

UDC 94(597):364.272:615.015.6:274

REMAKING LIFE: CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO DRUG ADDICTION IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAM

Hoàng Văn Chung

PhD (Sociology)

Institute for Religious Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences

No. 27, Trần Xuân Soạn St., Hai Bà Trưng Dist., Hanoi, Vietnam

vanchung.hoang@gmail.com

Trần Thị Phương Anh

MSc (Sociology)

Institute for Religious Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences

No. 27, Trần Xuân Soạn St., Hai Bà Trưng Dist., Hanoi, Vietnam

tranphuonganh87@gmail.com

Narcotic drug addiction is one of the social problems faced by the Vietnamese since Renovation (Đổi mới) which is understood as the Party-state's economic reform accompanied by changes in politico-social policies. Drug addiction is reported to be associated with crimes such as family and community violence, robbery, murder, social disorder, and human trafficking. Many drug addicts die at a young age due to abuse of narcotic substances. Despite the state authorities' intensifying legal actions, anti-narcotic social campaigns and NGOs' initiatives, the number of narcotic addicts increases annually. Compulsory medical treatments applied at state-funded rehabilitation centers only achieve limited outcomes and the percentage of patients' relapse is always high. Meanwhile, in recent two decades, alternative methods to treat narcotic addiction have been provided by a number of Buddhist or Christian-based communities. Prominently, Protestant churches through what is called "Restoration ministry" have actively helped people to recover from addiction without using medicine. Despite being under controversial debate, their method has yielded undeniable results. This article examines how narcotic addicts have been enabled to rehabilitate, recover their health and remake their life at a community-based, voluntary rehabilitation center known as the Vietnam Full Gospel Church's Aquila Rescue Center. Based on analysis of gathered data, the authors illustrate that drug addiction treatment based on religious faith can provide long-lasting effects on the narcotic addicts.

Keywords: Post-Renovation Vietnam, drug addiction, rehabilitation, Protestantism, Vietnam Full Gospel Church's Aquila Rescue Center

Introduction

On a nice day before the end of 2018, a wedding was held at a rehabilitation center run by a Protestant church in the outskirts of Hanoi. Two pairs of grooms and brides, in their shiny costumes, happily approached the central stage with the cheering crowd. At the moment when the officiate of the wedding ceremony declared the two became husband and wife, witnesses saw tears running on the two bridegrooms' faces – which is odd and very rarely seen in Vietnam. Once being heavy narcotic addicts, spending endless days in the darkness of heroin, neither of the bridegrooms had ever dreamt of a day when

© 2023 Hoàng Văn Chung and Trần Thị Phương Anh; Published by the A. Yu. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS of Ukraine on behalf of *The World of the Orient*. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

they could stand confidently in the sunlight and open air before their family and friends to enter married life.

Hai was one of the happy grooms on that unforgettable day. He had a past obscured by narcotic drugs. Hai started using drugs at the age of 15 and quickly turned into a heavy addict. He did countless bad things just to get money to satisfy his craving for heroin; he soon became a threat to any person who had a relationship with him. All his family's efforts to help him ended in failure. Hai wanted to escape from the grip of drugs many times but he could not conquer relentless cravings. Such failures made him think nothing could help him quit drugs. Darkest despair and insanity were all that he experienced every day. For the last try, with family and friend's encouragement, he came to the Aquila Rescue Center (ARC) and participated in its rehabilitation programs. To his surprise, he was able to completely stop taking drugs in a short time. Afterwards, he made very good progress in restoration of his mental and physical health. He gained sobriety through learning the Bible, singing worship songs and receiving good care from his new friends at ARC. He finally decided to get baptized and became a devout Christian. He began to experience what he called "the God's power in healing". Upon his graduation after 18 months at ARC, he made a commitment to stay and voluntarily work for the ARC as staff. His hope in making a new life became stronger and stronger day after day, especially when he started falling for a female staff member who was also a former drug addict. Their love came to final fruition at their wedding, witnessed by a large community of new Christian fellows. Hai is one of many narcotic drug addicts in the North of Vietnam who refused to die young and successfully found the way back to a normal life with the help of a faith-based community.

In recent two decades, there emerged a number of Protestant churches in the northern region of the country establishing drug rehabilitation centers and providing an alternative method to the state-funded centers for treatment of drug addiction, health restoration, post-rehab care, and community reintegration. Instead of applying strict supervision and medical detoxification during treatment like the state-funded centers for compulsory rehabilitation, these churches politely invite the addicts to participate in their voluntary rehabilitation programs. Church members show love and care, assist and encourage the participants to study the Bible and follow Christian moral guidelines. No participants are asked to use special medicines for treatment such as methadone. Additional programs provided are health training courses, socializing activities, and post-rehab care. There is evidence of these centers' success in rehabilitation for the drug addicts [Thu Van Dang Nguyen 2016; Jory 2019; Tran Thi Phuong Anh 2020]. The rehabilitation process focuses on fostering the faith that if a person believes in God and follows God's teaching in the Bible, s/he will be saved by God's power. In addition, these centers collect very low fees for their program: US\$130 per month. This low financial contribution by the participants is possible because all the workers are voluntary graduates at the centers. These graduates want to give back to the centers and help those who have the same experience as them to get out of the social evil cycle.

