



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SHISHA CONSUMPTION AND DYNAMICS OF NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANT PRACTICES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN ABIDJAN (IVORY COAST)

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ABSTRACT

Adolescent socialization is shaped by ethnic identity, class status, place of residence, and peer influence in the adoption of risky behaviors, particularly the use of psychoactive substances. In Abidjan, particularly in the neighborhoods of Port-Bouët II and Wassakara, hookah use is experiencing significant growth and is becoming part of young people's everyday practices. This study aims to analyze the cultural, relational, and symbolic logics underlying shisha use, as well as the mechanisms of normalization of deviant practices that result from it. To this end, the research employs a qualitative approach based on direct observation, group interviews, and individual interviews. Based on a sample of 40 respondents, the results show, on the one hand, that hookah use serves as a means of social integration and identity formation, linked to a quest for recognition within the peer group. On the other hand, they reveal that this practice unfolds in socially constructed spaces where it becomes commonplace while simultaneously strengthening bonds of sociability, trust, and confidentiality. Finally, the study highlights that this normalisation contributes to obscuring the health and social risks involved, particularly exposure to other psychoactive substances and the development of behaviours that may encourage certain forms of deviant behaviour.

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INTRODUCTION

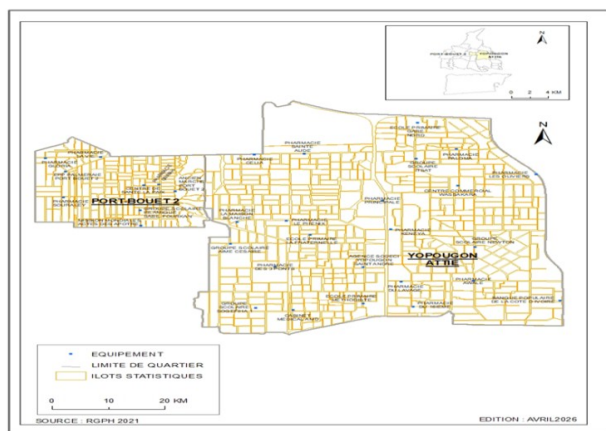
Adolescence is a pivotal stage in the socialisation process, during which individuals gradually construct their social identity, values and behavioural patterns. In this transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, adolescents are particularly susceptible to the influences of their social environment. Classic works in sociology have shown that individual behaviour is embedded within a system of norms and social relations that structure people's everyday practices (É. Durkheim, 1895; P. Berger & T. Luckmann, 1966). Thus, consumption practices, particularly those related to psychoactive substances, cannot be analysed solely as individual choices ; they also stem from social processes of learning and integration within specific social groups. In the social sciences literature, peer influence is identified as a key factor in the adoption of risky behaviours among adolescents. According to H. S. Becker (1985), deviant behaviours are acquired through social interactions within groups, where individuals gradually learn the techniques, meanings and justifications associated with such practices. This perspective aligns with the social learning approach developed by R. L. Akers (1998), according to which substance-use behaviours spread through social relationships and processes of peer imitation. Within this dynamic, certain practices that were initially marginal may gradually become normalised within youth groups and serve as vehicles for social interaction and integration. The work of P. Peretti-Watel (2001) also shows that the use of psychoactive substances among young people is often linked to issues of identity and relationships, where the use of certain substances becomes a means of self-affirmation and of belonging to a group. In contemporary African societies, urban transformation and cultural shifts are contributing to a reshaping of patterns of youth socialisation. Today, Africa's major cities serve as prime settings for the emergence of new cultural and consumer practices, particularly under the influence of the globalisation of

