

Exploring Teachers' Perspectives on Utilizing Local Resources to Address Substance Abuse within Schools

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The purpose of this study was to identify the conceptual foundations that underlie school teachers' preferences for the utilization of personal resources to address the problem of substance abuse at the school level. Also, it was examined whether there is a relationship between the school teachers' perceived approaches with their gender, school type, and socioeconomic status. The participants in the study consisted of school teachers working in secondary schools located in four densely populated districts of Karachi, Pakistan. The research was conducted using a mixed-method methodology. Data were collected by using semi-structured interviews through personal visits. A qualitative analysis method was used to find out the perceptions of school teachers regarding their preferred approach to deal the issue of drug abuse. In addition, a quantitative analysis was performed to ascertain the relationship, if any, between participants' demographics and their preferred approach. The results show that the school teachers selected effective strategies to address this issue at the school level within their means, including emotional competence, psychological competence, religion, and monitoring.

Keywords: substance abuse, emotional competence, psychological competence, religiosity

Drug abuse among youth is an enduring challenge worldwide, and it has been expanding over time (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2012, 2014, 2020). Pakistan is also a victim of this growing trend, especially among students (Baloch, 2016; Khan, 2020; Qasim, 2018; Rahman, 2021). In the last two decades, school-going children are increasingly suffering from this crisis worldwide (Burns, 2014). As a result, they are suffering from physical problems, emotional disturbances, and a decline in educational success and productivity (Mojiz & Zaib, 2018). Studies show that about 90% of high school boys and 60% of girls of elite schools in Karachi aged 10-19, admitted that they have experimented with drugs and alcohol, for some time. The elite schools, parties, and private parties of youth are the centers of drug abuse (Niaz et al., 2005). The growing practice of drug abuse in educational institutions of the metropolitan cities of Pakistan has become a major threat to the health and well-being of students who use drugs freely and openly. According to Qasim (2018) nearly 50 percent of students at various educational institutions, especially in Islamabad, Lahore & Karachi, are drug abusers at some level, and most of these students belong to elite-class families, with no problem paying for purchases.

As far as the reasons are concerned, research shows that peer pressure plays a key role in getting children to start using drugs (Alhyas et al., 2015). Other major reasons include its easy availability, watching liquor (alcohol) consumption in TV dramas & films, as an experiment, as a rebellion against parents, to exhibit masculinity, to relieve stress, and to decrease anxiety (Alhyas et al., 2015; Barret, 1986; Sultan et al., 2018). The notable risk factors include emotional problems such as depression or anxiety. These factors reduce confidence levels, create a desire to escape, and feelings like insecurity, powerlessness, and hopelessness that ultimately lead to reduced coping skills (Byrne, 2000). The other key factor in this regard is the parent-child relationship. Kids often get things done by modeling their parents and the quality of parent-child relationships is the key factor. Those parents who maintain a warm, supportive relationship with their children are more likely to induce their values and morals in their children. But at the same time, it is not enough for parents to hold specific values about drug abuse; children are less likely to accept the values of reluctant parents, emotionally deprived, or overly strict/abusive (Simons et al., 1988).

When it comes to the effects, drug abuse can cause physical problems, emotional disturbances, and a decline in educational success and productivity. Efforts to combat drug abuse must happen in schools because they have a great impact on conveying values, standards, and information to children. The effects of drug abuse have far-reaching consequences. They not only affect the users, but also their families, and the community as a whole (Cranford et al., 2011; Masood & Sahar, 2014; Short, 2010).

To deal with this issue, various programs have been set up at the school level to prevent this problem in economically developed countries. In Pakistan also different prevention programs have been started by the government and different NGOs to address this problem (Mufti, 1986; Shah et al., 2020) but these programs are not producing the anticipated results. Botvin (2000) concluded that these approaches may be effective when teachers involve at the local level in different populations. So, we need to have a look at the teacher/school level to combat this problem. It is very wisely said by Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus that "Prevention is better than cure". It would be better to prevent this problem before it becomes uncontrollable. This study discusses the views of teachers about the role of schools and teachers to combat the existing problem and for its prevention.

A limited number of studies have explored this issue from the perspectives of teachers and its prevention at the school level with the help of the school community (Bonyani et al., 2018; Botvin, 2000). Thus, identifying the preventive strategies from the perceptions of teachers can help set up effective and culturally sensitive strategies for the prevention of substance abuse at the school level. It will eventually help educators, educational administrators, parents, and policymakers to be aware of the version of teachers on this issue. Moreover, it will help the decision-makers to develop strategies to cope with this problem effectively.

Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers regarding the strategies to be used to prevent substance abuse in the schools of Karachi using locally available resources.

Research Question

- How do teachers perceive the strategies to prevent substance abuse at the school level?
- How do demographic differences of teachers impact their choice of strategy for dealing drug abuse?

Method

The research paradigm of this study was post-positivism. Therefore, a mixed-method approach was used. The mixed method is generally used because it combines the benefits of qualitative and quantitative methods while reducing their weaknesses (Creswell, 2017). The intent of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study was to explore the approaches teachers can use to prevent drug abuse at the school level. The first phase was a qualitative exploration of the perceived approaches/strategies by collecting qualitative phenomenological data from teachers at the secondary school level. Findings from this qualitative phase were then used to test hypotheses that relate the choice of perceived approach/strategy with gender, socioeconomic status, and type of school.

Karachi is the biggest metropolitan city in Pakistan with a population of roughly 20 million, also called Mini Pakistan. For administrative purposes, the city is divided into seven districts. To ensure geographical representation, respondents from the four densely populated districts were included in the sample as highlighted in Table 1. Variation in socioeconomic backgrounds was achieved by including teachers from public and private schools and schools situated in areas of privileged and underprivileged economic classes of the city as shown in Table 1. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the sample. Data were collected through personal interviews with teachers teaching at the secondary school level.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants

Variable		f
Subject	English/Urdu/Sindhi (Languages)	20
	Islamiat/Social Studies/Gen. Science/Pak Studies (Social Sciences)	25
	Math/Physics/Chemistry/Biology/Computer (Sciences)	25
Gender	Male	25
	Female	45
School Type	Private Schools offering SSC (Matriculation)*	50
	Private Schools offering GCE (O-Level)**	10
	Public Schools offering SSC (Matriculation)	10
Location	District East	20

	District South	20
	District Central	20
	District Korangi	10
Socioeconomic Status	Elite Class	10
	Middle Class	50
	Lower Middle	10
	Total	70

* Secondary School Certificate Exam taken by Karachi Board of Secondary Education

**General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) Exam taken by Cambridge Assessment International Assessment

Data were collected from four out of seven districts of Karachi. Twenty respondents from each of district East, South, and Central were taken whereas ten respondents were taken from district Korangi and thus a sample of 70 teachers was selected.

To ensure the participation of each economic group in the sample, each district was further divided into areas of three major economic classes. Ten participants were selected from schools located in the high-income class of the city and charging a high fee, ten participants were from a low-income group and fifty participants were selected from schools located in middle-class income group areas and charging average fees from students. Ten public schools and sixty private schools were included in the sample from these areas as shown in Table 1.

Written consent was taken from the school's administration. One teacher was selected from each of these schools with the criteria of having a teaching experience of a minimum of 10 years at the secondary level. Data were collected through personal interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the respondents. The collected data were analyzed using the constant comparison method.

All audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and uploaded into NVivo (version 12.0) software that helped in data coding & categorization and allowed for searching of the interviews, re-sorting of material, and consistent redefining of codes to support the analysis process. SPSS (version 22) was used for quantitative data analysis. Tables and diagrams of categories and subcategories were also used to display relationships between identified categories.

Results

Personal interview protocols were carried out and a total of 70 teachers (25 males and 45 females) participated. Data analysis identified four main themes: (1) Emotional Competence; (2) Psychological Competence; (3) Religiosity and (4) Monitoring & Supervision.

Table 2
School Teachers' Views on Substance Abuse Prevention

Theme	Category	Subcategory	f	
Emotional Competence		Self-worth	Students' endeavors	6
		Self-control	Refusal skills	4
		Coping skills	Emotional composure	4
			Sense of belongingness	6
		Relationship-management	Peer relationships	6
Total			26	
Psychological Competence	Alternatives of Pleasure	Indoor/outdoor sports	5	
		Challenging tasks	1	
	Stress Management	Co-curricular activities	8	
		Exercise	6	
		Hobbies	4	
		Busy in productive activities	4	
	Intrapersonal Development	Positive self-communication	3	
		Big goals of life	2	
		Active listener	1	
	Total			34
Religiosity	Character development	Stories of heroes	8	
		Religious teachings	7	
	Religious values	Clear direction	1	
		Spirituality	1	
	Purpose of life	Usefulness	1	
		Social taboo	3	
Total			21	
Monitoring & Supervision	Awareness	Sessions for students/parents	8	
		School environment	6	
	Deviant attitudes	Parental support	6	
		Protective measures	Anonymous helpline	1
		Strict disciplinary actions	4	
Total			25	

