptual dimensions to existing categories.

## **1.2. Data collection:**

Data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview guide was designed based on the research objectives and was subsequently modified and enriched following four open interviews with individuals outside the main target group. At the outset of each interview, the following open-ended question was posed: "Tell me about the path that led you to the phase of drug

addiction." The interview guide itself was revised several times based on concepts emerging from prior interviews, which were generated through exploration or follow-up questions during the interviewing process.

Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, with the average interview duration not exceeding 50 minutes. Respondents were interviewed multiple times, with a minimum of two and a maximum of five interviews per individual. Supplementary questions were also administered via telephone interviews. Furthermore, field visits were conducted to treatment and care centers, as well as to the homes of some sample members. Thus, the data collection process incorporated additional methods, namely observation and the analysis of certain records.

The research continued until reaching the phase of saturation, where no new information or data emerged, indicating that data saturation and sample stability had been achieved<sup>iv</sup>.

Following the recording of interviews with the research subjects, we systematized these interviews by transcribing them into written texts using Microsoft Word. We also organized and documented the notes recorded during the interviews, as well as during the field visits to treatment and care centers. This process resulted in the accumulation of a substantial body of diverse data, comprising interview transcripts, observational notes, and documents.

### **1.3. Data analysis:**

The data analysis process was initiated according to the underlying theory, relying on a symbolic interactionist approach that aims to build a theoretical understanding emerging from the field, of the subject of the study:



**Soumission : 10/02/2025    Acceptation : 12/05/2025    Publication : 15/07/2025**

“Pathways to Addiction”. Constant comparative analysis<sup>v</sup> was adopted as the primary methodological mechanism throughout all stages of coding, from open to selective coding.

### **First phase: Open Coding**

The axial coding phase is a thought-sifting and analysis process that aims to focus on the codes most indicative of ideas surrounding the theme of “addiction pathways,” remove non-essential details, and consolidate closely related codes under a single concept<sup>vi</sup>. A code is a brief label or conceptual phrase assigned by the researcher to a piece of data (a sentence, paragraph, expression, etc.) that represents a specific idea or meaning. It serves as a "conceptual translation" of what the participant expresses, rather than merely repeating their words. In this initial stage of analysis, the goal is to group codes that convey the same fundamental meaning or core idea into a single concept. Therefore, after conducting in-depth interviews with addicts and transcribing them, each text was analyzed line by line. Meaningful units were identified in participants' narratives, such as "I can't stand the pressure anymore," "This is what curiosity brought me," resulting in 420 codes, such as "Loneliness drives me to use," and "I feel accepted among addicts." At the same phase, the axial coding phase; initial categories are formed on a semantic, functional, and interpretive basis by grouping concepts that are similar in meaning, function, or significance within the phenomenon being studied, with the aim of arriving at initial analytical units that can later be linked in axial coding.

## Second phase: Axial Coding

At this stage, with the aim of constructing main categories that reflect the explanatory model of the phenomenon under study, we linked the initial categories that were extracted in the axial coding stage to each other, based on the explanatory model of Corbin and Strauss, in which we answered the following questions<sup>vii</sup>:

- ✓ What factors or conditions led to the emergence of the phenomenon?
- ✓ In what context or framework did the phenomenon occur?
- ✓ What intervening conditions or factors influence the trajectory of the phenomenon?
- ✓ How do individuals interact with the phenomenon, and what strategies do they employ?

By answering these questions, the initial categories are linked together through causal and contextual relationships, helping us classify the composition of the main categories.

**Table N° 1: Concepts, initial categories and main categories**

N <sub>0</sub>	Concepts	initial categories	main categories
1	Inability to meet basic needs	<b>Material deprivation</b>	Facilitatin
2	Long-term unemployment		
3	Living in an informal settlement		
4	Limited insufficient income		
5	Loss of main source of livelihood		
6	Repeated domestic violence	<b>Family disintegrati on</b>	
7	Parental separation		
8	Absence of family supervision		
9	Favoritism among siblings in treatment		



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10	Lack of interest in personal problems		g Social Contexts
11	Constant feeling of anxiety	<b>Psychological pressures</b>	
12	Exposure to early trauma		
13	Low self-esteem		
14	Feeling of worthlessness		
15	Fear of the future		
16	Prevalence of drug use in the neighborhood	<b>Facilitating surrounding environment</b>	
17	Easy access to drugs		
18	Weak security surveillance		
19	Implicit societal acceptance		
20	Presence of commonly known drug use spots		
21	Initial curiosity	<b>Initiation and experimentation</b>	
22	Peer pressure		
23	Blind imitation		
24	Seeking pleasure		
25	Escaping reality		

