

## Family relations and psychoactive substance use among students

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**Objective:** to investigate the association between family relations and psychoactive substance use among Elementary School students. **Methodology:** a cross-sectional study conducted with 271 students from municipal public schools. For data collection, the *Teen Addiction Severity Index* questionnaire was used, which contains diverse information on sociodemographic data, psychoactive substance use, housing situation, family members with whom they live, family disturbances, family conflicts, aggression in the family, trust in the parents and family activities, which were analyzed using the Chi-Square test, Pearson's Chi-Square bilateral test, and Mantel-Haenszel Odds Ratio estimate. **Results:** there was an association between psychoactive substance use by students and the "housing situation", "satisfaction related to the housing situation", "aggression by family members" and "family disturbances" variables. **Conclusion:** there was an association between family relations and psychoactive substance use among Elementary School students and such relationships should be taken into account in the development of prevention and care actions for psychoactive substance use by this group.

**Descriptors:** Nursing; Students; Family Relations; Substance-Related Disorders.

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## Relações familiares e uso de substâncias psicoativas por estudantes

**Objetivo:** investigar a associação entre relações familiares e o uso de substâncias psicoativas por estudantes do ensino fundamental. **Metodologia:** estudo transversal, com 271 estudantes de escolas públicas municipais. Para a coleta dos dados, utilizou-se o questionário *Teen Addiction Severity Index*, que contém informações sobre dados sociodemográficos, uso de substâncias psicoativas, situação de moradia, familiares com quem reside, incômodos familiares, conflitos familiares, agressão em família, confiança nos pais, atividades em família, sendo os dados analisados por meio dos testes de Qui-quadrado, Qui-quadrado de Pearson bilateral, e estimativa de razão de chances comum de Mantel-Haenszel. **Resultados:** houve associação entre o uso de substâncias psicoativas por estudantes e a situação de moradia, satisfação relacionada à situação de moradia, agressão por familiares, e incômodos familiares. **Conclusão:** houve associação entre relações familiares e uso de substâncias psicoativas por estudantes do ensino fundamental, devendo-se levar em consideração tais relações no desenvolvimento de ações de prevenção e cuidado no que tange ao uso de substâncias psicoativas por esse grupo.

**Descritores:** Enfermagem; Estudantes; Relações Familiares; Transtornos Relacionados ao Uso de Substâncias.

## Relaciones familiares y uso de sustancias psicoactivas por parte de los estudiantes

**Objetivo:** investigar la asociación entre las relaciones familiares y el uso de sustancias psicoactivas por parte de estudiantes de primaria. **Metodología:** estudio transversal realizado con 271 alumnos de escuelas públicas municipales. Se utilizó el cuestionario *Teen Addiction Severity Index* para recopilar datos sociodemográficos, consumo de sustancias psicoactivas, situación de vivienda, familiares con los que convive, disturbios familiares, conflictos familiares, agresión familiar, confianza en los padres y actividades familiares, que se analizaron mediante las pruebas Chi-cuadrado, Chi-cuadrado de Pearson bilateral y estimación de la razón de probabilidades de Mantel-Haenszel. **Resultados:** hubo una asociación entre consumo de sustancias psicoactivas por parte de los estudiantes y situación de vivienda, satisfacción con la situación de vivienda, agresión por familiares y disturbios familiares. **Conclusión:** se descubrió que existe una asociación entre las relaciones familiares y sociales y el uso de sustancias psicoactivas por parte de los estudiantes de primaria y que tales relaciones deben ser consideradas en el desarrollo de acciones de prevención y atención referentes al consumo de sustancias psicoactivas por parte de este grupo.

**Descriptorios:** Enfermería; Estudantes; Relaciones Familiares; Trastornos Relacionados con Sustancias.

## Introduction

Psychoactive substances are characterized by their ability to affect people's mental and cognitive processes. Both the term "psychotropic drug" and its equivalent neutrally describe any and all classes of substances, both licit and illicit<sup>(1)</sup>.