Narcotic addiction is on the rise during the past three decades and causes serious social problems in Vietnam [Nguyen & Scannapieco 2008, 536]. By November 2019, there were 235,314 registered narcotic addicts, an increase by 10,215 in comparison with 2018. Each year, the number of new addicts is calculated at over 10,000. It is alarming that the number of young addicts keeps increasing and that new types of drugs are being imported and sold widely. Further, more serious crimes such as robberies, disturbing public order and murders committed by drug users are reported. Meanwhile, public and state-funded centers for rehabilitation throughout the country are often overcrowded. By April 2020, there were 111 licensed rehabilitation centers throughout the country with around 35,000 inmates [Sen 2020]. Moreover, state-funded rehabilitation centers are facing difficulties due to the lack of competent doctors, therapists and equipment [Sen 2019].

In Vietnam, a strict social norm has formed and narcotic drug use has been negatively viewed as a “destructive force” and a “social evil”. Through time, the public perception of narcotic drug use as “social evil” has been socially and politically constructed [Tuan Truong et al. 2020, 2]. Consequently, drug addicts tend to be seen as criminals and are thus subjected to discrimination, exclusion and isolation. After taking drugs, the users would often be labeled “the addict guy” and looked down on for their entire life. People would rarely believe that an addict could be saved and remake his/her life. In the most recent three decades, more narcotic addicts are reported committing illegal activities such as murder, drug dealing, prostitution, and bad debts collecting. In the worst cases, narcotic addiction is related closely to HIV infection and therefore the AIDs epidemic because of drug users’ high vulnerability to HIV/AIDS [Nguyen & Scannapieco 2008, 537]. These issues have worsened the public view on drug use and drug addicts.

The addicted always has feelings of insecurity and anxiety. When they are first caught taking drugs, their family might secretly try to help them quit. But long-term drug users become a financial burden for the family. Having an addict seriously undermines the reputation of the family. Therefore, drug addicts are often isolated from family and friends [Nguyen & Scannapieco 2008, 540]. Broken relationships begin to push them further away from the love and support of their family. Living marginally, they are unable to seek help when needed.

In this context, the state authorities’ solution is mainly to capture the addicts, detach them from their community and family, and send them directly to state-funded rehabilitation centers. Treating the addicts as medical patients, Methadone maintenance treatment is widely applied. Patients are also required to take re-education programs at the same time [Nong et. al. 2017, 2]. The state-funded rehabilitation centers, however, are reported to be not very successful in helping the addicts to rehabilitate. The percentage of post-rehab people who relapse is often high, up to 90 % [Hayes-Larson et. al 2013, 2; VNA 2019]. For many of the addicted, their drug addiction becomes worse after returning from these centers because they soon relapse and return to the old habit of abusing drugs. Meanwhile, there were many cases where the inmates broke out and escaped in a large group from these centers and caused public disorders. The government is now shifting to reduce compulsory rehab centers and encourage community-based, voluntary rehab centers [VNA 2019]. The Law on Drug Prevention and Control No.73/2021/QH14 dated 30th March 2021 opens more space for non-state, community-based rehabilitation centers and non-compulsory treatment on drug addiction. However, these changes are mostly on paper at present. More specific guidelines from the government are needed so that such kind of rehab center can operate legally.

This article, by examining the ARC, a voluntary Protestant-based rehabilitation center, describes how drug addicts are helped and supported to rehabilitate, restore their mental and physical health and make a new drug-free life. The authors implemented intensive long-term fieldwork at the ARC from 2017 to 2021. We visited and revisited the center at various times during the year to observe regular and occasional activities, to join major events, and to build trust and intimate relationships with members of the ARC. Twenty-five in-depth interviews with the leaders of the Center and participants of the rehabilitation program were conducted. In order to keep the assessment objective and reliable, we conducted a survey using structured questionnaires with all 85 who participated in a rehabilitation program at the ARC during the year 2020. Interviewees were randomly chosen. Among these respondents, 34 had graduated while 51 were attending the Center at the time of survey. The graduates filled the questionnaires via telephone because we could not distribute copies of the questionnaires to all of them since they were living in different localities. The latter group completed the printed questionnaires by themselves. All respondents voluntarily participated in the survey and gave us the verbal consent to use the data collected. They even asked for the use of their real names. The main questions

asked were the reasons they chose to participate in the program at the ARC, their experience of self-transformation, their assessments of the program and their life plan after graduation. In this research, for ethical reasons, we employ anonymous names for all participants.