5			Interactive dynamics of relapse
26	Transition from soft to hard drugs	<b>Gradual involvement</b>	
27	Gradual increase in doses		
28	Turning drug use into a habit		
29	Justifying continuation		
30	Introducing new drugs		
31	Body's adaptation to the drug	<b>Normalization and habituation</b>	
32	Drug use turning into a routine		
33	Forming a circle of addicts		
34	Legitimizing the behavior		
35	Integration into drug use culture		
36	Appearance of withdrawal symptoms	<b>Dependence and addiction</b>	
37	Loss of control over drug use		
38	Prioritizing drug use above everything		
39	Noticeable health deterioration		
40	Continuing despite consequences		
4	Feeling of being different	<b>Stigma and</b>	



1		<b>shame</b>	Addict Identity Managem ent
4 2	Discrimination in treatment		
4 3	Hiding the condition from close ones		
4 4	Fear of being discovered		
4 5	Avoiding social occasions		
4 6	Using pseudonyms	<b>Coping mechanism s</b>	
4 7	Making excuses for behavior		
4 8	Justifying drug use as treatment		
4 9	Social isolation		
5 0	Changing drug use location		
5 1	Hiding signs of drug use	<b>Managing outward appearance</b>	
5 2	Paying attention to appearance to hide the condition		
5 3	Using air fresheners to hide the smell		
5 4	Wearing long clothes to hide injection marks		
5 5	Using eye drops to hide redness		
5 6	Attempting to prove "control" over drug use	<b>Negotiating identity</b>	

5 7	Emphasizing "positive" aspects!		
5 8	Comparing oneself to "worse" addicts		
5 9	Playing the victim role		
6 0	Exaggerating the ability to quit		
6 1	Resorting to private clinics	<b>Treatment attempts</b>	Confrontation and Relapse Pathways
6 2	Participating in follow-up programs		
6 3	Using alternative treatments		
6 4	Resorting to folk medicine		
6 5	Attempting self-cessation		
6 6	Conditional family support	<b>Support networks</b>	
6 7	Follow-up by supportive friends		
6 8	Participating in group therapy sessions		
6 9	Seeking help from a religious leader (Imam)		
7 0	Benefiting from association services		
7 1	Going through a stressful situation	<b>Relapse triggers</b>	
7 2	Meeting old drug use companions		



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7 3	Passing by places associated with drug use		<b>Relapse managemen t</b>
7 4	Feeling bored and empty		
7 5	Experiencing disappointment		
7 6	Hiding relapse from close ones		
7 7	Feeling guilt and failure		
7 8	Returning to justification mechanisms		
7 9	Searching for excuses to continue		
8 0	Reconnecting with drug suppliers		

**Source: Prepared by researchers, 2024**

### **Third phase: Selective Coding**

Selective Coding is the final phase in data analysis according to the Grounded Theory methodology, wherein the Core Category is extracted from among the principal categories derived during axial coding. Subsequently, all principal categories are integrated around it to construct a comprehensive and coherent theory<sup>viii</sup>.

It is crucial to note that the core category is not merely a category chosen randomly from among the principal categories. Rather, it is the category with the highest explanatory power, meaning it connects and logically relates to most of the other principal categories through clear and logical relationships<sup>ix</sup>. Furthermore, it represents the essence

of the phenomenon under study or the «core of the emerging theory» and its recurrence in the data is notably prominent.

#### **1.4. The Path to Extracting the Core Category:**

The Core Category is the heart of grounded theory, the central thread that ties all main categories into one comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon. It is not a new category but rather a synthetic product of analyzing the main categories derived from the axial coding process<sup>x</sup>. It represents the deepest and most unifying meaning of the phenomenon. The Core Category is formed based on five analytical criteria outlined by Corbin and Strauss and applied by numerous researchers in subsequent qualitative studies. These criteria are: Semantic Dominance: The category must be the most recurrent and prominent across different interviews. Explanatory Power: It must possess the strength to explain the relationships between most of the main categories. Connectivity: It must be related to and unify all main categories within a single causal and temporal logic. The ability to abstract: It must be capable of expressing the essence of the phenomenon in a general formulation without reducing it to a specific case or partial category. Theoretical Integrability: It must be amenable to integration into a broader theoretical framework.

In this context, we will analyze the main categories that explain the phenomenon of the pathway to addiction and, based on these five formative criteria, select this Core Category.



