

Drugs in The News: What do the Afghan News Media Say about Illicit Drugs?

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Abstract

Globally, research has shown that media coverage of illicit drug issues can play an important role in influencing public opinion and shaping drug policies. However, in Afghanistan, the world's largest opium producer, very little is known about the media coverage of illicit drug issues. Afghan media, especially radio and television have developed dramatically during the past 11 years.

Using the theories of agenda setting and framing, this study explored what drug-related topics were covered in the Afghan news media; how were these topics covered; how were the health and social consequences of drug abuse depicted in the media; and how much time was devoted to drug related topics in the media. Employing content analysis, the study examined primetime news coverage of the two leading media outlets: Azadi Radio and Tolo Television from 1st March 2011 until 31st July 2011.

This thesis found the following types of imbalances in Afghan media reporting on illicit drug issues: 1) media reports on drug issues were heavily focused on supply reduction issues (81%) while paying considerably less attention to drug demand reduction issues (19%); 2) media predominantly framed illicit drugs as a law enforcement issue (83%) with only 15% of the paragraphs in the sample framing illicit drug as a public health problem; 3) media reporting on illicit drugs heavily relied on official sources (79%) lacking voices of the public health practitioners and drug addicts; 4) media coverage of illicit drug issues was heavily centered in Kabul (56%) with considerably less reporting from southern Afghanistan, which is the largest opium producing region.

This study, which is presumably the first of its kind, provides media organizations, policy makers, and public health officials with a broad picture on the drug-related information available to the public on the leading Afghan news outlets. In addition, it serves as a basis for future research on media coverage of illicit drug issues in Afghanistan.

Dedicated to my beloved mother.

Dear Mom,

I salute your tolerance, patience, and dedication! You have taught me the true meaning of dignity, love, and compassion.

You are my true inspiration, Mom!

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Acronyms

AFP	Agence France-Presse
AISA	Afghanistan Investment Support Agency
AP	Associated Press
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CND	Counter Narcotics Directorate
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IDUs	Injection Drug Users
MCN	Ministry of Counter Narcotics
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDCS	National Drug Control Strategy
OPC	Opium Poppy Cultivation
RAND	Research and Development Corporation
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNODCCP	United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter One: Introduction

“Controlling drugs in Afghanistan will not solve all of the country’s problems, but the country’s problems cannot be solved without controlling drugs” -- Antonio Maria Costa, September, 2009.

Statement of the problem

Media are widely known to have a potentially important role in influencing public opinion, attitudes, behavior, and policy-making regarding illicit drugs (Christie, 1998; Gelders et al., 2009; Lancaster, Hughes, Spicer, Matthew-Simmons, & Dillon, 2010). Research has shown that news media reporting on narcotics, particularly portraying the health and social consequences of illicit drugs use, can play an important role in creating anti-drug attitudes and preventing drug abuse among youth (Hughes, Spicer, Lancaster, Matthew-Simmons, & Dillon, 2010). Therefore, examining news media coverage of illicit drug issues is important to understanding public perception regarding drugs, drug abuse, and anti-drug policy (Forsyth, 2001b; Korner & Treloar, 2004; Szmigin et al., 2008, as cited in Belackova, Stastna, & Miovisky, 2011). In Afghanistan, however, which lies at the heart of the global illicit drug problem, very little, if any, is known about news media coverage of illicit drug issues.

Fuelled by nearly three decades of brutal armed conflict and internal strife, Afghanistan continues to produce nearly 90% of the world’s opium (UNODC, 2012). In addition, according to a joint UNODC, Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and Afghanistan’s Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) survey conducted in 2009, the impoverished country now copes with around one million drug addicts between the ages of 15 and 64. According to the survey, the numbers of Afghan drug addicts are substantially increasing. The research found that the number of opiate addicts in that age group had doubled from 1.4 % in 2005 to 3 % in 2009. That increase, according to Sarah Waller, a UNODC official in Kabul, “puts Afghanistan, along with Russia and Iran, as the top three countries for opiate drug use worldwide” (as cited in Vogt, 2010, para. 4).

Most worryingly, due to the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS among injection drug users (IDUs), Afghanistan now faces a concentrated HIV epidemic¹(UNODC, 2009). The main reason behind the looming HIV epidemic, according to the survey, is the lack of awareness about HIV/AIDS transmission among the IDUs. The survey found that nearly 90% of IDUs were using shared needles, most of whom had very little information about HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne diseases. Furthermore, heroin trafficked from Afghanistan has led to a significant global public health issue, catering to 15 million drug addicts and killing 100,000 people each year (UNODC, 2009).

Given the extent, complexity, and national and international consequences, Afghanistan's drug problem requires a multi-faceted, long-term solution. In its fight against narcotics, in May 2003, the Afghan government with the support of the international community launched Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) — a long-term roadmap aimed at tackling the growing drug crisis in Afghanistan (MCN, 2006). The main goal of the eight-pillared plan was to provide Afghanistan's Ministry of Counter Narcotics with a strategic framework on how to effectively fight against the opium poppy cultivation, drug trafficking, and drug abuse in the country. Eight pillars of the NDCS are as follows: 1) Increasing counternarcotic public awareness; 2) boosting international and regional cooperation in order to fight drug trafficking across the borders; 3) providing alternative livelihoods for Afghan farmers in order to abandon opium poppy cultivation; 4) reducing drug demand and treating the drug addicts; 5) strengthening law enforcement agencies to fight drug trafficking; 6) establishing an effective criminal justice system in order to prosecute drug traffickers; 7) eradicating opium poppy fields; and 8) building effective counter narcotics institutions.

Rationale for the study

One of the key approaches in fighting drugs — as outlined by the NDCS — is to “inform,

¹ “An HIV epidemic is concentrated if HIV transmission is primarily attributable to HIV-vulnerable groups and if protecting HIV-vulnerable groups would protect the wider population” (Wilson, 2006, p. 4).

educate, deter and dissuade the population from involvement in the illicit drugs trade, cultivation of opium and abuse of opiates”(MCN, 2006, p. 21). Scholars argue that public awareness must be a significant part of any program aimed at tackling narcotics in Afghanistan. Ghani (2004) argues, “crop destruction ‘victories’ will prove pyrrhic if Afghan farmers [...] do not understand why drugs threaten their future” (para. 4). Furthermore, Ghani (2004) contends, “in the long term, success demands that average Afghans understand why we must defeat the narcotics industry – for our country, for our faith and for our children” (para. 15).

Moreover, research in the developed world has shown that media can play an important role in influencing public opinion and shaping drug policies (Christie, 1998; Gelders et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2010; Lancaster et al., 2010b). Citing Warwick, Williams, and McCallum (2003), Lancaster et al. (2010b) argue, “understanding of risk, whether it be related to drug use, road safety or sun protection, develops through social practices but also through the ever changing way that risk is presented to audiences in media content”(p. 399). Similarly, citing Gelders et al. (2009), Lancaster et al. (2010b) argue that media messages can also influence public behavior and build support for drug policies. Also, citing Gelders et al. (2009), Lancaster et al. (2010b) maintain, “those who have little contact with illicit drugs and illicit drug users tend to shape their perception of risk and their behavior around prominent portrayals in the media” (p. 399). One such example where news media brought a significant change in public opinion about drugs was in the U.S. in the 1990s. Fan (1996) found that, public responses to the question whether drugs were the USA’s most important problem increased from 5 % in 1985, to 60 % in 1994. Fan (1996), after undertaking time series analyses of U.S. media coverage of drugs, and public opinion between 1985 and 1994, found that intense U.S. media coverage of illicit drug issues contributed to a 55% rise in public perception (from 5% in 1985 to 60 % in 1994) about illicit drugs being the USA’s most important problem. Moreover, scholars contend that in order to influence public perception about drugs, there needs to be more focus on increasing and improving media coverage

about the dangerous consequences of drug use (Hartman & Golub, 1999; Myhre et al., 2002, as cited in Gelders et al., 2009).

That being said, however, as the largest opium producer in the world, very little is known about media impact on public opinion and attitudes regarding illicit drugs in Afghanistan. A UNODC survey released in 2008 found that many Afghan farmers still did not believe in the long-term benefits of abandoning opium poppy cultivation (OPC). The report suggests that all future media counter narcotics programs in Afghanistan should focus on changing these public attitudes. The report reveals that many rural residents of Afghanistan still do not believe in the long-term social and health-related consequences of illicit drugs/use. Also, the survey found that there was still a significant lack of information among the general public about the strong link between opium poppy cultivation, addiction, criminal activities, and terrorism. Furthermore, the UNODC report suggests that farmers involved in poppy cultivation “need to be made aware of the increasing prevalence of opium and heroin addiction, its negative effects on households and communities, and, importantly, of the direct link between OPC and addiction” (p. 25).

While the UNODC (2008) survey mainly focused on examining the effectiveness of various drug-related social marketing campaigns, the researcher has not been able to find a single study to explain the nature of the news media reporting on illicit drug issues in Afghanistan. Given that 1) news stories gain much more public attention than advertisements (Wang, 2008); 2) that news reports have a significant potential in shaping public opinion and even policy change (McCombs, 2004); and most importantly, 3) that news media, particularly radio and television, are the primary and the most reliable sources of information for Afghans (Altai, 2010), it is of particular importance to understand the quality of the information that the Afghan news media convey to the public regarding the illicit drug problem. Against such a backdrop, this study aims to explore what drug-related topics are mostly covered in the news media and how are illicit drug issues depicted in these topics.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to explore how the Afghan news media depict the illicit drug² issues. This research examines news stories of the two leading Afghan media outlets, Azadi Radio and Tolo TV, from 1st March 2011 until 31st July 2011. The reason for selecting this timeframe is that it covers the harvest and post-harvest season of opium poppy cultivation in southern Afghanistan, where about 80% of the poppy cultivation takes place (UNODC, 2011). Studying this particular timeframe helps the researcher to understand trends and variations in media reporting on drug-related issues during harvest and post-harvest season in Afghanistan.

Using the theories of agenda setting and framing, this study aims to identify the main topics that the Afghan news media cover about the illicit drug issues and the way these topics are presented to the public. Moreover, the study explores how much importance the Afghan news media attach to the illicit drugs issue and, most importantly, how the health and social consequences of illicit drugs/use are covered in the Afghan news media.

Both Azadi Radio and Tolo TV are leading media outlets in Afghanistan. Azadi Radio started its operations in 2002 (Altai, 2010), covering around 50% of the population (SIGAR, 2011), while Tolo TV is a private television channel, established in October 2004, covering 45% of the population (Altai, 2010).

Azadi Radio is Afghanistan's branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Headquartered in Prague, Czech Republic and funded by the U.S. Congress RFE/RL is a private, non-profit corporation reaching 21 countries globally (Ulbricht, 2011).

²**Drugs:** In the context of the NDCS the term 'drugs' refers to those illicit psychoactive substances, natural or synthetic, which are prohibited by the law. The most common illicit drugs produced in Afghanistan are: opium, morphine, heroin and hashish (MCN, 2006, p.12).

According to a U.S. Department of State report released in March 2010, Azadi Radio's journalists have widespread presence in Afghanistan with 60% of its broadcast material prepared in Afghanistan and 40 % in Prague, Czech Republic. In other words, Azadi Radio in addition to broadcasting materials prepared by its bureau office in Kabul has a significant number of Afghan journalists in Prague, where they prepare various programs for Azadi Radio's listeners, such as debates on social and political issues as well as health and entertainment programs. Azadi Radio has a total 110 staff in Afghanistan, which includes the news bureau chief, senior editors, full-time reporters, technicians, and support and administrative staff. All employees of Azadi Radio in Afghanistan work on freelance contracts. Moreover, according to the report, the service broadcasts 12 hours a day, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. (Kabul time) in both Dari and Pashto Afghanistan's official languages. The radio has a website in Dari and Pashto, www.azadiradio.com. Azadi Radio has FM stations in all five major cities of Afghanistan (Kabul, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Herat)(Altai, 2010). Most importantly, a survey by the Altai (2010) found that Afghans deemed Azadi Radio the most trusted radio station in Afghanistan. Also, the study found two equivalent audience peaks for radio usage in Afghanistan: the first in the morning between 6:00a.m. — 9:00a.m. (Kabul time), with a peak in 7:00 a.m. and the second at 8:00p.m. —9:00 p.m. Furthermore, the Altai research found that the total Afghan population listening to radio at 7:00a.m. reaches 1.2 million.

Tolo TV, on the other hand, is the first and the most popular national private television channel in Afghanistan (Altai, 2010; BBC, 2012). With initial funding of \$2.5 million from the United States Agency for International Development, the channel was launched in October 2004 in Kabul and broadcasts mainly in Dari (Altai, 2010). The outlet belongs to Moby Group, which has 700 staff in Afghanistan and 40 in the United Arab Emirates. The channel grows by 50-70% every year, with its yearly revenue reaching \$20 million (Altai, 2010). 60% of Tolo TV viewers watch the TV during its prime time between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. (Kabul time). Furthermore, a total of 1.5-2 million

Afghans watch the TV on Sunday evenings (Altai, 2010).

It is worth mentioning that in addition to Tolo TV, Moby Group includes another TV channel (Lemar), a radio station (Arman FM), a 24-hour satellite news channel (Tolo News), a movie production company (Kaboora), one magazine (Afghan Scene), an advertising agency, and several other media services (Altai, 2010).

Overview of the thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, chapter two is devoted to highlighting the existing literature on illicit drugs in Afghanistan. The second chapter is divided into two parts. The first part takes an in-depth look at Afghanistan's drug problem and includes topics such as: Afghanistan's drug problem and its regional and international consequences; history of opium production in Afghanistan; poppy growing areas; factors fueling farmers' decisions to cultivate poppy; socio-economic, political, and health related consequences of illicit drugs in Afghanistan; and Afghanistan's national drug control strategy and how it functions. The second part mainly focuses on the theoretical framework for this study, existing literature on media reporting on drugs, and an overview of the media landscape in Afghanistan. Chapter three explains the methodology used for conducting this research. Chapter four reports the findings of the research and chapter five presents the discussion of the findings. The final chapter concludes the thesis by offering a number of recommendations, study's limitations, and directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The literature review is divided into two sections. The first section covers the following topics: a brief look at Afghanistan's drug tragedy and its regional and international consequences; the history of opium production in Afghanistan; a brief overview of the poppy growing regions in Afghanistan; farmers' motivations for cultivating opium poppy in Afghanistan; the link between opium trade, insurgency, warlordism, and corruption; health and social costs of illicit drugs; and a brief look at

Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy and some of its key pillars. The second section covers the following topics: the theoretical framework for this study; media consumption in Afghanistan; a brief history of journalism in Afghanistan; media reporting on illicit drug issues; and the research questions this study aims to address.

Afghanistan's drug tragedy

War-ravaged Afghanistan supplies 84% of the world's consumed heroin, which is the most dangerous illicit drug worldwide (UNODC, 2011). Afghanistan's illicit opium industry, which gradually flourished after the former Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, poses a significant threat to the health, socio-economic wellbeing, and security of the war-torn nation (Rubin, 2004). Rubin (2004) warns, "Afghanistan's opium industry, which fosters terrorism, violence, debt bondage, and organized crime, has expanded to the point that it could undermine the entire U.S. and international effort" (p.1). Moreover, Afghanistan's drug trade, according to Byrd and Ward (2004), "is unprecedented in international experience in terms of its size in relation to the economy as a whole, its penetration of the polity, economy, and society, and the insecure and lawless environment in which it has thrived"(p. 23).

Afghanistan's fledgling economy continues to rely heavily on illicit drug trade, which accounts for around a quarter of total economic activity in the country (Byrd, 2008). Afghanistan's illicit heroin trade has a global market value of \$ 65 billion, an amount that exceeds the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of more than 120 countries in the world (UNODC, 2009).

According to Swanström and Cornell (2005), the opium industry is a threat to Afghanistan's "military, political, economic, societal, and environmental security" (p.10). On a military level, the opium industry is a major source of funding for the Taliban and other insurgent groups who seek to destabilize Afghanistan. According to a UNODC report released in 2009, the Taliban earn US\$125 million from the opium farmers and traders each year. The report titled "Addiction, Crime, and

Insurgency: The transnational threat of Afghan opium” explained that, the Taliban used the opium money to pay for their soldiers and buy weapons for their war against the Afghan government and international forces stationed in Afghanistan. Also, another UNODC report released in 2010 found that 98% of Afghanistan’s total opium cultivation had taken place in southern and western regions, where the Taliban-led insurgency is most active. According to the report, more than half of the total opium production took place in the southern province of Helmand, one of the most insecure provinces in Afghanistan. On a political level, according to Swanström and Cornell (2005), several powerful warlords who hold key governmental positions are involved in the illicit drug trade. Rubin (2004) argues, “Afghan warlords and militias fattening off of the drug sector create insecurity and block efforts by the national government to extend its authority” (p.1). In economic terms, according to Swanström and Cornell (2005), “increasing opium production endangers food security by reducing food production and forcing the importation of food to formerly self-sufficient areas” (p.10). One such clear example is Helmand, which was once known as the breadbasket of Afghanistan, but now it has turned into the largest opium-producing province across the country. On a social level, according to Swanström and Cornell (2005), Afghanistan now faces an alarming health crisis. More than one million of Afghanistan’s total 28 million population (WHO, 2012) is addicted to illicit drugs (UNODC, 2009). Importantly, Afghanistan faces a concentrated epidemic of HIV/AIDS due to the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS among the injection drug users (IDUs). In 2009, the UNODC warned that Afghanistan was facing a significant risk of an HIV/AIDS epidemic, because nearly 90% of the IDUs were found to have been using shared needles, most of whom had very little knowledge about the HIV/AIDS transmission. Finally, from an environmental perspective, Swanström and Cornell (2005) argue that, opium cultivation and production causes deforestation, a reduction in water levels, “as well as the large-scale use of fertilizers and insecticides impacting soil quality negatively in the long run, while heroin refining involves the use of highly toxic chemical precursors” (p.11).

Global and regional consequences

Globally, Afghanistan's illicit drug trade has caused a growing public health crisis, supplying heroin to 15 million drug addicts and killing 100,000 people each year (UNODC, 2009). In the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries Afghan heroin kills more than 10,000 people each year (UNODC, 2009). The International Narcotics Control Board estimates that 78% of heroin consumed in Canada come from Afghanistan (as cited in Nonato, 2012).

Regionally, Afghan heroin has caused an alarming increase in drug abuse and HIV/AIDS (Griffin & Khoshnood, 2010). In Russia alone, Afghan drugs kill more than 30,000 Russians each year (Farmer, 2010). In Pakistan, through which nearly 30% of Afghan drugs are trafficked (UNODC, 2009), there are about 125,000 IDUs, and the country is now suffering from a concentrated HIV/AIDS epidemic (Emmanuel & Attarad, 2006; Emmanuel & Attarad, 2009; Open Society Institute, 2010, as cited in Griffin, & Khoshnood, 2010). In Iran, through which nearly 40% of Afghan drugs are trafficked (UNODC, 2009), the number of IDUs has reached 200,000 (Griffin & Khoshnood, 2010). Moreover, Central Asia, through which 30% of Afghanistan's illicit drugs are trafficked (UNODC, 2009), is also coping with an alarming increase in drug addiction and HIV/AIDS. UNODC (2009) estimates 120,000 heroin users in Uzbekistan, 85,000 in Kazakhstan, 26,000 in Kyrgyzstan, and 20,000 in Tajikistan.

In addition to fueling drug abuse and HIV/AIDS globally, the Afghan drug trade funds various regional and international terrorist and criminal organizations including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Chechen separatists (Stepanova, 2005).

History of opium production in Afghanistan

Globally, the exact geography where opium poppy was first originated is difficult to pinpoint (Chouvy, 2006). However, Chouvy (2006) argues that "the oldest opium poppy capsules have been found in Switzerland, the plant itself is thought to have originated somewhere between the eastern

Mediterranean and Minor Asia” (pp. 21-22). Given that opium poppy plant can easily adapt to most ecological environments, therefore, the plant has spread to many parts of the world including Europe, Asia, Americas, Australia, and Africa (Chouvy, 2006).

