

## Attitudes of teachers of elementary and middle school towards the use psychoactive substances\*

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The objective of this study was to evaluate the attitudes of primary and / or middle school teachers regarding the use of psychoactive substances in their work function. It is a descriptive and cross-sectional study. Participants were 75 teachers from four municipal and state institutions of two municipalities, who answered a questionnaire containing sociodemographic information and Drug and Drug Problems Perceptions Questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The results showed teachers' indifference about the subject; Those who had already participated in training had more negative attitudes; The male, however, more positive attitudes. It was concluded that such attitudes evidence the emergence of collective, preventive actions that link health and education.

Descriptors: Street Drugs; School Health Knowledge; Teacher Training; Health Attitudes and Practice.

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## Atitudes dos professores de ensino fundamental e médio frente ao uso de substâncias psicoativas

O objetivo do estudo foi avaliar as atitudes dos professores de Ensino Fundamental e/ou Médio diante do uso de substâncias psicoativas, em sua função laboral. Trata-se de estudo descritivo e transversal. Participaram 75 professores de quatro instituições municipais e estaduais de dois municípios, que responderam um questionário contendo informações sociodemográficas e Drug and Drug Problems Perceptions Questionnaire. Utilizaram-se estatísticas descritivas e inferenciais para análise dos dados. Os resultados mostraram indiferença dos professores acerca do tema; aqueles que já haviam participado de capacitação tiveram atitudes mais negativas; os do sexo masculino, entretanto, atitudes mais positivas. Concluiu-se que tais atitudes evidenciam emergência de ações coletivas, preventivas que vinculem saúde e educação.

Descritores: Drogas Ilícitas; Saúde Escolar; Capacitação de Professores, Conhecimentos, Atitudes e Prática em Saúde.

## Actitudes de los profesores de enseñanza fundamental y medio frente al uso de sustancias psicoactivas

El objetivo del estudio fue evaluar las actitudes de los profesores de Enseñanza Fundamental y/o Medio frente al uso de sustancias psicoactivas en su función laboral. Se trata de un estudio descriptivo y transversal. Participaron 75 profesores de cuatro instituciones municipales y estatales de dos municipios, que respondieron un cuestionario que contenía informaciones sociodemográficas y Drug and Drug Problems Perceptions Questionnaire. Se utilizaron estadísticas descriptivas e inferenciales para el análisis de los datos. Los resultados mostraron indiferencia de los profesores acerca del tema; Los que ya habían participado en la capacitación tuvieron actitudes más negativas; Los varones, sin embargo, actitudes más positivas. Se concluyó que tales actitudes evidencian emergencia de acciones colectivas, preventivas que vinculan salud y educación.

Descriptorios: Drogas ilícitas; Salud Escolar; Formación del Profesorado; Conocimientos, Actitudes y Práctica en Salud.

### Introduction

Although the term “attitudes” is extensively studied, there is no complete and definitive definition. It can be understood from three conceptions. The first definition is related to affective behavior, which will be what the person feels in relation to an object of attitude, resulting in positive or negative feelings according to their own judgment. The second definition refers to the cognitive behavior and it includes the information that the object of attitude

transmits, as well as the information and knowledge that the individual has about it. Finally, the behavioral component as the third definition is the action that will be performed in front of an attitude stimulus<sup>(1)</sup>. They constitute research objects linked to social psychology, which became an important field of social science research in the XX century<sup>(2)</sup>.

Attitudes would then be a useful concept to analyze the classes of human responses, determining the control of social actions<sup>(2)</sup>.

Other concepts that permeate this issue such as values, opinions, beliefs and social issues, influence how a person deals with situations and problems. Thus, attitude can be understood as a set of factors around an object or situation that preordains a directed, positive or negative, cultural, coming from experience, in which it will determine a preference<sup>(3-4)</sup>. Studying attitudes is relevant insofar as they determine the relation of the individual to the environment in which he lives.

The application of the aforementioned concept can permeate evaluative responses attributed to several human phenomena, such as the work that needs to be addressed, for example, the issue of the use of psychoactive substances. When dealing specifically with this issue, one of the environments in which it would be pertinent to evaluate attitudes regarding the use of alcohol and other drugs is the school, since it is directly affected by the problem.

In the presented context, evaluating the teachers' attitudes can be a useful tool to think about the creation of effective ways of implementing prevention programs for the use of psychoactive substances at school level, since it substantially affects the type of work developed by teachers in the classroom.