History shows mankind's interest in psychoactive substances; however, the use context, possible motivations and ways of acquiring these substances vary according to each person's individual, family and socioeconomic circumstances<sup>(2)</sup>. In the last decades, psychoactive substance use has been considered as a highly complex phenomenon for public health. The first contact with drugs occurs at increasingly early ages, which constitutes a predictor of abuse and addiction in adulthood<sup>(3-4)</sup>.

In this sense, adolescence represents a phase in which individuals are susceptible to risk behaviors. It is characterized as a period marked by discoveries and conflicts, favorable to seeking new experiences, which renders them more vulnerable to psychoactive substance abuse<sup>(5)</sup>. Allied to this, school phases comprise periods marked by strong influences mediated by groups of friends. These latter can oftentimes act as influencers in drug experimentation<sup>(6)</sup>.

A study developed with adolescents in Spain identified that the main risk factor for tobacco experimentation is having a best friend making use of the substance<sup>(7)</sup>.

Regarding the family, it can convey diverse values, knowledge and beliefs that can exert an influence on the performance of practices that promote health in its members. However, it can also render individuals more vulnerable to health problems and psychoactive substance use<sup>(8)</sup>.

A study conducted with 2179 British students aged from 15 to 16 years old showed that adolescents who consumed illicit psychoactive substances belonged to families that had more tolerant and favorable attitudes towards drug use. In opposition, certain reduction was observed in consumption among the group of students that reported receiving guidelines discouraging drug use from their parents<sup>(9)</sup>.

In Brazil, according to a nationwide school health survey (2015), 73.0% of the students aged 16 and 17 years old had already drunk alcohol some time in their life. It is worth noting that 12.0% of them had already had problems with family members and friends due to this consumption. Regarding the use of illicit psychoactive substances among schoolchildren in Brazil, 4.2% had consumed some type of illicit drug in the last thirty days prior to the research<sup>(10)</sup>.

Therefore, analyzing the students' family and social relationships with regard to psychoactive substances use

may provide important data for nurses to plan actions to prevent substance abuse in their different work contexts, to act according to the Health at School Program guidelines, and to minimize the harms caused by this problem in the students' family and social environment.

When developing Health Education actions along with schools, nurses can promote an increase in knowledge targeted at health promotion. Thus, students can be encouraged to reflect about the risks to which they are exposed, as well as on the detrimental effects of psychoactive substance abuse, in order to promote a healthier adolescence<sup>(11)</sup>.

In view of the foregoing, the national literature presents data on the use of alcohol and other drugs by this population segment; however, a search on *Biblioteca Virtual de Saúde* using the words "psychoactive substances", "students" and "family" revealed scarcity of studies on this theme in the Northeast region of the country, especially in small- and medium-sized municipalities.

Consequently, a gap was verified in the knowledge produced regarding research about the association between family relations and psychoactive substance use. Thus, the study starting point was the hypothesis that there is an association between family relations and psychoactive substance use among Elementary School students.

Therefore, the objective of the current research was to investigate the association between family relations and psychoactive substance use among Elementary School students.

## Methodology

### Type of study

A descriptive and cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach.

### Study locus

The study was conducted in public Elementary Schools located in the urban area from a city in the inland of the state of Pernambuco. The municipality has 66 schools; 26 of them located in the urban area and included in the study.

### Study period

The data were collected from January to March 2019.

### Study participants

The study population consisted of students enrolled at the schools from the municipal education network included in the study. The sample was calculated based

on the formula for infinite populations, according to the following parameters: 95% confidence coefficient ( $Z\alpha$ ); 5% sampling error ( $e$ ); and 80% event estimate ( $p$ )<sup>(12)</sup>. A sample comprised by 245 participants was estimated. The formula for infinite populations was chosen given the size of the population of enrolled students. According to data provided by the Municipal Education Department, there were 6,442 students enrolled at the schools included in the study during the data collection period.

The inclusion criteria were the following: students aged at least 12 years old and who were attending school regularly. This information was obtained from the schools' managers. The exclusion criterion was as follows: presenting some difficulty or disability that prevented the students from understanding and answering the questions included in the questionnaire. This criterion was evaluated by identifying the available medical reports in the students' school files.