In Afghanistan, according to Macdonald (2007), the opium poppy has been cultivated in several parts of the country for many centuries. Macdonald (2007) argues that soldiers in Alexander the Great’s armies might have introduced opium into Afghanistan, or, according to him, “it may have been imported as a trade commodity from countries like Egypt and Greece where it was a popular medicine” (p. 60). Citing a report by the British Indian government in 1905, Macdonald (2007) contends that opium poppy cultivation was one of the main autumn-planted, spring harvest crops in the Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan. In 1924, the government of Afghanistan reported to the Second Opium Conference that poppy cultivation had taken place in the provinces of Badakhshan, Herat, and Nangrahar. In 1932, Afghanistan was reported to have produced 75 tons of opium, a portion of which was designated for domestic consumption (Macdonald, 2007). Compared to other agricultural products, opium poppy is a cash crop with a hard currency value, and is easy to protect, transport, and sell (Macdonald, 2007). Also, it is a drought-resistant plant, which requires little water, but it generates much higher profits than other licit crops for farmers (Macdonald, 2007). Moreover, citing a UNODC report released in 2003, Macdonald (2007) argues:

Although officially prohibited in 1945, with annual production falling to only twelve tons by 1956, by the early 1970s Afghanistan was seen as a country where narcotics constituted a serious problem and the government was unable to control either production or trafficking to neighboring countries. (p. 60)

In 1972, the International Narcotics Control Board, after receiving some suspicious information regarding the increase of illicit opium production in Afghanistan, “listed Afghanistan among those countries which presented the strongest immediate challenge in terms of control of illicit production and traffic” (UNODC, 2003, p.88). At that time, according to Farrell and Thorne (2004), the main

global producers of illicit opium were Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran. Farrell and Thorne (2004) argue that during the 1970s the three countries enforced strict bans on opium production, which left a vacuum in the markets for southwest Asian illicit opium and heroin, which was then gradually filled by Afghanistan. Confirming this idea, Byrd (2008) contends:

Iran's abrupt elimination of opium poppy cultivation at the beginning of the Khomeini regime, Turkey's shift to licit production, and Pakistan's more gradual phase-out of opium poppy cultivation (while remaining a very important location for opium processing and the narcotics trade) provided "space" in the world market for Afghanistan to emerge as a major exporter of opium (including to meet Iran's domestic consumption requirements). (p. 3)

According to Macdonald (2007), it was only 1980 when Afghanistan has started to steadily develop as the world's leading opium producer. In 1979, the former Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan igniting a countrywide-armed conflict between the Russian army, its pro-communist regime, and the armed resistance called *mujahedeen*. The ten-year conflict claimed the lives of around 2 million Afghans, maiming half a million more and forcing millions of others to flee into neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran (Stabile & Kumar, 2005). Moreover, the fighting severely damaged Afghanistan's agriculture and irrigation system, where more than 80% of the population relies on agricultural products for making their living (FAO, 2012). Due to the conflict, half of all farms were abandoned and the impoverished country saw 70% decline in livestock (MCN, 2006); as well as Afghanistan's cereal production per capita, according to Sloan (2001), dropped by 45% from 1978 to 2000 (as cited in Rubin, 2004). This situation led to a dramatic increase in opium poppy cultivation and drug production by Afghan farmers (MCN, 2006). In the meantime, opium trade became a lucrative source of funding for financing the mujahedeen's war efforts against the Soviet occupation (Byrd, 2008).

As illustrated in Figure 1, according to UNODC (2003a, 2003b), Afghanistan's opium production increased an average of 15% annually during the Soviet occupation from 1979-1989 (as cited in Farrell & Thorne, 2004). After the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the lack of an effective and powerful government in Afghanistan, coupled with widespread anarchy, further contributed to

increasing the opium production in Afghanistan.

According to Macdonald (2007), Afghanistan became the world's primary opium producer since 1991; however, the country had not been the main cultivator of opium until 2003, when Myanmar had the largest opium cultivation in the world. Since 1990, Myanmar has had more land under opium cultivation than Afghanistan, but with poor opium production due to soil and other climate conditions compared to Afghanistan. In 2002, for example, Myanmar produced 10 kg of opium per hectare, while Afghanistan produced 46 kg opium per hectare (UNODC, 2002, as cited in Macdonald, 2007). According to Byrd (2008), after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, and the collapse of the pro-communist regime in 1992, international financing for the armed groups decreased sharply. This situation led to further increasing the importance of opium production for various warring factions, as one of the easiest means of funding their armed militias during the civil war, which ensued. According to Rashid (2008), the illicit drug trade fueled the Afghan civil war in the 1990s by providing funding to the warlords to finance their private militias. Byrd (2008) argues that the Taliban regime, which ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001, provided an environment in which opium production and trade further flourished.

According to Rashid (2008), the Taliban treated poppy as a legal crop collecting religious tax (ushr) on opium, ranging from 10 to 20% of production, and also collected tax from drug traffickers. The Taliban helped drug traffickers expand their export routes, funneling drugs through Pakistan, Iran, Central Asia, and the Arabian Gulf. Rashid (2008) further pointed out, "By 1998, the Taliban and drug traffickers were flying heroin out of Kandahar to the ports of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah – using al Qaeda contacts to sell drugs directly to the Gulf mafia and earn greater profits" (p. 320).

According to Rashid (2008), the Taliban were under increasing international pressure to ban opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, and in 2001, the Taliban banned poppy cultivation deeming it un-Islamic. Byrd (2008) argues the ban was a significant move but the main issue was that the Taliban

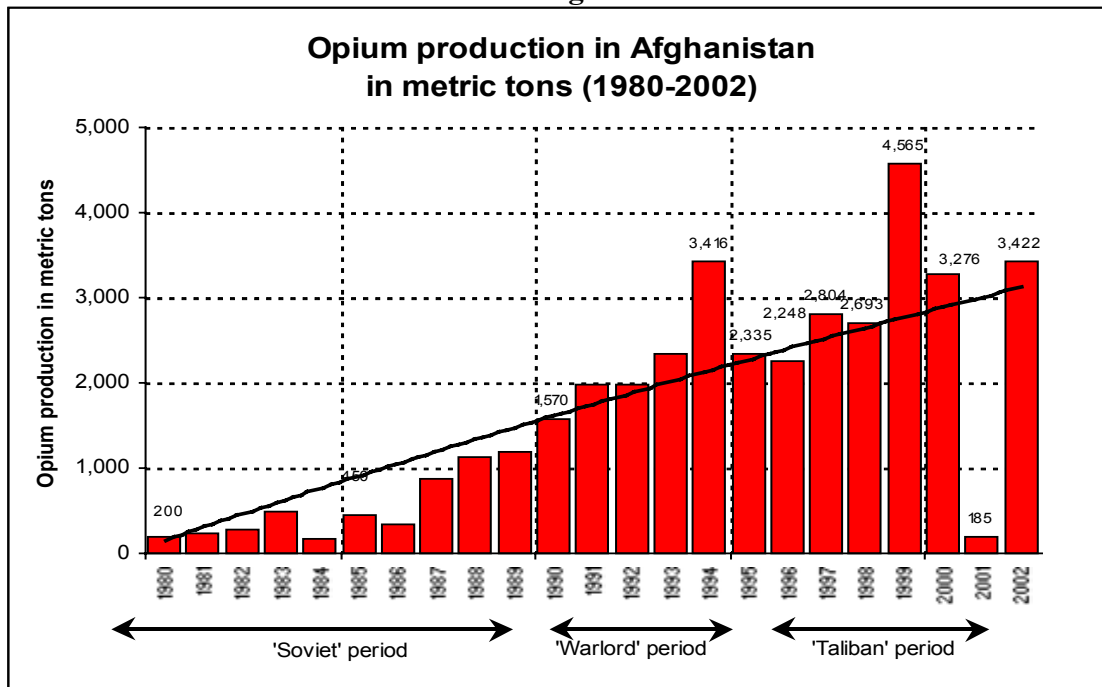
did not stop drug trade. Furthermore, Byrd (2008) contends:

While the motivation for this ban is subject to speculation, and major drug industry actors may have gone along with it in part because of oversupply and large stocks from previous bumper harvests, this was unquestionably the most successful, and cost-effective short-run reduction in production of illicit narcotics achieved in history. (p. 3)

Rashid (2008) believes the Taliban ban on poppy cultivation was the result of overproduction, and a decline in opium prices, which, according to him, had collapsed from US \$600 to just \$30 a kilogram. Moreover, Rashid (2008) contends, “The ban promptly pushed the prices up to US\$ 650 a kilogram” (p. 320).

After the collapse of Taliban regime in late 2001 by the U.S-led coalition, opium production continued to soar in Afghanistan. In 2007, Afghanistan saw the highest ever opium production until now, reaching to 8,200 metric tons, and producing over 90% of the world’s opium (UNODC, 2010).

Figure1

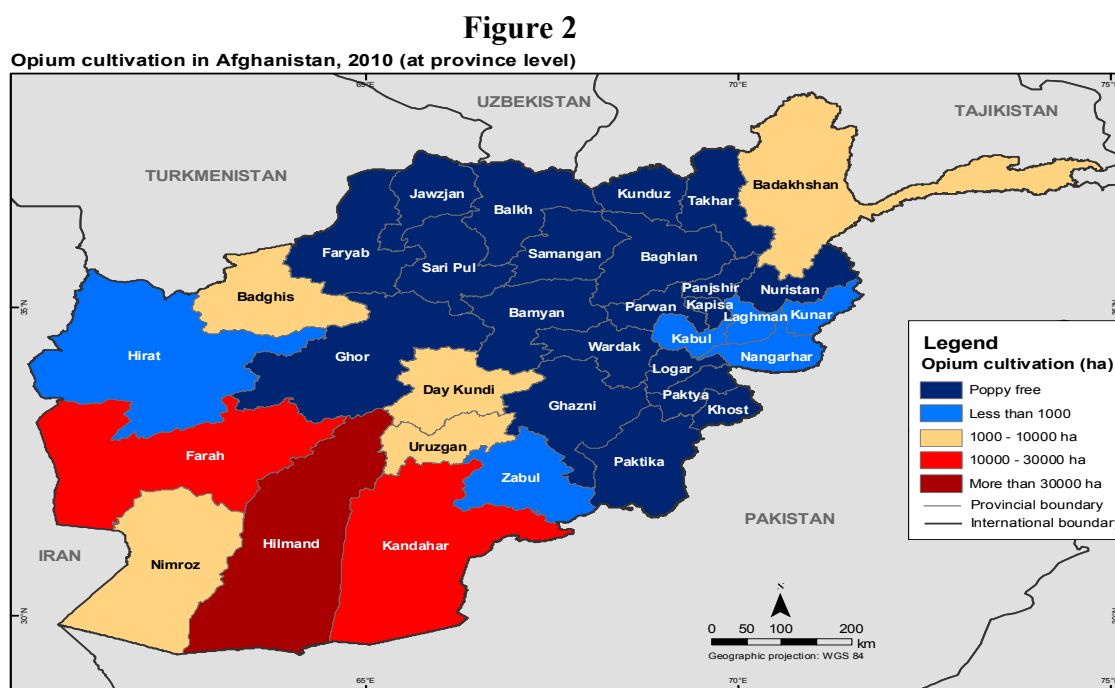


Source: (UNODC, 2003; UNDCP, 2002)

According to a joint report of the UNODC and MCN released in October 2011, opium poppy cultivation has seen a 7% increase in 2011 compared to 2010, reaching almost 131,000 hectares. In addition, the report found that opium production in Afghanistan had increased by 61% compared to 2010. The report cited insecurity and the high prices of opium as the main factors behind the increase.

Poppy and cannabis growing regions

According to a joint UNODC and MCN survey conducted in 2010, southern Afghanistan continues to remain the largest opium producing area in Afghanistan. In 2010, the region cultivated a total of 100,247 ha of opium poppy, which is equivalent to 82% of the total poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Also, the area produced 2,979 metric tons of opium in 2010, which makes 83% of the total opium production in Afghanistan. According to the survey, among southern provinces, Helmand had the largest opium poppy cultivation (53%), and Kandahar (21%). In other words, the two southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar make nearly 80% of the total opium cultivation in Afghanistan. Similarly, according to the 2011 UNODC and MCN survey, the southern region produced 85% of the total opium in Afghanistan with most of the production taking place in Helmand and Kandahar provinces. As shown in Figure 2, Helmand and Kandahar are the largest opium producing provinces in Afghanistan.



Source:(UNODC, 2010)

Besides being the world's largest opium producer, Afghanistan has also become the world's top producer of cannabis. According to the first-ever cannabis survey conducted by UNODC and MCN in 2009, Afghanistan cultivates 10,000 to 24,000 ha of cannabis every year. The study found that high profits from the cannabis crops with comparatively low costs were the main reasons driving farmers to cultivate cannabis. Besides, the research found that like opium, most of the cannabis was cultivated in the restive south of the country indicating a direct link between insecurity and cannabis cultivation. Furthermore, the survey found that about 67% of farmers involved in cannabis cultivation were also involved in growing opium.

Why do Afghan farmers cultivate opium?

According to Chouvy (2010), most Asian farmers resort to opium poppy cultivation “to cope with food insufficiency and food insecurity” (p.131). Also, Chouvy (2010) contends that the majority of Afghan farmers cultivate opium poppy because they are unable to achieve wheat self-sufficiency due to land scarcity and the very large sizes of their households. Similarly, Rubin and Sherman (2008) maintain that Afghan farmers cultivate poppy as a mechanism to cope with food insecurity. Moreover, Rubin and Sherman (2008) argue:

Afghan farmers do not cultivate poppy out of greed for the highest possible return. They cultivate it because for many it is the only way to supplement their subsistence farming with a cash income for food and social security, which has become essential over the past few decades of war-induced inflation and destruction of the rural economy. (p.16)

Similarly, Mansfield (2001) contends that opium poppy cultivation not only helps poor farmers achieve food security but it also helps them get access to land and credit when they face food shortages.

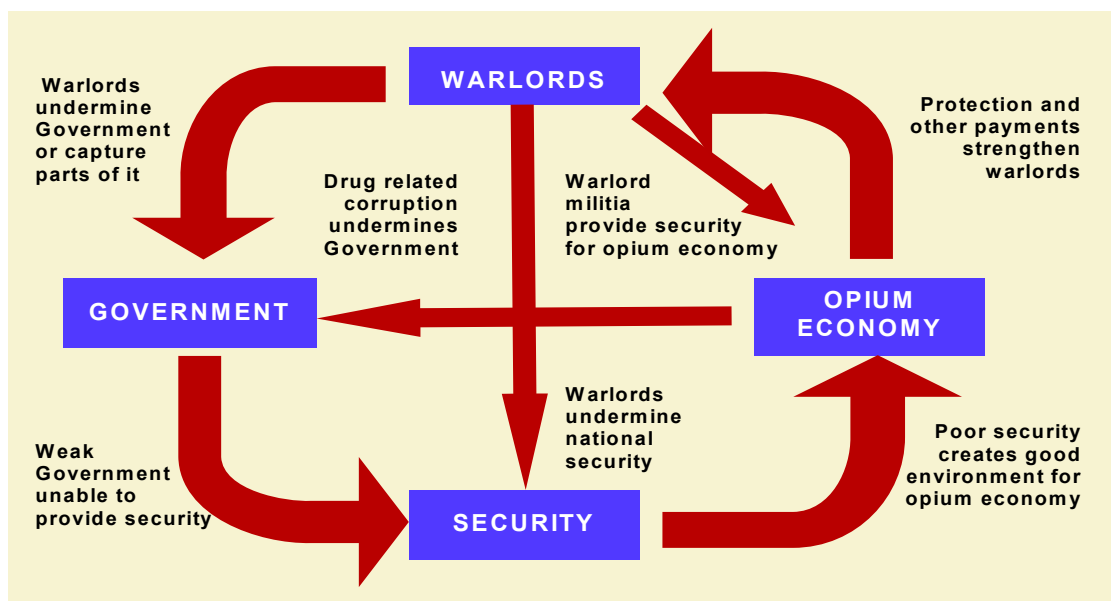
Mansfield (2001) argues, “ for the majority of households in Afghanistan opium poppy is a means of survival, providing access to land and securing the credit that is so critical for subsistence during the winter months” (p. 1). According to (Chouvy, 2010), decades of war, pervasive poverty and consecutive years of drought are key factors fuelling opium production in Afghanistan. Citing an FAO

report, Chouvy (2010) maintains that Afghanistan saw nearly 60% decline in its irrigated surfaces since 1978. Moreover, more than 70% of Afghan population live in extreme poverty with a per-capita income of US\$ 561 (WHO, 2011). In such conditions, many poor farmers are compelled to resort to growing poppy, which is a drought resistant plant, requiring little water but generating much higher profits than other legal crops (Chouvy, 2010; Macdonald, 2007). For instance, in 2006, according to the UNODC statistics, the gross income of opium per hectare was \$ 5,400 compared to \$550 per hectare of wheat (as cited in Chouvy, 2010).

Opium trade, insurgency, corruption, and warlordism – the vicious cycle

The Afghan drug industry poses a complex challenge to the war-ravaged country's reconstruction efforts: "on the one hand, it contributes heavily to local incomes; on the other hand, its illegality and associated corrupt and criminal activities undermine the basic institutions of the state" (Byrd, 2008, p.5). Importantly, as illustrated in Figure 3, Afghanistan's opium economy contributes to a vicious cycle whereby warlords and the Taliban insurgents benefit from the opium trade through their direct involvement in drug trafficking or by allowing poppy cultivation to thrive.

Figure 3: Drug trade, insurgency, corruption, and warlordism – the vicious cycle



Source: (The World Bank, 2005)

Byrd and Ward (2004) argue that such situation undermines security, development and governance in Afghanistan. Moreover, Byrd and Ward (2004) contend:

Warlords, drug interests, and terrorists all promote insecurity and weaken the state, even if their interests do not coincide in other respects. All in all, the security and political implications of Afghanistan's opium economy present a grave danger to the country's entire state-building and reconstruction agenda. (p.10)

According to Felbab-Brown (2005), warlords, terrorists, and the Taliban insurgents generally profit from the illicit drug trade in one of the following three ways: "taxing production or processing, providing protection for traffickers and taxing them for this service, or engaging in money laundering" (p. 59). According to a UNODC report entitled "The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment", released in 2011, the Taliban earned around \$ 155 million in 2009 from the illicit drug trade, while Afghan drug traffickers earned \$ 2.2 billion and Afghan farmers earned \$440 million. More worryingly, due to rampant corruption, weak governance, and porous borders, Afghan law enforcement agencies seized only 2% of the illicit drugs that were produced in 2009, compared to 36% in Colombia for cocaine (UNODC, 2009).

In 2004, in a *New York Times* article, the famous Afghan scholar Ashraf Ghani labelled opium poppy as "Democracy's Greatest Enemy" in Afghanistan. Similarly, Felbab-Brown (2005) argues that the booming opium trade threatens the very fabric of democracy in Afghanistan "by providing an avenue for criminal organizations and corrupt politicians to enter the political space, undermining the democratic process" (p. 58). Moreover, Felbab-Brown (2005) contends:

These actors, who enjoy the financial resources and political capital generated by sponsoring the illicit economy, frequently experience great success in the political process and are able to secure official positions of power as well as wield influence from behind the scenes.

Consequently, the legitimacy of the political process is subverted. (p. 58)

Similarly, the 2009 U.S. State Department International Narcotics Control Strategy Report for Afghanistan warned that endemic corruption within the Afghan government was a significant threat to the economic development and the fragile democracy in Afghanistan. In addition, in its 2009 annual report, Transparency International ranked Afghanistan 179 out of 180 in government corruption, only ahead of Somalia. Separately, a UNODC study released in 2010 found that the majority of Afghans (59%) considered government corruption as their biggest worry, even more than insecurity and unemployment. According to the report, Afghans paid about \$ 2.5 billion in bribes during 2009, equivalent to one quarter (23%) of Afghanistan's GDP. The aforementioned amount, according to the report, is nearly equal to the overall revenue from the illicit drug trade in 2009, which was estimated at \$2.8 billion.

Health and social costs of illicit drugs

1. Drug abuse

In addition to fueling insecurity, warlordism, and corruption in Afghanistan, opium production has led to a growing health tragedy in Afghanistan. A nationwide survey conducted by the UNODC, MCN, and the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) in 2009 found that, Afghanistan had one million drug addicts between the ages of 15 and 64, which makes nearly 8% of the population. The survey found that the number of opium users had doubled since 2005 reaching 230,000 while the number of heroin users had almost tripled since 2005 reaching 120,000 in 2009. In addition, the report found that the number of hashish users had reached 630,000 adults in 2009, compared to 520,000 in 2005. Tragically, the survey found that over 50% of drug users in the south and north of the country were giving opium to their children. Importantly, the report found a significant correlation between drug abuse and opium and cannabis growing areas. The report revealed that the south and northern regions had the highest prevalence of drug abuse. More worryingly, the research found that Afghanistan had around 20,000 IDUs, who have become the primary source of HIV transmission by sharing contaminated needles.

Also, a similar UNODC/MCN survey conducted in 2005 found that Afghanistan had an estimated 120,000 adult female drug abusers and 60,000 child drug users.