This research employs Albert Bandura's theory of the social learning model to examine and evaluate rehabilitation at the ARC. According to Bandura's argument, people's behaviors are learned through observation, imitation and modelling. Precisely, human behaviors are learned through observing and mediational processes, including (i) attention (the observer needs to pay attention to the sampled behaviors and form a mental representation of those behaviors; (ii) retention (a memory of the behaviors is formed by the observer); (iii) reproduction (the ability to perform the observable behavior from the model); (iv) motivation (the motivated observer will imitate the modeled behavior). In this final process, rewards are an important factor that influences on the motivation of the observer. If an observer sees others being rewarded for their imitations of the modeled behavior, he or she is likely to perform that behavior in exchange of rewards [Bandura 1977, 24–29].

The Rise of Protestant Restoration Ministry

In the Post-Renovation context, religious organizations in Vietnam have expanded their activities towards supporting social welfare. They are active in helping marginalized people deal with poverty, limited education, family breakages, unemployment, illnesses, and impacts of natural disasters. However, very few religious organizations engage in providing help for narcotic addicts. Some Protestant churches have chosen this difficult mission as implementing an agenda called “Restoration ministry” (*mục vụ phục hồi*). This ministry is a range of activities to help narcotic drug addicts and substance users rehabilitate, restore their mental and physical health and remake their life. Members of these churches travel extensively to approach addicts inside or outside state-funded rehabilitation centers and offer help. They share with the addicts prominent examples of the power of Jesus Christ in transforming sinful persons. Though conversion to Protestantism is not a must, many people chose to be members of the church after they successfully quit narcotic drugs. Most staff working at these centers are former drug users. They are not qualified in medical care as required by state laws but they have valuable first-hand experience in rehabilitating drug addicts. Furthermore, their religious commitment strongly motivates them to rescue those who have fallen in drug and substance abuse like they used to experience.

According to Pastor Thanh, a member of the Vietnam Full Gospel Church¹, the first Protestant base which offered care for drug addicts was founded in 1996 in the South. Pastor Thanh set up this base in Binh Long of Binh Phước province to provide care and support for young addicts from Saigon and its surrounding areas. He is now known as the first Christian to lay foundations for Protestant rehabilitation ministry in Vietnam. From there, he went on to support establishment of similar bases in other parts of the country. According to data we gathered, there are over 70 Christian rehabilitation centers throughout the country. Fifty out of these 70 centers are under management of the Vietnam Full Gospel Church (a Protestant denomination in Vietnam). The other 20 centers belong to Vietnam United Gospel Outreach Church (another Protestant denomination in Vietnam). Most centers are located in Hanoi. There are a few centers in the Northern provinces of Thái Bình and Bắc Giang [Lê Thanh Hậu 2016, 88]. The authorities recognize the contributions of these centers to the rehabilitation of drug addicts and the ARC's model is allowed to exist as a pilot program. However, none of these centers have been licensed due to the government's unresolved legal issues.

In the north, the first Christian rehabilitation center was established by Pastor Gia in 2000 in Thái Bình province, followed by some centers in Bắc Giang province. Later, in

early 2000, Christian rehabilitation centers flourished in Hanoi. The ARC was established in Hanoi in 2016 by Pastor Nam, who was a graduate from Pastor Thanh's rehabilitation program. The Restoration ministry represents efforts of Protestant churches to engage in a very risky and challenging field in Vietnam. This ministry was initiated and developed by southern-based Protestant denominations. But interestingly, they are most successful in the northern region. The number of new followers, called the re-born Christians, contributes significantly to the expansion of these churches.

Pastor Nam and the birth of the ARC

The history of the ARC is associated with Nam's journey of rehabilitation followed by devotion to Christian restoration ministry (Aquila Rescue Center 2022). Nam was born as the only boy in a wealthy family in Hanoi. Growing up as an overindulged child, he caused uncountable problems at schools and at home. Nam dropped out of university when he became a heavy drug addict at 18. Since then, whatever he did was just to satisfy his craving for heroin. He once grabbed his baby and used a knife to threaten his whole family to get some money for drugs. Every effort by his family to help him to rehabilitate was in vain. In deep depression, he even attempted suicide several times without success. Jails and state-run rehabilitation centers all failed to help him stop taking drugs. Instead, he learned more bad tricks and habits there and relapsed quickly. Finally, his family escorted him to Pastor Thanh's private rehabilitation center in Binh Phước province which is over 1,500 km away from Hanoi. To his surprise, here he quickly stopped craving drugs and chose to believe in God after experiencing dramatic changes inside out. He restored his mental and physical health, got rid of bad habits, learned to behave morally, and graduated earlier than expected. Coming back home as a new person, Nam told his family that all the darkest days in his life had been left behind because he had been a re-born Christian. He then wanted to save other drug addicts in the exact way he had experienced. His parents and wife happily agreed to give him what he needed to start. That was a milestone in remaking his life.

