

Prevalence of Drugs among School Students: Preventive Strategies from a Social Work Perspective Okul Öğrencilerinin arasında Uyuşturucu Yaygınlığı: Sosyal Hizmet Açısından Koruyucu Stratejiler

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Abstract

Drug abuse researches, suggests that most cases of drug use begin before the age of 20. Therefore, the most successful preventive strategies that are developed and applied in the educational institution. The school environment is the most suitable place to reach this category. There is no doubt that the educational institution and security agencies have a significant role in enhancing the prevention of students from drugs and dangerous psychotropic substances. Still, the sustainability of prevention by applying strategies continuously through a specialized category is the core of this process. In this context, the importance of the social work profession in school appears because the social worker is aware of the essence of the problem and the imbalance or deficiencies in the individual system or the system's interactions with him, such as family, friends, teachers, and staff. The issue of prevention through tactics based on the provision of information on drug damage through specific activities has not proved effective in the subject of prevention. Therefore, strategies need to be developed to produce positive results based on social workers who can manage the cases and develop appropriate strategies.

Objective: This paper aims to clarify the most important stages in the lives of school students that pose a risk in the issue of drug abuse. It also aims to present preventive strategies from a social work perspective.

Results: There is great importance in detecting and dealing with early cases and the need to adopt preventive strategies continuously within the school environment targeting all students.

Keywords: drug addiction, prevention strategies, psychotropic substances, social work.

Öz

Uyuşturucu bağımlılığı ile ilgili yapılan araştırmalar, uyuşturucu kullanımı vakalarının çoğunun 20 yaşından önce başladığını göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, uyuşturucu ile mücadele konusunda en başarılı önleyici stratejileri, eğitim kurumundaki geliştirilen ve uygulanan stratejilerdir. Okul ortamı bu yaş grubunun çoğunluğuna ulaşmak için en uygun yer olarak sayılabilir. Kuşkusuz, eğitim kurumu ve güvenlik kurumları, öğrencilerin uyuşturucu ve tehlikeli psikotropik maddelerden korunmalarını sağlamada önemli bir role sahiptir. Yine de, özel bir kategori aracılığıyla stratejileri sürekli uygulayarak önleme sürdürülebilirliği bu sürecin

çekirdeğidir. Bu bağlamda, sosyal hizmet mesleğinin okuldaki önemi ortaya çıkmaktadır. Belirli faaliyetler yoluyla uyuşturucu zararları hakkında bilgi sağlanmasına dayalı taktiklerle önleme konusunda etkili olmadığını kanıtlanmıştır. Bu nedenle, bu makale, vakaları yönetebilen ve uygun stratejiler geliştirebilen sosyal hizmet uzmanlarına dayalı olumlu sonuçlar üretmek için stratejiler geliştirilmesi gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Bu makalenin amacı, uyuşturucu bağımlılığı konusunda okul öğrencilerinin hayatlarındaki risk oluşturan en önemli aşamaları açıklığa kavuşturmayı ve önleyici stratejileri sosyal hizmet perspektifinden sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: uyuşturucu bağımlılığı, korunma stratejileri, psikotrop maddeler, sosyal hizmet.

INTRODUCTION

The UNODC 2017 report noted the spread of amphetamine and the expansion of its markets in the Near and Middle East¹. In general, the problem of alcohol and drug abuse is on the rise in the Middle East. The seriousness of the problem in the region lies in the decrease in the age of drug use. The risk is that the majority of drug users do not seek treatment because of limited resources or social stigma. As well as personal reasons and misunderstanding of drug users about the self-will in dealing with this problem led to spared this problem. Therefore, it should develop national policies for the care of addicts and increasing the range of community services for prevention and treatment.²

The problem of drug abuse among adolescents is one of the most severe social issues that cannot be covered up because of its seriousness and the prevalence of unity in the world. Communities that are neither productive nor exporting or have no history of drug abuse have not been survived this problem. Schools are one of the most accessible places for adolescents and promote their health and to develop programs to raise awareness and prevent drug addiction. However, the role of education and teachers in the subject of prevention is unclear and needs the support of the competent authorities in the subject of prevention.

School social work may be of great importance in strengthening the role of the educational institution, professional intervention, development of appropriate programs, case studies, and guidance. Besides, intervention in the individual, group, family, and community levels to overcome this problem. These interventions may have a significant impact on the protection of students from the drug.