It is worth remembering that the development of such actions by Primary and Secondary School teachers are essential, as they are pillars of training and information. In this age group, students incorporate references to their behaviors, in which they will serve as a basis for the formation of their opinions, personalities, and character, considering what they assimilate in the classroom<sup>(5)</sup>.

It is known that the largest contingent of teachers demonstrates that they are not sufficiently prepared to provide the necessary information on alcohol and drug use and abuse. A study points to the misconceptions of these professionals as "licit drugs are less dangerous than illicit drugs" and "the main risk factor for drug use is socioeconomic status." Also, fear was also observed when discussing the use of psychoactive substances, but on the other hand, they believe that the school has a great possibility of contributing to the prevention of cases<sup>(5)</sup>.

Thus, there is a scenario showing the need to create subsidies to train and qualify these professionals, using scientific bases<sup>(4)</sup> and creating situations that can make their attitudes more positive regarding the theme "alcohol and drugs use and abuse" because it is important for adolescents to have their support in health promotion and prevention actions<sup>(6-7)</sup>. However, few studies address teachers' attitudes towards preventing the use of psychoactive substances in their work routine

and the investigation of this theme is necessary to think about better strategies of sensitization and more effective ways to deal with such problematic in schools.

Based on the above, the objective of this research was to evaluate the attitudes of Primary and/or Secondary School teachers regarding the problem of the use of psychoactive substances in their work routine. The specific objective was to verify the relationship between demographic and labor data (time of exercise in teaching, religion, gender, and age) and teachers' attitudes towards the subject.

## Methods

It is an observational cross-sectional and descriptive study. The data were collected in four state institutions of Primary and/or Secondary School in two municipalities in the interior of the State of São Paulo, from four schools. The study population was 129 teachers, distributed in the following way: in the municipality of Jardinópolis, there were 48 teachers in total, distributed in two schools; in the municipality of Brodowski, the schools involved have a total of 81 teachers. A non-probabilistic sample of 75 (58.1%) teachers was composed. The sample loss was due to the non-fulfillment of the exclusion criterion and also to the non-return of the research instruments.

The inclusion criteria were to work as a secondary or primary school teacher for more than six months; both genders. The exclusion criteria were do not respond to the search instrument in its entirety.

The data were collected from September to November 2016 in the respective schools, at the times provided by the teachers, by signing the Free and Informed Consent Term. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee on Research in Human Beings of the institution, under opinion number 1,718,924. The guarantees provided for in Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council were preserved. This research is a development of the thematic project entitled "Preventive interventions for the use of alcohol and drugs in school environment: evaluation of the impact of a program for students of Primary and Secondary school" funded by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development. Participants were invited to participate in the study, through guidance on justification, objectives, and procedures. Those who agreed to participate in the study signed the Informed Consent Term (TCLE), in accordance with Resolution 466/2012 of the National Council of Ethics in Research.

It was divided into two parts: sociodemographic information and an attitudes assessment scale,

titled “Brazilian version of Drug and Drug Problems Perceptions Questionnaire” (DDPPQ-br) adapted for teachers. Sociodemographic information: it will be useful to evaluate the profile of age, gender, religion, marital status and occupational data; DDPPQ-br: it is an instrument that evaluates the attitudes towards the work that involves the problematic with the use of drugs validated originally for the use in Nursing students. An adapted version of it was used with teachers, which is in the validation process for this target population. It consists of 20 items and can be self-applied. The items consist of assertions, in which the respondent can agree or disagree with their content, that is, the answers make up a scale that ranges from zero (0) - I strongly agree to seven strongly disagree, that is, the lower the score the better attitudes towards work that addresses the use of psychoactive substances<sup>(6)</sup>.

To make the analyzes feasible, a database was built in the Excel program, which was double checked and then migrated to the SPSS 22 statistical program. Regarding the characterization, the descriptive statistics were calculated using central trend measures (mean, median) and dispersion measurements (minimum and maximum, quartiles, standard deviations). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to test the normal distribution of the data. The Kruskal Wallis Test and Mann-Whitney tests were used to verify the relationship between the sociodemographic data and the scores of the attitudes scale. For all statistical tests, the 95% confidence interval was adopted. To evaluate the internal consistency of the adapted version for teachers of DDPPQ-br, Cronbach's alpha was used<sup>(9)</sup>.