By late 2007, Nam established a home church named Hội Thánh Gia đình Tái sanh (Family Reborn Church) specifically for new Christians who were ex-addicts. Together, they sought God's power to stay strong against the temptation of narcotic drugs. Further, the Church expanded its restoration ministry by opening a private rehabilitation base for men in Bắc Giang province. Around ten years later, in 2016, he sold his house in Hanoi, bought a land in the remote area in Quốc Oai district of Hà Nội and started to build a rehabilitation center which was named Aquila Rescue Center (ARC). At the present, the ARC is located on land of over 20,000 m², including modern houses for students, well-equipped classrooms, large and shiny meeting halls, an open-air gymnasium, mediation private rooms, houses for staff and trainers, a healthcare unit, an office, a library, gardens and a small farm. For Christians in Hanoi, the ARC is now seen as a model where very good conditions are provided for addicts. Nam has not only dedicated his time, money and energy for the ARC, but he also actively contributes to the activities of the Vietnam Full Gospel Church in Hanoi. Consequently, he was ordained as a pastor and elected to the position of the Head of Hanoi parish under the mother church. By 2020, he was invited to share his life story with various Protestant communities in 24 nations around the world.

Pastor Nam is seen as one who shed light for those who had taken the dark road. With strength and love, and in collaboration with others, Nam has helped hundreds of people through the ARC to rehabilitate and find jobs. Many people have seen in his example the inspiration and hope to escape the grips of drugs and remake their life. His life story and work have been documented and broadcasted widely in the nation [Nam Quốc Trung 2022].

People who attend rehabilitation programs at ARC are called "students" and most staff served there are called "teachers" or "trainers". According to regulations at the Center,

students are required to stay full time at the Center for at least 18 months during the rehabilitation program. When they finish the program, they will be tested and allowed to graduate if proposed criteria are satisfied. From reception until graduation, all students need to go through three stages, including detoxification, restoration of mental and physical health, and re-establishment of relationships with their family. The first stage is short, ranging from 3–5 days. It is said to not be very hard even though no medicine is used. Students are helped and cared for by staff and peers to quickly ease their cravings. Physical therapy is considered important at this time.

The second stage focuses on creating changes within students and establishing good behaviors. There is actually no gap between the leaders of the center and the students since everybody treats the other like a brother. Here, the main content of the curriculum is studying of the Bible. In person or groups, students are guided to pray for God's power to save them from temptation of drugs and from doing wicked things. They are taught about the nature of their dark, sinful past and how to practise Jesus's moral teachings. Becoming a Christian through baptism is not a must, but all students are encouraged to read and discuss the contents of the Bible. At the ARC, collective activities take place very often and thus students are kept very busy. They pray to God together, sing psalms in Vietnamese, listen to lectures by visiting pastors (domestic and foreign), exercise in the gymnasium, play soccer, and work on the farm. They learn to serve the others by doing the cooking, bedding, and cleaning in turns.

For the third stage, the ARC assists the students to rebuild relationships with their family. This is preparation for the students' reintegration with the society after graduation. At each stage, specific conditions are set out. Students are allowed to graduate early if they pass all the tests. In fact, there were students who asked to stay longer than 18 months at the ARC to ensure they would not take drugs again. For students who follow Protestantism through baptism, when they finish the program, the ARC will contact local churches near their residential place to maintain religious practice. The ARC states that maintenance of connection with God and Christian community is the long-term solution for preventing relapse into narcotic drugs.

During the whole procedure of rehabilitation, students at ARC do not take methadone or any medicine for detoxification or maintenance of an opioid drug addiction. This makes ARC very distinctive to state-funded rehabilitation centers. Many students who took treatment using methadone elsewhere reported the fear of its side effects such as long-term headache, fading memories, losing clear mind, and slow reaction times. So when they learned about the alternative treatment at the ARC, they preferred to try. Not all who came to ARC liked the treatment that only relies on religious faith. Some of them found it hard to read and study the Bible which is foreign to their culture and knowledge. Consequently, they opted to leave the center after several weeks or months. But for those who chose to stay, everything began with their positive transformation.

Remaking life with faith in God at the ARC

All participants in this research have reported a deep transformation since arriving and participating with the ARC. Though at different levels, they experienced a total break from drug usage, improvement of mental and physical health, adaptation to a new outlook of life through the lens of the Bible, restoration of relationships with their family, and a clearer plan to live a new drug-free life.