As shown in Table 2, four themes: *emotional competence*, *psychological competence*, *religiosity*, and *monitoring & supervision* were identified from the school teachers' comments regarding the prevention of substance abuse. The first theme emotional competence (f= 13) was divided into four categories as self-worth (f=3), self-control (f=2), coping skills (f=2), and relationship management (f=6). The second theme, psychological competence (f=26), was subdivided into the categories of alternatives of pleasure (f=9), stress management (f=11), and interpersonal development (f=6). Another theme, is religiosity (f=18) character development (f=13), religious values (f=3), the purpose of life, and portrayal of drug abuse (f=2). Lastly, monitoring & supervision (f=24) was explained in the categories of awareness (f=8), deviant attitudes (f=12), and protective measures (f=4).

Emotional Competence: Many participants felt that students who use substances have poor emotional competence. Thus, they believed that drug abuse prevention can be made by developing the emotional competence of students.

To develop emotional competence, respondents shared the following views:

Students' emotional competence will likely have an impact on things like motivation and academic success.

“Emotional competence is even more important than Intelligence Quotient (IQ) as success in life depends more on it”. (Male, 40 years)

Acceptance and giving importance to students' endeavors in class contribute to developing self-worth and emotional competence among students.

“Give importance and acceptance to students' efforts although they are trivial, in any area of development”. (Female, 28 years)

The most important component of emotional competence is self-control.

“In my opinion, we should teach our students in which situation they have to say NO and how to say it”. (Female, 35 years)

Students who have stronger ties with their peers, parents, and teachers are more likely to have strong emotional skills.

“The students who become a victim of their peer's bullying are more likely to take drugs, therefore, we should take extra care on this issue and help such students adjust in class.....”. (Female, 42 years)

Psychological Competence: Most of the respondents believed that students who use drugs or alcohol lack psychological competency. They, therefore, thought that fostering pupils' psychological competency could help avoid drug usage.

Respondents agreed on the following ideas for developing psychological competence:

Students' energies can be channeled and their outstanding skills can be expressed by involving them in challenging tasks, co-curricular activities, and outdoor or indoor games. This gives them other ways to enjoy life.

“..... Keep students busy in different activities, don't let them idle because an idle mind is the devil's workshop.....”. (Male, 52 years)

Games are crucial for fostering psychological competence.

“Schools should arrange competitions of outdoor and indoor games for the psychological health of students”. (Male, 35 years)

“In cities like Karachi, where there are few public grounds and the majority of school buildings lack outside play areas, accommodations can be made for indoor games like chess, scrabble, basketball, volleyball, and martial arts.....”. (Male, 30 years)

Physical exercise, hobbies, and other useful activities help students in managing stress, anxiety, and exhaustion.

“Teachers should provide opportunities for students to involve in healthy physical and mental activities during school time and motivate them to develop their interest in good hobbies at home”. (Female, 26 years)

Positive self-communication, positive inner speech, and big goals in life help in intrapersonal development.

“Always encourage your students, praise them even on their minor achievements, and make them feel that you are always thinking for them. Make them believe that they can do any task that other students can do. Help them to dream big in life and motivate them for hard work to achieve this goal”. (Female, 55 years)

Religiosity: The majority of respondents thought that pupils who abuse alcohol or drugs lacked religiosity. Therefore, they believed that encouraging religiosity among students through their character development could aid in preventing drug use.

The following suggestions for fostering religiosity were acknowledged by the respondents: Teaching kids about Muslim historical figures can be extremely beneficial for developing their moral character and other religious and moral ideals.

“Topics about the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the biographies of other Muslim heroes should be included in the subjects like Urdu, Islamic Studies, Social Studies, and Pakistan Studies”. (Female, 48 years)

A clear purpose in life can foster a sense of religiosity and spirituality in students.

“Students who understand the meaning of life avoid participating in these types of activities. Make them understand the true purpose of life.....”. (Male, 55 years)

The prevention of drug abuse can be aided by a consistent focus on the religion's prohibition of the practice.

