



## Drug Abuse Perception and Associated Variables among Secondary School Students in Duhok City

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Nowadays, illicit drug abuse is becoming a serious public health problem worldwide specifically in Iraq, affecting the entire community.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to determine the secondary school students' perception in Duhok City about drug abuse and its association with their demographic characteristics.

**Methodology:** A descriptive (cross-sectional) study which is conducted from September 2022 to January 2023 utilizes an assessment approach in order to determine the secondary school perception of drug abuse at nine boy secondary schools in Duhok City. A probability sample was adapted to select students from each secondary school to reach (135) students. Data were collected through the direct interview technique using the questionnaire as a tool for data collection, which is constructed through the extensive review of the related literature that consisted of two assessment parts. The first one is concerned with the assessment of the secondary school student's demographic characteristics and the second part of the assessment tool is concerned with assessing the student's perception of drug abuse. Data were analyzed through the application of frequency, percentage, cut-off points, and Fisher Exact test. Such analyses are computed by using the SPSS, IBM program version 23.

**Results:** The findings indicate that approximately half of the students who participated in the present study have good perceptions about each of the general perceptions of drug abuse and perception of physical, behavioral, and Psychological warning signs of such abuse. While they have an average perception of the factors that increase vulnerability and alteration of brain function due to drug abuse.

**Conclusion:** According to the study results and discussion, more than fifty percent of secondary school students had a high perception of drug abuse.

**Keywords:** Drug Abuse, Secondary School Students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Typically, any use of drugs for non-medical, often consciousness-altering purposes is referred to as drug abuse. Drug abuse is defined as the frequent use of drugs that alter a person's mental or physical condition and result in aberrant behavior (Yadav and Parajuli, 2021). Since ancient times leaves, Herbs and other plants have been used to treat and prevent diseases, medications could be used to cure illnesses and diseases when properly delivered, using them does not present any threat in and of itself, but the majority of individuals, especially young people, misuse medicines since they don't just take them to treat illnesses but also for other purposes (Yusuf and Okanlawon, 2019). Drug abuse is becoming a severe continuous community health concern across the world, affecting practically every community and family in some form. Because of the consequences of early drug dependency on the future of the young, its usage among young people and students is an important field of research, so researchers show high school students and those in higher education institutions use alcohol and drugs at rather significant rates (Elkazh et al., 2017).

Today, addiction is a very serious issue that is damaging the lives of millions of individuals, both young people and the general public, so the intake of illicit substances has overgrown and reached every corner of the globe, thus drug and substance misuse has generated a severe crisis in every country (Mohammed et al., 2021). It is estimated that between 162 million and 324 million people worldwide aged between 15 and 64 years used an illicit drug at least once in the year prior and these drugs typically belonged to the cannabis, cocaine, opioid, or amphetamine stimulants types (UNODC, 2014). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), between 15.5 and 38.6 million persons used drugs regularly across the globe in 2010, while around 200,000 individuals worldwide pass away from drug-related overdoses each year (Mohammed et al., 2021). The young age group is more likely to use both legal and illegal substances because they spend the majority of their time in school and because peers have a significant determining or influencing influence, that is why legal and illicit drug usage was more prevalent among

male students, and family members' drug use had a great influence on their children's consumption of that substances (NCPC, 2009; Bhattarai and Chudal, 2018). As reported in Geneva, New York, and Vienna, on June 22, 2017 - A quarter of a billion individuals took drugs in 2015, and around 29.5 million individuals, or 0.6% of the adult worldwide population, participated in problematic drug use and had drug use problems, including dependence (UNODC, 2017). Even at the age of 12, the age limit for drug addiction has been pushed to younger age groups, and the median age is now 17 years. This is particularly concerning given the rise in the number of drug users (Mesic, 2013; DuPont, 2018). Comprehending the abuse pattern is crucial in order to create a plan. Secondary school students in Egypt frequently use hashish to socialize with friends and for recreational purposes on special occasions. The second most commonly misused substance was sedatives and hypnotics, which were taken for physical tiredness, and fatigue, to deal with psychological issues, challenging job situations, and during test times. College students often use hard drugs (Elkazh et al., 2017).

