Risky behavior among youths in Egypt: Theoretical underpinnings, Classification and Determinants

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Abstract

This paper focuses on studying the issue of risky behavior among youths in Egypt. Risky behavior is considered one of the most pressing of current social problems. Of particular concern is the increase in delinquency among young people. Given the significant social concern surrounding the problem of youth delinquency, it is reasonable for policy makers, academics and citizens to ask what might cause misbehavior. The methodology of this paper is based on studying and analyzing the topic of risky behavior among youths by clarifying the concept, introducing its classification and identifying its determinants depending on the literature review on different models that explain risky behavior among youths. Additionally, a designed questionnaire is used in order to identify the classification and the determinants of risky behavior, particularly drug use, in Egypt.

Keywords: Risk preferences; Risky behavior; Youths; Egypt.

1. Introduction

Risky behavior can be defined as performing outlandish unacceptable acts rejected by society. Risk taking has been an important feature of youths for many years and will undoubtedly continue in the future. There is a host of potentially risky behavior in which youths engage (Fischhoff, 1992). Generally, misbehavior has many forms such as to harm other people or even oneself such as aggravated assault, suicide, reckless driving and rape. Furthermore, it may take the shape of damaging property of others, for instance, robbery, vandalism, larceny and arson.

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addition to the forms mentioned above, youths may use drugs; drink alcohol and smoke. These types of risky behavior have important implications on their well being as youths and their life prospects (Furby and Beyth-Marom. 1992).

The issue of risky behavior is one of the important interests for developed and developing countries as well. In Egypt, the number of youths who commit risky activities increased heavily in the recent years (Biltagy, 2005).

This paper concentrates on the risky behavior among youths, because they have a serious effect on the economy. For example, the addiction of different kinds of drugs and cigarettes has a negative impact on the manpower planning, production and consequently on the economy as a whole. Drugs are by far the most commonly used illicit substance among youths. The sheer popularity of drug use among youths makes it important to examine the factors determining that behavior. Furthermore, drug addiction has a dangerous effect on society from economic, political and social point of view.

This paper provides an economic analysis of risk taking by youths. The main objective of this paper is to analyze the fundamental characteristics of risky behavior among youths in Egypt. Taxonomy of different types of risky behavior will be introduced. The methodology depends on a designed questionnaire, which is used in order to identify the classification and the determinants of risky behavior in Egypt. The main questions that this paper aims to answer are: What are the main types of risky behavior and its classification in Egypt? What are the main determinants of risky behavior- especially drug use- in Egypt?

2. Literature Review

The concept of adjacent complementarity is the key assumption of the Rational Addiction Model (RAM) by Becker and Murphy (1988). It means that the past consumption of an addictive good raises the marginal utility of current consumption of that good. Equivalently, it implies that the consumption levels of an addictive good at different points of time are complements i.e. level of consumption of an addictive good in period \( T \) affects consumption level in period \( T + 1 \) and is affected by consumption level in period \( T - 1 \). Moreover, Gruber and Koszegi (2000) include this concept in their Time Inconsistent Model (TIM) as a fundamental assumption.

The models of RAM and TIM introduce the utility function \( u(t) \) as a function of three variables. The first one is the consumption of non addictive good, \( y(t) \), the second is the consumption of the addictive good, \( c(t) \) and the third variable is the stock of past consumption of the addictive good, \( S(t) \).

\[
u(t) = u[y(t), c(t), S(t)].
\]

(1)

According to Becker and Murphy (1988), the utility function would be

\[
U(0) = \int_0^T e^{-\kappa t} u[y(t), c(t), S(t)]dt.
\]

(2)

Where \( T \) is the length of life and \( \kappa \) is the rate of time preference for the present moment. Rationality implies that the individual maximizes his utility according to some constraints on his expenses. If \( A_0 \) is the primary value of assets, \( r \) is the interest rate, \( w(S) \) represents the income at some point of time, \( t \) and \( D(t) \) symbolizes expenditure on endogenous depreciation or appreciation, then the budget equation would be

\[
\int_0^T e^{-\kappa t} [y(t) + p_c(t)c(t) + p_d(t)D(t)]dt \leq A_0 + \int_0^T e^{-\kappa t} w(S(t))dt.
\]

(3)

Where the price of \( y(t) \) is normalized to unity. A person maximizes his utility in equation (2) subject to the budget constraint in equation (3).

Another assumption of the RAM is that, the price of an addictive good affects the consumption of that good and it has a negative impact on this consumption. This result is supported by many other models, which analyze risky
behavior (e.g. Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Real and Caraco, 1986; Becker, Grossman and Murphy, 1994; Clevenger and Birkbeck, 1996 and Gruber and Koszegi, 2000).

