

The Use of Substances among Children Settings in Algeria in the School Environment: Status-Quo, Prevention, and Treatment

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Abstract:

This paper aims at making a program that raises awareness about, and prevents, the use substance and addiction by schoolchildren. Besides, it shall shed light on the main therapeutic methods. It is a scientific contribution that helps the educational stakeholders make a fast intervention to prevent this phenomenon that horribly penetrated the school milieu. In this regard, the annual reports of who officially confirm the spread of drugs and their addiction in schools because the drug dealers promote for their goods in the school to take advantage of the vulnerability and immaturity of the schoolchildren. Besides, the Algerian Health Ministry and the Organization for Combatting Crime and Corruption launched alerts. Therefore, the researchers must provide the stakeholders with scientific data based on the nature of the society and psychology of the Algerian child and adolescent to limit the rapid spread of use substance and addiction behavior.

Key words: use substances disorder; use substances, schoolchildren; behavior addiction.

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1. Introduction:

Substances use is one of the problems that face all the societies as the numbers are increasing annually and the types of drugs are getting diverse. Lately, drugs consumption is no more limited to the rich people as it had been; rather, the poor people turned into the biggest addicted and consumer of drugs. In addition, drugs were exclusively consumed by the males; unlike the present time that witnesses a considerable number of female drug consumers. The UN Drugs and Crime Office (2021) revealed that the number of people who take drugs has increased with 11% during 2010 and 2018. Locally, the Algerian Office against Drugs and Addiction

reveals that drugs consumption in schools has increased to record numbers. It turned into one of the contemporary issues that threaten the Algerian school and society in general. Therefore, the schools find themselves obliged to secure the students from the drugs effects and dealers who take advantage of the students' immaturity.

The UN General Assembly sees that despite the increasing efforts by the states, the civil society, the international organizations, and the concerned bodies, the problem still raises risks to the physical and mental health. Based on what was said, this study focuses on the reality and motives of drugs consumption and addiction by schoolchildren to suggest prevention and treatment methods that limit the spread of the phenomenon and help treat the addicted. In so doing, we raise the following problematic, "what is the status-quo of use substance and addiction behavior by children and adolescents in the Algerian schools? What are the prevention and treatment strategies?"

2. Aims of the study:

- Covering the concepts related to the substances use disorder.
- Tackling the reality and causes of substances use and addiction by schoolchildren.
- Suggesting preventive and therapeutic methods to limit use substances and addiction by schoolchildren.

First: determining the main concepts:

1. The schoolchild:

Article 01 of UNICEF Convention on Childhood defines the schoolchild as any person under the age of 18. All the rights mentioned in this Convention apply to all the children without exceptions. Thus, the state must protect them against any form of segregation and promote for their rights. The definition integrates the real childhood, the adolescence, and the start of youth. This definition has been adopted by the Algerian Legislator (Article 01 of the Executive Decree 23-53 in the Official Gazette of 15 January 2023). This paper shall use this definition and focus on U-18 children of the different educational levels; primary, middle, and secondary.

2. Drugs:

2.1 The scientific definition:

They are anything that leads to laziness, relaxation, weakness, sleepiness, and heaviness in all the body parts and a feeling of pain (Mkhamra, 2017, p. 14).

2.2 The legal definition:

The term refers to any natural or synthetic substance listed in the 1st and 2nd tables of the Drugs Convention of 1961 with its amended form by the Protocol of 1972. It also designates every substance that is nationally classified as numbing (Law 23-05 that amends Law 04-18 of 25 December 2004, issued on 07 May 2023 on the prevention from drugs and the hallucinogen and the eradication of the illicit use or trade of drugs). In addition, drugs are any chemical substance that causes one of the following changes:

- Effect on the physiological state, including the level of activity, consciousness, and balance.
- Effect on the feelings in the brain.
- Effect on the perception level and the ability to analyze or change the stimulants.
- Change in the mood (Al Qadafi, 1999, p. 258).