lifestyles and youth cultures (M. Diouf, 2003 ; F. De Boeck & A. Honwana, 2005). In these urban contexts, informal social spaces such as bars, maquis or places where young people gather play a central role in the spread of certain consumption practices. The consumption of shisha is part of this dynamic of the transnational circulation of cultural practices. Initially associated with certain societies in the Middle East and Asia, this practice has gradually spread to many African cities, where it is now adopted by younger generations as a form of leisure and socialising. In Côte d'Ivoire, and particularly in the city of Abidjan, social changes and increased interaction among young people are fostering the emergence of new forms of youth socialisation. In this urban context, characterised by high population density and significant cultural diversity, certain consumption practices are becoming increasingly widespread among adolescents. Among these, the use of the hookah has gradually established itself as a recreational activity in several spaces of youth social interaction. In the district of Yopougon, particularly in the neighbourhoods of Port-Bouët II and Wassakara, the communal consumption of shisha has become a common practice among groups of young people. These gatherings often bring together young boys and girls to share a hookah, in a friendly atmosphere that encourages social interaction and the formation of bonds between peers. However, beyond its apparent recreational aspect, the use of shisha may also conceal more complex forms of psychoactive substance use. Certain empirical observations carried out in the municipality of Yopougon highlight the clandestine addition of substances such as cannabis, alcohol or various spirits to hookah set-ups. This practice contributes to normalising adolescents' exposure to potentially harmful substances, the effects of which on physical and mental health are often underestimated. Consequently, shisha use among adolescents cannot be viewed solely as a simple leisure activity. It forms part of a set of social, cultural and symbolic logics that contribute to the construction and spread of certain

consumption practices within youth groups. From this perspective, the gradual normalisation of this practice raises questions about the processes of social construction and the normalisation of potentially deviant behaviours, as well as the mechanisms through which certain risky behaviours can be gradually integrated into the everyday patterns of youth social interaction. In light of these empirical observations, the central question guiding this research is as follows : How do cultural, relational and symbolic factors contribute to the social construction of hookah use and the normalisation of associated practices among adolescents in the Port-Bouët II and Wassakara neighbourhoods, located in the municipality of Yopougon ? Building on this central question, several subsidiary questions arise : In what ways does hookah use constitute a means of social integration and identity formation among adolescents within peer groups ? What are the social spaces and forms of sociability that foster the spread and normalisation of hookah use among adolescents ? How does the normalisation of hookah smoking contribute to the downplaying of health risks and the emergence of potentially deviant behaviour among adolescents ?

METHODOLOGY

Study site: This study was conducted in the neighbourhoods of Port-Bouët II and Wassakara, located in the municipality of Yopougon, one of the largest and most populous in the Autonomous District of Abidjan. More specifically, the fieldwork took place in these two urban areas, characterised by a high concentration of young people and a vibrant youth social scene. These neighbourhoods are distinguished by the presence of numerous informal gathering places such as maquis, bars, school playgrounds and certain public spaces where teenagers and young adults meet regularly for recreational and social activities. In these social spaces, the use of the hookah, commonly known as shisha, tends to be part of everyday leisure and socialising practices among peers. The choice of these two neighbourhoods is therefore based on their empirical relevance to the analysis of the phenomenon under study, insofar as they provide ideal settings for observing young people's consumption practices.



Source: RGPH 2021

Data collection and analysis: The study adopts an inductive qualitative approach based on a descriptive, comprehensive and analytical examination of social practices related to hookah use among adolescents and young people (B. G. Glaser & A. L. Strauss, 1967 ; P. Paillé & A. Mucchielli, 2012). It aims to capture the social, cultural and symbolic logics that structure the behaviours of the participants, whilst paying particular attention to their subjective experience and the social context of their practices. The study population consists of adolescents and young people who use hookahs within the youth social spaces under investigation. Forty (40) participants were selected using snowball sampling, based on their experience of hookah use, their availability, and their free and informed consent. The sample comprises eighteen (18) users of both hookah and cigarettes, twelve (12) who combine hookah with alcoholic drinks, and ten (10) who combine this practice with other psychoactive substances, notably cannabis. Data collection was based on individual semi-structured interviews, open-ended interviews, direct observations recorded in field notes, and a literature review drawn from scientific databases and specialist portals. The interviews, lasting an average of forty-five minutes, focused on motivations for use, the social dynamics of consumption, health risks, personal experiences, and perceptions of the effects on health and social trajectory. The data analysis

is based on thematic content analysis. Following the full transcription, proofreading and anonymisation of the interviews, the empirical data were subjected to thematic sorting to identify recurring patterns in the discourse and to establish categories of analysis in line with the research objectives. Thematic content analysis was thus used to structure the different sections of the results. This involved a cross-sectional breakdown of the corpus in order to identify, across interviews, segments of discourse relating to the same theme. This analytical approach aims to mitigate the singularity of individual statements in favour of highlighting discursive regularities and thematic coherence across interviews, in line with the stated research objectives (A. Blanchet & A. Gotman, p. 99).