### ***1.4.1. Analysis of the First Category: Predisposing Social Contexts***

Facilitative social contexts represent the structural frameworks that organize individual experiences and guide actors' interpretations of their own behavior. According to Herbert Blumer, Human action does not arise in a vacuum; rather, it is shaped by the meanings that individuals construct through their interactions with others<sup>xi</sup>. These meanings are a product of their experiences within their social reality, where situations are reinterpreted based on the individual's experiences of deprivation, pressure, or marginalization. Erving Goffman explained that individuals act within what he called an "interaction system," that is, within specific social environments in which situations are defined and "definitions of reality" are constructed<sup>xii</sup>. Within these interactional frameworks, individuals develop a specific understanding of what is happening around them and reinterpret their behavior in line with the meanings or justifications prevalent in their social environment. From this perspective, material deprivation, family disintegration, psychological pressures, and environments conducive to substance use can be viewed as social and living conditions that generate new meanings and interpretations. These, in turn, lead some individuals to perceive substance use as a means of coping, escaping, or redefining their identity. Thus, these contexts are not merely an objective background but an interactive space in which meanings are produced, meanings that precede addictive behavior and grant it symbolic legitimacy in the eyes of the actor.

### *1.4.2. Analysis of the Second Category: The Interactive Dynamics of the Slide*

This category refers to the actual process of engagement in addiction, with its temporal sequence and social interactions. It includes themes such as: Initiation and experimentation, Gradual progression in use, Normalization and habituation. Here, we move from structure to direct social interaction, that is, to how the phenomenon is "lived." The subject does not become an addict all at once, but rather through a series of symbolic negotiations between the self and the group. Communications in the user group recognition that is missing in the wider society, which transforms use into a "communicative act" that grants them a temporary identity and a meaning for existence. From this perspective, this category constitutes the second phase of identity construction: **"Experience as the source of the new identity."**

### *1.4.3. Analysis of the Third Category: Managing the Addict Identity*

In this category, the analysis shifts from action to the reflexive self that reinterprets its own experience. It includes themes such as: Stigma and shame, coping mechanisms, Negotiating identity. This category expresses what Goffman calls the "management of a stigmatized identity<sup>xiii</sup>." The addict does not only live with chemical dependency but also enters a symbolic struggle over the definition of self: Are they a deviant? A patient? A victim? A seeker of meaning? This is a phase in which the reshaping of the self is embodied, where internal interpretations intersect with the gaze of the external society, and the actor begins to



reconstruct their personal narrative to justify their existence and the continuation of their action.

#### *1.4.4. Analysis of the Fourth Category: Pathways of Confrontation and Relapse*

This category deals with the subsequent strategies the addict employs to regain control over their life, including Attempts at treatment, Support networks, Relapse triggers, managing relapses, At this phase, the oscillating identity of the addict is embodied: they are in a conflict between a past self and a desired self<sup>xiv</sup>. Treatment attempts are not merely endeavors for biological healing, but symbolic processes for redefining the self and regaining social recognition. Hence, the dialectical relationship between the "old self" and the "restored self" emerges, revealing the continuous and circular nature of the addiction experience.

**Based on the analytical integration of the four main categories** and following Corbin and Strauss's criteria for identifying the core category, «**the Interactive Dynamics of Sliding**» emerges as the central category that most comprehensively explains the phenomenon of addiction. This category functions as the connective thread linking the structural conditions that predispose individuals to substance use, the experiential and identity-based processes that sustain it, and the cyclical efforts of confrontation and relapse. More than a behavioral description, it encapsulates the progressive, interactional process through which individuals negotiate meanings, reconstruct identities, and redefine their relationship with self and society. The concept of "sliding" captures the gradual, socially mediated transformation of the self—from experimentation and

normalization to dependency, stigma, and attempts at recovery—revealing addiction as a continuous identity project rather than a static deviant state. As such, the Interactive Dynamics of Sliding constitutes the theoretical core of the study, capable of integrating the different dimensions of the phenomenon into a coherent explanatory model that views addiction as a socially constructed process of progressive identity transformation.

### **1.5. From Core Category to Final Grounded Theory Construction:**

The study's results reveal that addiction is not isolated or a sudden event, but rather an interactive social process that develops gradually within specific social and psychological contexts<sup>xv</sup>.

Through analyzing interview data considering Corbin and Strauss's explanatory model, the phenomenon was found to be structured around a core category: "The Interactive Dynamics of Slippage." This is the central process that explains how an individual transitions from being merely influenced by social contexts to an actor engaged in the experience of addiction, and then to a self that reconstructs its identity under stigma and attempts at confrontation.

