

The Association Between Family Functioning and Intention to Avoid Drug Abuse among Secondary Schools Students in Al-Hilla City, Iraq

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Family
Functioning and
Intention to
Avoid Drug
Abuse among
Students

ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine the association between family functioning and the intention to avoid drug abuse among secondary school students.

Study Design: Descriptive correlational study

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted at the Babylon Education Directorate, Al Hilla Iraq from 15th October 2024 to 30th June 2025.

Methods: This descriptive correlational study was among 600 secondary school students. Family functioning was measured using a Thai family function scale, while intention to avoid drugs abuse was assessed through Intention to Drug Avoidance Scale.

Results: 70% of students reported high family functioning. The majority of 95.3% demonstrated a high intention to avoid drug abuse. Statistically significant but weak positive correlation was found between family functioning and intention to avoid drug abuse ($r = .110, p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Most participants reported high levels of family function suggesting strengthening communication, parental involvement, and emotional support within families can contribute to higher preventive behaviors against drug abuse among youth. Statistically significant association was found between family function and intention to avoid drug abuse however, the magnitude of this association was weak.

Key Words: Adolescents, Drug abuse, Family functioning, Intention to avoid drug abuse

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a very critical stage where there is an excessive growth and development in social, psychological and biological aspects. It is also a phase that accompanied with heightened susceptibility to different risky behaviors, such as substance abuse and the ensuing adverse effects. At this age, adolescents are also prone to drug experimentation because of curiosity, need to feel independent, vulnerable to peer pressure, authority disadvantages, and low self-esteem.

Consequently, long-term negative effects of substance abuse in adolescence include have mental disorders, low academic achievement, addiction disorders to

substances and high risk of alcohol and marijuana abuse.^{1,2}

Drug abuse can be taken to mean the self administration or usage of drugs in a way that is not within the medically or socially accepted norms of a given culture and involves the repetitive consumption of illicit drugs or the misuse of prescribed drugs. Drug abuse is a common phenomenon during the adolescence stage, which is an intermediate stage in an individual that involves puberty, rapid physical growth and psychological transformations. The physiologic and psychological impact of drugs on the maturing adolescence brain makes the risk even more dangerous to substance misuse during this period in life.³⁻⁵

The intention to stay out of such risky activities especially drug use is one of the most effective psychological influences on the involvement of adolescents in risky behavior. Intent gives a distinct connection between knowledge and real actions, which is a clear willingness of not using drugs and knowing that these are harmful. Theory of planned behavior and the social cognitive theory are some of the behavioral theories believe that intention is a determining factor of behavior and is influenced by both external and internal factors.^{6,7}

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Family functioning is among the external factors that affect the intentions and behaviors of adolescents. Family functioning is the capacity of the family to remain stable, to adjust to change of life, to settle conflicts, to ensure emotional attachments, effective discipline, respecting of individual boundaries, and observance of collective values and norm.⁸ It has been established that a healthy family environment with warm and supporting conditions, healthy communication, and parental involvement can decrease the involvement of adolescents in smoking and substance use. The family leisure time and the development of a coherent environment at home can greatly reduce the risks of substance abuse among adolescents and later in life.⁹

Families can be defined as one of the essential elements of drug prevention programs as they have a powerful impact on the personality, attitudes, and choice of behavior among adolescents. Family members can assist adolescents to learn the skills of self-regulation, peer pressure resistance, and positive health behavior, through guidance, emotional support, and problem-solving support. Proper functioning of the family has been linked to the increased intentions of adolescents to never use drugs and to participate in protective behaviour.¹⁰

Although it is established that family functioning is important in determining the behavioral intentions of adolescents, the relationship between family functioning and the intention to avoid drug abuse among secondary school students has not been done especially in the Iraqi context. Thus, the current study is meant to explore the relationship between family functioning and the intention to abstain drugs in adolescents among secondary school students.

METHODS

This descriptive correlational study was carried out at Babylon Education Directorate, Al Hilla Iraq from 15th October 2024 to 30th June 2025 vide letter No. 3434/QM/Approval/EFEF3 dated October 2, 2024 among 600 secondary school students who were sampled through multistage non-probability sample. Students in the fourth and fifth grade were selected because they represent a critical developmental stage of mid-to-late adolescence, during which intentions and attitudes toward risk behaviors such as drug abuse become more clearly formed and willing to participate were included. Students with cognitive or communication difficulties that could affect questionnaire completion were excluded.