## Results

The DDPPQ-br presented an overall Cronbach's alpha value = 0.83 for the sample studied (Table 1).

Table 1 – Distribution of participants according to schools (N=75), Brodowski, Jardinópolis, SP, Brazil, 2016

Schools	População		Amostra	
	N	%	N	%
School 1	25	19.3	21	28
School 2	23	17.8	20	26.7
School 3	59	45.7	20	26.7
School 4	22	17	14	18.7

The teachers who participated in the study had a mean age of 42.3 years old, SD  $\pm$  9.72 years old, with a maximum of 64 and a minimum of 21. Table 1

shows their distribution by the schools where the data were collected.

Table 2 shows the significant differences in the attitudes of female and male teachers, showing that men have more positive attitudes toward work that addresses substance use than women. It was also evidenced that those professionals who did not receive specific training for the subject present more positive attitudes than those who did not have such opportunity.

Table 2 – Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and mean scores of DDPPQ-br (N=75), Brodowski, Jardinópolis, SP, Brazil, 2016

		N	%	DDPPQ-br
Gender*†	F	55	73.3	40.93
	M	20	26.7	29.95
Subject‡	Biology	16	21.3	37.19
	Human	41	54.6	36.77
	Exact	11	14.6	37.14
	Polyvalent	7	9.3	48.43
Training*† for the topic	S	47	62.66	42.09
	N	27	37.33	29.52
Religion‡	Catholic	52	70.3	37.03
	Evangelic	8	10.7	29.06
	Spiritual	7	9.5	30.29
	Without religion	7	9.5	38.33

\*p-value <0.05; †Mann-Witney; ‡Kruskal Wallis Test

Regarding the answers offered in the scale, according to the available options, most of the teachers is indifferent to the approach of the subject in their fields of work, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3 – Answers offered to the item of DDPPQ-br (N=75), Brodowski, Jardinópolis, SP, Brazil, 2016

	N	%
I totally agree	181	12.1%
I partially agree	97	6.5%
I agree	201	13.4%
Indifferent	412	27.5%
I partially disagree	240	16.0%
I disagree	182	12.1%
I totally disagree	186	12.4%

## Discussion

The impact on the lives of children and adolescents as well as their families due to the use of chemical substances is great, and preventive actions are important for this age group, which is not limited to the health area<sup>(10)</sup>. The issue of psychoactive drug use is a subject of extreme relevance in public health and education. The Brazilian Legislation on the use of drugs regulates

the continuing education of teachers in the prevention of alcohol and drug use, with an implementation of pedagogical actions in schools<sup>(5,11)</sup>. The prevention developed in schools by primary and secondary school teachers are strategic actions that must be implemented in better conditions for more effective results.

The teacher plays a fundamental role in the personalities and opinions of the students since they are figures who transmit information and are in direct contact with students of all age groups. The school is usually the first social environment that the child and the adolescent will attend, so their actions will be mirrored in situations that occur in schools, as well as in the teachers' attitudes. Despite this, prevention programs are not achieving the effectiveness necessary for effective prevention<sup>(5)</sup>.

In this study, although teachers believe that training in drug use in schools is relevant, those who have participated in previous training have more negative attitudes towards training. Also, our main results indicate that most of them are indifferent to the topic, which is alarming. Previous studies have shown that teachers understand the relevance of the issue but tend not to take on this task, perhaps for fear of addressing such a topic in the classroom, citing exactly the lack of theoretical knowledge and access to information about the subject, fear to suffer reprisals (from students, parents and traffickers in the school environment) and also the understanding that this is a job to be carried out by professionals specialized in the area<sup>(7,12)</sup>.

It is clear that training courses for the use of psychoactive substances do not promote changes in the attitudes and values of teachers, nor they seem to be enough for these professionals to feel prepared to deal with the issue in their work context<sup>(5)</sup>. Also, the lack of an integrated public policy that allows for longitudinal prevention actions and ineffective models, mainly for prevention, but with moral appeal, based on repression and formal education (lectures) stands out<sup>(7,13)</sup>.

Testimonials from educators report the lack of prevention programs in schools and suggest specific courses for the subject, with continuing education. The study highlights the teacher training as a vulnerable formation in relation to some subjects, such as prevention of alcohol and drug use. Another discussion is that the educators do not have subsidies to implement the actions discussed in the said training areas<sup>(14)</sup>. They receive the demands, proposals and end up not receiving support and material from the institutions<sup>(5,11)</sup>.