The predisposing social contexts represent the infrastructure where the meanings of addictive behavior emerge. Conditions such as material deprivation, family disintegration, psychological pressures, and facilitating environments act as causal factors that generate feelings of helplessness and marginalization. Based on this, individuals reinterpret substances use as a means of escape or balance, granting it symbolic legitimacy.



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The Interactive Dynamics of Slippage (the core category) embodies the central process through which the actor passes from the first experience to habituation and dependence. In this stage, the individual interacts with fellow users within a framework of symbolic recognition and group belonging, transforming substance use into a communicative act that provides meaning and a new identity. This dynamic represents the structural engine of the phenomenon, explaining the transition from context to action, and from action to identity.

Following the formation of an addictive identity, the actor enters a process of symbolic self-management to confront social stigma. This management manifests in hiding the condition, justifying behavior, and balancing between (deviant and accepted) self-images. Here, addiction becomes a arena for negotiating the social meaning of the self, following what can be termed, from Goffman's theoretical perspective, "the management of a stigmatized identity".

Finally, the actor (the addict) enters the stage of confrontation and relapse, where they attempt to regain self-control through treatment, social support, or returning to religion. However, confrontation remains governed by the same dynamics of slippage; the conflict between the "old self" and the "recovering self" repeats, making relapse part of an ongoing cycle of redefining identity.

Based on all the above, a grounded theory of pathways to addiction can be constructed as follows:

The pathway to addiction is a dynamic process formed through continuous interaction between predisposing social contexts, a gradual behavioral sequence, and mechanisms of self-negotiation of identity, where the dynamics of

confrontation and relapse determine the persistence or transformation of the pathway, framing addiction as a recurring socio-subjective process.

### **1.6. The Theoretical Integration of the Proposed Model:**

The theoretical model resulting from this research highlights the integration between the different levels that constitute the phenomenon of addiction. It brings together the structural dimension (socio-economic conditions), the interactional dimension<sup>xvi</sup> (the dynamics of involvement in drug-using groups), and the symbolic dimension (the reinterpretation of self and meaning).

This integration demonstrates that addiction is not merely a behavioral or psychological phenomenon, but rather a symbolic social system in which structural pressures interact with subjective meanings to produce and reproduce the pathway into addiction.

The theoretical value of the proposed model lies in its shift in understanding addiction from a logic of linear causality to a logic of interactive process. Consequently, the social actor is no longer viewed as a pure victim or an isolated deviant, but rather as a symbolic agent who negotiates their reality through meaningful behavior within changing social structures.

Furthermore, this model, grounded in empirical data from an Algerian popular neighborhood, opens the door for theoretical comparisons with similar Arab and African contexts. In these contexts, manifestations of poverty and marginalization intersect with fragile social bonds and a weak sense of belonging, making this grounded model a applicable interpretive tool for comparative analysis in



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societies living under proximate socio-economic and cultural conditions.

Thus, the proposed grounded theory does not limit itself to describing the phenomenon of addiction in a specific context; it goes beyond that to offer an interactive conceptual framework for understanding how a deviant identity is formed and reformulated in confrontation with the social structure. This enhances the study's contribution to developing a deeper sociological understanding of deviant phenomena from a constructivist-interactionist perspective.

### **1.7. Data Trustworthiness**

This study adhered to the four criteria of Guba and Lincoln to ensure the quality of qualitative research<sup>xvii</sup>. Credibility was achieved through triangulation, where data was collected from multiple sources (in-depth interviews, field observations, treatment records) to ensure the integration of different perspectives. During the research, we regularly recorded personal reflections on the phenomenon of addiction to ensure the separation of subjective interpretations from the actual analysis of data that reflects the experiences of the participants themselves. This also reflects the relationship of trust built with the participants, allowing for a deeper understanding of their contexts. Negative cases that did not align with the main identified pathways into addiction were analyzed, contributing to the accuracy of the analysis. All of this was under the umbrella of an extended engagement spanning six months of research and analysis. Finally, after the preliminary results were presented to a sample of the addicts participating in the study, it was confirmed that they reflected their real

experiences and subjective interpretations of the pathway into addiction.

On the other hand, the researcher's provision of a thick, detailed description of the context and participating entities enhances the transferability of the study's results, meaning the possibility of applying or comparing its conclusions in similar contexts. The demographic characteristics of the participants, the nature of the research settings, and the dates and locations of data collection were meticulously documented, along with the steps of analysis and interpretation. This enables the reader or researcher to assess the similarity of another context to that of the study and thus determine the appropriateness of generalizing the results or transferring the conclusions to other cases and communities. This type of description compensates for the limitation of broad generalizability in qualitative research, especially Grounded Theory, and transforms the results into resources usable for practical and theoretical purposes in similar places and social conditions.