2. Drivers of drug abuse in Afghanistan

Major factors that fuel drug addiction in Afghanistan include: war-related trauma, unlimited availability of cheap narcotics, pervasive poverty, and widespread migration (Ezard et al., 2011; Zafar et al., 2003, as cited in Todd et al., 2012). Afghanistan has been suffering from a deadly and a growing Taliban-led insurgency during the past ten years, claiming the lives of thousands of innocent Afghans. The insurgent group, which is partially financed by the booming opium trade, is responsible for nearly 80% of civilian casualties (UNAMA, 2012). Fuelled by the ongoing conflict and poverty more than 60% of Afghans, mostly women, suffer from psychological disorders (WHO, 2010, as cited in Agence France-Presse, 2010). Moreover, war-ravaged Afghanistan is one of the world's least developed country with nearly half of its population being unemployed and about half of Afghans surviving on less than US\$2 a day (AISA, 2011; Matta, 2010, as cited in Todd et al., 2012). In addition, according to the UN refugee agency, more than 5.7 million Afghan refugees have returned home since 2002 (UNHCR, 2012). Returning refugees make a significant number of the current drug addicts in Afghanistan (Saif-ur-Rehman et al., 2007). Furthermore, Todd et al. (2012) argue that Afghan government and international donors have paid less attention to combating drug abuse compared to poppy cultivation and drug production in Afghanistan.

3. Who are most vulnerable to drug abuse?

According to Macdonald (2007), those who are at high risk of drug abuse in Afghanistan include women, particularly widows, youth, returning refugees, and policemen. War-torn Afghanistan has one million widows and 1.6 million orphans (World Bank, 2011). In addition, millions of Afghan refugees still live in neighboring countries of Pakistan and Iran, which cope with an alarming number

of drug addicts and a rapid increase in HIV/AIDS infections (World Bank, 2011). Moreover, Afghan youth, particularly those who have no education or employment are also very vulnerable to drug addiction (Macdonald, 2007). Generally, only 36% of the Afghan population is literate and literacy rate among women is only 13% (World Bank, 2011). Unfortunately, drug abuse is also prevalent among Afghanistan's security forces. Citing U.S. State Department officials, a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, released in 2010, says "12 to 41 percent of Afghan police recruits at Regional Training Centers test positive for drugs, depending on the province"(p. 33). Importantly, drug addiction is much higher among police force in southern Afghanistan. In 2009, citing an official from the UK government, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that 60% of the Afghan police in southern Helmand province were using drugs.

4. IDUs and Afghanistan's HIV problem

Global estimates show a disturbing rate of HIV/AIDS among injecting drug users. In 2008, almost 3 million or nearly 19% of the total 16 million IDUs worldwide were infected with HIV (World Drug Report, 2012). Similarly, in Afghanistan, IDUs have become the primary source of HIV transmission mainly through sharing needles (Rubin & Rahimi, 2011). According to Saif-ur-Rehman et al. (2007), almost all HIV cases identified in Afghanistan are due to injecting drug use. Although the exact figure regarding HIV prevalence is unavailable but current statistics indicate a rapid increase in HIV infection in the country. More recently, the Afghan ministry of public health announced that the registered HIV positive cases have doubled in Afghanistan, from 630 in 2010, to 1,250 in 2011, while the actual number of HIV patients is estimated to be much higher, most likely between 2,000 – 3,000 patients (as cited in Salehi & Naadem, 2011). Experts warn that Afghanistan faces an HIV epidemic and high prevalence of Hepatitis B and C infections (Griffin & Khoshnood 2010; Maguet & Majeed; Saif-ur-Rehman et al., 2007). A nationwide survey in 2009 confirmed that Afghanistan was facing a concentrated HIV epidemic mainly because more than 87% of the IDUs had been using shared needles,

who had very little knowledge about the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis B & C (UNODC, 2009). Similarly, Todd et al. (2007), in a study aimed at assessing the prevalence of HIV, HCV, HBs Ag and associated risk behavior among IDUs in Kabul, found that 3% of IDUs were HIV positive; 36.6% were HCV positive; and 6.5% were HBsAg positive. The study found that more than half of the IDUs were sharing needles, and about 43.6% had difficulty in obtaining new syringes. Moreover, the research revealed that the majority of the IDUs (76.2%) were paying women for sex and 28.3% were involved in having sex with men and boys.

Afghanistan saw its first HIV case in 1989, however, incidents of the disease remained negligible and un-reported for the next 15 years, “before a combination of circumstances - including a rise in poppy cultivation, drug trafficking and drug use; unscreened blood being used in transfusions and conflict scattering refugees around the world - began to push infection rates up” (Peter, 2010, para. 4). According to Saif-ur-Rehman et al. (2007), those who are potentially at high risk of HIV/AIDS in Afghanistan include: truck drivers, widows, prisoners, and abandoned children.

5. Healthcare for drug addicts, and HIV/AIDS prevention

Overall, healthcare for drug addicts is a serious public health issue in Afghanistan with only 10% of the drug addicts having access to health services (UNODC, 2009). In 2002, Afghanistan had only two drug treatment centers for the entire country, both of which were located in Kabul (Todd et al., 2012). According to the MCN, the existing drug treatment centers, which are largely providing detoxification services for the drug addicts, are lacking post-detoxification support, and therefore, have a 92% relapse rate (as cited in Rubin & Rahimi, 2011).

In response to the growing problem of drug abuse, especially the increasing threat of HIV transmission among IDUs in Afghanistan, Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World), an international French organization, launched the first ever methadone treatment pilot program in Kabul in 2010

(Ferris-Rotman, 2012; Rubin & Rahimi, 2011). Funded by the World Bank and strongly endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO), the project administers methadone to nearly 70 drug addicts in Kabul (Rubin & Rahimi, 2011; Stracansky, 2011). Methadone is an effective long-acting legal opioid substitute for heroin and other narcotics. Taken orally, it not only prevents the withdrawal symptoms but it also reduces the desire for using other drugs. Importantly, the medication significantly reduces the HIV prevalence among IDUs, reduces the level of drug-related crimes, and helps drug addicts to improve their productivity and reintegrate in the society (Lyman & Potter, 2011; McArthur, 1999; Ontario Addiction Treatment Centers, 2012). However, in spite of all the successes and several pleas from the MoPH, Afghanistan's ministry of counternarcotic still doubts the effectiveness of opiate substitution therapy and opposes the expansion of this program to the rest of the country (Rubin & Rahimi, 2011; Ferris-Rotman, 2012; Stracansky, 2011).

According to Peter (2010), in addition to issues in providing healthcare for drug addicts, lack of awareness about HIV/AIDS, stigma, and discrimination against HIV patients are other key problems that fuel drug abuse and HIV/AIDS in the deeply conservative Afghan community. Furthermore, Peter (2010) argues:

As a conservative country, the general community has a difficult time accepting people with a disease that is widely known to be sexually transmitted. There are numerous stories of women who having been infected by their husband were later accused of prostitution when their families found out. (para. 23)

Afghanistan's counter narcotics strategy

"The state prevents all types of terrorist activities, cultivation and smuggling of narcotic drugs and production and consumption of intoxicants." The Article 7, Constitution of Afghanistan (as cited in NDCS, 2006, p. 3)

According to Blanchard (2009), in 2002, the Afghan government issued a decree banning opium poppy cultivation, heroin production, opiate trafficking, and drug abuse. In the same year, the

government of Afghanistan established the Counter Narcotics Directorate (CND), which was later transformed into the Ministry of Counter Narcotics in 2004. In May 2003, the Afghan government with the technical and financial support from the U.S. the United Kingdom and the UNODC launched the National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS). According to this strategy, Afghanistan was committed to reducing the opium poppy cultivation by 70% until 2008, and was also obliged to completely eliminate poppy cultivation and drug trafficking by 2013. However, in January 2006, the government modified the NDCS by incorporating an over-arching objective, which is “to secure a sustainable decrease in cultivation, production, trafficking, and consumption of illicit drugs with a view to complete and sustainable elimination” (p. 17). According to Blanchard (2009), unlike the old version, the new version of NDCS did not set any firm deadlines for opium poppy elimination in Afghanistan.

As previously mentioned, in order to eliminate the scourge of narcotics from Afghanistan, the MCN (2006) laid out the following four national priorities:

1. Disrupting the drugs trade by targeting traffickers and their backers and eliminating the basis for the trade.
2. Strengthening and diversifying legal rural livelihoods.
3. Reducing the demand for illicit drugs and treatment of problem drug users.
4. Strengthening state institutions both at the center and in the provinces. (p. 8)

Moreover, as previously mentioned, the government of Afghanistan, in order to make progress towards achieving the four national counter narcotics priorities, laid out eight objectives, called “pillars” which are as follows: raising counter narcotics public awareness; strengthening regional and international cooperation to fight drug trafficking across the borders; providing alternative livelihoods to farmers in order to abandon poppy cultivation; drug demand reduction and the treatment of drug addicts; law enforcement or strengthening interdiction of illicit drugs; establishing an effective criminal justice system to support drug law enforcement; poppy eradication; and building strong counter narcotics institutions. Some of the key pillars that are the main focus of this thesis are explained below.

Counter narcotics public awareness

Raising counter narcotics public awareness is another neglected area, which has received little attention compared to other counter narcotics programs in Afghanistan (Byrd, 2008; Leary-Miller, 2010). According to the MCN (2006), public awareness is aimed at to “inform, educate, deter and dissuade the population from involvement in the illicit drugs trade, cultivation of opium and abuse of opiates” (p. 21). However, some scholars argue that nearly all efforts aimed at raising public awareness against the dangers of illicit drugs/use in Afghanistan have not achieved the desired outcomes (Byrd 2008; Lipetz, 2007). A UNODC survey released in 2008 found that there is a wide gap of information among the general public about the social and health related consequences of illicit drugs and that the opium poppy cultivation was fueling addiction, criminal activities, and terrorism. Given that radio is the most popular medium in Afghanistan (Altai, 2010), the UNODC survey suggested that its coverage must be improved, especially in rural areas, where poppy cultivation takes place, in order to inform and educate the public about the social and health-related consequences of illicit drugs.

Given that farmers view opium as a lucrative and profitable crop, changing this perception is essential, and opium farmers should be educated about the negative impact of opium poppy cultivation (Lipetz, 2007). Moreover, public should be informed that drug production and consumption is un-Islamic, affect their health, society, politics, economy, and the reputation of Afghanistan internationally (Lipetz, 2007; MCN, 2006). However, Lipetz (2007) claims that there are many shortcomings in the current public awareness programs, one of which, according to Lipetz (2007), is the credibility of those who are responsible for raising counter narcotics public awareness. Lipetz (2007) contends, “Primarily, there is a problem with hypocrisy: individuals and institutions that publicly educate the masses and condemn the narcotic are often complicit in the drug trade.

When this occurs, the thrust of the message loses some of its strength” (p. 9). Moreover, Lipetz (2007) suggests:

To avoid this, there is a need to ensure that all parties involved in heightening awareness practice what they preach. One way for making this happen is by establishing rule of law and due process, which will minimize the number of people involved with the drug, including those who are in charge of delivering the message to the masses. (p. 9)

Moreover, Byrd (2008) argues that communication efforts aimed at convincing farmers to abandon poppy cultivation by providing them with development assistance have not been successful and have conversely fuelled such expectations among the people. In addition, Byrd (2008) contends that sometimes public awareness programs fail to take into account the social and cultural norms of the targeted population. Citing Mansfield (2007), Byrd (2008) contends:

Where being unable to read, people looking at a counternarcotic poster gave widely varying interpretations unrelated to the intended message. For example, no one saw an armed, turbaned young man in the poster as a terrorist or insurgent (which was the intended depiction), as people with such clothing and carrying a weapon would be a normal part of the local scene. (p. 21)

Interdiction

Interdiction³ is mainly referred to law enforcement agencies’ actions in “pursuing drug traffickers and seizing their product, enforcing closure of opium bazaars, and destroying processing facilities” (Byrd & Ward, 2004, p. 20). Moreover, Byrd and Ward (2004) contend:

The technical rationale for interdiction is strong, as the trafficking and processing business is more concentrated, more evidently criminal, and has fewer participants than the production stage. Interdiction also does not result directly in rural impoverishment, at least not to the same degree as actions against resource-poor farmers. (p. 20)

³ In this research “interdiction is used to refer more broadly to law enforcement actions against drugs beyond the farm level, including actions against drug trading within Afghanistan (as well as across its borders) and actions against opium processing labs etc.” (Byrd & Ward, 2004, p. 13).

However, scholars criticize Afghan and international law enforcement agencies' interdiction efforts for being too much eradication-led and targeting impoverished farmers, while paying less attention to drug trafficking (Goodhand, 2008; Rubin, 2004). Goodhand (2008) argues, "It makes little sense to concentrate on the part of the chain that involves 80 percent of the stakeholders but only 20 per cent of the value" (p. 418). Scholars contend that poppy eradication campaigns without the provision of sustainable licit alternative livelihoods – that are acceptable for farmers – are counterproductive; increase opium prices; make drug trafficking a more profitable business and drug traffickers more rich (Byrd & Ward, 2004; Goodhand, 2008; Rubin, 2004). Goodhand (2008) suggests that law enforcement agencies must focus on drug traffickers, where "80 percent of the profits are located" (p. 418). However, interdiction efforts in Afghanistan have been marred by endemic government corruption (Byrd & Ward, 2004; Glaze, 2007). For instance, in 2009, Afghan law enforcement agencies seized only 2% of the illicit drugs (UNODC, 2009). Glaze (2007) claims the drug-related corruption existed in various layers of the Afghan government, which was eroding the rule of law. Glaze (2007) argues that drug traffickers give bribes to law enforcement personnel in order to provide safe passage for their drugs. Moreover, Goodhand (2008) contends, "those attempting to do anything about drugs and corruption are unlikely to keep their jobs" (p. 418). Furthermore, drug money provides Afghan warlords – who hold key government positions – with political power (Felbab-Brown, 2005; Glaze, 2007). To sum up, according to Glaze (2007), "political corruption is so widespread in Afghanistan that it is undermining public institutions, eroding the rule of law, and creating widespread instability and volatility"(pp. 6-7).

Poppy eradication: Does it really work?

According to Chouvy (2010), "Eradication is the forced destruction of standing crops, whether manually (thrashing of poppy fields by hand), mechanically (by tractor, helicopter, planes), chemically (use of herbicides such as glyphosate, paraquat, or Agent Orange), or even biologically" (p.157). In

Afghanistan, security forces carry out most of the eradication manually (Rubin & Sherman, 2008).

Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy emphasizes on strengthening the ability of law enforcement agencies "to conduct targeted and verified eradication where there is access to 'alternative livelihoods'" (p. 41). However, Rubin and Sherman (2008) criticize NDCS for being unclear about the provision and definition of alternative livelihoods, claiming that in practice it was largely ignored.

Highlighting the significance of viable alternative livelihoods for farmers, Byrd and Ward (2004) argue:

...eradication in the absence of alternative livelihoods being available does not work, and eradication followed by assistance does not seem to work well, yet eradication (and its threat) can help reinforce alternative livelihoods development if the former follows the latter. (p.16)

Those who advocate for poppy eradication as a key approach for eliminating opium poppy believe it increases perception of risk among farmers and thus enforcing them to abandon poppy cultivation (Mansfield & Pain, 2006). However, Mansfield and Pain (2006) reject the aforementioned assumption and argue:

...eradication may not only fail to have an impact on a farmer's decision to plant opium poppy in subsequent years but even result in increased cultivation as households seek to recoup the losses (and increased debts) they incurred as a result of their opium crop being destroyed. (p. 8)

Mansfield and Pain (2006), citing a GTZ document released in 1998, argue that global experience has showed that eradication of illicit crops without the provision of legal income sources for farmers further increases poverty. Byrd and Ward (2004) argue that crop eradication can suppress opium production locally, however, according to them, "production can quickly shift to other producing areas and spread to new areas (stimulated in part by the higher farm-gate prices caused by eradication)" (p. 21). Similarly, Mansfield and Pain (2006) contend "In areas where there is already a history of

migration, as in the drug crop producing regions of Latin America and South East Asia, eradication has prompted relocation of both people and drug crop cultivation” (p. 5).

Moreover, Mansfield and Pain (2006) maintain that the relocation of farmers and drug crop production increase deforestation and losses in biodiversity. In an attempt to control coca production the Colombian government used aerial spraying dropping herbicides on a more than 100,000 acres of land each year (Lyman & Potter, 2011). Lyman and Potter (2011) argue:

As a result, Colombian peasants who are dependent on the coca crop as their only source of income have moved into the Amazon rainforests. The movement of coca growers to rainforest has resulted in the clearing of at least 1.75 million acres of rainforest (Trade and Environment Database, 1997:4-8). (p. 428)

Besides, global experience has showed that a more eradication-led approach leads to political and social insecurity. For instance, according to Mansfield and Pain (2006), in Myanmar, Peru and Colombia eradication efforts forced local households to relocate to “regions beyond the control of the state and into the hands of non-state actors” (p. 6). Similarly, in Afghanistan, nearly all national and international efforts tailored towards a more eradication-led approach have had adverse effects fueling insurgency, poverty, and corruption (Byrd & Ward, 2004; Glaze, 2007). Also, Rubin and Sherman (2008) argue that, “eradication raises the price of opium, thereby making more money available for insurgency, and causes cultivation to migrate to more remote areas” (p. 5). In 2009, Richard Holbrooke, the former U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, criticized U.S. counter narcotic policy’s poppy eradication program, which, according to him, was counterproductive driving farmers into the hands of the Taliban insurgents. Calling for a review of the U.S. anti-drug policy, Holbrooke said instead of targeting poor Afghan farmers who were growing opium to feed their families, the U.S. must target the insurgents and drug traffickers who buy and transport the illicit drugs (as cited in AP, 2009).

Furthermore, another consequence of poppy eradication is that it fuels opium-related indebtedness. Byrd and Ward (2004) contend “Eradication also appears to have worsened the problem of opium-related indebtedness, as indebted farmers whose fields are eradicated fall deeper into debt, which they can manage only by continuing to cultivate poppy” (p. 21). In addition, there are documented cases of farmers who were unable to pay their loans to the drug traffickers after their opium crops were eradicated had either traded their young girls to the drug traffickers or had fled to neighboring Pakistan (Mansfield & Pain, 2006; Rubin & Sherman, 2008). Citing a 2007 poll conducted by Charney Research, Rubin and Sherman (2008) argue:

Note that one out of seven respondents in poppy growing provinces and one in four in Helmand said they knew of farming families who had sold their children (most likely girls) in payment of opium debts as a result of eradication. (p. 12)

Furthermore, according to Felbab-Brown (2005), farmers who flee to neighboring Pakistan might end up in the radical madrasas or Islamic religious schools “whose harsh interpretation of Islam and strong anti-U.S. stance became the primary ideological and religious influence on the Taliban” (p. 62).

Alternative Livelihoods

Mansfield and Pain (2005) argue that any intervention aimed at reducing opium production in Afghanistan will not achieve the desired outcomes unless it addresses the main factors that influence farmers’ decision to cultivate opium poppy. Therefore, the concept of alternative livelihoods has been developed, which encompasses a wide-range of strategies to deal with the root causes of the opium poppy cultivation such as poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity (Mansfield & Pain, 2005). Similarly, Byrd and Ward (2004) suggest that any alternative livelihood program, in order to achieve success, must be an integral part of the broader rural development and poverty alleviation strategy in Afghanistan. As Rubin and Sherman (2008) contend “Afghan farmers do not cultivate poppy out of greed for the highest possible return” (p.16). But, according to them, they cultivate opium mainly to

cope with the growing food insecurity and feed their impoverished families. A survey conducted by the UNODC in 2007 found that 98% of the farmers in Afghanistan said they were ready to abandon opium poppy cultivation if they were provided with viable alternative livelihoods (as cited in Rubin & Sherman, 2008). In this regard, Rubin and Sherman (2008) suggest that any alternative livelihoods program must work with that 98% of people, and eradication must be reserved for the remaining 2% individuals. But still, according to Rubin and Sherman (2008), “first the rural population has to have confidence in the alternative” (p. 45).

Demand reduction and the U.S. counter narcotic strategy for Afghanistan

In collaboration with United Kingdom and the government of Afghanistan, the U.S. government, as the largest donor of counter narcotics programs in Afghanistan, has designed its own five-pillar counter narcotics strategy. The strategy that mainly focuses on supply reduction⁴ policy includes the following five pillars: alternative livelihoods, eradication, interdiction, law enforcement and justice reform, and public information (Chouvy, 2010; Glaze, 2007; Maguet & Majeed, 2010).