SCHOOL STUDENTS AND SERIOUS PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES

The problem of drug and psychotropic substance abuse is one of the most severe issues in different societies and has a substantial impact on the physical, psychological, social, economic, family, and educational aspects. Although the factors leading to drug addiction vary from person to person, some common elements can be listed and identified. Age factor is one of the most critical risk factors in an individual's use of narcotic substances. Substance abuse often starts in adolescence and turns into persistent addiction as a result of a sense of pleasure and cravings for the substance once used. In adolescence, adolescents begin to move away from family members and give more importance to friendships because of the physical and psychological changes they experience. Consequently, adolescents who run away from the family are more likely to drug abuse and addiction. Therefore, the reasons for starting substance use in childhood can be listed as family communication disorders, curiosity, friend pressure, self-proving efforts, thinking that drugs will mature themselves, lack of self-confidence, loneliness, inability to cope with distressing emotions (Bozkurt, 2015).

On the other hand, the characteristics of the age group make young people tend to use volatile substances or psychotropic substances in general as an expression of their reactions to adults and social values. Consequently, drug use affects a person's social life and pushes him to a lifestyle surrounded only by people who use drugs and isolated from the society in which he lives. The tendency to establish a subculture is also increasing because of constant contact with people who use drugs and dangerous psychotropic substances (Duman, 2001).

Some risky behaviors can be seen since childhood. The personality characteristics and temperament of children may have high-risk signs of initiation of drug use in subsequent years. For example, introverts or

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, World Drug Report 2017 (ISBN: 978-92-1-148291-1, eISBN: 978-92-1-060623-3, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.17.XI.6).
https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_1_EXS_UM.pdf

²David J. Powell Addiction in the Middle East and Asia:

<http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/Addiction%20in%20the%20Middle%20East.pdf>

aggressive children often exhibit problematic behavior in relationships with their families, peers, and environment. Academic failure, incompatibility with the social environment, exclusion by peers, and substance use during adolescence are the most common risk behaviors. Research has shown that children between the ages of 7-9 and children with low academic performance and inappropriate social behaviors can start substance abuse at the age of 14-15. There are several risk factors that can affect a child's substance use, which can be summarized as follows (Ögel et al. 2004):

“Family factors

The first interaction of children with their environment takes place within the family, and the effects can be positive or negative. Therefore, family relations are significant in the early developmental period. Experiences that increase the risk for children in the family include:

1. Lack of mutual love and attachment between parents and child
2. Inadequate and ineffective parenting
3. Confusion and unrest in the home environment
4. Lack of regular relationship with the adult caring for the child
5. One or both parents have substance abuse, have a psychological disorder or have committed a crime

Factors outside the scope of family

Another factor that increases the risk of negative behavior is the social environment. Children's interactions with school, peers, teachers, and society shape their behavior. Difficulties in this interaction create a risk for healthy emotional, cognitive, and social development of children. Some risk factors include:

1. Inappropriate behaviors such as angry and impulsive behaviors in class
2. Inability to cope with social problems
3. Academic failure
4. Relationship with peers with many bad habits, including substance abuse
5. The misconception that substance use in society is accepted

Risk periods

According to the researches, the highest risk for substance use occurs in transition periods. The first significant transition period for children is to leave a safe environment in their homes and go to school. The transition from primary to secondary and high school is a difficult period due to the broader group of friends and high expectations of academic success. This process, which corresponds to adolescence, is one of the riskiest

periods to begin substance use. There is a high risk of alcohol and smoking, especially for young people who are forced to move away from the family for university or work and live alone”.

Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen preventive and awareness-raising efforts and develop many programs that are suitable for children of different ages. There is no doubt that there is an urgent need for cooperation between the various bodies in the implementation of these programs, especially cooperation with the educational institution. This collaboration is focused on the pivotal role of the school social work in the formulation and implementation of these programs.

The problem of drug abuse is one of the most challenging and serious issues that can face students in the school field. The student who use the drug is often timid and confidential, which makes the early detection of case difficult. Hence the importance of social workers in the school field in the early detection of cases of drug abusers students for help and guide them to treatment centers in an appropriate manner and confidentially. In addition to preventive and awareness-raising work on a regular basis, which takes into account cultural and social characteristics.

Several studies have been conducted on the impact of drug abuse and addiction on children and youth and the role of educational and security institutions. But this study calls for the need to focus on the development of social workers working in schools and the development of their abilities and professional skills in this area through continuous training and cooperation with experts working in this field.