The study instruments for data collection were structured, self-administered questionnaire designed to comprehensively explore the research variables and gather relevant information. The instruments were put in Iraqi Arabic language through a forward-back translation technique. A panel of experts in the fields of

community health nursing and psychology reviewed the translated version to make sure that it has cultural relevance and clarity. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

Demographic characteristics form consist of sociodemographic variable for the students and their family such as (age, sex, educational grade and family economic status) and for family (father educational level, mother educational level, and parental marital status).

Family functioning domain assessed the level of family function measured by using Thai Family Function Scale (TFFS) it composed of 30 items and divided in sub-domain Communication (1) Problem solving include 8 items statements and (2) Cohesion include 13 items statement

Based on a three-point Likert scale (3=Always, 2=Sometime, 1=Never). In order to make sure that the higher total score, indicating high level of family function. The scores of the Family Functioning Scale (TFFS) are categorized into three levels using the equal interval method. The total possible score range (30 to 90) is divided into three equal intervals (Low=30-50, Moderate=50.1-70, High=70.1-90).

Intention to avoid drugs abuse domain to evaluate the participants intention to avoidance drug abuse in secondary schools students by used Intention to Drug Avoidance Scale [IDAS], consists of 22 item, and divided into 2 factors: (1) desire and commitment to avoid drugs: consist of 15 Items and (2) readiness to avoid drugs consist of 7 items

Based on a three-point Likert scale: (1=True, 2=Sometimes true, 3=Not true). In order to make sure that the higher total score, indicating high level of intention to avoid drug abuse. The scores of the Intention to Drug Avoidance Scale are categorized into three levels using the equal interval method. The total possible score range (22-66) is divided into three equal intervals (Low=22-36.66, Moderate=36.67-51.33, High=51.34-66).

The internal consistency method was used to determine the reliability of questionnaire in current study; internal consistency reliability measures the consistency between different items of the instrument. The internal consistency between items was determined by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha was 0.84 for the family function scale and 0.87 for the Intention to Avoid Drug Abuse Scale).

In the study tool dispensation, the uniform instructions on the study objective and how the questionnaire should be filled. Given the sensitive nature of drug-related questions, participants were informed that the questionnaire was administered solely for research purposes and that all responses would be treated with strict confidentiality. No names or identifying information were collected, which helped encourage honest responses. Data were analyzed using SPSS-26.0.

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to examine the association between family functioning and students' intention to avoid drug abuse.

RESULTS

Majority of students are between 15 and 17 years old with mean age was 16 ± 1 years and female student's more than male student. The sample is composed of students from a greater proportion in the fifth grade. The highest proportion of the students was considered their family's financial situation as sufficient (Table 1).

Table No. 1: Distribution of secondary school students according to their sociodemographics (n=600)

Variable	No.	%
Age (years)		
15 – 17	456	76.0
18 – 20	144	24.0
Gender		
Male	274	45.7
Female	326	54.3
Education grade		
Fourth	250	41.7
Fifth	350	58.3
Family economic status		
Sufficient	350	58
Sufficient to some extent	198	33
Insufficient	52	8.7

Table No. 2: Distribution of secondary schools students according to their parents' sociodemographics (n=600)

Variable	No.	%
Father's education		
Un able to read & write	16	2.7
Read & write	124	20.7
Primary school	162	27
Secondary school	164	27.3
Diploma/Bachelor and above	134	22.3
Mother's education		
Un able read & write	50	8.3
Read & write	204	34
Primary school	136	22.7
Secondary school	106	17.7
Diploma/Bachelor and above	104	17.3
Parental marital status		
Living together	520	86.7
Separated	14	2.3
Divorced	32	5.3
Deceased father or mother	34	5.7

The major proportion of student fathers holds either a primary or secondary school education. While mother's education levels show the largest segment of mothers can read and write without formal education. Regarding

parental marital status most of students were living with together parents (Table 2).

Table 3 exhibits that the majority of students reported high intention to avoid drug abuse indicating a generally strong and consistent tendency among students to resist drug use. More of students reported high family functioning level (Table 4).

A statistically significant but weak positive correlation was observed between these findings suggest that better family functioning are associated with a stronger intention to avoid drug use among students (Table 5).