RESULTS

The study's findings are structured around three main analytical dimensions. On the one hand, hookah smoking appears to serve as a means of social integration and a vehicle for identity formation within peer groups. Secondly, the analysis highlights a gradual normalisation of this practice among adolescents, driven by factors such as the desire for social recognition, fashion trends and the downplaying of risks. Finally, the results underscore the existence of health effects linked to hookah use, the dangers of which remain largely underestimated in adolescents' perceptions.

Hookah smoking: a means of social integration and a vehicle for identity formation: Field data show that hookah smoking is not merely a recreational activity. It forms part of the social world of adolescents, within which it fulfils specific social functions. On the one hand, it serves as a means of gaining access to a group, enabling young people to integrate into valued social circles. On the other hand, it contributes to self-presentation, through the adoption of codes, attitudes and markers of distinction that nurture a sense of social existence in the eyes of peers.

Hookah use as a means of fitting in with peers: Among the adolescents surveyed, hookah use appears primarily as a rite of passage into teenage social life. It enables them to join a social circle, avoid being excluded, and take part in group activities that are highly valued by the group. In this sense, the hookah functions as a means of social inclusion : using it with others demonstrates adherence to the group's norms and a willingness to share the same practices as one's peers. Several respondents emphasise that not using the product exposes one to a certain degree of symbolic marginalisation. Conversely, participating in collective use facilitates acceptance by other teenagers. The practice is therefore valuable not only for the substance consumed, but for the social relationships it helps to establish. It becomes a language of belonging, a marker of participation in the life of the group. According to one respondent :

« When your friends get together to smoke and you always refuse, they tend to leave you out a bit. But if you sit down with them and have a smoke too, they see you as one of the group. » (Kader, not in education.)

Another respondent commented on this:

« At first, I didn't smoke. But after spending so much time with them, I started. Otherwise, it looks like you're not part of the scene. When you join in, you chat with them, you laugh with them, you're part of it. » (Idriss, student).

These verbatim quotes show that the use of the hookah is part of a process of normative integration. The group gradually establishes smoking as a common social practice. Consequently, smoking is not merely an individual act, but a way of making oneself socially available to others, of being recognised as a full member of the peer group. Thus, the hookah becomes a means of integration because it allows the adolescent to enter a relational space where acceptance, closeness and mutual recognition are at play.

Social influence and the construction of a valued adolescent identity: Hookah use is also driven by a dynamic of social influence that shapes adolescents' perceptions, desires and aspirations. The data collected indicates that young people do not use hookah solely under direct peer pressure, but also because of social role models they find attractive : influential friends in the neighbourhood, older peers, celebrities, artists, and public figures seen on television or social media. In this context, hookah use forms part of a process of symbolic identification.

Adolescents seek to emulate figures perceived as modern, admired or socially accomplished. The hookah thus becomes a fashion accessory, a visible sign of belonging to a highly valued youth culture. It is no longer simply about consumption, but about presenting oneself as a certain type of person : someone who is trendy, visible, respectable or even financially well-off.

«Young people who smoke hookahs imitate the local influencers and those from elsewhere they see on television. These young people want to be like them in the way they act, so they behave like them » (Mamoun, tailor)

Another respondent added:

«When you see certain artists or even the big names in the neighbourhood with a shisha, you feel it's something classy. You want to show that you're not just anyone either » (Ismaël, unemployed). These verbatim accounts reveal that hookah smoking plays a part in shaping adolescents' identities by providing them with repertoires of behaviour and self-presentation. The practice enables them to adopt a socially valued identity associated with modernity, elegance, self-assurance or success. In this respect, social influence is not merely a mechanism of imitation; it constitutes a framework for self-construction within which the adolescent adjusts their behaviour to the valued images circulating in their environment. The hookah thus becomes a symbolic mediator of identity.