According to Chouvy (2010), previous experience has showed that a balanced approach between drug demand reduction⁵ and supply reduction is key to reducing illicit drug production and consumption. A landmark study of cocaine markets by the U.S. based RAND (Research and Development) Corporation found that “dollar for dollar, providing treatment to cocaine users is 10 times more effective at reducing drug abuse than drug interdiction schemes and 23 times more effective than trying to eradicate coca at its source” (as cited in Chouvy, 2010, p.144). Chouvy (2010) argues that this idea is also applicable to opium production and heroin consumption. Similarly, the UN General Assembly in its 20th session, held in 1998, called for a balanced approach between demand

⁴**Supply reduction**, “is a broad term used for a range of activities designed to stop the production, manufacture and distribution of illicit drugs” (UNODCCP, 2000, p. 69). Production of illicit drugs could be stopped through crop eradication or through the provision of viable alternative livelihoods to farmers while distribution of illicit drugs can be curtailed through law enforcement.

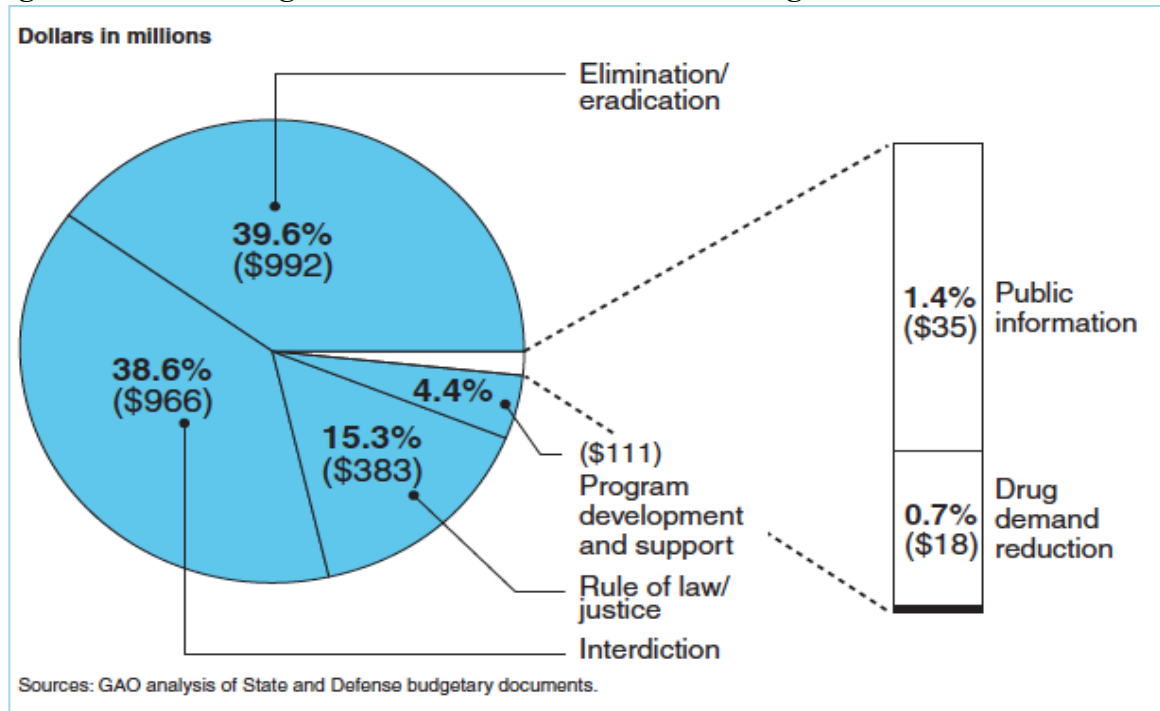
⁵**Demand reduction**, according to UNODCCP (2000), “is a broad term used for a range of policies and programs which seek a reduction of desire and of preparedness to obtain and use illegal drugs” (p.19). Drug demand reduction could be achieved through various programs including treatment for drug addicts, harm reduction techniques, education, and addressing the social determinants of drug abuse such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness and so on.

reduction and supply reduction. The 4th item of the UN General Assembly *Declaration of the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction* calls on the member states:

Extensive efforts have been and continue to be made by Governments at all levels to suppress the illicit production, trafficking and distribution of drugs. The most effective approach towards the drug problem consists of a comprehensive, balanced and coordinated approach, encompassing supply control and demand reduction reinforcing each other, together with the appropriate application of the principle of shared responsibility. There is now a need to intensify our efforts in demand reduction and to provide adequate resources towards that end. (para. 4)

However, drug demand reduction interventions in Afghanistan have received the least amount of international funding compared to supply reduction interventions. For example, as shown in Figure 4, the U.S. allocated only 0.7% (\$18 million) for drug demand reduction out of the total \$ 2.5 billion allotted by the U.S. government for counter narcotics-related programs in Afghanistan, from 2005–2009 (GAO, 2010).

Figure 4: U.S. funding for counternarcotics activities in Afghanistan from 2005 to 2009



Source: (GAO, 2010)

In other words, the U.S. government allotted only 0.7% of its counter narcotics funding for drug

demand reduction, while allocating 39.6% for eradication/elimination; 38.6% for interdiction; 15.3% for rule of law/justice; 4.4% for program development⁶ and support; and 1.4 % for public information, from 2005–2009. Given that 90% of the one million drug addicts have no access to healthcare and the impoverished country faces an HIV/AIDS epidemic due to the rapid spread of the disease among IDUs (UNODC, 2009), demand reduction programs must be an integral part of any counter narcotics strategy designed for the poverty-stricken nation. The government of Afghanistan, like in many other areas, is heavily dependent on international funding for treating its drug addicts. According to the U.S. Department of State International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, released in March 2012, the 50 drug treatment centers across Afghanistan, 29 of which are funded by the U.S. government, are inadequate to treat the nearly 800,000 drug addicts.

According to Chouvy (2010), the European Union has paid considerable attention to drug demand reduction, designing a balanced counter narcotics strategy for the period 2005-12. The strategy focuses on both drug demand reduction and supply reduction. Based on this strategy the law enforcement part mostly focuses at drug trafficking not at forced eradication. Moreover, Council of the European Union on May 25, 2012 recommended that the EU counter narcotics strategy for 2013-2020 must pursue the current policy “to form the basis of the EU approach to the drug problem in the future; drug demand and drug supply reduction measures shall be based on available evidence, well balanced, and implemented with equal vigour” (p. 6). Furthermore, considering drug demand reduction as the number one priority in combating illicit drugs, UNODC’s current head, Yury Fedotov, in September 2010, concluded:

We must not forget the consumer side of opium's deadly equation. Unless we reduce the demand for opium and heroin, our interventions against supply will not be effective. As long as demand drives this market, there will always be another farmer to replace one we convince to stop cultivating, and another trafficker to replace one we catch. (para. 19)

⁶According to the U.S. GAO report, Figure 4 does not include the \$1.4 billion allocated by the U.S. government for alternative development and agriculture programs, from 2005–2009.

As previously mentioned, the next part of the literature review highlights the following topics: theoretical framework for this study; media consumption in Afghanistan; a brief history of journalism in Afghanistan; media reporting on illicit drug issues; and the research questions this study aims to address.

Theoretical Framework

The following two theories were employed to guide this research: agenda-setting theory and framing. Both of the theories have been widely used in media studies. Agenda setting theory mainly focuses on the role of media in shaping public opinion and policy change (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1972), while framing highlights the power of framing in media reporting (Entman, 1993). Both of the theories are explained in detail below.

Agenda setting theory

The agenda-setting theory was developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), and it was used to study the role of mass media in influencing public opinion during the 1968 presidential campaign in the University town of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA. This theory basically indicates that the media have a significant power to influence public opinion. As a framework, this theory is chosen to help the researcher understand how the Afghan news media portray the illicit drug issues in Afghanistan. In order to raise public awareness about the dangerous consequences of opium poppy cultivation and drug abuse in Afghanistan, it is also relevant to first get an overall picture of the media portrayal of illicit drug issues. More specifically, it is important to know what the Afghan news media tell the public about the drug problem, and how much importance do the Afghan news media attach to the illicit drug issues in its day-to-day coverage of various affairs of Afghanistan.

Describing the agenda-setting theory, McCombs (2004) argues:

Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors focus our attention and influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day. This ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda has come to be called the agenda-setting role of the news media. (p.1)

Historically, according to Dearing and Rogers (1996), it was newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann (1922), who for the first time shed light on the agenda setting role of mass media. Later on, while conceptualizing the agenda setting role of the news media, Cohen (1963) argued, “The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (p.13). Subsequently, building on Cohen’s (1963) concept of agenda-setting, McCombs (1997)’s new research found that, “the media are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about and they often are stunningly successful in telling us how to think about it” (p. 441).

According to McCombs (2004), the main idea of the agenda setting theory is that the more media give importance to an issue in the news the more the issue becomes important among the public. In other words, news media, according to McCombs (2004), set the public agenda. Furthermore, McCombs (2004) contends, “establishing this salience among the public, placing an issue or topic on the public agenda so that it becomes the focus of public attention and thought – and, possibly, action – is the initial stage in the formation of public opinion” (p. 2).

According to McCombs (2004), salience means how much importance news media give to a topic. The importance of a news topic depends on where the news media place the story, how much space and time is devoted to the topic, and most importantly, how frequently the news outlet broadcast or publishes the story – all these examples highlight the salience of a topic on the media agenda.

In addition, Kiouisis (2004) argues that, “Beyond placement and position, the presence of a story in a prestigious news source is another signal of prominence that relays salience cues to audiences” (p.75).

According to Dearing and Rogers (1996), the agenda-setting process has the following three main components: the media agenda, the public agenda, and policy agenda. The public agenda is usually measured by conducting public opinion surveys, while media agenda is usually measured “by a content analysis of the news media to determine the number of news stories about an issue or issues of study,” (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p.18). According to Dearing and Rogers (1996), “the number of news stories measures the relative salience of an issue of study on the media agenda” (p.18). Similarly, the audience usually measures the importance of an issue based on the amount of coverage the issue has received in the news (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The policy agenda, according to Dearing and Rogers (1996), is usually measured by the introduction of new rules and regulations to address an issue or issues, which are put forward by either public agenda or media agenda, or both.

For the first time, McCombs and Shaw (1972) used the term agenda-setting in their research to study the role of mass media in the 1968 presidential campaign in the University town of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The main purpose of the study, according to McCombs and Shaw (1972) was “to match what Chapel Hill voters said were key issues of the campaign with the actual content of the mass media used by them during the campaign”(p. 177). For their research, they randomly selected 100 undecided voters who they interviewed in a 3-week period just before the election, between September 18 and October 6, 1968. To select these 100 participants, McCombs and Shaw (1972) used a filter question “to identify those who had not yet definitely decided how to vote — presumably those most open or susceptible to campaign information” (p. 178). Therefore, they interviewed those candidates who had not yet made any decision which candidate to vote. The voters were asked to explain what they were most concerned about, and what were the two or three main issues that they think the government should consider doing something about. In response to these questions, the unsure voters

mentioned the following five issues frequently, as the most important problems for them: foreign policy, law and order, fiscal policy, public welfare, and civil rights, thus highlighting the public agenda. Afterwards, in order to measure the media agenda, McCombs and Shaw (1972) content analyzed the news articles, editorials, and broadcast stories in the nine mass media outlets that served Chapel Hill. The media outlets included *Durham Morning Herald*, *Durham Sun*, *Raleigh News and Observer*, *Raleigh Times*, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *NBC* and *CBS* evening news broadcasts. Finally, McCombs and Shaw (1972) found a complete correlation between the five issues that were considered by the voters as the most important issues, and the rank order of the same issues on the media agenda. In other words, McCombs and Shaw (1972) found that each of the five issues, which voters consider as the most important, had gained the same level of reflection in the media outlets. For instance, the voters frequently mentioned foreign policy as the most important issue for them, while the same issue (foreign policy) gained the highest reflection in the media outlets. After conducting this research, McCombs and Shaw (1972) concluded:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues — that is, the media may jet the “agenda” of the campaign.

(p.176)

More specifically, research has shown that media can play a significant role in influencing public concern about social control issues such as crime and illicit drugs. Beckett (1994) argues that it is the power of media that can significantly increase public concerns about social control issues such as drugs and crime, not the extent of the problem in the society. In 1989, a study by Shoemaker, Wanta, and Leggett (1989) from the University of Texas, found a significant correlation between the increase

in media reporting on illicit drug issues and the overall public concern about the illicit drugs in the USA. In order to measure the public concerns about the drugs, they conducted 46 Gallup polls between 1972 and 1986. They asked the question, “What is the most important problem facing this country today?” In the meantime, in order to measure the media agenda, they counted the number of news articles on illicit drugs in nine U.S. media outlets (*The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *ABC evening news*, *NBC evening news*, and *CBS evening news*) from 1972 to 1986. Their results showed that “public concern with drugs was highest in the early 1970s, become very low during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and climbed again in 1985 and 1986” (Shoemaker et al., 1989, p.72). On the other hand, Shoemaker et al. (1989) found that the media reporting on illicit drug issues had followed the same pattern from 1972 to 1986. After this research, Shoemaker et al. (1989) concluded that “the more the media emphasize drugs, the more people will list drugs as the most important problem facing the country” (p.72).

Similarly, according to Watts (2003), when the heroin overdose increased in Australia, the Herald Sun Newspaper in Victoria started publishing stories comparing the heroin-related deaths with the road accidents deaths on its editorial page under the heading “Stop the carnage” until 2005 (as cited in Hughes et al., 2010, p.19). Watts (2003) argues that, by continuously updating the public about the heroin-related deaths, the media managed to keep “drugs and particularly heroin at the forefront of the public agenda as ‘profound social and personal problem’” (as cited in Hughes et al., 2010, p.19).

Framing

In addition to knowing what stories on illicit drugs are told in the Afghan news media, it is also important to know how these stories are told. The agenda setting theory basically explains what the news media say about a particular issue, while framing tells us how the issue has been constructed and represented in the news reports (McCombs, 2004; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Therefore, the framing concept, which is widely used in communication literature (Hughes et al., 2010), is employed

here as a theoretical framework. Developed by sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) and anthropologist-psychologist Gregory Bateson (1972) “framing refers to the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences” (as cited in Reese, 2001, p.7). Moreover, Entman (1993) puts forward a more comprehensive definition of framing concept, as follows:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)

In sum, framing is a process where journalists highlight some aspects of an issue in the news story “while ignoring or downplaying others” (Durrant, Wakefield, McLeod, Clegg-Smith, & Chapman, 2003, p.75). According to Entman (1993), frames in the news can be identified by “the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (p. 52).

There are many examples of news framing. One of such examples where media managed to bring about a tremendous change in public perception about illicit drugs was in the USA in 1990s. After conducting time series analysis of the press coverage of the illicit drug issues between 1985 and 1994, Fan (1996) found that, by framing drugs as a crisis, the press managed to significantly influence public perception that drugs were the USA’s most significant problem, from 5% in 1985 to 60% in 1994.

Media consumption in Afghanistan

Afghan media have flourished tremendously after the fall of Taliban in 2001, who imposed strict bans on free media during their five-year rule (Colvin, 2011). Under the Taliban, independent media were strictly banned with only one government radio station based in the capital Kabul being allowed to broadcast Taliban propaganda and religious programs (Cary, 2012). The hardline

movement, during its rule, officially banned television, photography, movies, and Internet, considering them un-Islamic, while the militant group is currently using the same tools in its propaganda war against the government and international forces in Afghanistan (Gwakh, 2011).

Currently, Afghanistan has over 75 television channels and almost 200 radio stations, and the media industry is growing by 20% every year (Colvin, 2011). Each year, 9 TV channels and 20 radio stations are created in Afghanistan (Altai, 2010). There are hundreds of print media, which include private and state-run publications in Afghanistan (Altai, 2010). Moreover, radio and TV are the most dominant media outlets in Afghanistan. As of June 2010, 63% of Afghans listen to radio and 48% watch TV (Altai, 2010). In addition, radio and TV remain the most trusted sources of information in Afghanistan (Altai, 2010). According to the 2005 Millennium Development Goals report (UN News Center, 2009), the country has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world, where 90% of women and 63% of men in rural areas are illiterate. A nationwide survey conducted by Altai Consulting firm in 2010 found that, more than 80% of the interviewers acknowledged that the media have had impact on their opinions. Also, the survey found that only 13% of Afghans read the press and 4% of Afghans use the Internet (Altai, 2010).

In addition, according to the Afghan ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology, some 15.5 million Afghans that make around 60 % of the total 28 million population (WHO, 2012) have access to mobile phones (as cited in Khetab, 2011). In a significant development towards establishing the foundations for citizen journalism in Afghanistan, in October 2010, Radio Azadi, in partnership with a mobile provider *Etisalat*, launched its SMS alert service in the country. The service enables Azadi Radio' listeners, particularly women and those living in remote and inaccessible regions, to receive regular news updates, as well as send their own news items to Azadi Radio (Pain, 2011). According to Pain (2011), during its first year of operation, nearly 400,000 Afghans of all ages and genders subscribed to Azadi Radio's SMS alert system.

Furthermore, with regards to freedom of press, Reporters Without Borders ranked Afghanistan 147 out of 178 countries in 2010. However, Cary (2012) argues that Afghanistan has more freedom of press than some of its neighbours.

Brief history of journalism in Afghanistan

According to Rawan (2002), Afghanistan's first weekly newspaper, the Shamsal-Nehar (Sun of The Day) was published in 1873 in Kabul, covering issues such as daily news, official and unofficial government announcements. Afghan media witnessed a significant shift when Mahmud Tarzi, the father of Afghan journalism, published the first reformist and pro-independence newspaper, Seradj-ul-Ahkbar (Luminary of Chronicles) in 1906 (Ahang, 1970). After the independence of Afghanistan in 1919 from the British Empire, Afghan society went through significant changes with some liberal and secular intellectual entities gaining power who were opposing the religious fanatics and advocating for democracy, free media, and social justice (Rawan, 2002). According to Schwager, (1932), under King Amanullah Khan's rule, Afghans were for the first time granted rights of free speech under article 11 of the 1923 Constitution (as cited in Rawan, 2002). At the same time, according to Grevenmeyer (1987), Afghanistan had 23 state-owned and private newspapers and magazines in Kabul and other provinces (as cited in Rawan, 2002). Among the publications, according to Yussufi (1977), was the first Afghan women magazine Erschad-al-Nasswan (Instructions for the Women), which was published by Queen Soraya in Kabul in 1922 (as cited in Rawan, 2002). Moreover, in 1925, King Amanullah Khan laid the foundation of the first radio station in Afghanistan (Rawan, 2002).

According to Rawan (2002), Afghanistan's first news agency, "Bakhtar," was established in 1939, connecting Afghanistan with local and international media outlets. At the end of the monarchy in 1973, Afghanistan had a total of 70 different publications including 16 daily newspapers. In total, there were 220,000 copies of all publications. According to Ahang and Siddiq (1972), four different readers shared a copy of a given publication. Afghanistan's first television channel started its operations in

1978 from Kabul (Khaydary, 1994, as cited in Rawan, 2002).

Until the collapse of Najibullah's pro-Soviet regime in 1992, Afghanistan had 4 national daily newspapers, 8 weekly papers, and 18 provincial newspapers published in Dari and Pashto, Afghanistan two official languages (Khaydary, 1994, as cited in Rawan, 2002).

After 1992, and the takeover of Mujahedeen (1992--1996) and subsequently the Taliban (1996--2001), during which Afghanistan plunged into a brutal civil war and internal strife "the press [in Afghanistan] basically collapsed" (Rawan, 2002, p.160).