### Study variables

The dependent variable was "psychoactive substance use" and the independent variables were gender, race, age, religion, monthly family income, schooling, family problems related to substance use, housing situation, satisfaction with housing situation, collaboration among family members, conflicts between family members, participation in family activities, compliance of rules at home, trust in the parents, expressing oneself in the family, aggression by a family member, sexual activity with a family member, family disturbances, and need for counseling.

### Data collection instruments

The Teen Addiction Severity Index (T-ASI) questionnaire was used; it assesses severity of drug use by adolescents and problems in other aspects of their life. It consists of 153 questions divided into seven domains: Chemical Use; School Status; Employment/Support Status; Family Relations; Peer/Social Relations; Legal Status; and Psychiatric Status. Each question has different answer options. The following domains were addressed in the study: Chemical Use (alcohol and/or drugs) and Family Relations.

The instrument was originally developed by McLellan, et al. and validated for the Brazilian reality<sup>(13)</sup>. It presented good internal consistency in the "Chemical Use" domain, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89<sup>(13)</sup>. Due authorization from the authors of the validation study was obtained to use it in the research.

### Data collection

Initially, the study was presented to the Municipal Education Department where it was conducted and to the managers of the schools included in the research.

After the managers' consent, the project was presented to the students. They were recruited at the schools during class hours. The Free and Informed Consent Forms (FICFs) were handed it to the students for their parents or guardians to sign them. The students that presented the FICFs signed by their parents or guardians received the Free and Informed Assent Form (FI AF) and, after its signing, research team members applied the questionnaire in a private room at the school itself.

### Data treatment and analysis

The data collected were incorporated to an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Absolute and relative frequencies and 95% confidence intervals were used. The Chi-Square and Pearson's Chi-Square bilateral tests and Mantel-Haenszel common Odds Ratio estimate were used to analyze the association between the variables and substance use. The statistical significance level adopted was 5%.

### Ethical aspects

The research is a clipping from the project entitled "Psychoactive substance use among students attending public schools", approved by the Research Ethics Committee of *Universidade Federal de Pernambuco* (CAAE: 57691516.5.0000.5208).

### Results

A total of 271 students participated in the study, most of whom were female (58.3%), brown-skinned (50.6%), aged from 12 to 15 years old (70.5%), Catholic (48.3%), with family incomes from one to three minimum wages (74.5%), from seven to nine years of study (81.5%), and reported not having family problems related to substance use (70.1%). Among the students that reported that some family member had problems related to substance use, there was predominance of grandfathers and uncles (22.1%).

With regard to the information on family relations, most students live with both parents (62.0%), is satisfied with this situation (87.5%), reported having few conflicts between family members (35.1%), moderate participation in family activities (27.3%), and high compliance with rules at home (28.8%). Most of the participants reported always trusting in their parents (50.6%) and always expressing themselves at their homes (27.3%). Only 5.9% reported having suffered an aggression by a family member, and 3.0% reported having had sexual intercourse with a family member in the month prior to data collection.

In relation to drug use, 19.6% of the students reported having used some psychoactive substance some time in their life and/or in the thirty days prior to the research. Of these, 64.2% were aged from 12 to 15 years old, 52.8% were female, and 47.2% reported brown race/skin color. In addition to that, 39.6% reported the presence of family problems related to substance use; and 20.8% reported having suffered an aggression by a family member in the last month.

Alcohol is the most used substance (49,1%), followed by marijuana (5.7%), tobacco (5.7%), opiates (3.8%), cocaine (1.9%) and hallucinogens

(1.9%). Moreover, 35.8% of the students reported having obtained the drugs from friends and/or family members. With regard to the events caused by substance use, they reported abstinence periods (13.2%) and "blackout" episodes (7.5%). However, 9.4% of the students reported feeling disturbed with alcohol and other drugs.

It was observed that the socioeconomic variables do not have a statistically significant association with substance use. Table 1 presents all the information about the association between psychoactive substance use and family relations.