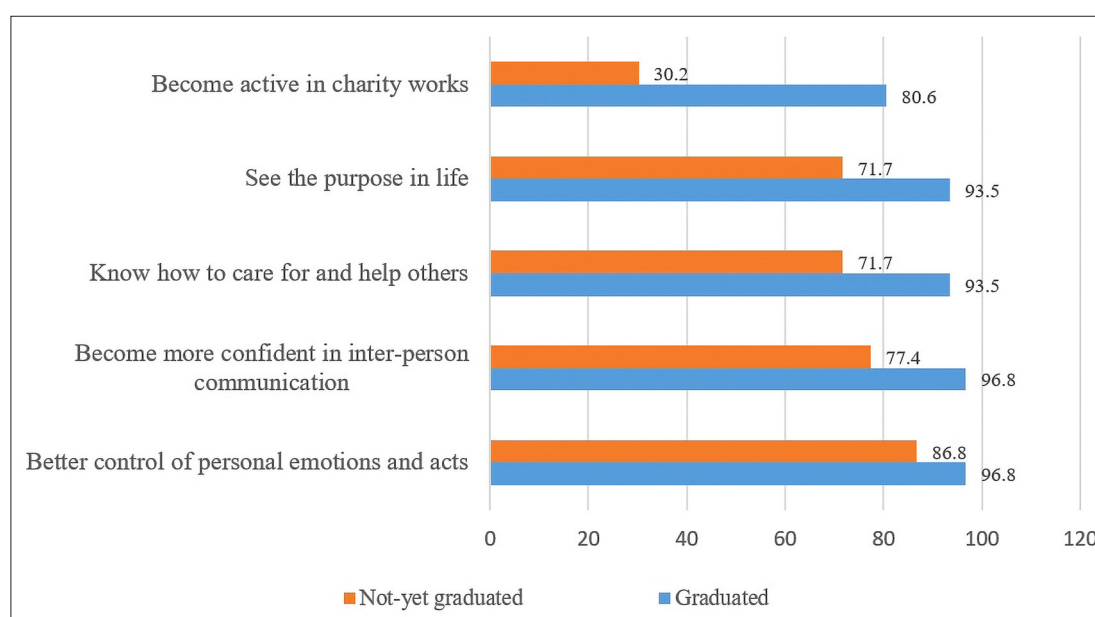
Our survey was conducted with 85 male students at the ARC. Of the 85 respondents, 34 were graduates and 51 were at different stages of the rehabilitation program. The majority of respondents are under 40 years old (81,2 %). In regard to education, 36,5 % finished primary school and 43,5 % finished secondary school. Only a few attended post-secondary level (14,1 %). Regarding employment, 30,6 % of the respondents were working as gig workers or had no job, 22,4 % participated in small family business, and

the rest were working as factory workers, or office staff. Concerning marriage status, 54.2 % of the respondents were unmarried, 32,9 % were married and 12,9 % had divorced.

Before attending the ARC, the majority of students used narcotic drugs (72,9 %) and heroin (61,2 %). A small percentage used various types of psychotropic substances such as methamphetamine and a few were addicts of gambling, alcohol, or video games. Of the respondents, 65,1 % had used narcotic drugs for over 10 years while 78,8 % reported that they had tried several times to rehabilitate, either at home or at rehabilitation centers. Once coming to the Center, all respondents reported that they had stopped taking drugs, drinking alcohol or gambling.

Most respondents reported significant improvement to their mental and physical health after attending the Center. Before arrival, 7.1 % “got addicted and had many issues of health”, 18.8 % were “in bad health conditions” and 5.9 % “got addicted and infected with HIV viruses”. Since taking the rehabilitation program, 87.1 % respondents said their health had been much improved while 9.4 % still faced some health issues. Improvements in physical health had positive impacts on mental health which gradually helped the students build their confidence and belief in remaking their life.

Changes in students’ psychological reaction and behavior illustrate the effectiveness of rehab activities at the Center. Below are key findings.



Correlation between the graduates and current students’ assessments of changes (%)

The diagram shows positive changes in both groups. Respondents reported that they were in better control of themselves and had become more active in caring for others. Long-term users of narcotic drugs often experience problems controlling personal behavior and emotions. Here, both groups reported very positive changes in these two aspects. In particular, both groups scored high percentages regarding the awareness of purpose in their life.

One notable point is the change in respondents’ thinking about committing suicide. Over 50 % of respondents reported that they once tried to commit suicide but got rid of this intention when arrived at the Center. Du, a 28-year-old student, showed us scars on his left hand and arm as evidence of the times he sought to end his life. He said: “I only stopped thinking about committing suicide when I came here. I learned from the Bible

that 'You yourselves are God's temple'. How can you destroy His temple while he is helping you out?" Du, like many others, could only change the conception of himself as a bad, unrecoverable person when he saw life through Christian eyes.

Changes in respondents' habits and behaviors before and after attending the center are distinctive. They abandoned most previous habits such as smoking, drinking, gambling, or making illegal money. Meanwhile, they learned how to help others and actively participated in doing charity work. A male student, 32, told us: "I did help people sometimes before but just to lure them to use drugs or when I actually needed money to buy drugs. Now I am ready to help people without any conditions and this makes me really happy". This change is closely related to the deep, inside-out transformation as students become more aware of their actions.

Rebuilding relationships with family and relatives is another positive change recognized by respondents. For students at the ARC, many reported that they felt a sense of belonging to a community that tried its best to help them, not only in rehabilitation but also in rebuilding broken ties with family and friends. Of the respondents, 90,5 % reported that they had made acquaintance with Christians; 33,3 % knew new people outside the Protestant community; and only 4,8 % reported that there were no changes to their existing relationships.