Recent developments in behavioral economics, for example, O’Donoghue and Rabin (2001) have deserted the inappropriate features of the RAM, such as the assumption that discounting is time-consistent. However, this model incorporates the characteristics of the RAM that are realistic, such as, the assumption that prices affect the consumption of addictive goods.

It is assumed that, younger teens are both more impatient (Lewis, 1981) and more subject to peer pressure, which could increase risk taking by younger relative to older teens. Actually, youths want to engage in risky activities because they have a higher preference than adults to commit actions that create negative externalities in the long run and this is consistent with the TIM. Equivalently, youths might engage in too much risky behavior because they give little weight to their well-being as adults (O’Donoghue and Rabin, 2001).

Risky behavior tend to generate positive short run rewards and negative long run consequences, in turn, extra bias for the present makes youths more likely to engage in risky behavior (Becker and Mulligan, 1997). Suppose for example that, a young individual must decide whether to use drugs or not, in making this decision, he takes into account both instantaneous pleasure he would derive from this act and expected cost he might bear later in his life.

Consequently, the most suitable model for analyzing risk taking by youths is the TIM. This model implies that when individuals make their decisions, which have both short run and long run consequences, they tend to satisfy their immediate needs in a way that they do not like from the long run point of view. In other words, the future behavior of individuals is not coinciding with their current preferences.

3. Classification of Youths’ Risky Behavior in Egypt

This section concentrates on the pattern of criminal activities of young individuals in Egypt, using the data gathered from some homes of juveniles. In Egypt, there are many houses of juveniles for males and females in several governorates. The sample is chosen from the two houses of juveniles (one for males and the other for females) and it contains individuals between 12 and 18 years of age because the involvement in risky actions reaches its maximum level in this age range. The data was assembled by a designed questionnaire. Participants were interviewed in their homes of juveniles; individual interviews were conducted separately with the boys and girls. Total interview time for each person was between 3/4 and 1 hour.

3.1. Characteristics of the Sample

| Age | Males |  | Females |  |
|-----|-------| |         |   |
| N.  | %     | N. | %     |
| 12  | 12    | 7.95 | 5     | 12.5 |
| 13  | 13    | 8.6 | 9     | 22.5 |
| 14  | 19    | 12.6 | 6     | 15   |
| 15  | 36    | 23.8 | 8     | 20   |
| 16  | 19    | 12.6 | 6     | 15   |
| 17  | 25    | 16.55 | 5     | 12.5 |
| 18  | 27    | 17.88 | 1     | 2.5  |
| Total | 151 | 100 | 40 | 100 |

Table (1) presents the distribution of the sample by the age of juveniles; it appears that the age of 23.8% of the sample of delinquent males is 15 years old. Moreover, the age of 22.5% of the sample of delinquent females is 13 years old. This result confirms that, committing risky actions soar at very younger ages for both genders.
Table 2: Educational Attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>47.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory school</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (2) shows that, the percentage of illiterate individuals was about 9.93% among males and 10% among females. Furthermore, about 47% of young males reached their primary school and did not complete their education. However, the educational attainment of 77.5% of the total sample of young girls was only a primary school.

According to preparatory education, 38.4% of the sample of males reached this stage, while the percentage among girls was 12.5% only. This means that large percentage of delinquents did not complete the mandatory basic education stage.

Almost all individuals in the sample committed more than one type of risky behavior. Smoking cigarettes was the most committed risky action among young males with percentage of 92.7%. Furthermore, 73.5% of young boys engaged in aggravated assault using their masculine power or weapons and 58.3% of them have used guns. Another type of dangerous crimes is robbery, 48.3% of young males involved in that risky action. Regarding drugs, there are many types of these substances, which were used by youths, for instance, bango, pills and hashish. 32.5% of young individuals have used drugs heavily.

In addition to the types of risky behavior mentioned above, youths also committed other dangerous crimes such as begging (17.9%), drinking alcohol (15.9%), driving in a reckless way (13.2%), escaping from work (5.96%), arson (1.99%), murder without intention (1.32%) and forgery (1.32%).

It is concluded that, the most committed crimes among males were, smoking cigarettes, escaping from education, carrying and using weapons, robbery and using drugs. In contrast, other types of risky behavior were not committed heavily among young males like arson, murder without intention and forgery.

For young females, escaping from education was the most committed risky behavior with percentage of 95%; the whole percentage represents a permanent escape. Smoking cigarettes came in the second position with percentage of 72.5%. Additionally, 50% of young girls involved in robbery and begging. Moreover, 42.5% of the sample involved in aggravated assault and 37.5% of them used guns. According to drugs, 20% of girls have got addicted to different types of drugs, for example, bango and pills. Finally, drinking alcohol, as one type of risky behavior, was not commonly used among young females. Only 5% of the sample has got addicted to alcoholic beverages.