PREVENTION AND AWARENESS ROLE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

The school environment is considered one of the most suitable places that a social worker can use his special knowledge and skills to help students overcome many of the problems that they can face in the school and family environment. Perhaps one of the most critical issues that the school social worker can interfere with is learning difficulties, behavior problems of children in school, drug use, alcohol, and violence. In addition, the social worker uses his knowledge to interfere with school staff and parents to find out the causes of problems and develop an appropriate intervention. In general, the work of the social worker in the school requires close cooperation with teachers on various issues, specifically on topics related to drug use and other psychotropic substances and in case detection. The social worker also helps students find solutions to their problems related to school success, aggressive behavior, the relationship between each other, the relationship with teachers, bullying issues, school absenteeism, and other problems that may be related to a student's starting to use drugs. This intervention of the social worker at the level of students, teachers, and parents requires extensive skills and knowledge in forms of human behavior so that it

contributes to the early diagnosis of drug use and other harmful substances (Duman, 2000).

It is worth noting the great impact of the family environment and school aspects in shaping children's attitudes. There are many risk factors present in the school environment that can motivate students to use drugs. In contrast, there is a relationship between school activities directed at adolescents and the tendency to use drugs. Thus, properly planned preventive measures that take into account the risk factors present in the school environment and the appropriate activities carried out by qualified personnel play an important role (Jedynak & Motyka, 2020).

Studies show that preventive programs implemented in schools have many goals, such as increased knowledge about drugs; reduce drug use, delay onset of first use; reduce the harm caused by use. Several studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of preventive programs used in schools and found that all drug prevention programs in schools increase knowledge about drugs. Although effective prevention programs are available in schools, their deployment has not been successful in most schools. Where Cuijpers (2003) proposes in her article "Three decades of drug prevention research" that family-based drug prevention programs are a promising new area for drug prevention (Cuijpers, 2003). However, the objective view of this problem indicates the need to integrate intervention and prevention programs must be comprehensive to all aspects of the problem and work with all parties and everywhere. This opinion stems from the multilateral intervention of social work. It has a significant role in formulating and implementing effective programs through multiple levels with which the social worker cooperates, such as the individual, the family, and the concerned institutions in the community.

Psychosocial issues are a very influential factor in students' use of narcotics, so social worker's intervention and building more effective school programs are inevitable in the subject of preventing students from abuse and addiction (Diraditsile & Mabote, 2019).

The presence of school social work and the effectiveness of the role of social workers have a significant impact on the prevention and education students about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse and addiction. The practical part of social workers in this issue is that they also work closely with students daily to solve their problems. During daily work with students, the social worker focuses on detecting abuse and addiction cases. The discovery of cases of addiction is somewhat difficult because it is a topic surrounded by secrecy often feel ashamed and drug abuser hesitate to ask for help. But in some cases, the student may go to ask for help to get rid of depression, making it easier to discover the situation and to provide assistance and guidance to the treatment center (Diraditsile & Mabote, 2014).

The risk of drug abuse is increasing in many transition periods from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, those who prepare prevention programs should identify their target groups and make a separate program for each developmental phase. Also, the multiplication and diversification of protective factors specific to transitional periods are essential (Ögel et al.

2004). Intimidation tactics, which only provide information about drugs and their effects, build self-confidence, clarify values, large gatherings, and educational presentation of substances have not been particularly useful in preventing drug abuse and other dangerous psychotropic substances. Therefore, another approach should develop that can produce positive results. It is not possible to say that there is one intervention capable of preventing drug abuse for all, but there are specific characteristics of successful curricula and programs needed. These programs must target everyone because risk factors exist years before the start. Prevention activities should be strengthened periodically and start in primary schools as students face new social situations and pressures to use materials. Therefore, the essential characteristic of the successful plans is that they are designed to meet the developmental needs of students at each level of classes (Bosworth, 1996).

PROPOSED PREVENTION STRATEGIES FROM A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

There are many models of drug prevention that can be broadly divided into two basic approaches: the first one is the "war on drugs" model, and the second one is the "harm-based prevention model." The first model focused on the idea of a drug-free society. The educational strategies underlying this model are the suppression of consumption and intimidation. The "harm-based prevention" model is an educational model in nature and is based on the idea of expanding and deepening knowledge and information about drugs and using them as a form of character-building for the target population and developing their ability to make choices based on potential consequences. In this approach, drugs cease to be the main focus, and the complexity of the subject acquires central importance based on the psychosocial dimension and the consequences of citizenship. Based on this approach, the researchers pointed to several promising preventive models, the most important of which is the "Alternative Model," which included sports and artistic activities aimed at promoting a lifestyle where drugs do not arouse interest or curiosity. Another model is the "health education model," which is based on adequate food guidance, non-turbulent activities, safe sex, and education on the dangers of drug abuse. There is also a third model that focuses on adjustments to teaching conditions, and intensive, long-term and early interventions, with parental and community participation. More recently, in Europe and the United States, the "Life Skills Training Model" has been implemented; the preventive strategy embodied in this model is being used in schools to equip

young people to address unpleasant feelings and conflicting attitudes³.