A previous study that interviewed primary and secondary school teachers from the city of São

Paulo reported what they considered necessary to effectively address drug use at school: good material, labor investment, collective work, constant, open to new opinions and new knowledge<sup>(15)</sup>, which should be developed in partnership with people who deepen and specialize in the subject<sup>(5,16)</sup>.

Another relevant result of this study was in relation to male teachers. They have more positive attitudes towards the preventive work of alcohol and drugs. There is a dearth of prior scientific research that can provide comparative data. However, it is possible to parallel the perspectives of gender and positive discrimination. Positive discrimination is the reference to the advantages of competition brought to a group for the same benefit. Male teachers suffer prejudice by the profession of educating to be considered historically, a female role. In previous research, some of the teachers reported that they are recognized as different because they were a minority of gender in the profession but wanted to show that they could be engaged and make a difference in their profession. The teachers of the study stated that they benefit from being a man in society<sup>(17)</sup>. Thus, the gender perspective is related to the theme, which indicates a greater masculine positivity in relation to the school aspects, possibly linked to the more positive attitudes verified in this study.

In the context, there have been initiatives by the government that aim at capacity building for the topic, such as the Drug Abuse Prevention Course for Public School Educators, organized by the National Secretariat for Drug Policy (SENAD), in partnership with the Secretariat of Basic Education of the Ministry of Education (MEC), which proposes programs to reduce drug use through shared responsibility, linking various social networks such as school, family, community and government to restructure programs. Despite this, there are still practices for rethinking and more effective forms of prevention to implant. The Health School Project (PSE) is a program that articulates education and health and extends the possibilities of prevention to the use of alcohol and drugs in schools<sup>(5,11)</sup>.

In a study that analyzed the actions of a project developed in a school in which they implemented a permanent program of prevention to the misuse of drugs, methods of training that could be effective were discussed. It was emphasized the importance of placing the issue in a consistent and continuous manner based on theoretical foundations, institutional policy on the subject, epidemiological research, sensitization of the school community, training of volunteers, placing the youth as

a focus, giving space for conversations, encouragement to sports, cultural and artistic exhibitions<sup>(12)</sup>.

Health areas, especially nursing, which are introduced in primary health care, can contribute by fulfilling their key role in preventing substance use. Collaboration between health and education can contribute to improving the attitudes of teachers in their field of work through exchanges of experience and knowledge. Along with the nursing team, the nurses are fundamental in the construction and implementation of actions, programs in Basic Health Units or Family Health Units, due to the proximity to the community of its territory and the schools of the districts<sup>(15,18)</sup>. Authors surveyed in an integrative review that investigated educational strategies for the prevention of alcohol and drug use for elementary school children in Brazil, highlighted the nurse as an essential part of prevention strategies, since it is a professional that always attaches new knowledge, and capable of making changes<sup>(19)</sup>.

Health Education would be a way to raise awareness among young people and teachers about this theme, articulating technical and popular knowledge, promoting quality of life through groups, workshops, talk circles, being the basis of actions developed on the issue, both within of Health Units, and in schools<sup>(15-18)</sup>.

### Limitations of the study

Despite the relevant results of this study, the sample was non-probabilistic, and the number of participants in the study was reduced. Thus, the results obtained are not generalizable.

### Conclusion

This study showed that teachers who have participated in training have more negative attitudes towards work that involves the issue of the use of psychoactive substances. On the other hand, male teachers have shown more positive attitudes about the subject than their co-workers, which is a new hypothesis to be deepened in future studies.

The results show the need for projects that are really effective and make sense for teachers in their daily lives.

It is clear the emergence of joint actions between health and education, such as investment in training, but that are continuous that deconstruct misconceptions and are carried out in a shared way, providing scientific background on the subject, implementation of alternatives that stimulate students to healthier life practices, following an institutional policy on the subject

and holding informational events. Preventive training in the use of misguided substances, without pedagogical resources, investments, and support will reflect and reproduce in the feelings of impotence and indifference found in this study.

The contributions of this study point to the role of health professionals (and not only those of education) in the understanding of the school environment as a useful space to bring about changes in the health habits of young individuals. In this sense, the school constitutes a strategic place for the accomplishment of actions, especially preventive, of several subjects of interest of the area, as well as the use of substances. The teacher is an essential partner in this process, professional icon for any educational and training interventions of the students, which makes him a natural agent of social transformation, also for health-related matters.

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