It is obvious that, almost all types of risky behavior committed by the individuals in the sample are identical to the one in the literature (e.g. Hirschi, 1969; Elliot, Huizinga and Ageton,1985; Maugin, and Loeber, 1996; Farrington, 1997; Garbarino, 1999, Mocan and Rees 1999 and Gruber, 2001a, 2001b) except begging, escaping from education and work. It is known that, the phenomenon of begging is due to low levels of income and harsh poverty. In addition, the percentage of escaping from education is highest among poor households, especially in rural areas.

4. Determinants of Risky Behavior in Egypt

Economists have their particular ideas about factors that might cause delinquency. For example, some believe that unemployment and poverty are the reasons of committing risky behavior; others think that families are the problem and still others suppose that unsuitable peers are the major contributor. Therefore, the important goal of
this section is to add all these thoughts together in order to understand the determinants of risky behavior among youths in an easy and precise way.

In Egypt, it is clear that the economic factors play an important role in determining juveniles’ delinquency. The personal observations of interviews with delinquents illustrate that; almost all members of the sample have a very low standard of living. Specifically, those individuals do not receive their essential and simple needs like adequate food, comfortable sleeping, suitable house and medical care. Generally, these circumstances result in deterioration of health, which has dangerous effects on the persons’ performance. A large number of those people satisfied their needs through escaping from home and committing different types of risky behavior like robbery, smoking cigarettes and using drugs. In other words, hard conditions represented in low standard of living, low wages and harsh work lead youths to engage in many risky activities.

The previous argument implies that, the severe economic circumstances are considered one of the most important determinants of committing risky actions in Egypt. Furthermore, the absence of one of the parents or both (due to death, getting married from another and divorce) is considered an important reason of committing risky activities. Regarding the sample of young males, 52.3% lived without their parents, for example, father, mother or both. Equivalently, 72.5% from the total sample of young girls lost one or both of their parents. The conclusion is that, broken homes have very dangerous effect on children and it is considered one crucial determinant of risky behavior committed by Egyptian youths.

The results confirm that some of the families and relatives of delinquents committed some types of risky actions. Actually, 23.84% of families/relatives of delinquent males committed risky behavior. Moreover, 25% of families/relatives of criminal females had involved in delinquent activities. The most common risky actions, which were committed by the families/relatives of delinquents, are drug use and smoking among the families of young males and drug use and robbery among the families of young females.

Almost all addicted females joined only the primary schools and they did not complete their education. Similarly, 46.9% of addicted males joined only the primary schools. The main result is that, addiction was spread among youths who did not complete their primary school.

The essential motives of taking drugs among young males were curiosity (24.5%), peer pressure (24.5%) and family destruction (20.4%). On the other hand, family destruction was the main reason of committing that type of risky behavior among females with 50% from the total sample. Peer effect (25%) was considered the second motive of taking drugs among young girls. Furthermore, curiosity and feeling lonely were the third and fourth motives of involving in that dangerous behavior with equal percentage; which is, 12.5%.

It is concluded that, there are three main kinds of drugs used by youths in Egypt. They are, bango, hashish and pills. The most common one is bango, 91.8% of young males used bango heavily and they got addicted to that kind of drugs. This can be attributed to the fact that, the price of bango is not very expensive if compared with other kinds of drugs in addition to its availability.

5. Conclusion

The potentially excessive long run implications of risk taking by youths for their future well-being and dramatic changes in the nature of risk taking by youths over the past decade, suggest that economic factors matter in decisions of risk taking. The results indicate that smoking cigarettes is the most risky action committed by young males, while drinking alcohol is not too much common among young males. Another remark arises is that; drugs are used by 32.5% of the sample, which is a critical percentage. It is clear that smoking cigarettes is the first step of involving in more dangerous risky activities.

For young females, 72.5% of the whole sample is a cigarettes smoker, which is a huge and dangerous percentage. According to drug use, it is obvious that 20% of the sample is considered as drug addicts.

The main findings of this paper are: first, the economic factors are very crucial and are considered one of the important determinants of risky behavior in Egypt. The evidence is that, large numbers of delinquents live in very harsh circumstances (poor homes, severe poverty represented in very low income and comfortless living conditions), which lead to involvement in more risky actions. Second, the family conditions are very important determinant of risky behavior in Egypt.
Third, the degree of religiousness plays an important role in taking the decision of involving in risky behavior (i.e. there is a negative relationship between risk taking and the degree of religiousness). That is, almost all individuals in the sample have not any rules of religion. They did not realize that risky actions are prohibited from a religious point of view, because there is no religious awareness.

References