Table 1 - Association between drug use and family relations. Vitória de Santo Antão, PE, Brazil, 2019

Variables	Drug use						
	Total	No		Yes		OR* (95% CI†)	p-value‡
	N	%	n	%			
<b>Housing situation</b>							
Living with both parents	142	85.5‡	26	15.5	1.000	<b>0.049</b>	
Living with one parent	54	71.1	22	28.9‡	2.225 (1.16-4.26)		
Living with other family members	19	86.4	3	13.6	0.862 (0.24-3.12)		
Living with boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse	3	60.0	2	40.0	3.641 (0.58-22.87)		
<b>Satisfied with housing situation</b>							
No	22	64.7	12	35.3	0.384 (0,176-0,836)	<b>0.013</b>	
Yes	196	82.7	41	17.3			
<b>Collaboration between family members</b>							
Not at all	21	80.8	5	19.2	1.000	0.412	
Little	38	79.2	10	20.8	1.105 (0.33-3.66)		
Moderate	37	78.7	10	21.3	1.135 (0.34-3.77)		
Very much	45	73.8	16	26.2	1.493 (0.48-4.62)		
Excessive/Always	77	86.5	12	13.5	0.655 (0.21-2.07)		
<b>Frequency of conflicts between family members</b>							
Not at all	73	80.2	18	19.8	1.000	0.660	
Little	79	83.2	16	16.8	0.821 (0.39-1.73)		
Moderate	41	82.0	9	18.0	0.890 (0.37-2.16)		
Very much	19	70.4	8	29.6	1.708 (0.64-4.52)		
Excessive/Always	6	75.0	2	25.0	1.352 (0.25-7.26)		
<b>Participation in family activities</b>							
Not at all	31	70.5	13	29.5	1.000	0.087	
Little	39	73.6	14	26.4	0.856 (0.35-2.08)		
Moderate	60	81.1	14	18.9	0.556 (0.23-1.33)		
Very much	39	86.7	6	13.3	0.367 (0.13-1.08)		
Excessive/Always	49	89.1	6	10.9	0.292 (0.1-0.85)		

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Variables	Drug use					OR* (95% CI†)	p-value‡
	Total	No	Yes				
	N	%	n	%			
<b>To what extent are rules complied with in your house?</b>							
Not at all	19	82.6	4	17.4	1.000		0.257
Little	46	79.3	12	20.7	1.239 (0.35-4.33)		
Moderate	43	71.7	17	28.3	1.878 (0.56-6.33)		
Very much	64	82.1	14	17.9	1.039 (0.31-3.53)		
Excessive/Always	46	88.5	6	11.5	0.620 (0.16-2.45)		
<b>To what extent can you trust your parents/guardians?</b>							
Not at all	12	66.7	6	33.3	1.000		0.214
Little	17	73.9	6	26.1	0.706 (0.18-2.73)		
Moderate	33	89.2	4	10.8	0.242 (0.06-1.01)		
Very much	48	85.7	8	14.3	0.333 (0.1-1.14)		
Excessive/Always	108	78.8	29	21.2	0.537 (0.19-1.55)		
<b>To what extent can you express yourself and be listened to in your family?</b>							
Not at all	23	65.7	12	34.3‡	1.000		0.201
Little	51	85.0	9	15.0	0.338 (0.13-0.91)		
Moderate	40	80.0	10	20.0	0.479 (0.18-1.28)		
Very much	43	82.7	9	17.3	0.401 (0.15-1.09)		
Excessive/Always	61	82.4	13	17.6	0.408 (0.16-1.02)		
<b>Did you suffer any aggression from any of your family members in the last month?</b>							
No	213	85.3	42	16.5	11.157 (3.685-33.777)		<b>0.000</b>
Yes	5	31.3	11	68.8			
<b>Family disturbances</b>							
Not at all	131	86.8‡	20	13.2	1.000		<b>0.010</b>
Little	57	78.1	16	21.9	1.839 (0.89-3.8)		
Moderate	11	57.9	8	42.1§	4.764 (1.71-13.28)		
Very much	10	71.4	4	28.6	2.620 (0.75-9.16)		
Excessive/Always	9	64.3	5	35.7	3.639 (1.11-11.96)		
<b>Do you feel the need for counseling in terms of family problems?</b>							
Not at all	162	82.7	34	17.3	1.000		0.138
Little	24	82.8	5	17.2	0.993 (0.35-2.79)		
Moderate	9	75.0	3	25.0	1.588 (0.41-6.18)		
Very much	9	56.3	7	43.8‡	3.706 (1.29-10.64)		
Excessive/Always	14	77.8	4	22.2	1.361 (0.42-4.39)		