Media reporting on illicit drugs

According to Hughes, Lancaster, and Spicer (2011), several studies have criticized media reporting on illicit drugs as being biased, sensationalized, and narrowly framed. Citing Blood, Williams, and McCallum (2003), Hughes et al. (2011) argue that media "have been found to use 'alarmist fear imagery and risk frames,'" when reporting on illicit drugs (p. 286). Scholars contend that media reporting aimed at instilling fear among the public about the drug issues contribute to "moral panics" (Beckett, 1994; Brownstein, 1991; Denham, 2008; Fan, 1996; Homan, 2003; Lancaster et al., 2010a; Reinerman & Levine, 1989; Taylor, 2008, as cited in Hughes et al., 2011, p. 286). Young (1981) contends that, "by fanning up moral panics over drug use, [the media portrayal of the drug user] contributes enormously to public hostility to the drug taker and precludes any rational approach to the problem" (as cited in Shoemaker et al., 1989, p. 69). A study by Mastroianni and Noto (2008), aimed at exploring the news making process of drug-related issues in the Brazilian media, found that, the main factors that contributed to the production of news articles on drugs in the Brazilian media were incidents of crime and illegality associated with illicit drugs. Moreover, Mastroianni and Noto (2008) contend, "They [Brazilian media professionals] claimed that by instilling fear among readers, newspapers and magazines tend to increase their audiences and/or sales" (p. 293). Similarly, a recent study by Hughes et al. (2010), aimed at examining the dominant media portrayal of illicit drugs in the

Australian news media between 2003 and 2008 and exploring whether media's reporting on illicit drugs have had any effect on the attitudes of youth against illicit drugs, found that:

In almost 70% of cases illicit drugs were deemed newsworthy [by Australian journalists] because of an illicit drug bust, an arrest or criminal court case against a drug user, trafficker or manufacturer, or drug-related crime, with the implied consequence that drug use will lead to legal problems. (p. 103)

In addition, Hughes et al. (2010) found that, media portrayal of illicit drugs does influence youth attitudes about illicit drugs through the following ways: first, it increases their perceptions regarding the risks of illicit drugs; second, it reduces their perception of the acceptability of drugs; and third, it reduces the chance of future drug abuse among the youth. Most importantly, the study found that the change in the youth perception about illegal drugs was mainly due to media's reporting on the negative health and social consequences of drug use. In other words, media portrayal of health and social consequences of illicit drugs was far more effective in changing youth's attitudes against drugs than the dominant arrest and crime portrayal. On the one hand, this finding highlights the importance of media reporting on health and social consequences of illicit drugs and its pivotal role in changing public perception against the illicit drugs. On the other hand, the finding indicates media's inability in maintaining balance in reporting on various aspects of the illicit drugs. For instance, Hughes et al. (2010) found that nearly 70% of the total news articles in the Australian media depicted drugs as a law enforcement and criminal justice-related issue, which included legal actions against the drug users or drug traffickers and so on, while only 14.2% of the articles discussed the drug-related health problems, and 10.1% of the articles highlighted the social consequences of drug abuse. According to Hughes et al. (2010), this study revealed that, the drug-related issues "are not depicted in a heterogeneous manner" (p. 50). Moreover, Hughes et al. (2010) conclude:

In general, the health and social harm portrayals were far more effective than the dominant law enforcement portrayal at reducing pro-drug attitudes. The irony was that the health and social portrayals were the least represented in the sample of Australian news media. (pp.113-114)

In order to determine the number of sources used in the news stories on illicit drugs, Hughes et al. (2010) found that, “the vast majority of articles in the sample cited sources, with 80.5% of the articles using at least one source” (p. 53). Moreover, 38.5% of the articles cited only one source, while 21.6 % of articles used two sources, and 20.2% of news stories cited three or more sources. Interestingly, 19.5% of news stories on illicit drugs did not cite a source. Importantly, nearly 50% of the articles on illicit drugs predominantly cited law enforcement sources such as police, the legal profession or judiciary, a trend which Hughes et al. (2010) consider “the marginalization of other types of sources” (p.105). Furthermore, Hughes et al. (2010) contend:

This provides clear evidence of the marginalization of other types of sources and reinforces what Beckett (1994, p. 429) has argued, namely that the inequality in media reporting is “exacerbated by the reliance of the media on ‘institutional’ sources” and by the privileging of these sources in terms of “access to the media,” to the exclusion of alternate sources. (p. 105)

Moreover, Hughes et al. (2010) found that 11.5% of the articles cited a drug addict and 4.9% of the articles citing a health worker.

In addition to influencing public attitudes and raising public awareness regarding illicit drugs media can also play an important role in reforming drug policies. For instance, in the mid-1980s the news media played a key role in influencing Australian government’s decision to endorse and expand methadone treatment, as the most effective mechanism, for addressing drug abuse and drug-related crime (McArthur, 1999).

The above-mentioned studies, particularly in Brazil and Australia, provide us with useful insights into various shortcomings that exist in media reporting on illicit drug issues globally. However, many of the above-mentioned questions regarding media’s reporting on illicit drugs remain unanswered in Afghanistan, which lies at the heart of the global drug problem. Given the extent, complexity, and the multi-faceted nature of the drug problem in Afghanistan, the researcher believes

that Afghan media may have a similar scenario in depicting the illicit drug issues, but such claim can never be made unless a scholarly research is conducted in this regard. Therefore, this study tries to fill this gap in the literature.

Research questions

After exploring the existing literature about the illicit drug problem of Afghanistan, as well as understanding the pivotal role of the news media and the theories of agenda setting and framing in influencing public opinion and policy-making regarding illicit drugs, this study is aimed at addressing the following four research questions:

RQ 1: What drug related topics are covered in the Afghan media?

RQ 2: How are the drug-related topics covered in the Afghan news media?

RQ 3: How do the Afghan media depict the health and social consequences of drug abuse?

RQ 4: How much space or time do the Afghan news media devote to stories about illicit drugs?

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter briefly explains content analysis and the rationale for using it to conduct this study. In addition, the chapter presents the step-by-step process of the content analysis employed in this study.

Research method

The researcher employed the content analysis method for this study because it has been described as the most appropriate approach for measuring the media agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Keyton, 2011; Macnamara, 2005). According to Dearing and Rogers (1996), “content analysis is the quantification of meaning in documents. Meaning may be both manifest (that is, obvious), or latent (implied or inferred)” (p. 35). In addition, Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p.18). Historically, it was Berelson (1952) who first defined content analysis as

“a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (as cited in Krippendorff, 2004, p.19). So far, scholars have not agreed on a unified definition for content analysis (Wesley, 2009). As previously mentioned, some scholars such as Berelson (1952), describe content analysis as a quantitative approach while others such as Krippendorff (2004), question the importance of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Krippendorff (2004) argues, “Ultimately, all reading of texts is qualitative, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers” (p.16). In addition, some scholars, such as Wright (1986), argue that content analysis can be either quantitative or qualitative, or both. Moreover, Wright (1986) states, “content analysis is a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories. It may involve quantitative or qualitative analysis, or both” (as cited in Berger, 2011, pp. 205-206).

In quantitative content analysis, scholars tend to convert text into numbers and percentages while in qualitative content analysis scholars usually focus on examining the meaning of the text (Wesley, 2009). Scholars suggest conducting both qualitative and quantitative content analysis in order to understand the full meaning of the text and make valid inferences about the potential impact of the media content (Hansen et al., 1998; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, as cited in Macnamara, 2005).

Similarly, this study employed both qualitative and quantitative content analyses. Quantitative content analysis was used to find out what drug-related topics are covered in the media and how much time and space are allocated to these topics, while qualitative content analysis was used to find out how the two media outlets depict the consequences of illicit drugs/use in the news. In other words, quantitative content analysis was employed to convert textual information regarding illicit drugs into numbers, graphs, and percentages, while qualitative content analysis was used to examine the meaning of the text and make valid inferences about its potential impact on audiences (Wesley, 2009).

Sampling

The researcher selected two media outlets, Azadi Radio and Tolo TV for this research. The selection was based on the following criteria: 1) the medium must be highly popular among the general public and must have nationwide reach; 2) the medium must broadcast in one of the two official languages of Afghanistan (Dari or Pashto). Both of the selected media fall under the above-mentioned criteria. Both Azadi Radio and Tolo TV are among the most popular media outlets in Afghanistan. Azadi Radio covers around 50% of the population (SIGAR, 2011), while Tolo TV is the most popular TV channel covering 45% of the population and broadcasting mainly in the Dari language (Altai, 2010). Specifically, this study examined only the primetime news coverage of the two media outlets, 7:00 a.m. Pashto news bulletin of Azadi Radio (Paul T. Tibbitts, personal communication, February 14, 2012) and 6:00 p.m. Dari news bulletin of Tolo News (Altai, 2010). In addition, the study examined only five-months news coverage of Azadi Radio and Tolo TV, starting from 1st March 2011- 31st July 2011, because this time period covers the opium harvest and post-harvest season in southern Afghanistan. Generally, the harvest season of opium poppy cultivation in southern Afghanistan starts in late March and ends in May, while post-harvest season of opium poppy cultivation starts in June (Martin Raithelhuber, personal communication, February 16, 2012). Exploring media coverage during harvest and post-harvest season is important in understanding trends and variations in media reporting on illicit drug issues.

Data collection procedure

One of the strengths of content analysis is that the data for research can be easily obtained (Berger, 2011). The data for this study was already available online. Azadi Radio has an online archive for all its primetime newscasts available at: (<http://pa.azadiradio.org/ondemand/latest.html>), while all primetime newscasts of Tolo TV can be downloaded from the YouTube website (www.youtube.com). First, the researcher downloaded all 306 news clips (153 for Azadi Radio and 153 for Tolo TV), which

were broadcast from 1st March 2011 - 31st July 2011. Each 7:00 a.m. news bulletin of Azadi Radio is 30 minutes long, while the news clips for Tolo TV ranges from 13 minutes – 28 minutes. The reason for this difference in air time is that the short news clips include only national news, while the longer clips include all news including international, business, and sports news. According to Lotfullah Najafizada, Head of Current Affairs of Tolo TV, international, business, and sports news have been broadcast from the beginning but due to technical issues some of the news clips had not been uploaded in full on YouTube (personal communication, March 14, 2012).

The researcher listened to and viewed all of these news clips and identified 109 news stories that contained one or more mention of any of the following Pashto and Dari terms, which are used for illicit drugs: *Neshaie Toki*, *Mowad-e-Mukhadar*, *Khash-khash*, *Koknar*, *Taryak*, *Heroin*, and *Chars*. The two terms, *Neshaie Toki* and *Mowad-e-Mukhadar*, are used for illicit drugs in Pashto and Dari respectively, while the terms *Khash-khash* and *Koknar* are used for opium poppy in Dari and Pashto. Similarly, the term *Taryak* means opium in Dari, while the term *Chars* means hashish or cannabis in both Dari and Pashto. All of these 109 news stories were first transcribed and simultaneously translated into English. This method used here has been informed by Hughes et al. (2010) who examined drug-related coverage in the Australian print media.

News story selection

In order to exclude stories from the sample where illicit drugs were not the subject of the story and were also not mentioned at the beginning of the story (Hughes et al., 2010), a second sampling of the data was conducted using the following criteria:

- 1) Any news story that included one or more mention of the following terms: drugs, opium, heroin, poppy, cannabis, and hashish in its first or second paragraph. More specifically, if the story might be introduced by an anchor and then continued by a reporter, in this case, any story that contained any of the abovementioned terms in its introduction, or in the first two

paragraphs of the reporting were included in the sample (Slater, Long, & Ford, 2006).

- 2) Another criterion for selecting news stories was that illicit drugs must be either the primary focus of the news story, or the secondary focus of the story, which means that the story might be focusing on another issue but mentions drugs as an important contributing factor (Hughes et al., 2010).
- 3) Finally, the news story must highlight issues that relate to Afghanistan's drug problem only.

Based on the abovementioned criteria, a sub-sample of 74 news stories were identified for content analysis. This sample included 41 news stories from Azadi Radio and 33 stories from Tolo TV. The 41 news stories that were broadcast by Azadi Radio were comprised of 30 news stories, 4 SMS news reports that were sent by listeners to Azadi Radio, and 7 editorial articles. The editorial articles were taken from the following international media outlets: *The Economist*, *Foreign Policy*, *Eurasiareview*, *National Interest*, *The Independent*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Unitizing the data

After downloading, transcribing, translating, and selecting data for content analysis, the researcher went through the data several times in order to get a general sense of the information (Creswell, 2009). This process helped the researcher to understand the relations between the data, the theories of agenda setting and framing, and the research questions (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Using the relevance-sampling technique the researcher looked for text that could provide the best answers for the research questions. According to Krippendorff (2004), relevance sampling "aims at selecting all textual units that contribute to answering given research questions" (p.119).

Story topic

First, in order to identify what drug-related topics are covered in the sample, each news story was considered as a unit of analysis (Hughes et al., 2010), and afterwards, the researcher read the

beginning of each story to determine which illicit drug-related topic was emphasized the most. The beginning of each story included the first two paragraphs of the story or if the story was introduced by an anchor and then continued by a reporter, in that case, the first two paragraphs of the reporter (Slater et al., 2006). The researcher used this technique to find out the story theme because, according to Slater et al. (2006), “the beginning of a typical media story acts as a strong organizing element for the story” (p. 3). In doing so, the researcher discovered the following four main themes: interdiction; eradication; alternative livelihoods, and demand reduction. Subsequently, in order to determine whether each of the news stories is focusing on one of the above-mentioned topics or if it includes more than one topic, the researcher went through each of the news story and coded all stories that had included more than one topic (Long, Slater, & Lysengen, 2006).

Furthermore, given that a balance approach between supply reduction and demand reduction is key to tackling drug production and consumption (Chouvy, 2010; UN, 1998), recent research suggests that media also need to maintain balance in covering both supply reduction and demand reduction issues (Belackova et al., 2011). Therefore, all topics covering supply reduction and demand reduction issues in the sample were explored and compared to each other for further discussion.

Framing illicit drugs

Second, in order to find out how the media frame the consequences of illicit drugs/use, each paragraph was considered as a unit of analysis (Devitt, 2002; Fish, Recksiek, & Fan, 2002), and then it was coded for determining legal, social, and health-related consequences of illicit drugs/use (Hughes et al., 2011). Previous research has showed that each news story can have more than one frame; therefore, “the use of paragraphs allows one to detect multiple frames in a single story as well as their frequency” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1996, as cited in Devitt, 2002, p. 451). The aim to explore the consequences of illicit drugs/use was to examine whether Afghan news media pay equal attention to the socio-health consequences of illicit drugs and the legal consequences of illicit drugs. Maintaining this balance is

important because it is the health and social consequences of drug use that play key role in raising public awareness on drug abuse and creating anti-drug attitudes (Hughes et al., 2010).

It is worth noting that the entire coding⁷ process was carried out both manually as well as via using NVivo 9.0 software. The next chapter reports and analyzes the findings of this study and provides answers for the research questions.

Chapter Four: Results and Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the thesis first by addressing the research questions and then through an explanation for the focus of the news stories in the sample; an examination of the placement of the drug stories in the newscasts; an account of the total time devoted to drug-related stories in the news; an analysis of trends and variations in media reporting on illicit drug issues during opium harvest and post-harvest season in Afghanistan; an examination of source bias in media coverage of illicit drug issues; and an analysis of the geographical imbalance in media reporting on illicit drugs in Afghanistan. To review, the research questions for this study included the following:

RQ 1: What drug related topics are covered in the Afghan media?

RQ 2: How are the drug-related topics covered in the Afghan news media?

RQ 3: How do the Afghan media depict the health and social consequences of drug abuse?

RQ 4: How much space or time do the Afghan news media devote to stories about illicit drugs?

Below the researcher provides answers to these research questions:

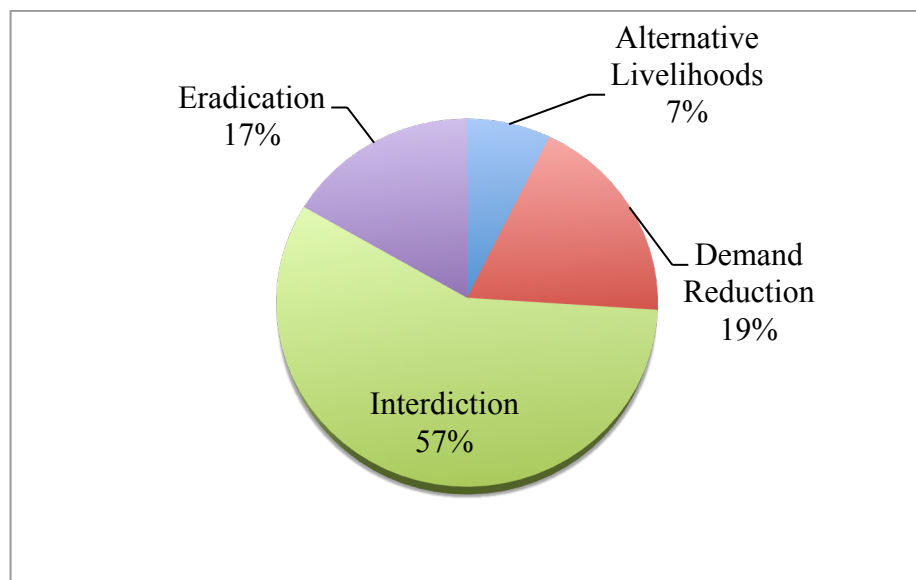
What drug related topics are covered in the Afghan media?

A detailed analysis of the 74 news stories found that all drug-related issues covered in the two media outlets were comprised of the following four main topics: drug trafficking/ interdiction, poppy

⁷ For the coding schedule, kindly refer to Appendix A. *[The design of the coding schedule was learned from Hughes et al. (2010), who had taken from: (Kohring & Matthes, 2002; Matthes & Kohring, 2008, as cited in Hughes et al., 2010, p. 33)].*

eradication, alternative livelihoods, and drug demand reduction issues. Specifically, as illustrated in Figure 5, the research found that 55 news stories (57%) had covered topics concerning the interdiction of illicit drugs, which mainly include issues such as, the problem of drug trafficking, drug seizures, destruction of the drug factories, and arrest of the drug dealers by the law enforcement agencies. Similarly, the research found that 18 news stories (19%) included topics regarding drug abuse, lack of healthcare for the drug addicts, and stories on various sport games aimed at drug abuse prevention. In other words, 18 stories were found to have covered topics that were associated with drug demand reduction issue. Moreover, 16 news stories (17%) were found covering topics related to opium poppy eradication. Furthermore, 7 stories (7%) were found to have covered topics related to providing alternative livelihoods to poppy growing farmers. It is worth noting that the total number of stories covering the above-mentioned four major topics exceeds the total number of stories (74) under study, because some of the stories had covered more than one topic (Long et al., 2006).

Figure 5: Drug-related topics covered in the media



How are the drug-related topics covered in the Afghan news media?

The following sub-sections provide detailed explanation of each drug-related topic covered in the two media outlets:

1. Topics on drug trafficking or the interdiction of illicit drugs

Tackling drug trade and the interdiction of illicit drugs is the number one national priority of Afghanistan's Drug Control Strategy (MCN, 2006). Similarly, the two media outlets had also paid significant attention to this area by broadcasting 55 news stories (57%) on issues concerning drug trafficking and the interdiction of the illicit drugs. This study found that 40 stories (41%) were predominantly focusing on issues concerning drug trafficking and the interdiction of illicit drugs, while the remaining 15 stories (16%) had partially discussed drug trafficking/interdiction issues and included other topics such as alternative livelihoods, drug demand reduction, and poppy eradication. For example, the following is the beginning of a news story broadcast by Tolo TV on April 5, 2011. The main focus of the story is the interdiction of illicit drugs by the law enforcement agencies.

Broadcast by: Tolo TV on April 5, 2011

<i>Time</i>	<i>Script</i>	<i>Speaker/Title</i>
06:14:15 p.m. To 06:14:36 p.m.	<i>More than 620 Afghan drug traffickers were arrested and punished over the past one year. According to the Afghan Judicial Centre for Counter-narcotics, the arrested drug traffickers were mostly from Helmand, Kandahar, Herat and Nangarhar provinces. The head of Afghan judicial centers says that security forces have also seized more than 40,000 kg of drugs.</i>	<i>Shuja Zaki, The Anchor.</i>

2. Alternative livelihoods and poppy eradication

Providing Afghan farmers with viable alternative livelihoods, in order to abandon opium poppy cultivation, is the second national priority of Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy (MCN, 2006). However, this study found that topics covering alternative livelihoods issues received the least amount of media coverage with only 7 stories (7%) discussing alternative livelihoods topics, often in a superficial manner. Only one news story from Kandahar had alternative livelihoods issue as its main focus. In addition, an SMS story sent by a listener to Azadi Radio highlighted alternative livelihoods as its main issue. However, the story from Kandahar was not entirely related to alternative livelihoods but it also included other topics such as poppy eradication and the interdiction of illicit drugs. Similarly, the

remaining five stories had partially covered alternative livelihoods and included other topics such as poppy eradication, interdiction of illicit drugs, or drug demand reduction. These findings suggest that the two news outlets have paid considerably less attention to one of the most needed approaches in reducing opium poppy cultivation, which if provided sufficiently, may turn away 98% of the farmers from growing opium poppy in Afghanistan (Rubin & Sherman, 2008; UNODC, 2007). For example, the following is the beginning of the story that mainly focused on alternative livelihoods. The story was broadcast by Azadi Radio on March 13, 2011.

Broadcast by: Azadi Radio on March 13, 2011

<i>Time</i>	<i>Script</i>	<i>Speaker/Title</i>
07:16:23 a.m. To 07:16:50 a.m.	<i>Minister of Counter Narcotics and the Minister of Agriculture and Livestock announced that they would be launching the food zone program in Kandahar. The ministers said they would be providing farmers with purified seeds and chemical fertilizer, as an alternative livelihood for farmers who cultivate poppies. Minister of Counter Narcotics, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, and Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development visited Kandahar yesterday. They met officials and local residents.</i>	<i>Esmat Sarwan, The Presenter.</i>

Interestingly, on the other hand, poppy eradication, which many scholars contend is ineffective and even counterproductive without the provision of sustainable alternative livelihoods to farmers (Mansfield & Pain, 2006; Rubin & Sherman, 2008), received more than double of the media coverage compared to topics on alternative livelihoods. There were 16 news stories (17%) on poppy eradication issues, with some reports covering several other topics as well. For example, the following is the beginning of a story focusing on poppy eradication. The story was broadcast by Tolo TV on June 11, 2011.