From the Center's view, the family relationship is seen as an important foundation for students to reintegrate with their relatives and local community. Pastor Nam explained the importance of this reintegration as follows: "When the graduates come back home after completion of the program, they will still be isolated by their own family members. In that case, the chance that they come back to their old road, which means relapsing, is very high". Our survey has found that the majority of students at ARC had made good progress in re-establishing relationships with their family. 81 % respondents reported that they and their family members "have better understood and loved each other"; 61.9 % reported that they had reconnected with family and lineage; and 57.1 % reported that they had "resolved existing conflicts with their family". We interviewed some students to understand more about how they managed to reconnect to their family. Ha, a 28-year-old male graduate told us: "When I got addicted, my family abandoned me. I mainly lived here and there like the homeless. Each time I came back home, my father would take a big knife to chase me away. He felt ashamed with relatives and neighbors because of having a bad son like me. Now, I have been transformed into a good and well-behaved person, all thanks to the Center. I am no longer an addict but working as a teacher and counselor to help the addicts now. You know what, my father even called me via mobile phone to visit home. Seeing me back there, he will take a big knife again. But now he uses it to chop chicken and prepare meals to welcome me". Ha was among many graduates who regained trust and love from their family.

Another case is Tú, who was one of the first students at the ARC. Tú became a drug addict at 14 years old. He was put into prison several times for using and trading drugs. Most of the friends he made were drug addicts and drug traffickers. To make money, he engaged in gambling and managing prostitution, in addition to swindling money from parents and relatives. He attended some drug rehabilitation centers but their programs did not work for him. The use of narcotic drugs for many years made Tú exhausted and he saw no hope in life. But one day he met Pastor Nam, who offered a solution. He joined ARC's program and soon experienced what he called "miraculous restoration". He placed his full faith in God, got baptized and studied the Bible very hard. After completion of the program, Tú worked for a hotel. "I was paid 2 USD a day but it was the first legal income I had", he said. In his free time, he registered for a course at a Bible school. There he met a girl who, according to him, was "beautiful, talented, well-educated and at a higher social level". At first, he thought he did not deserve her. But his faith in God was strong. "God makes beautiful things happen", he said. "He showed me how to win her

heart and I got married to her then”. After getting married, they opened a private transportation company which was successful. They preferred to recruit alumni from rehabilitation centers and their customers were mainly families and friends of the former drug addicts. Tú spent much time providing consultancy for drug addicts and helping them to look for jobs and shelters after rehabilitation. He was happy since he was living a meaningful life and felt very confident about his future. His story in remaking life inspired many students at ARC later.

A major factor that facilitates changes inside students is the staff members working at the ARC. Most staff members and volunteers working at the Center were people who experienced the distress and sufferings caused by dependence on drugs, its side effects, and desperation in resisting the evil temptation of drugs. In addition, drug users often face hatred, isolation, and exclusion. This situation only makes personal efforts to quit drugs harder since the addicts cannot find help, support or sympathy. From their own life lessons, the staff at the ARC knows very well what kind of guidance and help the students need at different stages of rehabilitation. They take care of the students with unconditional love – the love that some students said they never had before. Addicts are treated like normal persons with respect, not like disgusting criminals. Students are shown how ethical behaviors, as stated in the Bible, which is key to their own personal transformation.

In fact, most students at the ARC used drugs since the early stages of their life and lacked family care and education at schools. Data reveals that the youngest respondent took drug at his 11 and the oldest one did it at his 49. For the young addicts, they spent their youth on drugs. When they realized that they had lost their opportunity for education and wanted to quit, they had already grown up. Of the respondents, 79,8 % reported that specific moral rules and guidelines in the Bible helped them achieve success during rehabilitation and restoration. The daily reading, discussion and adherence to ethical guidelines in the Bible gradually created changes inside the students. Transformation is explained as the manifestation of God’s power. For them, that transformation is the fruit from their trust invested in God. “We cannot see Him. But I can feel his presence upon his manifestation in healing and saving fallen human beings”, said Pastor Nam. At the ARC, the students gradually build the belief that they are able to make a new life. From Bible reading, they learned that in God’s eyes, human beings are equally valuable. This belief assists the students’ confidence and trust in rehabilitation. Meanwhile, 70,2 % of the respondents reported that the examples of successful rehabilitation at the Center were the motivation for them to transform themselves. Almost 80 % of the respondents agree that they feel more confident in a new and bright future.