Social networks of consumption: sociability, solidarity and sharing among adolescents: According to our field data, beyond social influence, hookah smoking creates and sustains genuine social networks among adolescents. Young people gather around this practice in a variety of settings: maquis, bars, restaurants, hangars, school playgrounds, ceremonial venues or commercial spaces where regular, close-knit relationships are formed. Here, the hookah acts as a relational object, that is to say, as a focal point around which exchanges, patterns of socialising and practical solidarity develop. Field data show that these networks are often organised around forms of informal cooperation. Some members provide the equipment, whilst others buy the substances or pay for the session. This pooling of resources strengthens the sense of belonging to a community of practice. Sharing the hookah thus fosters a sense of community based on reciprocity, trust and confidentiality. « Not everyone has the equipment we use to prepare the shisha. So we ask those who have it to set it up for us. Often you have the equipment and your friends provide the substances so we can smoke together » (Ali, assistant bricklayer).

One of the interviewees stated that:

« When we get together, everyone brings something. One person has the machine, another brings the charcoal, and another chips in for the tobacco. That's exactly what keeps us close » (Yao, student.)

These verbatim accounts reveal that hookah smoking is not merely an individual act, but is underpinned by a moral economy of sharing. It creates mutual obligations, strengthens solidarity among group members and stabilises relationships over time. In this sense, the social networks surrounding hookah smoking constitute spaces for socialisation where concrete feelings of belonging are forged. Here, the hookah becomes a vehicle for social bonding, as it fosters the continuity of interactions, the loyalty of social circles and the consolidation of adolescent groups.

The social normalisation of hookah use among adolescents: between the quest for recognition, fashion trends and the downplaying of risks: Field data show that hookah use among adolescents cannot be reduced to a mere recreational activity. It forms part of a set of social and symbolic dynamics that contribute to its spread, legitimisation and normalisation within youth spaces. This normalisation is based on the sensory appeal of the practice, the symbolic value that adolescents attribute to it, and the low perception of the risks associated with it. In this sense, shisha use appears as a socially invested behaviour, the normalisation of which makes the health and behavioural dangers it may conceal less visible.

Hookah as an appealing experience: curiosity, pleasure and the start of use: One of the main drivers of hookah use among adolescents lies in the appeal of curiosity and the search for pleasurable sensations. The interviews conducted show that people often take up this practice as a form of experimentation. Adolescents wish to discover what motivates

their peers to use the product and seek to understand, through direct experience, the effects associated with this practice. The hookah thus appears as an object of discovery, with the first use generally presented as a response to a question raised by observing others. This experimental phase is not limited to a one-off trial. It is quickly reinforced by the sensory aspects linked to the product itself. The taste, aromas and sensations experienced during use play an important role in continued use. Thus, the pleasure experienced from the very first attempts tends to turn an initial curiosity into a more regular habit. This dynamic shows that the normalisation of use also depends on how the product is presented to teenagers: not as a substance immediately perceived as dangerous, but as a pleasant, appealing and accessible experience.

« When you have friends who are always using it, you'll try it one day to find out what makes them smoke shisha. But once you've tried it and the smell and taste are pleasant, you become hooked on it. Anyway, that's how I ended up smoking shisha all the time. » (Koffi, cleaner)

This verbatim highlights a two-fold process. On the one hand, initiation stems from proximity to peers who are already users. On the other hand, the continuity of the practice is reinforced by the sensory pleasure it provides. The hookah thus establishes itself as an attractive experience that facilitates entry into use, whilst contributing to the gradual development of a routine relationship with the practice.

A socially valued practice: self-assertion, symbolic distinction and a fashion trend: According to the information received, it appears that, beyond the pleasure it provides, the hookah holds strong symbolic significance for many teenagers. Its use is seen as a means of self-assertion within the youth social sphere. Field data reveal that some young people associate this practice with a positive self-image. In their view, smoking a hookah does not merely mean using the product ; it also allows them to project a certain image of success, style or modernity. The hookah thus becomes a marker of distinction within the group. This symbolic value is based in particular on the conditions of access to the product. Unlike other, more common forms of consumption, the hookah is sometimes perceived as requiring greater financial resources, accessories and organisation. This specificity fuels a feeling among some teenagers that its use places them above those who do not have access to it. The hookah is therefore not merely an object of pleasure ; it also becomes a marker of symbolic status within peer relationships.