Broadcast by: Tolo TV on June 11, 2011

<i>Time</i>	<i>Script</i>	<i>Speaker/Title</i>
06:10:30 p.m. To 06:10:48 p.m.	<i>In an operation aimed at eradicating poppy crops in LalPura and Mohmand districts of Nangrahar province by Afghan security forces, 12 insurgents have been killed. The police chief of Nangrahar province says that during the operation, one policeman was also killed and five others have been injured.</i>	<i>Shuja Zaki, The Anchor.</i>

3. Drug demand reduction

With more than 90% of the drug addicts lacking healthcare, drug demand reduction and the treatment of drug addicts is the third national priority of Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy (MCN, 2006; UNODC, 2009). The research identified 18 stories (19%) that had either fully or partially covered topics related to drug demand reduction issues. The stories included topics, such as drug abuse, lack of healthcare for drug addicts, and stories on various sport games such as football, cricket, and so on. The sport games were launched to prevent drug abuse among youth. Interestingly, in the entire sample, only one news story from Kandahar and an SMS news report sent by a listener to Azadi Radio (also from Kandahar) covered drug abuse as their main focus. Both of the news reports primarily focused on the increase in the number of drug addicts in Kandahar and the lack of healthcare for the drug addicts. Kandahar, like many parts of the country, has seen an alarming rise in drug abuse cases. According to the Ministry of Public Health, the number of drug addicts in Kandahar has increased five-fold since 2003, reaching 100,000 (as cited in UNAMA, 2012). Interestingly, it is worth noting that the only news story on drug abuse was not entirely devoted to drug abuse but it had also covered issues concerning poppy eradication. Moreover, 7 stories (8%) were simply sports news covering mostly games that were played under the title of drug abuse prevention among youth. In other words, the main focus of the news reports was sports – not the illicit drugs/use. The remaining stories mostly focused on other topics such as drug trafficking, eradication, or alternative livelihoods, and highlighted drug abuse and the lack of healthcare for drug addicts in a very peripheral manner, mostly at the end of the story. For instance, the following paragraph is taken from a story broadcast by Tolo TV on June 6, 2011. The story is mainly focusing on opium poppy cultivation and drug trafficking while it mentions drug abuse and the lack of healthcare for drug addicts in its last paragraph.

Broadcast by: Tolo TV on June 6, 2011

<i>Time</i>	<i>Script</i>	<i>Speaker/Title</i>
06:09:07 p.m. To 06:09:18 p.m.	<i>According to the Ministry of Counter Narcotics, while there are around one million drug addicts in the country, only one percent of them have access to healthcare.</i>	<i>Syed Sharif Amiri, The Reporter.</i>

Similarly, another story that was broadcast by Tolo TV on June 25, 2011 mentioned the issue of drug abuse in its last paragraph. The story's main focus is to highlight the government's failures in tackling drug trade and opium poppy cultivation. The following paragraph is the last paragraph of the story, where it discusses the issue of drug abuse and healthcare for the drug addicts.

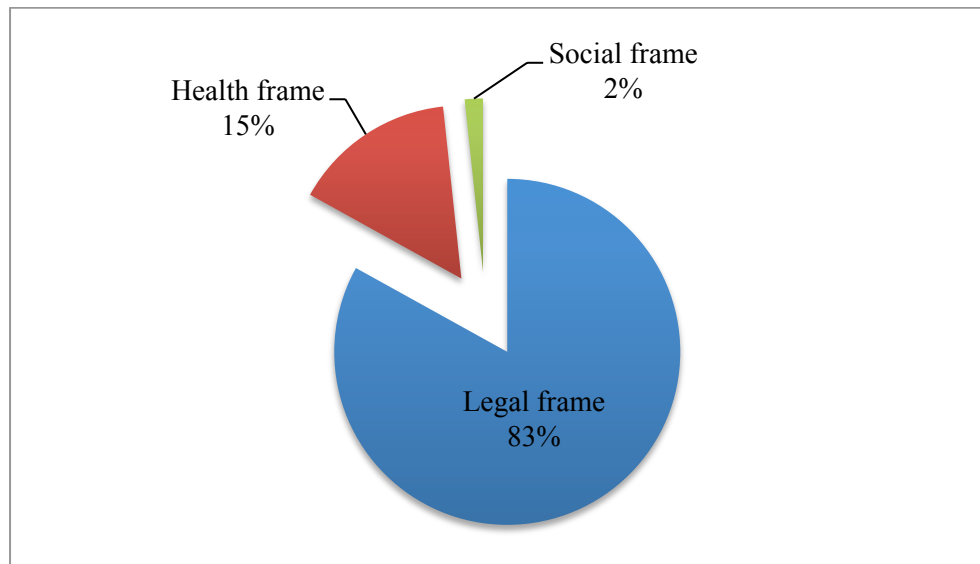
Broadcast by: Tolo TV on June 25, 2011

<i>Time</i>	<i>Script</i>	<i>Speaker/Title</i>
06:18:06 p.m. To 06:18:19 p.m.	<i>Currently, there are nine million drug addicts in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. In Afghanistan, which has around one million drug addicts, only 10,000 of drug addicts have access to healthcare.</i>	<i>Tamim Hamid, The Reporter</i>

How do the Afghan media depict the health and social consequences of drug abuse?

Research has found that the media's portrayal of health and social consequences of drug abuse plays a significant role in raising public awareness and drug abuse prevention (Hughes et al., 2010). Therefore, all paragraphs of the sample that discuss the consequences of illicit drugs/use were coded using each paragraph as the unit of analysis (Devitt, 2002; Fish et al., 2002).

As illustrated in Figure 6, this study found that, in 83% of the paragraphs that were coded in the sample, illicit drugs were framed as a law enforcement issue, with the implied consequences that drug abuse causes legal problems.

Figure 6: Framing the consequences of drugs/use

On the other hand, only 15% of the paragraphs in the sample framed illicit drugs as a health issue resulting in addiction. Moreover, 2% of the paragraphs highlighted the social consequences of drug abuse such as drug-related violence, which included theft or murder by the drug addicts.

These findings suggest a significant imbalance in media framing of socio-health and legal consequences of drugs/use. The following examples highlight how the two media outlets framed the health consequences of illicit drugs. The paragraph below is taken from a story, which was broadcast by Azadi Radio on April 19, 2011.

Broadcast by: Azadi Radio on April 19, 2011

<i>Time</i>	<i>Script</i>	<i>Speaker/Title</i>
07:29:53 a.m. To 07:30:03 a.m.	<i>Some analysts say that the slow pace of the counter narcotics efforts in Afghanistan has led to an increase in drug addiction and the country is now coping with around one million drug addicts.</i>	<i>Zakia Ghiasi, The Reporter</i>

Similarly, an SMS story that was sent by a listener from Kandahar on May 13, 2011 to Azadi Radio also highlights the issue of drug abuse.

Broadcast by: Azadi Radio on May 13, 2011

<i>Time</i>	<i>Script</i>	<i>Speaker/Title</i>
07:29:30 a.m. To 07:29:49 a.m.	<i>The number of drug addicts and heroin users is increasing day by day in Kandahar. Why the Ministry of Public Health does not establish health centers for treating these drug addicts and why the Ministry of Interior does not take firm steps for preventing opium poppy cultivation.</i>	<i>Esmat Sarwan, the reporter reads the SMS message sent by Abdullah from Kandahar.</i>

Also, the following paragraph is taken from a story broadcast by Tolo TV on July 30, 2011 and highlights the health consequences of illicit drugs/use.

Broadcast by: Tolo TV on July 30, 2011

<i>Time</i>	<i>Script</i>	<i>Speaker/Title</i>
06:06:45 p.m. To 06:06:58 p.m.	<i>According to the UNODC report, there are 16.5 million drug addicts worldwide, who consume 375 tons of heroin each year, among which 150 tons of heroin is consumed in Europe only.</i>	<i>Mohammad Rafi Sadiquie, The Reporter.</i>

Interestingly, there was only one paragraph in the entire sample linking illicit drugs use with HIV/AIDS. Fueled by the growing injection drug use, HIV/AIDS is one of the most important public health issues in Afghanistan (Rubin & Rahimi, 2011; Saif-ur-Rehman et al., 2007). Moreover, none of the paragraphs in the entire sample mentioned other health-related consequences of drug abuse such as hepatitis B or C, or any death due to drug abuse/overdose. Similarly, none of the paragraphs in the entire sample mentioned other social consequences of drug abuse such as lost productivity, marginalization, or family breakdown (Hughes et al., 2010; Lyman & Potter, 2011). Interestingly, there was only one paragraph in the entire sample highlighting the social factors of drug abuse in Afghanistan such as poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment.

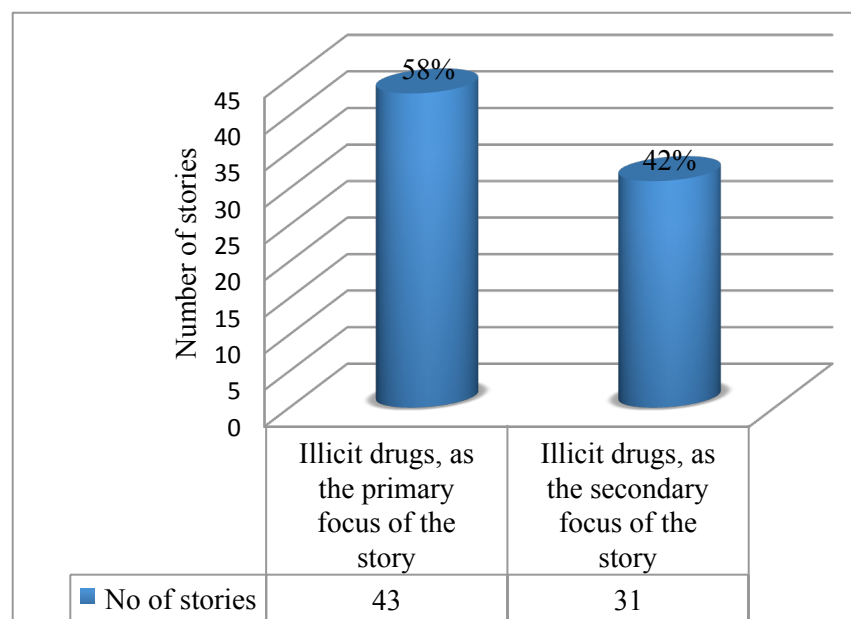
Focus of the news stories

Given that news media often tend to mention illicit drug issues in a peripheral manner (Hughes et al., 2010), it was necessary to examine the Afghan news media's approach to covering illicit drug

issues. Similarly, this study found that illicit drugs were not the primary focus of all the 74 news stories in the sample. Out of the total 41 stories broadcast by Azadi Radio, 29 stories (71%) highlighted illicit drugs as their main focus. Likewise, out of the total 33 stories broadcast by Tolo TV, only 14 news stories (42%) had illicit drugs as their primary focus. These findings suggest that Azadi Radio had more stories that had illicit drug issues as its primary focus than Tolo TV had during the five-month period.

As illustrated in Figure 7, overall in the sample, 43 stories (58%) had covered illicit drugs as their primary focus, while the remaining 31 stories (42%) covered illicit drugs as the secondary focus of the story.

Figure 7: Focus of the news stories

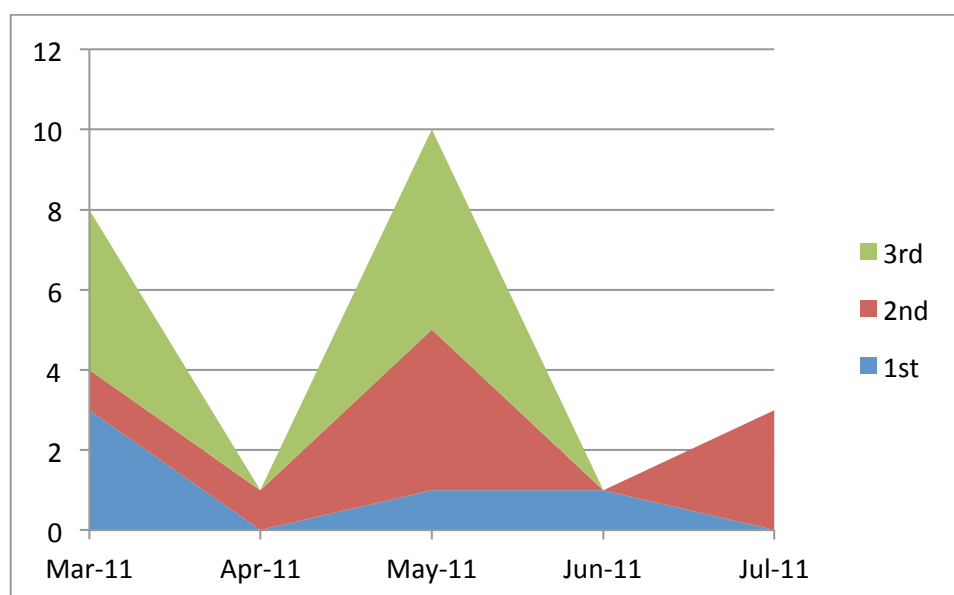


In other words, illicit drug issues were the primary focus of 43 stories while the remaining 31 stories were primarily focusing on other topics such as terrorism and insecurity with the mention of illicit drugs as an important contributing factor to the aforementioned issues.

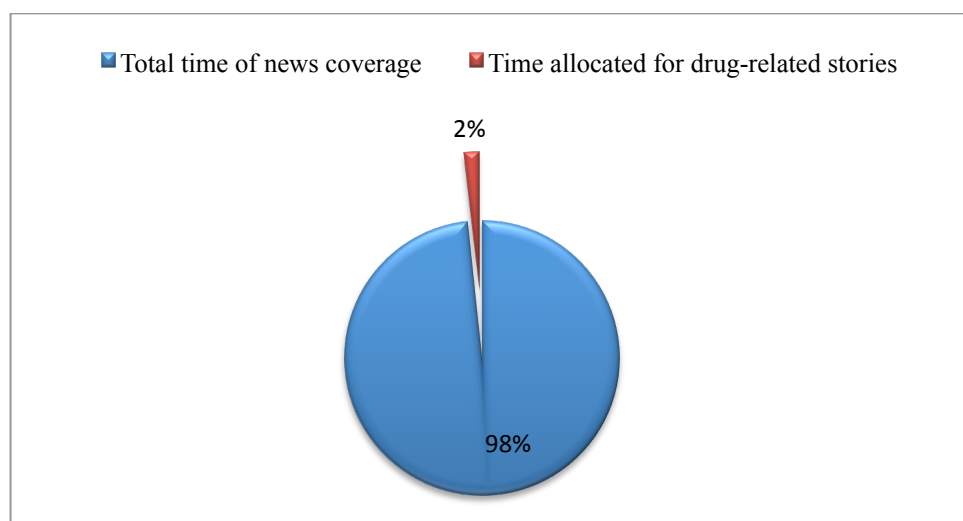
Position of the drug-related stories in the newscasts

The more media give importance to an issue the more the issue becomes important among the public. Importance depends where the media place the story in the news, how frequently the media reflect on the story, and how much time is devoted to the story (McCombs, 2004). Therefore, it is important to explore whether the two media outlets under investigation had placed the drug-related stories in the headlines, and if they had, how frequently and where in the headline. Focusing on the monthly coverage, this study found that in March 2011, both Azadi Radio and Tolo TV had three news stories in the first position in the headline; one story in the second position; and four stories in the third position. In April 2011, both media outlets had no story in the first position in the headline; one story in the second position; and no story in the third place. In May 2011, both outlets had one story in the first position; four in the second position; and five stories were placed in the third position. In June 2011, both outlets had included only one story in the first position; and had no stories in the second and third positions of the headline. In July 2011, the media outlets had only three stories in the second position of the headline and had no story in the first and third position.

As illustrated in Figure 8, there was a spike in media attention to drug-related stories in May and then a decline in June, something future research may better explain. However, interestingly, the spike in media attention in May corresponds with the harvest season of opium in southern Afghanistan, while the decline in media attention happens in June when the post-harvest season of opium in southern Afghanistan begins. Furthermore, the findings would be more understandable if there was previous research, to which it could have been compared.

Figure 8: Position of stories in the newscasts**Time allocated for drug-related stories**

As illustrated in Figure 9, this study found that security and political issues dominate Afghan news coverage and drug-related stories make only 2% (2h:09min:24sec) of the total five-months news coverage (126h:47min:37sec) of the two media outlets. Moreover, the research found that both Azadi Radio and Tolo TV broadcast an average of 15 stories on illicit drugs each month, which translates into one story on drugs every two days.

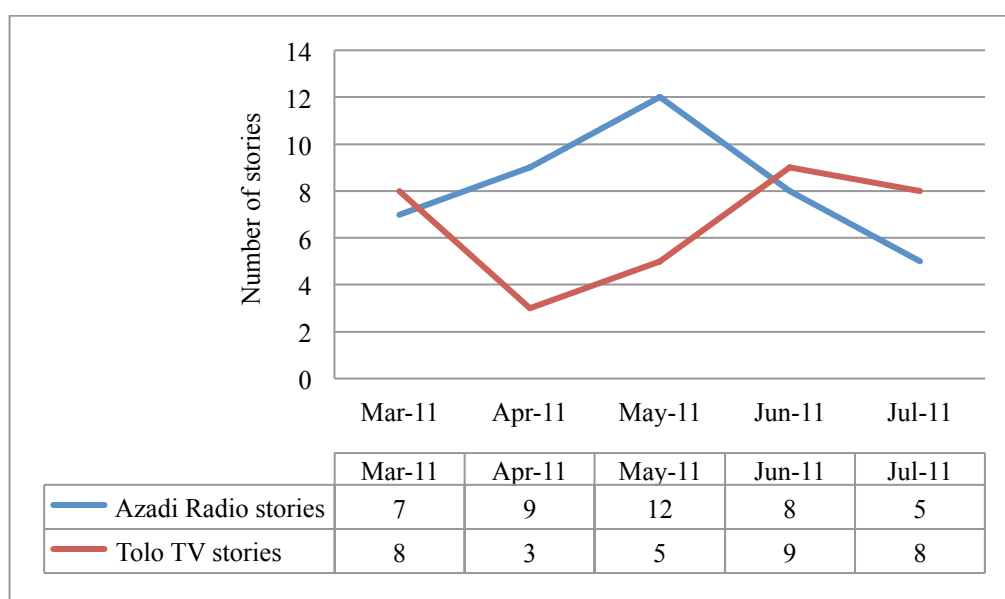
Figure 9: Time allocated for drug-related stories

Given the magnitude of the drug problem and that Afghanistan lies at the heart of the global drug tragedy, this finding indicates an insignificant amount of coverage of drug-related issues in the Afghan media. For example, in Australia, in a broader research, Hughes et al. (2010) found that Australian media had covered 19 articles on illicit drugs per day. Furthermore, this study found that both media channels, Tolo TV and Azadi radio, had allocated nearly equal time for covering illicit drug issues, with Tolo TV allocating 1h:06min:23sec (51%) and Azadi Radio devoting 1h:03min:01sec (49%).

Trends in media reporting on illicit drugs

As previously mentioned, one of the aims of this study was to explore whether media reporting on illicit drug issues has any relationship with opium harvest and post-harvest seasons in southern Afghanistan. Interestingly, as demonstrated in Figure 10, this study found a spike in media coverage of drug issues in May 2011, which corresponds with the opium harvest season in southern Afghanistan. It was found that the spike in media reporting on illicit drug issues in May was primarily caused by Azadi Radio, broadcasting 12 stories on drug issues, the highest number of reports the outlet had broadcast in a month in the sample.