Also, within the same context, the criteria of Guba and Lincoln were rigorously applied through comprehensive documentation of interviews and the analysis process in an audit trail. The study also underwent peer review by individuals with extensive experience in qualitative research and field studies on the topic of addiction, which enhanced the credibility of the results and their consistency with field data, and confirmed the reliability of the extracted grounded theory.

### **1.8. Ethical Considerations:**

In this research, and in commitment to established research ethics, detailed information about the research



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objectives and procedures was provided to the participants more than three days before determining the time and place of the interview. Before conducting the interview, participants signed an informed consent form for recording their voices and using the information they provided, without disclosing their real identities. Each participant had the freedom to withdraw from the interview or the research entirely at any phase. The privacy of the participants was maintained by coding their names with symbols linked to all their information and data. The head of the scientific council in the Sociology Department approved and encouraged the conduct of this study.

## **2. Results**

Through a grounded theory approach that relied on in-depth interviews and field observations with ten addicts in the Sidi Hammad neighborhood, we analyzed the narratives of these study participants line by line according to three integrated stages. The analysis was based on the constant comparison of cases until theoretical saturation was achieved, which enabled the extraction of four main categories. These categories clarify that the path to addiction is formed within a complex interaction of intertwined social, psychological, and behavioral factors.

Social fragility resulting from poverty, unemployment, family disintegration, and psychological pressures creates a fertile ground for the normalization and justification of drug use within environments where drugs are easily accessible. The descent progresses gradually from the first experiment, driven by curiosity or peer pressure, to the stage of habituation and then full dependence, where drug use

becomes the focal point of daily life. The addict faces social stigma that drives him to adopt concealment and justification strategies to maintain his symbolic balance and identity, such as denial or playing the victim role. Meanwhile, attempts at confrontation and treatment remain fragile and oscillate between hope and relapse, amid limited social support and recurring triggers that reproduce addictive behavior. This makes addiction a circular process combining subjective meaning and structural pressures within a social system that implicitly tolerates drug use.

Based on the four results, the research arrived at a grounded theory that presents the path to addiction as follows:

"The path to addiction is a dynamic process shaped by the continuous interaction between predisposing social contexts, a sequential behavioral progression, and self-identity negotiation mechanisms. Within this process, the dynamics of confrontation and relapse determine the persistence or transformation of the path, framing addiction as a recurring socio-subjective process".

In this context, addiction is a gradual social and moral path, wherein the addict's identity is reconstructed through daily interactions and symbolic meanings, within contexts of marginalization, poverty, and social void. This makes addictive behavior a form of distorted social adaptation to a troubled reality, whereby:

- Economic and social pressures produce the need for relief or escape.
- The subculture of drug use provides addicts with meaning and belonging.
- Stigma and marginalization deepen dependence and weaken treatment opportunities.



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- Addiction becomes a symbolic coping strategy that gives the actor a temporary sense of meaning and control.

### 3. Discussion:

The results of the study entitled "Pathways to Addiction" highlight that within the Algerian social context, the phenomenon of addiction cannot be reduced to its individual, medical, or moral dimensions. Instead, it manifests as a complex social and symbolic process, where structural determinants intersect with the subjective meanings formulated by actors in their daily interactions with their environment. Consequently, interpreting the results through the lens of classical and contemporary sociological theories enables a deeper understanding of the logic of the descent into addiction and the significance this behavior acquires in the lives of addicts.

#### 3.1. Addiction as a Product of a Fragile Social Structure

The study's results reveal that poverty, unemployment, and family disintegration are not merely external circumstances causing addiction but constitute a structural framework within which the meanings and interactions that grant addictive behavior its social legitimacy is reconstructed. When the social structure fails to provide the legitimate means to achieve cultural goals (as Merton posits in Strain Theory), individuals find themselves in a situation of strain between aspirations and capabilities<sup>xviii</sup>. They consequently resort to unconventional adaptation strategies that provide them with a symbolic sense of balance and control, including substance use. However, this "innovation"

is not understood here as an isolated individual act, but as a product of an interactive process in which actors negotiate with their environment and with their own selves to redefine the act within the logic of a crisis-ridden reality.