“.....Teachers should instill in the minds of students that use of drugs is prohibited (haram) in the religion.....”. (Female, 25 years)

Monitoring & Supervision: The vast majority of respondents said that students abuse drugs due to a lack of monitoring and supervision. They thus believed that proper monitoring and supervision of students' activities could help to deter them from drug usage.

The respondents agreed with the following recommendations for monitoring and supervision of students in schools for the prevention of drug abuse:

Parent and student education workshops at the school can aid in the correct monitoring and supervision of kids.

“Awareness sessions for students and their parents should be regularly conducted at schools.....”. (Female, 32 years)

The other protective measures that were agreed upon by the respondents were:

“Screening out students through a blood test at schools.....”. (Male, 38 years)

“.....encouraging whole school staff to have a part in reducing drug usage”. (Female, 40 years)

“Conduct regular inspections of the student's things, including their bags and books”. (Male, 35 years)

“Make arrangements to avoid mixing young with older age students during school”. (Female, 34 years)

“..... placing CCTV in the schools.....”. (Female, 27 years)

“Strict disciplinary actions should be taken against those students who are found involved in it”. (Male, 50 years)

Table 3
Chi-Square Test on the Difference between Frequencies of School Teachers' Preferences for an Approach

Theme	Observed	Expected	Residual	Chi-Square	p-value
Emotional Competence	26	26.5	-0.5	0.339	0.285
Psychological Competence	34	26.5	7.5		
Religiosity	21	26.5	-5.5		
Monitoring & Supervision	25	26.5	-1.5		
Total	106	26.5			

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was used to determine differences in teachers' preferences for drug-abuse prevention approaches. As shown in Table 3, the results show that there is no significant difference in school teachers' preferred approaches. All approaches are perceived as equally important.

Table 4
Chi-Square Test on Relationship between Gender and Teachers' Preference for an Approach

Themes		Gender		Total	df	chi-sq	p-value
		Male	Female				
Emotional Competence	Observed	7	15	22	3	0.357	0.948
	Expected	7.9	14.1	22.0			
Psychological Competence	Observed	8	12	20			
	Expected	7.1	12.9	20.0			
Religiosity	Observed	4	8	12			
	Expected	4.3	7.7	12.0			

Monitoring & Supervision	Observed	6	10	16
	Expected	5.7	10.3	16.0

The chi-square test of independence was used to examine the possible relationship between teachers' approach choice and gender. The findings presented in Table 4 show that there is no significant relationship between the teachers' gender and the approach they choose. Teachers of both genders believe these strategies to be equally beneficial.

Table 5

Chi-Square Test on Relationship between School Type and Teachers' Preference for an Approach

		School Type			Total	df	chi-sq	p-value
		Private	Public					
Emotional Competence	Observed	18	2	20	3	2.48	0.478	
	Expected	17.1	2.9	20.0				
Psychological Competence	Observed	21	3	24				
	Expected	20.6	3.4	24.0				
Religiosity	Observed	11	4	15				
	Expected	12.9	2.1	15.0				
Monitoring & Supervision	Observed	10	1	11				
	Expected	9.4	1.6	11.0				

The chi-square test of independence was used to investigate the potential relationship between teachers' approach choices and the type of school they teach in (public or private). The results in Table 5 show that there is no relationship between the type of school where the teacher teaches and their preference for a specific approach. Teachers in both public and private schools believe these approaches are equally useful.

Table 6

Chi-Square Test on Relationship between Socioeconomic Status and Teachers' Preference for an Approach

		Socioeconomic Status			Total	df	chi-sq	p-value
		Elite	Middle	Lower Middle				
Emotional Competence	Observed	3	10	1	14	6	4.24	0.643
	Expected	2.0	10.0	2.0	14.0			
Psychological Competence	Observed	4	13	2	19			
	Expected	2.7	13.6	2.7	19.0			
Religiosity	Observed	1	11	4	16			
	Expected	2.3	11.4	2.3	16.0			
Monitoring & Supervision	Observed	2	16	3	21			
	Expected	3.0	15.0	3.0	2.0			

