The Issue of the Distribution of Captagon Across the Middle East.

Fenethylline, commonly known by the trademark name Captagon, is a synthetic amphetamine-type stimulant that has been produced in southern Europe and trafficked through Turkey to the consumer markets on the Arabian Peninsula. It is one of the most popular drugs of abuse among the young, affluent populations of the Middle East. Fenethylline is a central nervous system stimulant with effects similar to amphetamine. In small to moderate doses, it causes elevations in heart rate, body temperature, respiration, and blood pressure. Over the long-term, amphetamine use can have a number of side effects, including but not limited to, extreme depression, lethargy, sleep deprivation, heart and blood vessel toxicity, and malnutrition. According to open source reporting, counterfeit Captagon tablets have been found in Saudi Arabia since the late 1980s. The majority of these tablets have contained mixtures of drugs capable of inducing effects similar to those of fenethylline. As available stocks of diverted fenethylline are depleted and the availability of chemicals for the clandestine production of the drug fluctuate, Captagon prevalence is likely to increase.

The production of illicit synthetic drugs sold in tablet form, such as Captagon, can be broken down into two distinct parts: chemical synthesis of the active ingredient (here amphetamine), followed by the manufacture of tablets or tableting (here Captagon). These two phases may take place in the same facility but are often carried out in different locations, or even different countries, sometimes by separate groups. Large organised crime groups specialising in synthetic drug production in Europe may manufacture the tablets themselves. However, it also appears common for amphetamine to be supplied 'in bulk' to third parties that will assume the responsibility for adding the necessary cutting agents and excipients, and pressing the tablets.

Nowadays, reports of widespread use of Captagon as a stimulant mainly emanate from the Middle East and from some countries bordering the European Union. However, very little contemporary information is available on the consumer markets for Captagon in these countries, making it difficult to describe the dynamics of such markets. Nevertheless, anecdotal and expert reports, as well as inference from supply-side information, suggest that in many countries the use of captagon as a stimulant may be significant, although currently non-quantifiable. Interpreting both demand and supply data is hampered by the fact that figures amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), which include amphetamine, methamphetamine and fenethylline, are generally reported as a whole.

In 2015, Lebanon reported the seizure of more than 15 million illicit Captagon tablets, around half the amount seized in 2014. The cumulative quantities of seizures reported to the UNODC and designated 'Captagon' in five Arabian Peninsula states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Yemen) between 2010 and 2014 amounted to 4.87 million tablets and 1.43 tonnes. During the same period, Saudi Arabia was the country that seized by far the largest quantities of amphetamine, totalling more than 325 million tablets, with 100 million reported in 2014 alone.

Points to consider:

- *Does your country hold a specific ethical/religious/political position on the distribution of Captagon across the Middle East?*
- *What mechanisms are your country prepared to consider to control this distribution?*
- *Are there alternatives to Captagon, with benefits that outweigh the negatives?*
- *How does your country respond to the addictive and abusive nature of Captagon?*

- *Should we consider the legalisation/decriminalisation of the drug?*

Useful Links:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fenethylline

http://flipper.diff.org/app/items/7404

https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-35449-6

https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/88109