For many people, the journeys of escaping the grips of drugs and making a new meaningful life of Nam, Hai, Hà, Du or Tú are a miracle. However, a close look at the ARC’s daily activities reveals that the success of the Restoration ministry is based on every effort that all people there make together to overcome drug addiction. But even though students can make very good progress while being at the Center, nothing can assure their permanent break from drugs once they exit its gate. From our survey findings and timely updates through communication with the graduates during the long-term fieldwork, it can be said that they have been equipped with good knowledge and maintained a strong will against drug use. Except for a few graduates that we could not communicate with, the majority of them are doing well with their drug-free life since graduation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The ACR’s successful case in drug rehabilitation calls for further scientific assessment and research. In light of Bandura’s theory of the social learning model, what we can see in the case of the ARC is the important role of successful models at the ARC who, as we indicated above, used to be drug addicts but are now working as caring teachers and trainers. New students can also learn from the older students who have experienced

positive changes. They begin to talk with reference to the words of God, behave politely to women and are eager to serve others. The Center has been constructed as an environment where students are living amongst and interacting with healthy and non-addicted persons on a daily basis. In this way, they are enabled to learn from successful models.

The learners are also oriented towards a defined pathway of rehabilitation and restoration. Indeed, the ARC has created a network of members that minimizes social isolation and marginalization while facilitating and maintaining interactions, plus providing peer-to-peer surveillance and sources of support when needed. Together, these factors create the necessary foundation for students' behavioral changes which alters their previous negative view of themselves and creates and promotes their motivation to be successful in the fight against drug abuse and make a new life.

The learners' rewards can be observed in various forms, such as freedom from the pain and shame caused by taking drugs, the feeling of being respected and treated well, the gradual improvement of mental and physical health, the reconnection with family, plus the help and love they can always find from their teachers, trainers and peers even if they make mistakes.

Moreover, the religious faith factor in the ARC's model deserves further analysis. Importantly, the residents' belief in the success of rehabilitation has a clear spiritual or religious dimension. In reality, most drug addicts cannot live a normal life. Being isolated and marginalized, facing despair, having no help, and doing bad things to get money, many addicts are involved in crime. As criminals, they used to show that they would fear no one and be grateful to no one, believing that nothing could save them from the destruction of drugs. But for students at the ARC, they learn every day to respect God. Stories retold many times there are mostly about former students' experiences of the presence and power of God healing His devout followers. Their sin in the form of crimes associated with drug abuse is explained as the evil act of devil like Satan rather than their own wrongdoings. Their sufferings are explained as challenges set out for them before Jesus Christ comes and saves them. The daily constructed belief in such a supernatural force has a deep impact on students' psychology. The dramatic shift in their worldview plays an important role in students' belief that they can be saved as well. The common discourse used at the ARC and in its communications with the outsiders (journalists, researchers, state officials, donors) is that God is the only supernatural force that can save the addicts from drug as a form of evil. Any other methods developed by human beings will eventually fail. Teachers and trainers at the ARC draw learners' attention to any sign or manifestation of God's act to save the sinful persons. These psychological elements gradually foster and reinforce their motivation to replace their previous bad habits with new good habits and a hope to live another life without drugs. It should be noted here that the religious-faith factor is almost absent at the state-funded centers' rehabilitation program. But in the case of the ARC, faith can have great power in resolving drug addiction. Despite the authorities' entrenched controversial debates on the legal status for faith-based rehabilitation centers, ARC and its peers have been silently and assiduously saving victims of drug addiction.

In short, our research findings reveal that surveyed participants in the ARC's rehabilitation program have experienced deep transformation. This can be explained by the devotion of staff members who have valuable experiences in rehabilitation, the reception of Christian faith, and the practice of moral rules written in the Bible. The ARC also creates and maintains social networks that provide forms of social capital and necessary support for graduates during their post-rehab phase. Up to the present, the state has not performed well in anti-drug programs and drug rehabilitation. Further, it is still struggling with legal complexities in the socialization of rehabilitation activities. Meanwhile, religion has emerged as a factor that can provide alternative yet effective solutions to addiction. The examined case of the ARC – a Christian-based, voluntary organization – has illustrated

how the addicts who once were drowning in drugs, sin, dead-ends and hopelessness have been rescued and supported to reintegrate with community and make a new life. Finally, the Christian engagement in resolving narcotic drug abuse as social problems signals the rise of a church movement in the late-Socialist Vietnam. It also shows how religions have managed to adapt and find ways to grow in the new social context.

Acknowledgement: The authors would like to express sincere thanks to Ms. Hien Thi Mai Vu, the Program manager at the Institute for Global Engagement (USA) and Ms. Eliza Billingham, a reporting fellow with the Pulitzer Center (USA) for English proof-reading and insightful comments during the preparation of this manuscript.

¹ The church originated from a Pentecostal movement which was introduced into the South of Vietnam before 1975. The church was established in 1988 and legally registered as a religious organization with the Government in 2018.