Figure 10: Monthly trends in media reporting on illicit drugs

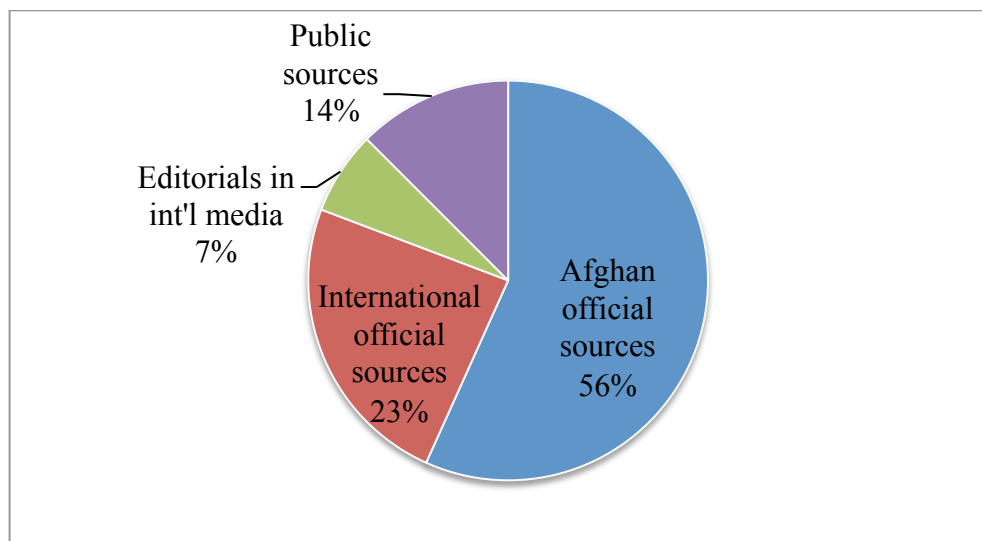


Interestingly, five of the stories broadcast by Azadi Radio were linked to illicit drug issues in southern Afghanistan. It could be assumed that an increase in media coverage of illicit drug issues could potentially increase the likelihood of drug-related stories being included in the headlines. However, a broader research with a more representative sample is required to explain the main reasons for the above variations in media reporting on illicit drugs in Afghanistan.

Imbalance in media's selection of news sources

News source plays a central role in determining how a story portrays an issue (Lin, Lo, & Wang, 2011). Research has found that journalists often tend to “treat ‘official sources’ such as government officials [...] as the most objective, credible, and accessible sources, and thus cite them most frequently” (Adkins Covert & Wasburn, 2009; McQuail, 1992, as cited in Lin et al., 2011, p. 296). Similarly, Hughes et al. (2010) found that nearly 50% of the total sources cited in the news stories regarding illicit drugs were from the law enforcement and criminal justice agencies. Hughes et al. (2010) called this trend “the marginalization of other types of sources” (p. 105). Therefore, it is important to explore which types of sources the Afghan media most frequently cite when it comes to covering the illicit drug issues. Accordingly, as demonstrated in Figure 11, this study found that all of the sources⁸ -- discussing illicit drugs in the sample -- were comprised of Afghan government officials (56%), international officials (23%), followed by public sources (14%). International officials were mainly from UN, NATO, and officials from the neighboring/regional countries. Public sources included ordinary citizens, farmers, and tribal elders. Moreover, more than half of the Afghan official sources were from the law enforcement agencies and the Ministry of Counter Narcotics. In addition, the remaining 7% of the sources in the sample included editorial articles, which were taken from the following international media outlets: *The Economist*, *Foreign Policy*, *Eurasiareview*, *National Interest*, *The Independent*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

⁸ This study focused only on sources that specifically discuss illicit drug issues, to the exclusion of other sources in the sample as some of them discussed issues that were not related to illicit drugs.

Figure 11: Types of sources discussing illicit drugs.

In other words, 79% of the total sources used in the sample were from the Afghan and international officials, while 14% of the sources were from the general public followed by 7% editorials articles. Importantly, in the entire sample, only two farmers were cited and there was no voice from a drug addict, either male or female. Interestingly, there was not a single source from the Ministry of Public Health to talk about drug abuse or any other problem resulting from drug addiction in Afghanistan.

Region-wise media coverage of the illicit drug issues

Given that opium poppy cultivation is confined to a few regions in Afghanistan, the following section explores whether these regions have received adequate media coverage compared to areas that are less involved in opium poppy cultivation.

1. Southern region

Given that southern Afghanistan produces 84% of the total opium (UNODC, 2011) and also copes with an alarming number of drug addicts, it is important to explore whether the region has received relatively balanced media coverage of its drug issues, compared to other parts of the country. In the southern region, Helmand and Kandahar alone produce nearly 80% of the opium (UNODC, 2011) and the two provinces suffer from a rapidly growing number of drug addicts. In Kandahar alone,

according to the Ministry of Public Health, the number of drug addicts has increased five-fold since 2003, reaching 100,000 (as cited in UNAMA, 2012). Similarly, in Helmand, which produces 52% of the opium in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2011), the number of drug addicts has also reached 100,000 (Kendall, 2012). Helmand is also the largest opium-producing region across the globe (Kendall, 2012). However, this study found that, out of the total of 56 stories⁹, which were identified, to have been reported from various provinces¹⁰ of Afghanistan, only three stories (5%) were either fully or partially reported from Helmand province. Two stories were simply sport news covering sports games aimed at drug abuse prevention, or in other words, the stories were essentially about sports games in Helmand and not about the illicit drugs.

The third story was primarily focusing on drug trafficking and was reported from Kabul and had only some contents from Helmand regarding the interdiction of illicit drugs. In other words, none of the aforementioned three stories had Helmand's drug issues as their main focus. Similarly, only five stories (9%) were reported from Kandahar. Stories from Kandahar included: two stories regarding poppy eradication; two reports about the increase in drug abuse; and one story regarding alternative livelihoods and the interdiction of the illicit drugs. Moreover, there was no story from Uruzgan province, which makes 8% of the opium cultivated in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2011).

2. Central region

Interestingly, as illustrated in Figure 12, this study identified 31 stories (56%) that were reported from the capital Kabul alone, most of which had focused on official statements and press conferences about illicit drugs.

⁹ The remaining stories included editorial articles, which were taken from international press, and some other stories, which were mostly reported from outside of Afghanistan.

¹⁰ By reporting from provinces, I mean the reporter is physically in the province and cites local sources in his/her report about illicit drugs. For example, a report on a statement by the ministry of interior in Kabul about a counter narcotics operation in Helmand is reported from Kabul – not Helmand.

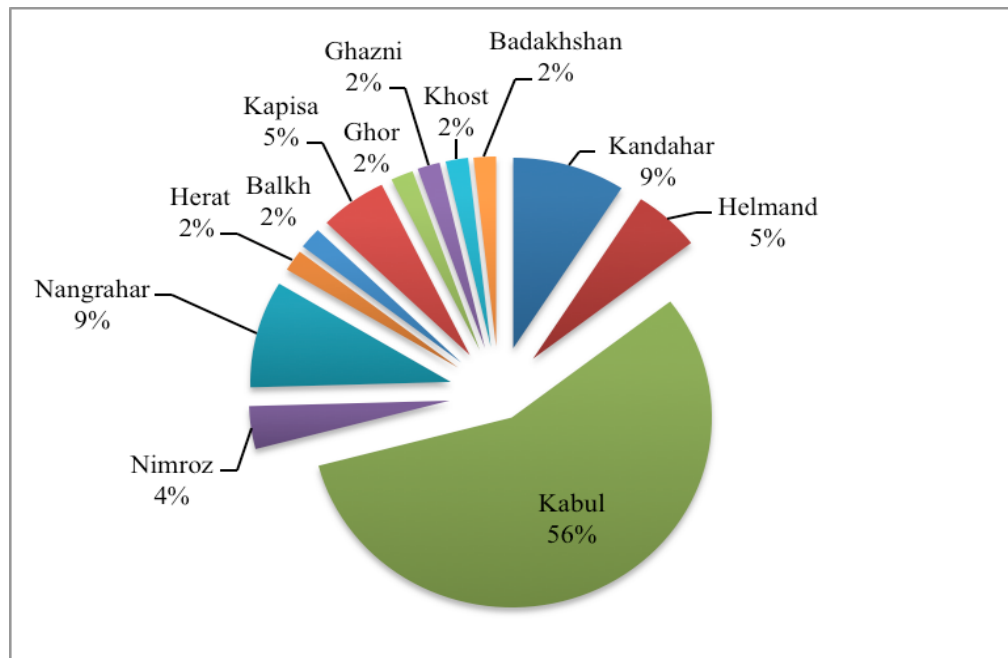


Figure 12: Region-wise media coverage of the illicit drug issues

Kabul province is nearly a poppy-free province producing only 0.2% of the opium in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2011). According to the UN estimates, there are 60,000 drug addicts in Kabul (as cited in Motlagh, 2011).

3. Western region

There were a total of four stories that were identified to have been reported from western Afghanistan. Two stories were reported from Nimroz province focusing on a football tournament aimed at drug abuse prevention. Nimroz's poppy cultivation makes 2% of the total opium cultivated in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2011). There was virtually no story from Farah province, which is the third largest opium-producing province cultivating 13% of the opium in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2011). Moreover, Ghor province had one story (2%) in the sample focusing on drug trafficking. Similarly, there was only one story (2%) from Herat province covering opium poppy eradication.

4. Eastern region

There were five stories (9%) from Nangrahar province in the sample. Nangrahar's poppy cultivation makes (2%) of the total opium poppy cultivated in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2011). However,

the province remains one of the major routes of drug trafficking to neighbouring Pakistan. The stories mainly focused on drug trafficking, interdiction and poppy eradication issues.

5. Northeastern region

There was only one story (2%) from Badakhshan province in the sample, which cultivates 1% of the opium poppy (UNODC, 2011) but, like Nangrahar, remains one of the major hubs of drug traffickers from where illicit drugs are trafficked to neighbouring Tajikistan (UNODC, 2009). The story mainly focused on drug trafficking and interdiction issues.

Furthermore, there were three reports (5%) from northern Kapisa province in the sample; one story (2%) from southeastern Khost province; one story (2%) from northern Balkh province; and one story (2%) from Ghazni province.

In summary, these findings indicate Afghan news media's coverage of drug issues is heavily centered in Kabul relying mostly on official sources/press conferences, and is paying considerably less attention to the provinces that are more severely affected by the illicit drugs/use such as southern Afghanistan.

The next chapter discusses these findings of the thesis and the implications they have for the current media discourse on illicit drugs as well as the drug policy in Afghanistan.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Based on the findings of the thesis, this chapter discusses the following topics: 1) the dominant media portrayal of illicit drug issues in the Afghan news media; 2) why the Afghan media are heavily focused on supply-reduction news while paying considerably less attention to the demand reduction side of the illicit drugs; 3) the shortcomings of the global supply reduction policy and why a more balanced approach of supply reduction and demand reduction interventions is essential for tackling illicit drugs; 4) the need for a balanced media coverage of illicit drug issues in Afghanistan; and finally,

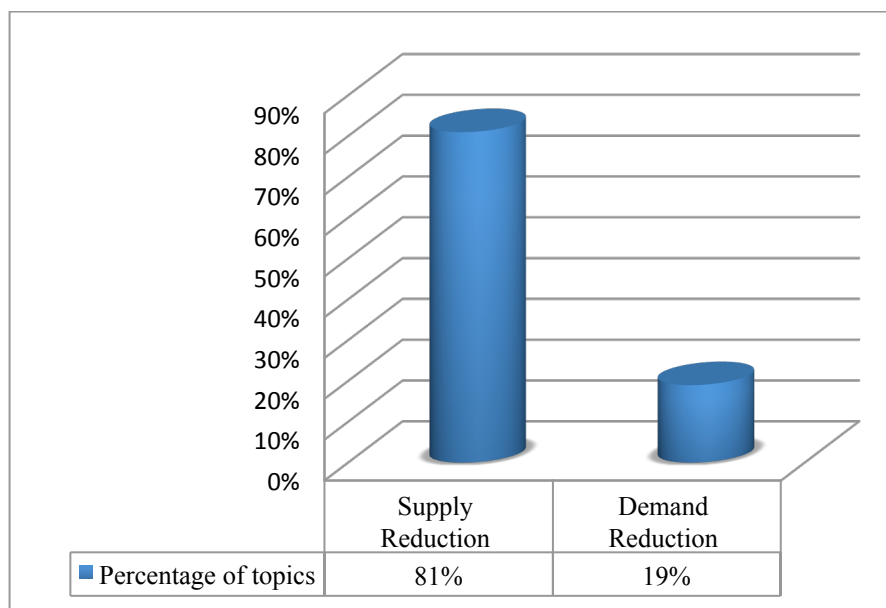
6) the role of Afghan media in raising public awareness about the link between HIV/AIDS and drug abuse in Afghanistan.

The dominant media portrayal of illicit drug issues

Exploring media coverage of illicit drug issues is important for understanding public perceptions about illicit drugs, drug abuse, and drug policies (Forsyth, 2001b; Korner & Treloar, 2004; Szmigin et al., 2008, as cited in Belackova et al., 2011). According to the agenda setting theory, the more media give importance to a topic in the news the more the topic becomes important among the general public (McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Importance depends on how frequently the media discuss the topic; where the media place the story; and how much time/space is devoted to the issue (McCombs, 2004). Similarly, Dearing and Rogers (1996) argue that, “the number of news stories measures the relative salience of an issue of study on the media agenda” (p.18). Overall, as illustrated in Figure 13, the thesis found that 81% of topics in the sample were devoted to drug supply reduction issues, such as opium poppy eradication, interdiction, and alternative livelihoods, while only 19% of topics in the sample focused on drug demand reduction issues, such as drug abuse and the lack of healthcare for the drug addicts. In other words, 81% of the media coverage on illicit drugs highlighted supply reduction interventions while 19% of the media coverage focused on demand reduction interventions. Drug supply reduction and demand reduction are two key approaches aimed at tackling illicit drugs/use. Existing research show that a balanced approach of drug demand reduction and supply reduction interventions is key to addressing the problem of illicit drugs/use (Chouvy, 2010; UN, 1998). Similarly, recent research suggests that media also need to maintain balance in covering illicit drug issues; this balanced coverage could play an important role in influencing public perceptions and shaping drug policies (Belackova et al., 2011; Christie, 1998; Gelders et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2010; Lancaster et al., 2010b). By focusing more on the law enforcement side of illicit drugs the Afghan media may be building public perception that is more supportive of a supply reduction policy.

As a result, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, and other health and social consequences of illicit drugs/use, which threaten the very fabric of the Afghan society, could further exacerbate, because they would continue to go unreported.

Figure 13: Supply reduction topics vs. demand reduction topics



Why are the Afghan media heavily focused on drug supply reduction issues?

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, 81% of the total topics covered by the two media outlets were devoted to supply reduction issues while only 19% of the topics highlighted demand reduction issues. Similarly, existing research show that TV and radio tend to focus more on broadcasting supply reduction news (Belackova et al., 2011). In a broader study in Australia, Hughes et al. (2010) found that in almost 70% of cases media reporting on illicit drugs was triggered by supply reduction issues, such as law enforcement and criminal justice actions against illicit drugs/use. Similarly, a landmark study in Brazil found that media professionals/owners had acknowledged that incidents of drug-related crime and illegality were the two main factors that contributed to the production of news articles on drugs (Mastroianni & Noto, 2008). Interestingly, according to Mastroianni and Noto (2008), the Brazilian media professionals/owners admitted that, “by instilling

fear among readers, newspapers and magazines tend to increase their audiences and/or sales” (p. 293). Afghan media may have a similar scenario but such claim cannot be made unless the owners/journalists are asked about their perspectives, a focus beyond the scope of this current thesis. Therefore, in Afghanistan, exploring the main factors contributing to the media coverage of supply reduction issues would certainly require separate research involving media owners and journalists. However, the most important factor that is potentially linked to more media coverage of supply reduction issues in Afghanistan could be media’s heavy reliance on official sources, particularly on law enforcement and criminal justice officials. As this thesis found that nearly 80% of the news sources used by the two media outlets were comprised of national and international officials who mostly focused on supply reduction issues. Interestingly, this thesis could not identify a single voice from a public health official or a drug addict in the entire sample to talk about the problem of drug addiction in Afghanistan.

In addition, supply reduction policy is at the core of both national and international counter narcotics agenda in Afghanistan (Maguet & Majeed, 2010; Todd et al., 2012). This idea could be better understood from the amount of funding allocated to supply reduction interventions compared to demand reduction programs. For example, as the largest donor of counter narcotics programs in Afghanistan, the U.S. allotted over 90% of its \$2.5 billion to supply reduction programs, such as eradication, interdiction, and the rule of law, while allocating only \$18 million (0.7%) for demand reduction programs, from 2005 to 2009 (GAO, 2010). Similarly, Afghan media have also treated drug demand reduction issues in this thesis, in the same manner. Nearly all topics covering demand reduction issues in the sample of this study were not only mentioned in a peripheral manner, but they were poorly sourced as well, lacking any citation from a public health practitioner or any voice of a drug addict, male or female. Emphasizing the importance of drug demand reduction interventions scholars such as Welch, Wolff, and Bryan (1998) argue, “In sum, the threat of illegal drugs has been socially constructed and reproduced (by politicians, the criminal justice establishment, and the media)

in ways that justify support of coercive strategies such as law enforcement and imprisonment” (p. 721). Citing Welch (1996a), the scholars contend, “As a result of this disproportionate investment in the criminal justice machinery, other, possibly more viable forms of intervention, including drug treatment and social (economic) reform, remain underutilized” (p.721).

Given the huge unmet need for drug treatment as well as the alarming increase in drug abuse in Afghanistan, Afghan media must pay equal attention to the health and social consequences of the illicit drugs/use and the law enforcement side of the illicit drugs. By paying equal attention to demand reduction and supply reduction issues, Afghan media may not only help influence the public opinion but it may also change the current policy agenda on illicit drugs.

The supply-reduction policy: How successful is this strategy?

Globally, drug supply reduction has been the cornerstone of anti-drug policies, especially since the launch of the war on drugs by the U.S. President Richard Nixon around four decades ago (Chouvy, 2010). The drug supply reduction policy is based on three pillars: eradication, interdiction, and the criminalization of drug abuse (Global Commission on Drug Policy, 2011). However, many scholars argue that the supply reduction strategy has failed to tackle illicit drugs and the global drug problem has further worsened (Chouvy, 2010; Lyman & Potter, 2011; Macdonald, 2007). Lyman and Potter (2011) argue that the main problem with the supply reduction policy is that it is based on a wrong assumption that the supply of illicit drugs is static and unchanging. They contend, “The supply of drugs is infinitely elastic, and trying to seize enough illicit produce to impact the market is the rough equivalent of trying to empty the Mississippi River with a teaspoon. The river is always going to win” (p. 427). Citing Rydell and Everingham (1994), Lyman and Potter (2011) contend, “The fact is that ‘suppliers simply produce for the market what they would have produced anyway, plus enough extra to cover anticipated government seizures’” (p. 427)

Similarly, the Global Commission on Drug Policy in its 2011 report called for a new approach on illicit drugs stating that the global war on drugs has failed. Citing a UN report, the commission argues that the global opiate use has increased by 34.5% between 1998 and 2008, as well as cocaine consumption by 27%. The commission contends that the global interdiction efforts have also largely failed to tackle the illicit drug trade. Citing UN figures, Vulliamy (2011) argues that the illicit drug trade is unfortunately now the third biggest business worldwide after oil and arms, worth around \$300bn annually. The report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy calls for a public health approach to drug abuse and recommends an end to “the criminalization, marginalization and stigmatization of people who use drugs but who do no harm to others” (p. 2). Moreover, Macdonald (2007) argues that an emphasis on drug supply reduction strategies has led to significant socio-economic costs “such as the rise of drug mafias, the criminalization and imprisonment of minor drug offenders and the inflation of police budgets at the expense of prevention and treatment services” (p. 35).

Furthermore, Lyman and Potter (2011) argue that the crop eradication pillar of the supply reduction paradigm has also not been successful globally. The scholars contend:

If heroin supplies in the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan) are targeted, opium growers in the Golden Triangle (Thailand, Myanmar, Laos), Mexico, or Colombia will simply grow more and supply the demand. (p. 427)

In addition, Lyman and Potter (2011) maintain that eradication aimed at reducing drug supply is more expensive than providing treatment to the drug addicts. They argue that it would cost the United States \$783 million to achieve 1% reduction in cocaine consumption. However, the scholars, citing Rydell and Everingham (1994), maintain, “To achieve the 1 percent reduction in cocaine consumption, the cost of a strategy emphasizing drug treatment programs would be \$34 million” (p. 428). Similarly, citing Drucker (1998), Laffiteau (2011) contends that the global supply reduction policy has failed to

tackle illicit drugs and deaths due to drug overdoses have increased 540% since 1980. Highlighting the importance of drug demand reduction interventions, Laffiteau (2011) concludes, “Demand reduction strategies aren’t always popular with the families of drug users and they don’t grab [news] headlines like big drug seizures do, but they will work over time if given a chance” (p.16). Moreover, as previously mentioned, the importance of demand reduction interventions is well established in a landmark study by the well-known RAND Corporation, which argues that “dollar for dollar, providing treatment to cocaine users is 10 times more effective at reducing drug abuse than drug interdiction schemes and 23 times more effective than trying to eradicate coca at its source” (as cited in Chouvy, 2010, p.144). Therefore, in order to tackle illicit drugs/use, a balanced approach of supply reduction and demand reduction interventions is required (Chouvy, 2010; UN, 1998). Globally, balanced strategy of supply reduction and demand reduction interventions is steadily gaining momentum. For example, European Union has designed a balanced counter narcotics strategy concentrating on two policy fields: demand reduction and supply reduction (Chouvy, 2010). Afghanistan, with the help of international community, could also pursue a similar strategy, which will not only help address the current urgent needs for demand reduction programs, but it may also lead to a paradigm shift in Afghan media coverage of illicit drug issues. Learning from the agenda-setting theory, it could be argued that with implementing a balanced counter narcotics strategy in Afghanistan, demand reduction interventions could attract more attention in the official agenda, which could then possibly influence the media agenda, which in turn could help set the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Media and the need for a balanced coverage of illicit drug issues

As previously mentioned, in addition to an imbalance in covering drug supply reduction news and demand reduction topics, the thesis found the following three types of imbalances in Afghan media coverage of illicit drug issues: First, in 83% of paragraphs coded in the sample illicit drugs were framed as a law enforcement issue while only 15% of the paragraphs framed illicit drugs as a public health

problem resulting in addiction. Durrant et al. (2003) argue that framing is a process where journalists focus on some aspects of an issue in a news story “while ignoring or downplaying others” (p.75). Moreover, Hughes et al. (2010) argue, “The framing of media reporting on illicit drug issues has broad consequences for how society is likely to perceive illicit drugs and illicit drug issues” (p. 104). According to Hughes et al. (2010), this type of portrayal sends a vague message to the society that illicit drugs can only be addressed through law enforcement and criminal justice action, whereas tackling illicit drugs requires a multi-faceted approach including demand reduction interventions.