Gareikitse and Plattner (2016) argue that interventions aimed at combating alcohol and drugs in schools are often designed to reduce risk factors for early alcohol use primarily at the individual level (for example, by enhancing students' knowledge and skills). It is worth noting that the most successful prevention programs in schools are the programs that focus on social and environmental risks (Diraditsile & Mabote, 2014). However, this study suggests that preventive measures and plans to be developed in this field should be under the full supervision of the school social worker in cooperation with other disciplines.

Here we present prevention strategies from a social work perspective that can make a qualitative contribution in protecting students in the school setting:

Strategy 1: Designing a program based on identification and assessment

The social worker identifies and assesses the needs of the students and conducts a comprehensive evaluation of the students taking into account the work to detect potential drug and alcohol abuse problems.

Strategy 2: Counseling

In his school counseling role, the social worker educates students about drug abuse, prevention, and treatment and focuses on providing a safe place for students to speak. To achieve a healthy life for students, the social worker cooperates with teachers, administrators, and external agencies. At this stage, social workers act as agents of change. Provides education for teachers and school staff on recognizing warning signs that make students more vulnerable to drug use.

Consequently, identify the positive ways to intervene and establish proactive programs. Also, the social worker will motivate and provide appropriate support to the cases that have been discovered and maybe at the individual and family level. The social worker offers treatment-related advice and communicates with addiction treatment centers with complete confidentiality.

Strategy 3: Designing a periodical preventive awareness program targeting all students.

At this stage, the social worker will prepare workshops and seminars for all students on drug abuse and serious harm. The social worker also identifies protective factors that make drug use less likely. The program is based on supporting students in terms of healthy living, academic success, and self-esteem.

Strategy 4: Designing a program targeting families

The social worker preparation workshops and seminars directed to the families of students with the beginning

and end of the school year. The social worker also focuses on the dangers of drugs, the relations between parents and children, and the factors that are considered a source of risk within the family. He also focuses on the need to follow the family of the child from the academic point of view, the friendship relations established by the child, and the internet security and follow-up sites visited by the child through the Internet.

Strategy 5: Designing a program targeting students at risk

At this stage, the social worker identifies at-risk students in collaboration with teachers and administrators, within specific criteria for describing at-risk students. These standards, for example, children exposed to violence, children with a background of family problems, children with irregular behaviors in school such as cigarettes, alcohol, bullying, etc. Here, the social worker focuses on teaching these students the skills of refusing drugs and narcotics and methods of protection and seeking counseling from the school social worker and introducing them to his roles. Here, he also focuses on creating positive peer groups and engaging at-risk students with these groups.

CONCLUSION

Several strategies aimed at activating the prevention of drugs and dangerous psychotropic substances in schools have been developed. Also, identifying the essential role of social workers in case of drug prevention in school. School social workers have a significant role in the protection of children and young people from drug abuse and addiction. Still, this role must be evident through a particular model pursued by social workers in their intervention at the school level. School social service has a pivotal role in the prevention and awareness of drug abuse and addiction. This study recommends that social workers should follow a preventive awareness model aimed at students, families, and society on an ongoing basis. It also suggests the need for social workers to detect the early cases of drug abuse and appropriate intervention. Besides, the study recommends:

- Promote the idea of continuing education for social workers working in schools by facilitating their participation in several workshops on work skills in the preventive and awareness-raising aspect related to the abuse and addiction of drugs and psychotropic substances.
- Involve the family in all awareness and preventive stages
- Promoting social values that reject drug abuse and trafficking

³ Moreira, A., Vóvio, C. L., & Micheli, D. D. (2015). Drug abuse prevention in school: challenges and

possibilities for the role of the educator. *Educação e Pesquisa*, 41(1), 119-135.

- Consolidation of the religious and national side, considering that the issue of drugs is a religious and national issue
- Cooperating with many state and civil society institutions in sustaining awareness and preventive campaigns
- Training social workers and counselors to develop multi-purpose programs for mothers and fathers
- Continuous definition of the importance and role of social work in the school and it is an open door to all students at all times

- The awareness workshops should provide guidance to users on practical and healthy methods of treatment and recovery
- Building bridges of cooperation between citizens and drug control agencies and drug treatment centers
- Familiarize the family with signs of drug abuse and introduce them to methods of early containment and treatment

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