Table No. 3: Overall assessment of intention to avoid drug abuse among secondary schools students

Intention to avoid drug abuse	No. (%)	Mean $\pm$ SD	Assess-ment
Low	10 (1.7%)	62.66 $\pm$ 6.31	High intention
Moderate	18 (3.0%)		
High	572 (95.3%)		

Table No. 4: Overall assessment of family functioning among secondary schools students

Family functioning	No. (%)	Mean $\pm$ SD	Assess-ment
Low	16 (2.7%)	77.83 $\pm$ 9.35	High family functioning
Moderate	164 (27.3%)		
High	420 (70%)		

Table No. 5: Correlation among family functioning, and intention to avoid drug abuse among secondary schools students

Spearman's rho		FFn	InADA
Family Functioning (FFn)	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.058
Intention to avoid drugs abuse (InADA)	Correlation coefficient	.110*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	.

DISCUSSION

The demographic characteristics of the study students showed that as three quarters are aged between 15-17 years which is consistent with the typical age range for secondary school education. This finding align with study in Nigeria that founded more than half 54.6% of the participants were between aged 14-16 years.¹¹ The current study revealed a more than half representation of females participants 54.3%, this finding align with study conducted in Jordan and deals with high-school students and drug addiction, their findings presented that greater than fifty of the study samples, constituted 52.2% were female.¹² While contrast with another study which reported a higher proportion of participants(52%)

were male.¹³ Concerning educational grades the sample greater proportion more than half in the fifth grade. These findings are align with study Ahmad et al¹⁴ that indicated more than two thirds of participants reflecting senior secondary school. The findings show that the family economic status, more than half proportion 58% of the students consider their family's financial situation as sufficient. The result consisted with the study conducted in Karbala City in Iraq, which revealed that more than half 55% sufficient economic status.¹⁵ Regarding father's education current study offered a relatively balanced distribution is observed across different educational levels. A majority of fathers hold either a primary 27% or secondary school education 27.3%, this finding inconsistent with another study that founded largest proportion of fathers were high education¹⁶ while mother's education levels in this study show a higher prevalence of lower educational attainment. The One third of mothers 34% can read and write without formal education. This result disagrees with study conducted by Ajibola et al¹⁶ that demonstrated that more than half of mother have secondary school. Majority of students about status parental marital, living with families where both parents are living together, this result go in line with the study that conducted in Norwegian, showed that the three quarter of adolescents living with both parents.^{17,18} In the current study, the percentage of students with high level of intention to drug avoidance is the biggest 95.3%. The result is in line with research in Pinlaung Township, that identified that most adolescents reported high predisposition to avoid drug abuse.¹³ This finding is also similar to the one in Saudi Arabia where high percentage 71.7% of intermediate and secondary students intended to quit smoking.¹⁹

According to the results of this research, over two thirds 70% of secondary school students stated that the level of family functioning was high. These findings follow suit with the research study carried out among the high school students in Iran, which reveals that mean family function was high.²⁰ In addition, this finding is consistent with the results of Dundar & Kaplan²¹ who reported that high quality of family relationships existed between teenagers and their parents. This study share similarity in various contexts which implies that strong family functioning is perceived by adolescents in a similar pattern.

This study given determined that family functioning had a significant statistical association with the intent of adolescents to avoid drug abuse. The strength of this association was however weak, which indicates that although family processes might have some influence on the intentions of adolescents, peer influence, personal characteristics of an individual, and surrounding conditions may have an important role in the behavior of adolescents. This highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach when examining the

factors that influence adolescents' decision-making regarding drug use. This research is consistent with, Silva et al, stated that the disorganized family dynamics and the inability of parents to monitor their offspring was found to be strongly linked to the increased risk of substance use in adolescents, this research highlights that the functioning of the family is a key factor that defines the behavioral outcomes of teenagers, as supportive family environments, as well as structured and cohesive ones, help to minimize the risk of substance use, but dysfunctional family dynamics may lead to the increase of susceptibility to drug abuse.²²

It is recommended to implement programs aimed at enhancing family functioning, particularly in communication, emotional support, and parental involvement, as these factors play a important role in shaping teenagers intentions to avoid drug abuse. Additionally, further research should be conducted to explore other factors influencing adolescent behavior, and schools, along with community organizations, should collaborate to raise awareness about the importance of a healthy family environment in preventing drug misuse

CONCLUSION

Most students were highly intending to avoid drug abuse and most of them reported high family functioning. It was also found that there was a positive correlation of a high level between intention to avoid drug abuse and family functioning.

Author's Contribution:

Concept & Design or acquisition of analysis or interpretation of data:	Rawaa Talib Sekeb, Salma Kadhim Jihad
Drafting or Revising Critically:	Rawaa Talib Sekeb, Salma Kadhim Jihad
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Agreement to accountable for all aspects of work:	All the above authors

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