«When we smoke a hookah, it looks a bit classy, a bit stylish compared to those who smoke cigarettes. For us, it's a way of boosting our self-esteem in the eyes of the public. It's a way of saying we haven't been left behind, that we belong to society too » (Mr Yao, manual worker)

This quote shows that the practice is driven by a desire for social recognition. It allows teenagers to build a positive self-image, to claim a place within a world considered more prestigious, and to distinguish themselves from other groups of consumers. This dynamic of self-enhancement is also linked to a fashion trend. Hookah smoking appears as a visible practice, freely embraced in public spaces and gradually becoming part of teenage social habits. The possibility of consuming in the open air, without immediate strong social disapproval, contributes to this construction of the hookah as a legitimate and trendy practice. In this context, teenagers do not perceive shisha as deviant behaviour, but as an ordinary expression of contemporary youth life. During our interview, Arnaud stated that:

«When you smoke and people look at you, you feel more valued, richer, because not all young people have enough money to treat themselves to a hookah or a cigarette. » (Abdoul, courier)

This quote shows that the way others perceive you plays a central role in reinforcing this practice. Consumption becomes performative: it serves to project a positive self-image, to assert a certain social visibility and to place the teenager in a position of distinction. The hookah, commonly known as shisha, thus establishes itself as a practice that is at once identity-forming, relational and symbolically rewarding.

Normalisation that carries risks: concealment of psychoactive substances and behavioural excesses: Whilst adolescents perceive hookah smoking as an enjoyable, rewarding and socially acceptable practice, field data show that it can also serve to normalise more serious

risks. One of the most significant aspects highlighted by the survey concerns the uncertainty surrounding the substances actually consumed. Indeed, several accounts suggest that the hookah sometimes serves as a discreet setting for the introduction of substances such as alcohol, cannabis or other psychoactive substances. Shisha consumption thus becomes the visible face of less openly acknowledged practices. This situation creates a form of social ambiguity surrounding the practice. What appears on the surface to be ordinary hookah consumption may, in reality, conceal more complex and harmful practices. The hookah thus functions as a symbolic screen that makes the seriousness of certain associated substances less apparent. The normalisation of shisha therefore contributes to obscuring not only the health risks but also the behavioural changes brought about by the added substances.

« There are concerns about hookah use because most of those who use it take drugs, so they put both drugs and alcohol into the hookahs » (Drissa, security guard)

This quote highlights the climate of suspicion surrounding the practice. The issue is no longer simply the use of the hookah in itself, but what it may contain and conceal. This means that the social normalisation of the hookah indirectly encourages the acceptance of more dangerous practices, precisely because these are concealed within seemingly ordinary behaviour.

The data also show that this use, when accompanied by psychoactive substances, can lead to behavioural problems. Respondents mention aggressive behaviour, brutality or loss of control in some adolescents following use. The hookah is therefore not merely a means of pleasure and socialising; it can also become a context for behavioural changes, particularly when the practice goes beyond its recreational appearance to incorporate substances with more pronounced psychotropic effects.

« Some young people, if they take drugs without using a hookah, will be stopped by the police or by members of the public. So they pretend to be using the hookah they're sitting around to smoke or take drugs. Then they become more aggressive towards their friends. » (Thomas, shopkeeper)

This account shows that the hookah can serve as a means of social camouflage. It allows the use of other substances to be concealed in a context where these would otherwise be more easily stigmatised or repressed. Consequently, the normalisation of shisha helps to shift social perceptions of risk and to make less visible behaviours that are likely to lead to relationship tensions, aggressive behaviour or other forms of deviance.