Amid weakened family and social bonds, as indicated by Hirschi's Social Control Theory, attachment to collective values recedes and mechanisms of self-control erode. Thus, deviant action transforms into a meaningful experience for the individual, living as a means of escaping marginalization or filling a void of belonging<sup>xix</sup>. From the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, addiction in this context becomes a communicative act saturated with symbols and meanings. Through it, individuals express their structural crises through the language of behavior, not the language of discourse, and through it, they redefine themselves and their relationships within a fragile society that has failed to provide them with the conditions for integration and recognition.

Therefore, it can be argued that addiction constitutes an interactive product of structural fragility. It reflects, on one hand, the failure of the social structure to provide integration and support mechanisms for young people, and on the other, the striving of individuals to reconstruct themselves and meanings within a crisis-ridden social reality. At its core, it is a symbolic expression of a crisis of social integration more than it is an individual deviation, confirming the profound sociological nature of the phenomenon, as highlighted by the grounded theory in this study.



### **3.2. The Descent as a Symbolic Interactionist Pathway**

The results clarified that the descent into addiction follows a gradual, interactive process. It begins with the first experiment, motivated by curiosity and peer pressure, then evolves into habituation and justification, until it transforms into full dependency.

This finding aligns with the propositions of Symbolic Interactionism, which focuses on the role played by interchanged meanings in the construction of social behavior. The addict does not initially engage in substance use as a "deviant" act but rather assigns it a positive meaning associated with pleasure, escape from reality, or a sense of belonging.

This evokes what Howard Becker indicated in his book "Outsiders", when he demonstrated that deviance is learned through social interaction with sub-groups that redefine deviant behavior as normal or legitimate<sup>xx</sup>. Within the drug-using group, the addict acquires a "sub-identity" and adopts a different language and set of values that grant the behavior symbolic legitimacy.

From this perspective, addiction becomes not merely an "act against values," but a result of social interaction that reproduces meaning and normalizes and justifies the behavior through habituation.

### **3.3. The Addict's Identity between Stigma and Resistance**

The study revealed that the addict lives in a state of identity conflict, represented in the attempt to reconcile the image imposed by society (the addict as deviant or sick) with the self-image they strive to maintain. Individuals develop multiple strategies to manage this identity, such as

concealment, justification, comparison, or playing the victim's role.

This finding is explained by Labeling Theory, as formulated by Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1963), which shows that stigma does not merely describe behavior, but reshapes the individual's social identity and determines the course of their interaction with others. When the addict is labeled "deviant," they find themselves outside the sphere of social recognition, which pushes them to withdraw from normal relationships and integrate into an alternative group that provides them with alternative recognition.

Thus, addiction becomes a symbolic defense mechanism against exclusion, through which self-redefines within a social space that does not grant it legitimacy or appreciation.

### **3.4. Relapse as a Failure in Social Reintegration**

The results showed that relapse after treatment is common due to weak social support networks and a lack of continuous follow-up. Individual treatment attempts remain limited in effectiveness in the absence of social capital that ensures sustainable recovery.

This can be interpreted considering Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which indicates that social relationships and solidarity networks represent a fundamental resource for integration<sup>xxi</sup>. When the addict lacks these resources, they remain in a state of fragility, making any psychological or social pressure capable of returning them to substance use.

Hence, it can be said that relapses are not an individual failure, but rather a reflection of a structural failure in building genuine social support systems capable of



reintegrating individuals into spaces of work, belonging, and participation.

### **3.5. Towards an Interactive-Structural Understanding of Addiction**

The grounded theory derived from the study highlights that addiction is a gradual, symbolic, interactive pathway through which the actor's identity is reformulated within a context of social marginalization, whereby deviant behavior transforms into a distorted adaptation strategy that holds symbolic meaning for the individual.

This conclusion integrates both the structural and interactive dimensions:

- Structure (poverty, unemployment, disintegration) provides the conditions of emergence.

- Interaction (justification, normalization, stigma) grants the behavior its meaning and continuity.

Thus, addiction becomes a mirror of the underlying social dysfunction in the systems of values, equity, and recognition, more than it is an individual illness or deviation.

#### **Discussion Summary:**

This discussion reveals that the phenomenon of addiction, as manifested in the Sidi Hamad neighborhood, represents a form of negative social adaptation in the face of intertwined structural and psychological pressures. It is an expression of actors seeking meaning and belonging in contexts where social support and symbolic recognition are absent.

The sociological approach, by integrating structural and interactionist analysis, allows for an understanding of

addiction as a symbolic social process that emerges from the interaction of individual suffering with the social structure and, simultaneously, reproduces it.

### **Research Limitations**

Despite the scientific value and intellectual richness this research offers in interpreting the phenomenon of addiction from a qualitative sociological perspective, its results are constrained by several methodological and contextual limitations that must be considered when reading them or attempting to generalize them.