### Importance of the Study

Adolescent drug abuse is a problem since it raises the chance of accidents, violence, and high-risk sexual behavior in this age group (Raja and Devi, 2018). Young drug users struggle with issues including poor peer connections, health issues (accidental accidents, physical impairments and illnesses, and overdoses), academic challenges (losing two grades, absences from school and other activities, and a higher risk of dropping out of school) in addition to suicide, homicide, accidents, and disease (Yadav and Parajuli, 2021). Drug and drug misuse among adolescents and young adults is a worldwide issue. According to an American study, the prevalence of drug use grew with age, reaching a prevalence rate of 19.6% between the ages of 18 and 20 years (Oshodi et al., 2010).

### AIMS OF THE STUDY

The study objects to determine the secondary school students' perception in Duhok City regarding

drug abuse and its association with their demographic characteristics.

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive (cross-sectional) study which is conducted from September 2022 to January 2023, utilizes an assessment approach in order to assess the secondary school perception of drug abuse at nine boy secondary schools in Duhok City.

A probability (Cluster stratified simple random sampling) is adapted for the selection of five simple random samples of secondary school students from each stratified grade (10, 11, and 12) from each one of the nine secondary schools out of 34 schools which are distributed in the eastern and western directorate of Duhok education, these nine schools were selected through the using a lottery technique to represent the cluster point of the study sample in order to reach (135) students for the current study.

Data related to secondary school students are collected through the direct interview technique using the questionnaire that is utilized as a tool for data collection in the present study which is constructed through the extensive review of the related literature that consisted of two assessment parts. The first is concerned with assessing the secondary school student's demographic characteristics. The second part of the assessment tool is concerned with assessing the student's perception of drug abuse which includes 18 questions asking about the general information related to drug abuse, five questions asking about the factors that increase an individual's vulnerability to drug abuse, five questions related to brain function alteration due to drug abuse, and five question for each of Physical, Behavioral, and Psychological warning signs of drug abuse; Moreover, the response to all these questions are as Don't know, Not sure, and Know and these responses are scored as (1) for Don't know, (2) for Not sure, and (3) for Know. The questionnaire's validity was proved by reviewing it with five experts, and its reliability was tested using the alpha Cronbach coefficient, which

resulted in  $r = (0.78)$  to ensure the internal consistency of the questionnaire.

Data are analyzed through the application of descriptive statistical data analysis (frequency, percentage, Mean, and SD), and the application of cut-off points in order to determine the Poor, Average, and Good levels of secondary school students' perception related to drug abuse. Moreover, the association between overall secondary school students' perception and their demographic variables is analyzed using the Fisher Exact test at P-Value equal to or less than 0.05. Such analyses are computed by using the SPSS, IBM program version 23.

## Ethical Consideration

Written consent is obtained after clarifying the study objectives from the student's parents who are under 18 years of age prior to undertaking data collection of the present study. while this consent is taken directly from students aged 18 years and more.

## RESULTS

The study shows that a total of 135 students were studied, more than 50.4% aged between 18-20 years, the majority of them are in urbanized residential areas (96.3%), living with nuclear families (81.5%), Their fathers' education accounted 23% and 23.7% as a primary school and university graduate, while their mother's education is unable to read and write (45.9%) (Table 1).

Moreover, the student's perception related to drug abuse has significant associations with each of the student's age and type of family (table 1). Also, the findings indicate that approximately half of the students who participated in the present study have a good perception of each of the general information about drug abuse and perception of physical, behavioral, and Psychological warning signs of such abuse. While they have an average perception of the factors that increase vulnerability and alteration of brain function due to drug abuse.

**DISCUSSION:**

Through the assessment of secondary school students' demographic characteristics, the present study indicates that a total of 135 students were studied, students aged 18 constituted the largest age group in the study, The majority of the study sample are urbanized residential areas and they live in nuclear families. Also, the highest number of fathers' education is primary school graduates, while the mother's education was unable to read and write.

Related to the assessment of secondary school students' general information on drug abuse, the present study reveals that more than half of the participants have good information on drug abuse, this implies that secondary school students receive good instruction on the consequences of drug abuse. The current finding agreed with the findings depicted by Masibo et al. (2013) who stated that all respondents (100%) in secondary school had sufficient knowledge about drug abuse. Also, the study conducted on students of 8th - 9th and 11th - 12th standards indicates that the majority of them show adequate knowledge of substance-causing dependency (Nebhinani et al., 2013).