Health effects of hookah use and the downplaying of risks among adolescents: Analysis of field data shows that hookah use among adolescents has effects that go far beyond the recreational context with which this practice is often associated. Repeated use exposes young users to various adverse effects affecting both physical health and mental well-being. However, these risks are frequently downplayed in social perceptions, due to the social and symbolic benefits attributed to this practice. Consequently, this final strand of the findings examines, on the one hand, the physical health effects linked to regular hookah use and, on the other, the psychological vulnerability as well as the social trivialisation of the health risks accompanying its spread within youth social circles.

Physical health effects associated with regular hookah use: Field data show that hookah use is not merely a recreational or social activity. It is also associated with consequences that may affect adolescents' physical health. Several respondents mentioned the onset of symptoms such as a persistent cough, breathing difficulties, shortness of breath, weight loss or weight gain. These symptoms are generally associated with the repeated and prolonged inhalation of the smoke produced by the device. One participant described the effects felt after repeated use as follows:

« When you smoke shisha often, after a while you start coughing, you find it hard to breathe and you feel your body getting tired quickly. I've lost weight myself and sometimes I get chest pain after sessions. » (Yacouba, a young mechanic)

According to the participants, the density of the smoke inhaled during a session and the frequency of use are aggravating factors. Some adolescents also link these health problems to the presence of nicotine in the tobacco used for shisha, which is perceived as a factor likely to cause respiratory and cardiovascular damage. In some cases, the addition of

other substances, notably alcohol or cannabis, is cited as a factor that exacerbates the harmful effects on the body. Thus, the comments gathered reveal that adolescents have a partial understanding of the physical effects associated with this practice, even though this awareness of the risks often takes a back seat to the social benefits attributed to shisha consumption.

Mental health vulnerabilities and the social trivialisation of health risks: Beyond physical harm, field data also highlight the impact on the mental health of adolescent users. Some participants mention stress, mood disorders, irritability or forms of malaise that arise following repeated use. These symptoms are sometimes associated with a gradual dependence linked to frequent hookah use. One respondent summed up this tension between psychological distress and the social acceptance of the practice in these terms:

« Sometimes, when I don't have one, I get nervous and feel unwell. But as soon as we get together with friends to smoke, we forget our worries and feel good together. That's why many carry on despite the problems. » (Huberson, bar owner)

However, despite recognition of these effects, the health risks tend to be downplayed in young people's perceptions. Shisha smoking is still widely seen as a sociable activity, valued and integral to young people's social circles. The social aspects of the practice – particularly sharing, relaxation and a sense of belonging to the group thus take precedence over perceptions of danger. This ambivalence contributes to the normalisation of consumption: although some adolescents recognise negative consequences for their health, these are often downplayed or relegated to the background. The gradual normalisation of the practice within youth networks therefore encourages its continuation and spread into everyday life.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Analysis of the data revealed three main findings: the hookah as a means of social integration and identity formation, the social normalisation of its use among adolescents, and the downplaying of the associated health risks. These findings shed light on the social dynamics underlying the spread of this practice within youth social circles. Firstly, empirical data suggest that hookah smoking serves as a means of social integration within peer groups. The adolescents interviewed associate this practice with moments of conviviality, sharing and the strengthening of social bonds. These observations are consistent with the analyses of É. Durkheim (1893), according to which certain collective practices help to consolidate social solidarity and reinforce the sense of belonging to a group. Similarly, the interactionist work of H. S. Becker (1963) confirms that practices deemed deviant are part of processes of social learning and socialisation within peer groups. Thus, hookah smoking appears to be a socially constructed practice that has gradually become normalised within certain youth networks. This interpretation is also consistent with the analyses of E. Goffman (1973), who argued that social interactions contribute to the performance of identity within relational spaces. Secondly, the results highlight a social normalisation of hookah use among adolescents, largely fuelled by trends, the desire for social recognition and the influence of digital networks. In this context, hookah use can be interpreted as a symbolic marker contributing to young people's identity construction. This interpretation aligns with the analyses of P. Bourdieu (1979), according to whom consumption practices contribute to the production of social distinctions and the structuring of cultural identities. The hookah thus becomes a symbolic object through which adolescents seek to assert their belonging to a specific generational group. Furthermore, the spread of this practice can be interpreted in the light of R. K. Merton's theory of anomie (1938), which suggests that certain behaviours are adopted in order to gain forms of social recognition within a group. In African urban contexts, these dynamics align with the analyses of F. Akindès (2004) and N. Yéo (2016), which show that contemporary youth practices are often shaped by considerations of social visibility and symbolic recognition in urban spaces. Thirdly, the study highlights a relative invisibility of the health risks associated with hookah use. Although some adolescents mention the existence of potential health risks, these risks are generally downplayed in their accounts. This diminished perception of danger can be interpreted in the light of the work of M. Douglas and A. Wildavsky (1982), according to whom the social perception of risk depends largely on cultural frameworks and collective representations. In this context, the social and symbolic benefits