REFERENCES

- Aquila Rescue Center (2022), "Introduction: History", available at: <https://aquilacenter.org/gioi-thieu#history> (accessed December 19, 2022).
- Bandura A. (1977), *Social Learning Theory*, Prentice Hall, Englewood, New Jersey.
- Hayes-Larson E., Grau L. E., Khoshnood K. et al. (2013), "Drug users in Hanoi, Vietnam: Factors associated with membership in community-based drug user groups", *Ham Reduction Journal*, 10, Article number: 33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7517-10-33>
- Jory F. A. (2019), *Substance abuse rehabilitation through faith-based ministry: Evaluation of Vietnamese Christian restoration ministry (VCRM) with Bandura's social learning theory*, PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary.
- Lê Thanh Hậu (2016), "Bản tóm tắt quá trình hình thành và phát triển của Hội thánh Phúc Âm Toàn Việt Nam trong Cộng đồng Tin Lành tại Hà Nội", in *Tọa đàm lần 1 – 2016 – Nhân dịp Lễ cảm tạ, Kỷ niệm 100 năm Hội thánh Tin Lành Hà Nội*, Hanoi, pp. 87–90. (In Vietnamese).
- Nam Quốc Trung (2022), "Tin Lành tham gia hoạt động cai nghiện và phục hồi sau cai nghiện", in *Inter-faith dialogues on social responsibility: Religions' engagement in response to social evils*, Conference proceeding (Hanoi, October 25, 2022, Institute for Religious Studies at Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences), Hanoi, pp. 93–111. (In Vietnamese).
- Nguyen V. T. & Scannapieco M. (2008), "Drug abuse in Vietnam: a critical review of the literature and implications for future research", *Addiction*, Vol. 103, Issue 4, pp. 535–543. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2007.02122.x>
- Nong V. M., Boggiano V. L., Nguyen L. H. T. et al. (2017), "Ability to join the workforce and work productivity among drug users under methadone maintenance treatment in a mountainous area of Northern Vietnam: a cross-sectional study", *BMJ Open*, Vol. 7, Issue 7, e016153. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2017-016153>
- Sen (2019), "Saigon's number of drug users rises to 23,500", in *VnExpress international*, May 28, available at: <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/saigon-s-number-of-drug-users-rises-to-23-500-3930383.html> (accessed August 12, 2022).
- Sen (2020), "Vietnam drug user number rises by 10,000 in a year", in *VnExpress international*, June 13, available at: <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-drug-user-number-rises-by-10-000-in-a-year-4114665.html> (accessed August 10, 2022).
- Thu Van Dang Nguyen (2016), *Transformed lives*, Hong Duc Publishing house, Hanoi.
- Trần Thị Phương Anh (2020), "Hoạt động hỗ trợ cai nghiện ma túy của đạo Tin Lành tại Trung tâm giải cứu Aquila", *Tạp chí Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No. 9, pp. 51–81. (In Vietnamese).
- Tuan Truong et al. (2020), "Social norms and political constructions of drug use: A narrative story of Vietnam", *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, Article: 1838707. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2020.1838707>
- VNA (2019), "More services support drug rehabilitation", available at: <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/more-services-support-drug-rehabilitation/156195.vnp> (accessed August 11, 2022).

Хоанг Ван Тьонг, Чан Тхі Фіонг Ань

Перетворення життя: християнський підхід до наркотичної залежності в сучасному В'єтнамі

Наркотична залежність є однією із соціальних проблем, з якими стикаються в'єтнамці після Оновлення (Đổi mới), що розуміється як державно-партійна економічна реформа, яка супроводжується соціально-політичними перетвореннями. Наркозалежність зазвичай пов'язується з такими злочинами, як насильство в сім'ї та суспільстві, пограбування, вбивство, соціальні розлади та торгівля людьми. Багато наркоманів помирають у молодому віці через зловживання наркотичними речовинами. Незважаючи на активізацію судових дій органів державної влади, антинаркотичних соціальних кампаній та ініціатив громадських організацій, кількість наркозалежних у В'єтнамі щорічно зростає. Примусове лікування, яке проводиться в державних реабілітаційних центрах, дає лише обмежені результати, а відсоток рецидивів у пацієнтів завжди високий. Тим часом за останні два десятиліття низка буддійських та християнських спільнот запропонували альтернативні методи лікування наркотичної залежності. Слід зазначити, що протестантські церкви через так зване "Служіння відновлення" активно допомагали людям вилікуватися від залежності без використання ліків. Попри дискусії, їхній метод дав незаперечні результати. У цій статті розглядається, як наркозалежним вдалося реабілітуватися, відновити своє здоров'я та змінити своє життя в громадському добровільному реабілітаційному центрі, відомому як Центр порятунку Аква Церкви повного Євангелія у В'єтнамі. Спираючись на аналіз зібраних даних, автори показують, що лікування наркозалежності, що ґрунтується на релігійній вірі, може мати довготривалий вплив на наркозалежних.

Ключові слова: постановлений В'єтнам, наркозалежність, реабілітація, протестантизм, Центр порятунку Аква Церкви повного Євангелія у В'єтнамі

Стаття надійшла до редакції 21.12.2022