In contrast, study findings at Minia City on secondary school knowledge related to drug abuse showed that close to three-quarters of students in secondary school had poor knowledge regarding drug abuse (Mohammed et al., 2021). In addition, Yadav and Parajuli (2021) assessed the knowledge regarding drug abuse among grade 9 and 10 school students and found that more than half of those students (57.5%) had poor knowledge of drug abuse. Other study results revealed that 5% of adolescent boys show poor knowledge, and close to three-fourths of them (73%) had average knowledge related to illicit drug use (Trevelli and Devi, 2016). This variation in the results may be because of the selection of the sample and cultural differences between research studies.

Through the sequence of data analysis of secondary school students, the present study findings

indicated that the student's perception related to drug abuse was associated with each student's age and the type of their family. Undoubtedly, the awareness of children and adolescents can increase as their age experiences and grows in a family with a large number of individuals. The current result is consistent with the study's findings, which showed that the majority of high school students from the educational directorate in a large urban area in the north of Jordan noticed drug abuse as a big problem, and the older students, however, were more awareness than the younger ones (Haddad et al., 2010). Also, additional study findings indicated a positive relationship between the knowledge score of drug abuse of secondary school students and their age (Mohammed et al., 2021). The study conducted on students of grades nine and twelve of secondary school students at Hassan, Karnataka, revealed that gaining knowledge of substance abuse is associated with the student's age and type of family at the  $P < 0.001$  (Kumar and Huidrom, 2016). In contrast to current study results, other study findings on secondary school students' knowledge of drug abuse revealed no significant association between students' age and their knowledge of drug abuse (Yadav and Parajuli, 2021).

**CONCLUSIONS:**

According to the study results and discussion, more than fifty percent of secondary school students had a high level of perception of drug abuse. Particularly, the students showed average perception of the factors that increase vulnerability and alteration of brain function due to drug abuse. At the same time, they revealed a good perception of each of the physical, behavioral, and psychological warning signs of drug abuse. Besides, the student's perception of drug abuse was affected by each of the student's age and their type of family.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The study recommended that increasing the awareness of secondary school students about the consequences of illicit drugs must be considered as a part of primary health care services through conducting educational programs and forwarding them to secondary school students.

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**DISCLOSURE STATEMENT:**

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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## TABLES:

**Table (1): Secondary school student characteristics and association with their overall perception of drug abuse**

Demographic Characteristics		Freq.	%	P-Value
Age of the Students	15-17	47	34.8%	0.020
	18-20	68	50.4%	
	21-22	20	14.8%	
Student residential area	Urban	130	96.3%	0.474
	rural	5	3.7%	
Student's type of family	Nuclear	110	81.5%	0.010
	Extended	25	18.5%	
Father's education	Unable to read and write	17	12.6%	0.222
	Able to read and write	22	16.3%	
	Primary school graduate	31	23%	
	Intermediate school graduate	23	17%	
	High school graduate	10	7.4%	
	University graduate	32	23.7%	
Mother's education	Unable to read and write	62	45.9%	0.255
	Able to read and write	28	20.7%	
	Primary school graduate	26	19.3%	
	Intermediate school graduate	8	5.9%	
	High school graduate	4	3%	
	University graduate	7	5.2%	

**Table (2):** Secondary school students' perception of drug abuse

<b>Students' Perception</b>	<b>Freq. (%)</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
<b>General Perception of drug abuse</b>	Poor	5 (3.7)
	Average	57 (42.2)
	Good	73 (54.1)
<b>Perception about the factors that increase vulnerability to drug abuse</b>	Poor	18 (13.3)
	Average	75 (55.6)
	Good	42 (31.1)
<b>Perception of alteration of brain function due to drug abuse</b>	Poor	23 (17)
	Average	78 (57.8)
	Good	34 (25.2)
<b>Perception of physical warning signs of drug abuse</b>	Poor	16 (11.9)
	Average	57 (42.2)
	Good	62 (45.9)
<b>Perception of behavioral warning signs of drug abuse</b>	Poor	6 (4.4)
	Average	57 (42.2)
	Good	72 (53.3)
<b>Perception of psychological warning signs of drug abuse</b>	Poor	7 (5.2)
	Average	54 (40)
	Good	74 (54.8)