#### **First: Limitations Related to the Nature of Methodology (Grounded Theory)**

The research relied on a qualitative approach based on Grounded Theory, a methodology that seeks to construct theory emerging from the field rather than testing pre-existing hypotheses. This choice, while appropriate for the nature of the phenomenon under study, limits the possibility of statistical generalization of the results, as the research aim is not to represent the entire Algerian population, but to understand the social processes and symbolic meanings as experienced by the actors themselves within a specific local context. Furthermore, the number of participants (ten addicts), even having reached theoretical saturation, remains limited compared to the diversity of potential experiences in other regions or different social groups (women, middle classes, rural areas...).

Additionally, the interpretive nature of the grounded analysis means the results are linked to the researcher's interpretation and field experience, despite efforts to ensure objectivity through triangulation and peer review.



## **Second: Limitations Related to the Social and Cultural Context of Research**

The research was conducted in the neighborhood of Sidi Hammad, in the municipality of Meftah, a social space characterized by:

- A fragile, popular character (residents relocated from a former shantytown).
- A lack of infrastructure and economic opportunities.
- Disintegration of family ties and weak social control.

These characteristics make the research results specific to a particular urban-popular context, which may not apply precisely to middle-class urban neighborhoods or to Algerian rural societies, which differ in their patterns of social control and kinship relations. Popular spaces dominated by unemployment, idleness, and weak institutional frameworks form a fertile ground for a parallel subculture, where drug use becomes a "normalized" practice within the group—a situation that may not be replicated with the same intensity in more cohesive or socially controlled communities.

Moreover, the Algerian cultural context—which still associates addiction with shame and moral stigma—limits full disclosure during interviews, which may lead to some participants being reserved or concealing certain sensitive aspects. Consequently, the extracted data expresses a part of the experience more than it reveals all its hidden dimensions.

### **Third: Limitations Related to the Time Factor and Social Change**

The research was conducted during a specific period (approximately six months of fieldwork), whereas addiction is a dynamic phenomenon constantly influenced by ongoing economic, cultural, and security changes. Therefore, coping strategies or patterns of use can change over time, depending on the emergence of new types of drugs, shifts in prevention policies, or changes in the cultural values of youth. That is, the results represent a snapshot of a specific moment in time, not a fixed truth across time.

### **Fourth: Limitations Related to the Subject of Addiction Itself**

The phenomenon of addiction is one of the most sensitive and secretive phenomena in Algerian society, which makes accessing participants and building trust with them a complex process that may limit the depth of disclosure. Also, the nature of the sample (addicts undergoing treatment or living through recovery attempts) means the narratives are conditioned by the phase the respondent is in; that is, their accounts may be influenced by the phase of treatment, remorse, or self-defense. Hence, the sociological analysis of their experiences does not necessarily reflect the complete experience of all addicts, especially those who are still in the phase of denial or outside the scope of treatment.

### **Fifth: Limitations of Generalization and Cultural Comparison**

Due to its local character and the Algerian context, caution should be exercised when comparing the results of this research with studies conducted in Western contexts



**Soumission : 10/02/2025    Acceptation : 12/05/2025    Publication : 15/07/2025**

that differ in their value structures and attitudes towards drugs. In Algeria, the phenomenon is loaded with strong religious and moral connotations, making it a doubly potent social stigma, unlike some societies that view it merely as a health or behavioral issue. This cultural-symbolic dimension is what gives the study its importance, but it simultaneously limits its applicability outside this specific cultural framework.

Although this research successfully constructs a solid grounded sociological theory explaining pathways into addiction within an Algerian popular space, it remains a qualitative study with a local-interpretive character more than a generalizable one. Its importance lies in the depth of understanding, not the breadth of representation, and in its ability to illuminate the symbolic and social relationships that produce addictive behavior within fragile and complex contexts.

## **Conclusion:**

This research aims to understand the phenomenon of addiction from a qualitative sociological perspective, by analyzing the social and symbolic trajectories that lead to the descent into drug use in the Sidi Hammad neighborhood of the Meftah municipality. The research was based on a grounded theory approach, relying on in-depth interviews and field observations with ten addicts, to build a theory emerging from the lived experiences of the actors, and to

examine how the identity of an addict is formed and how their relationship with the self and society is reconfigured.