\*OR = Odds Ratio; †95% CI = 95% Confidence Interval; ‡p-value<0.05

## Discussion

This study found that most of the students that use psychoactive substances are female, which diverges from other surveys showing that psychoactive substance use is greater among male students<sup>(14-15)</sup>. In the analysis of another study, no significant differences were observed between the genders with regard to consumption of the substances under study<sup>(16)</sup>.

A nationwide research study indicated that substance use increases as the students' age increases<sup>(8)</sup>. In this study, among the students who reported use, there was predominance of those aged from 12 to 15 years old.

A research study conducted in the United States identified drug use by white-skinned adolescents with a strong correlation with cocaine use<sup>(17)</sup>, which diverges from the data herein presented.

Conversely, a research study conducted in Spain found that the most consumed substances by students were alcohol, marijuana and tobacco<sup>(16)</sup>. Another study, conducted in São Paulo, Brazil<sup>(12)</sup>, as well as a survey carried out in Minas Gerais, Brazil<sup>(3)</sup>, also found a considerable prevalence for the use of these substances by students. Another study presented similar findings, where alcohol and tobacco were cited as the most consumed substances by this population segment<sup>(5)</sup>. The current study corroborates these findings.

With regard to the analysis of family relations, the results show that most of the students that reported not using psychoactive substances mention that they always trust their guardians and that there is collaboration between family members. Results found in a study conducted with adolescents in Mexico reveal that perceived trust and support among relatives delay onset age and/or reduce the chances of psychoactive substance use<sup>(18)</sup>. Another research study observed that the family exerts a strong and direct contribution, both as a supportive/protective factor and as a risk agent for substance consumption by children<sup>(19)</sup>.

In this sense, a study with professionals from a Psychosocial Care Center evidenced that they perceive the family as essential in the psychosocial rehabilitation process of addicts to chemical substances<sup>(20)</sup>. It also identified that the family should participate in the care process, but that it also needs to be cared for<sup>(20)</sup>. This care process poses some challenges, such as incompatibilities in family members' schedule that prevent them from participating in the activities proposed, health professionals' turnover and bond fragmentation<sup>(21)</sup>.

In contrast, a research study conducted with Colombian adolescents found results indicating that the current housing situation (with both parents, only one parent, or other people) did not present statistically

significant differences in the substance consumption rates<sup>(15)</sup>, which diverges from the finding herein reported.

Research data indicate that family aggression episodes are associated with substance use by adolescents<sup>(22)</sup>. Other researchers warn about the occurrence of intrafamily violence, as adolescents are considered to become even more exposed to vulnerability situations<sup>(14,18)</sup>. These data corroborate the findings observed in this research.

In this sense, a study evidenced that 18.0% of the students interviewed in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, reported suffering aggressions by a family member. This state obtained a higher percentage for this indicator when compared to the nationwide value. In addition, with regard to forced sexual activity, family members such as father/mother/stepfather/stepmother (11.9%) and others (19.7%) were among those most cited by Brazilian students<sup>(10)</sup>.

A study limitation worth mentioning is the fact that it was conducted only in municipal public schools. Therefore, it is suggested that new studies are carried out in private and state public schools, in order to include students from other realities.

The findings of this research contribute to Nursing care because they equip nurses so as to better guide their actions to prevent substance abuse among adolescents.

## Conclusion

The study evidenced an association between family relations and psychoactive substance use by students, specifically with the following variables: housing situation, satisfaction with housing situation, aggression by family members, and family disturbances.

These results can subsidize prevention and care actions related to psychoactive substance use targeted at students, especially by the Health at School Program (*Programa de Saúde na Escola, PSE*), by allowing to learn the sociodemographic and family relations factors associated with psychoactive substance use by this group.

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