associated with hookah smoking tend to overshadow perceptions of the health risks. This dynamic is also consistent with the analyses of P. Peretti-Watel (2003), which show that certain risky behaviours can become gradually normalised when they form part of festive or social practices valued by the group.

The findings of this research also corroborate several empirical studies on hookah use among young people. Studies by W. Maziak et al. (2004) confirm that this practice generally takes place within contexts of socialising and shared leisure activities. Similarly, E. A. Akl et al. (2011) show that young people tend to perceive the hookah as less harmful than cigarettes, which encourages its spread among adolescents. The work of B. A. Primack et al. (2008) also confirms that hookah use is strongly influenced by group dynamics and the social perceptions associated with this practice. In the African context, these findings build on the analyses by J.-P. Chauveau (2006) and M. Ouattara (2015), who highlight the importance of socio-cultural dynamics and relational logics in shaping social practices in urban settings. They also align with the work of S. Diabaté (2013) and K. Kouadio (2018), who highlight the role of spaces for youth socialisation in the spread of certain consumption practices among young people in West Africa. In light of these theoretical and empirical convergences, this research makes a scientific contribution to the understanding of youth practices in African urban contexts. In particular, it shows that hookah smoking serves as a vehicle for social integration, a means of identity construction, and a space for the normalisation of risky behaviour among adolescents. Furthermore, the study helps to address a lack of empirical research on hookah use in West Africa, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, where research into young people's social practices and risk-taking behaviour remains limited. However, this research has certain methodological limitations. The study relies primarily on a qualitative approach based on interviews and observations, which limits the generalisability of the findings. Furthermore, the data collected is partly based on respondents' statements, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Future research could therefore employ quantitative or comparative approaches to deepen our understanding of the scale of the phenomenon and its health implications in various African urban contexts.

CONCLUSION

This research analyses the cultural, relational and symbolic factors that shape the social construction of hookah use among adolescents. It highlights the dynamics of social interaction and social recognition, as well as the health implications associated with this practice. Using a qualitative approach based on the analysis of discourse and practices observed in spaces of youth socialisation, the study identified several social mechanisms that contribute to the spread and normalisation of hookah smoking among adolescents. The results show, firstly, that hookah use serves as a means of social integration and a vehicle for identity formation within peer groups. Sharing the hookah is part of social interactions characterised by conviviality, solidarity and the strengthening of relational bonds, thereby fostering a sense of belonging to the group and reinforcing adolescents' sense of identity. Secondly, the analysis highlights a gradual normalisation of this practice, driven by curiosity, pleasure and the quest for social recognition. The hookah thus emerges as a symbolic marker of distinction and self-assertion within youth social circles, although this normalisation may encourage certain behavioural excesses, particularly through the adoption of risky behaviour. Furthermore, the findings highlight the existence of health effects associated with hookah use, the risks of which remain largely overlooked in adolescents' perceptions. This diminished perception of danger contributes to trivialising the practice and downplaying its potential health consequences. Thus, this research highlights that hookah use among adolescents is embedded within social dynamics of socialising, recognition and identity formation, extending beyond the purely individual dimension of consumption behaviours. This study provides empirical insight into a phenomenon that remains poorly documented in West Africa, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire.

However, the results must be interpreted in light of certain limitations inherent in the qualitative approach and the potential biases in respondents' statements. In this regard, future research could employ comparative or mixed-methods approaches to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon's scope and its social and health implications in different sociocultural contexts.

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