Second, the thesis found a significant source bias with both national and international official sources making 79% in the sample. News sources play a key role in determining how a journalist frames an issue in the news story (Entman, 1993). Among the official sources, 56% were from the Afghan government, 23% sources were from the international officials such as UN, NATO countries, and neighboring/regional countries, while there were only 14% public sources, which included ordinary citizens, tribal leaders, and farmers. More than half of the sources from the Afghan government were from the law enforcement and Ministry of Counter Narcotics officials. Similarly, Hughes et al. (2010) found that “law enforcement voices amounted to 47.4% of all cited sources” (p. 105). Hughes et al. (2010) called this trend “the marginalization of other types of sources” (p. 105). On the other hand, sources that could bring balance in media’s portrayal of illicit drug issues by highlighting the health and social consequences of illicit drugs/use such as public health officials and drug addicts were lacking in the sample. Globally, research has found that media coverage on illicit drugs could be significantly altered “if professionals in the social and drug fields successfully enter the contents of the media through becoming media sources themselves, providing PR contents or guidelines, and thus replacing the police and politicians in their claims regarding the drug field” (Chermak, 1997; Coomber, Morris, & Dunn, 2000; Dillon, 1998; Gelders, 2004; Taylor, 2008; Teece & Makkai, 2000; Tones, 1996, as cited in Belackova et al., 2011, p. 478).

Third, the thesis found a significant geographical imbalance in Afghan media's coverage of illicit drug issues with more than half of the media coverage devoted to the capital Kabul alone, while allocating considerably less space for covering areas that are located at the heart of the drug tragedy such as southern Afghanistan. It could be argued that media's heavy presence and its reliance on official sources in the capital Kabul might have contributed to this geographical and source imbalance in media reporting on illicit drug issues. Citing Gans (1979), Danielian and Reese (1989) argue, "sources are covered most when they have: (a) incentives, (b) power, (c) the ability to supply suitable information, and (d) geographic and social proximity to journalists" (p. 58). Similarly, Epstein (1974) argues that media's focus on a certain number of areas could be linked to reporters' presence in those areas (as cited in Lin et al., 2011). Also, in a content analysis of 360 national network newscasts in the U.S. between 1973 and 1975, Dominick (1977) confirmed geographic imbalance in media reporting (as cited in Lin et al., 2011). Dominick's (1977) research found "that two-thirds of the domestic news was disseminated primarily from three places, that is, Washington, DC, California, and New York" (as cited in Lin et al., 2011, p. 295). Interestingly, Dominick (1977) found that stories originating from Washington D.C alone accounted for 50% of the airtime (as cited in Sumpter, 2007). According to Sumpter (2007), "Dominick called this ability for one or two states to command more attention than the other states the 'eclipse effect'" (p.152). Furthermore, media's heavy reliance on official sources has been confirmed by numerous studies globally (Adkins Covert & Wasburn, 2009; McQuail, 1992, as cited in Lin et al., 2011). For example, Sigal (1973) studied the news sources in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (as cited in Danielian & Reese, 1989). The study found that 74% of the news sources used in those two media outlets were comprised of U.S. and international officials (as cited in Danielian & Reese, 1989).

In the context of the findings of this thesis, in order to achieve a balanced coverage of illicit drug issues, Afghan media must devote more space to sources from the public health sector as well as

those affected by the illicit drugs/use such as drug addicts and farmers. In addition, in order to achieve a geographic balance, Afghan media must increase its attention to southern Afghanistan, which is the main center of illicit drugs.

Media and the threat of HIV/AIDS in Afghanistan

Fueled by the rapidly growing injecting drug use, HIV/AIDS is steadily turning into one of the most important public health problems in Afghanistan (Rubin & Rahimi, 2011; Saif-ur-Rehman et al., 2007). Exact figures about the nationwide prevalence of the disease are unavailable but public health officials warn that the disease is spreading rapidly among the Afghan communities with possibly thousands of Afghans being infected (as cited in Salehi & Naadem, 2011). Most importantly, public health experts warn that the impoverished country is now facing an epidemic of HIV/AIDS (Griffin & Khoshnood 2010; Maguet & Majeed; Saif-ur-Rehman et al., 2007). Similarly, a countrywide survey in 2009 also confirmed that an HIV/AIDS epidemic was looming in Afghanistan stating that nearly 90% of Injection Drug Users (IDUs) were using shared needles who lacked enough knowledge about the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other blood borne diseases (UNODC, 2009). Moreover, in order to counter the threat of HIV/AIDS, the Ministry of Public Health has enlisted HIV/AIDS as one of its top national priority among other communicable diseases (Todd et al., 2012). However, HIV/AIDS, being such an important health consequence of drug abuse in Afghanistan, was totally ignored by both Azadi Radio and Tolo TV. It was mentioned only once in a story by Azadi Radio, however, it was not related to Afghanistan but instead it was described as a consequence of drug abuse in Russia.

Several reasons could be pointed out for media ignorance of HIV/AIDS in Afghanistan. One of which may be the existence of social stigma attached to HIV/AIDS in the deeply conservative Afghan society (Peter, 2010). HIV/AIDS is widely known to be sexually transmitted and thus people living with HIV/AIDS are often discriminated and hardly accepted in the Afghan society (Peter, 2010). Due to this social stigma, HIV/AIDS patients may rarely disclose their problems to the media. As a result,

HIV/AIDS may continue to go unreported.

It is widely known that media can play a significant role in reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS by educating the public about the dangers of the disease (Boafo & Foreman, 2000, as cited in Chanda, Mchombu, & Nengomasha, 2008).

Moreover, citing Dixit (2001), Cullen (2003) argues, “By helping to keep the [HIV/AIDS] issue in the public domain, the press can assist health promoters to maintain HIV/AIDS awareness and keep it on the political and cultural agenda” (p.78).

Furthermore, media have also been known to play a key role in reforming drug treatment policies. For example, in Australia, media coverage on the efficacy of methadone played an important role in altering government decision to accept and expand methadone treatment for drug addicts (McArthur, 1999). A very recent study published in the British Medical Journal found that methadone could reduce HIV/AIDS risk by 54% (MacArthur et al., 2012). Afghan media, like the Australian media, could play a similar role in influencing the policy makers to officially approve the expansion of this vital program to the rest of the country.

The final chapter briefly reviews the main findings, makes recommendations, and underscores limitations of the study.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter first provides a brief summary of the thesis and its main findings and then suggests a number of recommendations to the Afghan news media and the government of Afghanistan with regards to combating illicit drugs. In addition, the chapter also highlights the limitations of this thesis and makes suggestions for future research.

Conclusion

Using the theories of agenda-setting and framing this thesis explored the drug-related content in the Afghan news media. This study employed content analysis examining primetime news coverage of the two leading media outlets in Afghanistan: Azadi Radio and Tolo TV.

The thesis found four types of imbalance in Afghan media reporting on illicit drugs. First, Afghan media reports on drug issues were heavily focused on supply reduction issues (81%) while paying significantly less attention to drug demand reduction topics (19%). Similar to what Hughes et al. (2010) found, Afghan media predominantly focus on the law enforcement and criminal justice dimension of the illicit drugs while paying considerably less attention to the health-related consequences of illicit drugs/use. This trend confirms assertion, made by Hughes et al. (2010) that, drug topics in the media “are not depicted in a heterogeneous manner” (p. 50). Moreover, existing research has shown that more balanced media coverage of illicit drug issues could significantly influence public perceptions and shape drug policies (Belackova et al., 2011; Christie, 1998; Gelders et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 2010; Lancaster et al., 2010b).

Second, as previously mentioned, 83% of the paragraphs in the sample framed illicit drugs as law enforcement issue resulting in legal problems, while only 15% of the paragraphs framed illicit drugs as a public health problem resulting in addiction. Media framing of illicit drug issues is of high importance for understanding public perception of illicit drugs (Hughes et al., 2010). For example, while the Afghanistan’s National Drug Control Strategy emphasizes the need for multi-faceted approach to the drug problem, Hughes et al. (2010) argue that such a portrayal of illicit drugs “sends the message that illicit drugs are first and foremost a criminal matter and the optimum response is through the provision of criminal justice intervention” (p. 104).

Thirdly, the thesis found a significant imbalance in media’s selection of news sources for drug stories, with official sources making 79% of the total sources on illicit drugs. Official sources were

comprised of Afghan government officials (56%), international officials (23%), public sources (14%), followed by editorials (7%). Sources from the Afghan government were predominantly comprised of law enforcement agencies and the Ministry of Counter Narcotics officials. This finding is again similar to Hughes et al. (2010), where nearly 50% of the total sources used in the news stories regarding illicit drugs were from the law enforcement and criminal justice agencies. Hughes et al. (2010) call this trend “the marginalization of other types of sources” (p. 105) and suggest that, “media portrayals that include multiple sources and points of view are more likely to be deemed credible” (p. 110). Interestingly, for this thesis, the researcher was unable to find a single voice from a drug addict, male or female, or any public health practitioner in the entire sample. Similarly, farmers who, like drug addicts, are the main victims of the illicit drug trade (Goodhand, 2008; Rubin, 2004) had only two voices in the entire sample.

Emphasizing the significance of balanced media coverage of drug issues, the Global Commission on Drug Policy, in its report released on June 2011, recommends:

A more mature and balanced political and media discourse can help to increase public awareness and understanding. Specifically, providing a voice to representatives of farmers, users, families and other communities affected by drug use and dependence can help to counter myths and misunderstandings. (p. 14)

In light of the above findings, Afghan news media need to reduce its reliance on official sources/statements and shift its focus to producing more original stories on illicit drugs from those enormously affected by this problem.

Fourth, the thesis found a significant geographic imbalance in media reporting on illicit drugs in Afghanistan. For example, southern Afghanistan, particularly Helmand and Kandahar provinces, which produce nearly 80% of opium (UNODC, 2011) and cope with an alarming number of drug addicts (Kendall, 2012; UNAMA, 2012), were less represented (14%) in the sample. On the other hand, Kabul,

which is comparatively less affected by the illicit drugs, had received the highest media coverage (56%). The main reason for this geographic imbalance could be attributed to media's heavy presence and reliance on official sources/statements in the capital Kabul.

Moreover, the above-mentioned imbalances in media coverage of drug issues are an important contribution to the study of communication. More specifically, an important contribution of this thesis to communication studies is how media intentionally or un-intentionally ignore the health aspect of the illicit drugs/use. This fact was observed in all the four types of imbalances in media coverage of illicit drug issues. Lack of a single voice from a drug addict or a public health practitioner, in the entire sample, is a good example of this fact. Moreover, media messages containing health component of illicit drugs were not only mentioned superficially but they were poorly structured as well. Besides, the social consequences of drug abuse were similarly under-represented. For example, there was nothing about the lost of productivity, social exclusion, marginalization, and family breakdown, which are key consequences of drug abuse (Hughes et al., 2010). Similarly, media messages containing the socio-economic factors of drug production and consumption were also exceptionally under-represented.

Furthermore, the uniqueness of this thesis is that it is presumably the first ever study revealing how a fledgling media in a war zone cover illicit drug issues in the world's largest drug producing country. In addition to discovering the above-mentioned imbalances in media coverage of illicit drug issues, this thesis found that how the ongoing conflict and political turmoil in Afghanistan had diverted media attention from one of the most critical problems, which continuously threaten the very foundations of the war-torn nation.

Lastly, it is worth noting that given the very complex nature of narcotics in Afghanistan and its socio-economic and political dimensions, media alone will by no means be able to tackle illicit drugs in Afghanistan. However, news media could be used as a significant part of a broad, multi-faceted, and multi-pronged approach designed to address illicit drugs in Afghanistan.

Recommendations

Learning from this study and existing literature the researcher offers the following recommendations to the Afghan media and the government of Afghanistan as a possible means to address the scourge of illicit drugs in Afghanistan.

For the Afghan media:

1. Given the importance of illicit drugs, Afghan news media need to cover drug issues in a balanced manner, as well as increase coverage of illicit drug issues by devoting more time and giving more prominence to drug stories in the newscasts.
2. Media organizations need to educate their journalists on the significance of illicit drugs, and most importantly, on the social and health consequences of drug abuse.
3. Media must criticize the drug policies of the Afghan government and pinpoint failures in the implementation of counter narcotics programs, and must not work as a tool of government publicity campaign.
4. News media must pay significant attention to reflecting the voices of the most vulnerable and victimized segments in the illicit drug chain such as drug addicts, both male and female, and farmers. These sources were extremely under-represented in the sample for this thesis.
5. Media need to pursue a geographically balanced coverage of illicit drug issues in Afghanistan. In other words, Afghan media must shift its focus from relying mostly on official sources, press conferences, and so on, to original reporting from areas, which are worst affected by the illicit drugs, such as southern Afghanistan.
6. Media must always engage the public health officials and ordinary Afghans while covering drug issues.

For the Afghan government:

1. The government of Afghanistan must pursue a balanced drug policy paying equal attention to supply reduction and demand reduction interventions. Moreover, the government must urgently scale up demand reduction interventions in order to contain the rapidly growing drug abuse and HIV infection cases in Afghanistan.
2. The government must boost HIV prevention among IDUs by using evidence-based techniques such as needle exchange programs and opiate substitution therapy.
3. The Ministry of Public Health must not only consider drug abuse as a national public health priority but also, in order to meet the current urgent needs, allocate a separate ward for treating drug addicts in all its provincial hospitals.
4. The government must treat farmers and drug addicts as the victims in the illicit drugs chain, not as the culprits. And, most importantly, the government must pay significant attention to addressing the socio-economic factors that drive farmers to opium poppy cultivation and drug addicts to opium consumption.
5. Drug abuse certainly kills many Afghans each year, but the exact figures are still unknown, because of the lack of research in this field. The government itself, and by encouraging other international organizations, must conduct a countrywide surveys to determine the drug abuse mortality rate.

Limitations and scope for future research

The thesis has a number of limitations, which could be taken into consideration in conducting future research. First, the sample is not representative of all the media, because it included only two media outlets. Therefore, its finding cannot be generalized. Future research could expand the sample and include more media outlets such as TV, radio channels, press, and online media, as well as conduct interviews with journalists who prepare stories on illicit drug issues. Due to time constraints, the

current study was unable to cover the above-mentioned areas. Moreover, future research could expand the study time to one or more years. Secondly, this thesis focused only on examining the verbal communication with the exclusion of audio-visuals and non-verbal clues in the news. Future research could include both audio-visuals and non-verbal clues in the news as well. Third, due to some technical problems, some of the Tolo TV clips were shorter than the others and were missing sports and business news. This omission is a consideration future research must take into account. Another limitation of this thesis was that it did not include studying the effects of media on audiences. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), content analysis alone “cannot serve as the basis for making statements about the effects of content on an audience” (p.159). Therefore, in order to understand the effects of media content audience analysis studies must be conducted. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) further simplify the limitation of content analysis in the following example:

A study of Saturday morning cartoon programs on television might reveal that 80% of these programs contain commercials for sugared cereal, but this finding alone does not allow researchers to claim that children who watch these programs will want to purchase sugared cereal. To make such an assertion, an additional study of the viewers is necessary. (p.159)

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), inter-coder reliability is key to ensuring objectivity and trustworthiness in the content analysis process. However, due to lack of resources and time constraints the researcher was unable to hire independent coders to code the data and see whether the coders achieve the same results. Instead, the researcher re-coded the whole data twice in order to ensure reliability. This lack of inter-coder reliability is considered a limitation of this study, which should be taken into account in conducting future research.

Moreover, acknowledging the fact that I am an Afghan, I have tried my best to be as objective as possible in conducting the research, collecting and analyzing the data, and interpreting the findings.

My professional background in medical field and several years of experience in journalism in Afghanistan have hopefully added value to this study.

Nevertheless, despite the above-mentioned limitations, this study, which in the best of my knowledge is the first research that has examined the drug-related contents in the Afghan media, will hopefully lay the foundation for future research on media's coverage of illicit drug issues in Afghanistan. Future research on media coverage of illicit drug issues could obtain better results and make better comparisons by looking at the findings of this study, as well as involving media professionals and audiences. Specifically, future research could examine the trends and variations in media reporting on illicit drug issues by addressing the following questions: 1) Do Afghan media maintain balance in covering illicit drug issues? 2) How are illicit drug issues framed in the news? 3) Do Afghan news media devote enough space for reflecting voices of the public health practitioners, drug addicts, and farmers? 4) Do Afghan media allocate appropriate time/space for covering illicit drug issues? 5) Do Afghan media pay enough attention to covering regions that are at the heart of the drug tragedy in Afghanistan?

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Appendix A: Media Coding Schedule—Stories selection, text elements, definitions, and coding categories

Criteria for News Stories Selection	1) Any news story that includes one or more mention of the following terms: drugs, opium, heroin, poppy, cannabis, and hashish in its first or second paragraph. If the story might be introduced by an anchor and then continued by a reporter, in this case, any story that contain any of the abovementioned terms in its introduction, or in the first two paragraphs of the reporting must be included in the sample (Slater et al., 2006).
	2) Illicit drugs must be either the primary focus of the news story, or the secondary focus of the story, which means that the story might be focusing on another issue but mentions drugs as an important contributing factor (Hughes et al., 2010, p.123).
	3) The news story must highlight issues that relate to Afghanistan's drug problem only.

Text Element	Definition	Coding Categories/Sub-categories
Topic [Unit of Analysis: News story]	Primary reason for 'what makes this news today?'	<u>Interdiction & Drug Trafficking:</u> topics covering: 1) Generally, the problem of drug trafficking; 2) The arrest of drug traffickers; 3) Seizure of illicit drugs /chemical precursors; and 4) Destruction of the drug laboratories. <u>Opium Poppy Eradication:</u> topics covering: 1) Issues in opium poppy elimination; 2) Eradication of opium poppy crops by the law enforcement agencies; 3) Security incidents during opium poppy eradication. <u>Demand Reduction Issues:</u> Topics highlighting: 1) Lack of healthcare for the drug addicts; 2) Drug abuse prevention initiatives; 3) Socio-economic factors fueling drug abuse; 4) Failures in counter narcotics fueling rise in drug addiction. <u>Alternative Livelihoods:</u> Topics focusing on: 1) Providing alternative livelihoods to farmers in order to abandon opium poppy cultivation; 2) Lack of alternative livelihoods for farmers.
Frame [Unit of Analysis: Paragraph]	How do the media depict the health and social consequences of drug abuse?	<u>Legal issue:</u> Illicit drugs result in: 1) Arrest/incarceration, 2) Elimination / eradication. [With the implied consequences that illicit drugs use results in legal problems]. <u>Health issue:</u> Illicit drugs result in: 1) addiction; and 2) HIV/AIDS. <u>Social issue:</u> 1) Drug-related crime (such as theft & robbery); and 2) Drug-related violence (such as murder committed by drug addicts).

Source Definition	A source is defined as an individual or organization giving information or opinion. A source may be quoted, give a statement, be interviewed, or publish a report that is mentioned in the story (Hughes et al., 2010, pp.127-128).
Types of Sources	Each source mentioned in the story must be noted. If one source gives multiple quotes, count that source only once (Hughes et al., 2010, pp.127-128).
Official Sources (National)	All govt. officials, such as: Officials from the ministries of Counter Narcotics and Ministry of Interior.
Official Sources (International)	Officials from the NATO countries, UN, & regional/neighboring countries
Public Sources	Tribal elders, farmers, ordinary citizens.