The results showed that addiction is not an individual act or a casual deviance, but rather a socio-symbolic process in which structural determinants (poverty, unemployment, family disintegration) intersect with the subjective meanings that actors assign to their experiences. The analysis revealed four main themes:

**First: The Social Contexts Predisposing to Descent:**

Where material deprivation, family disintegration, and psychological pressures create a fertile environment for the normalization of addictive behavior.

**Second: The Interactive Dynamics of Descent:**

Which reveals the progression from the first experience to habituation and then to full dependence, through a process of collective justification and normalization of the behavior.

**Third: The Management of Addict Identity:**

Understood as a process of symbolic negotiation between social stigma and the desire for self-preservation, embodied in strategies of concealment, justification, and resistance.

**Fourth: Pathways of Confrontation and Relapse:**

Which show the fluctuation of addicts between attempts at treatment and a return to drug use, within the context of fragile support networks and weak social recognition.

These results culminated in a grounded theory stating that addiction represents a gradual, interactive, and symbolic trajectory, through which the addict's identity is



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reconstructed via daily interactions and social meanings, within contexts of marginalization, poverty, and a lack of recognition, making addictive behavior a distorted form of social adaptation to a crisis-ridden reality.

The study confirms that addiction in the Algerian context cannot be explained in isolation from its cultural and social structure, as it remains surrounded by stigma and moral disgrace, which complicates avenues for disclosure and treatment. It also highlights the need for social and educational interventions that consider the symbolic and identity-related dimensions of the phenomenon, rather than relying solely on security or medical approaches.

This study is a first step towards establishing a deep sociological understanding of addiction as a social and meaningful phenomenon, one that interrogates social structure, reveals the fragility of social bonds and patterns of integration in vulnerable spaces, and opens new research avenues for studying the sociology of recovery, support networks, and gender differences in addiction experiences within the Algerian context.

### **Future Research Prospects**

The results of this research on the trajectories of descent into addiction open the way for a number of future research directions that could deepen the sociological understanding of the phenomenon and expand its theoretical and field scope, both within the Algerian context and in broader cross-cultural comparisons.

**Firstly: Towards a Comparative Sociological Approach**  
This study can serve as a starting point for comparative

research between different neighborhoods or regions (popular, rural, urban), in order to reveal the diversity of addiction trajectories according to differing social and cultural contexts. Comparing poor urban spaces with middle-class or affluent ones could highlight the effect of social status and cultural capital in shaping patterns of use, as well as individuals' resistance to the descent or their capacity for recovery.

### **Secondly: Integrating the Gender Dimension in the Study of Addiction**

National data shows that the percentage of female addicts is lower than that of males, but they are more exposed to stigma and social invisibility. Therefore, subsequent research could move towards analyzing the experiences of female addicts from a gender perspective, to explore how social and cultural roles influence their methods of use, justification, and stigmatization, especially in a conservative society like Algeria.

### **Thirdly: Studying Support Networks and Reintegration**

The study revealed that weak support networks are a critical factor in relapse. Based on this, future research could be developed focusing on the sociology of recovery—that is, studying the social and institutional mechanisms that help or hinder the reintegration of addicts after treatment, such as the role of the family, associations, religious institutions, or care centers. The symbolic relationships between active addicts and those in recovery could also be studied from the perspective of Bourdieu's social capital.



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#### **Fourthly: Digital Transformation and the New Culture of Drugs**

With the expansion of digital spaces and social media, new forms of virtual interaction around the culture of drug use have emerged, whether through the exchange of experiences or the promotion of substances. Future research could investigate the role of digital media in normalizing addictive behavior and how they create new spaces for symbolic belonging and self-justification among youth. An approach to "virtual addiction" has become necessary in light of current cultural transformations.

#### **Fifthly: Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods**

Although the grounded theory approach provided interpretive depth, future studies could complement it with a quantitative methodology to measure the prevalence of the categories and behaviors identified qualitatively. Adopting a mixed-methods design would allow for a link between deep understanding and relative generalizability, thereby enhancing the scientific and applicative value of the results.

#### **Sixthly: Utilizing Research Results in Designing Social Interventions**

The theoretical model derived from this research can be used as a basis for designing preventive and educational programs targeted at youth, which take into account the symbolic and identity-related dimensions of addiction, instead of relying solely on medical or security approaches. The results can also be used to train social workers and

educators to understand addiction as a social adaptation strategy, not merely as a stigma or moral deviation.

This study has opened a new horizon in Algerian sociology towards deconstructing sensitive phenomena from within the lived experience, making "trajectories of descent into addiction" a renewable research project upon which a new generation of qualitative sociological research can be built research that restores the importance of the actor, meaning, and local cultural contexts in the production of social behavior.

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