The chi-square test of independence was used to look into the potential relationship between teachers' approach choices and their socioeconomic status. The findings in Table 6 show that there is no relationship between socioeconomic status and preference for a particular approach. Teachers of all socioeconomic backgrounds believe that these approaches are equally useful.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to better understand how teachers at Karachi's schools felt about the approaches that should be taken to avoid substance misuse. The findings reveal that teachers of schools situated in all areas were well aware of this issue and the dangers related with it. They shared their mind to curb this problem at their level. The findings led to the development of four main themes: emotional competence, psychological competence, religiosity, and monitoring and supervision. The results of the current study are in line with earlier studies that placed a strong emphasis on conceiving emotional intelligence as a desirable trait in a prevention-based paradigm for reducing high-risk behaviors (Coelho, 2012; Eikenberry, 2016; Ferreira et al., 2012). Fakaruddin and Nor (2020) found that avoiding venues associated with drug abuse, managing their thoughts, and avoiding non-supportive friends; are some methods that have helped adolescents to have better control of themselves. These findings are also aligned with the findings of this study. The results of this study also offer ideas and strategies to enhance the emotional competence of secondary-level students that are practical, economical, and can be used locally in different contexts to minimize substance abuse.

Another important key finding from this study was that pupils' development of psychological competence greatly aids in preventing drug abuse, which is consistent with those of other studies conducted around the world (Botvin, 2000; Simone et al., 2016). The participants of this study provided practical, affordable, and adaptable suggestions and methods for improving psychological competency in secondary school children to reduce substance usage.

Francis et al., (2019) concluded that religious influences lessen, and give young people resilience against engaging in behaviors like alcohol and other drug abuse. To investigate the link between religiosity and substance use, the researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 123 studies with more than 50,000 participants from all around the world. The findings revealed that lower rates of substance use among young people were associated with higher levels of religiosity, including participation in religious activities, prayer, and believe in God. In particular, the study discovered that young individuals who were more religious had lower drug, alcohol, and tobacco usage rates. These conclusions are also supported by the findings of this investigation. Similar findings have been reported by other researchers as well (Alhyas et al., 2015; Byrne, 2000; Engs & Kenneth, 1999; Miller et al., 2000). The results of this study are distinctive and significant since they offer some doable strategies for raising students' levels of religiosity.

The finding reported in this study that through active monitoring and supervision of young students during school hours, we can prevent or reduce this problem is also consistent with other research findings on this issue (Alhyas et al., 2015; Ahmed et al., 2020; Bonyani et al., 2018; Niaz et al., 2005). Participants of this study suggested different approaches to enhance vigilance during school hours.

Various studies have been carried out nationally and internationally to highlight the potential causes of this problem, but the findings of this mixed-method study are special and pertinent in that they offer methods for addressing the issue of substance abuse at a very local level (teachers and schools) without the involvement of governmental organizations. The qualitative thematic analysis's results were subjected to quantitative data analysis, which showed that there was no significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies of themes drawn from the sample with its different demographic features. Moreover, no significant relationship was found between the perceived approaches of teachers and their gender, type of school, and socioeconomic status. This implies that despite their different demographic backgrounds, the respondents were aware of the situation surrounding drug usage in schools, and its potential effects, and was consistent in their views regarding how to address this issue locally by personal means.

Limitations and Suggestions

The role of students, school administrators, and parents are not taken into account in the current study, which exclusively examines the function of teachers in reducing drug misuse. The only participants in the study were all from Karachi. As a result of their unique environments, teachers from distinct regions of Pakistan could have different experiences and perspectives. The purpose of this study, however, was not to generalize the findings; rather, it was to examine how a small sample of teachers saw substances and gain a better knowledge of the preventative measures that may be taken. However, it would be interesting if subsequent research could identify methods for preventing substance usage across a wider representative sample of Pakistan or in other neighboring nations. The development of a more thorough preventive program at schools would also benefit from investigating and comprehending the perspectives of students, school administrators, and parents.

Conclusion

The study was successful in determining how much teachers knew about substances and the potential health risks linked with their usage. Several protective variables are also identified based on the opinions of teachers who live in Karachi, Pakistan. With the assistance of teachers and school employees, these factors can direct the planning, designing, and implementation of preventative programs at the school level. According to the study's findings, multifaceted preventative programs that focus on emotional and psychological norms, religion's role, and school supervision would be more successful and have greater protective results. Different demographically based teachers were aware of the problem and prepared to address it on their own using personal resources. Teachers' readiness and willingness to share specific, doable solutions show that this is the best way to approach the issue.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that school-based drug prevention programs involve all teachers and school staff in this task. As part of a curriculum that emphasizes emotional, psychological,

and religious aspects, teachers should also practice drug prevention techniques regularly. Consistent and careful monitoring and supervision should be a priority for school management.

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