3. substance use disorder:

3.1 Definition:

WHO defines it as a chronic poisoning state resulting from the repetitive use of the drug. It is a psychological and organic state that results from the interaction of the individual with the substance. It leads to different behavioral types that include the urgent desire of the continuous or periodical consumption of the substance to feel its psychological and organic effects and avoid the painful and threatening feelings of its absence. The consumer may be addicted to more than one substance such as alcohols, opium, cocaine, cannabis, steroids, and the hypnotic substances. DSM5 criteria for substance use disorders defines it as the continuous using of a specific drug despite its dangerous effects. According to this classification, the drugs are the alcohol, caffeine, cannabis, hallucinogen, opium, sedatives, hypnotics, anti-stress pills, stimulants (Amphetamine, cocaine..) (DSM5 criteria for substance use disorders).

The problems of the substance use are very complex medical problems as they attack the brain and cause negative feelings. The health professionals don't prefer using the term addiction or toxicomania to describe such issue; as it is mentioned in DSM-5. We must point that since 2013, DSM-5 uses the expression troubles related to a substance to designate the dependence and abuse, and overcome the use of the various stages, namely the use, abuse, and dependence.

3.2 How to diagnose the substance use disorders:

The diagnosis of the substance use disorders relies on some criteria set by the international mental health bodies in DSM-5 and CIM-11. This paper shall rely on DSM-5 because it is the one used in Algeria. DSM-5 refers to the addiction behavior when there is a consumption mode that leads to the change in the functions or to sufferance characterized with the manifestations of these symptoms during 12 months:

Impaired of control:

1. More important quantity or during a longer period than expected.
2. Persistent desire or non-fruitful efforts to decrease or control the using of substances.
3. Much time devoted for necessary activities to get, consume, or recover from the substance effects.
4. Craving or the need for using.

Psychological repercussions associated with the addiction behaviors:

1. Repetitive consumption leading to the inability to meet the major professional obligations in school or at home.
2. Continuous using the substances despite the persistence or the recurrence of the social or interpersonal issues.
3. Decrease or rejection of the important social activities.

Manifestations related to the risky behaviors:

1. Repetitive using in situations where it can be dangerous.
2. The continuous use of the substance despite the awareness about the physical or psychological troubles that may be exacerbated by the substance.

Psychological manifestations:

1. **The tolerance:** such as defined by one of the following conditions:
*A need for bigger amount of substance to reach the desired intoxication level.
*A decreased effect using the same amount of the substance.
 2. **The alienation:** it manifests in one of the following conditions:
*The withdrawal syndrome: characterized by the using substance.
* The substance (or an analogue) is taken for relief or to avoid the withdrawal symptoms.
- The severity of the disorder is determined with the following criteria:
- * **Low:** 2 to 3 criteria.
 - * **Moderate:** 4 to 5 criteria.
 - * **Severe:** more than 06 criteria.

In general, this diagnosis is made by the general doctors, psychiatrists, neurologists, psychologist, or experts of the drugs and alcohol use. We must notice that the medical exams and the urinary tests are sometimes necessary to detect the consumption.

3.3 -When is a disorder related to the use of the substance diagnosed as Severe?:

The disorder related to the use of the substance is severe when the users of the substances :

*Much time devoted to get the substance, consume it, and get rid of its effects.
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*Increase or extended consumption of the substance beyond due time (for example:
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medicine).
*Repetitive using in situations where it can be dangerous
* Appearance of a tolerance to the substance, which obliges the person to increase the dose to achieve the desired effect.
*Difficulty or impossibility of reducing or stopping the use of the substance.
* Problems during the withdrawal: the person shows withdrawal symptoms or uses the substance to overcome it.

Table 01: The criteria of high substance use disorder

The the substance use by children and adolescents causes long and short-term damages.

Short-term: the main effects are:

- * The violence either as a victim or as commissioner.
- * The non-protected and unwanted sexual intercourse.
- * Car accidents.
- * Memory troubles.
- * Absences in school or drop out.
- *Lack of concentration.
- * Delinquency.
- * Asthenia.

Long-term: the main effects are:

- * Schizophrenia.
- * Death (in case of overdose or mixing various substances).
- * Cancer (lungs-prostate...).
- *Depression and melancholy.
- *Infertility.

3.5 Phases of the use substance disorder for the schoolchildren:

The child who takes drugs goes through 05 phases:

- The preparation for making the mistake and preparing the incentives.
- Experimentation.
- The substances' overwhelming of the body.
- The use substances disorder.
- Post- substances disorder: the emergence of the results of the disorder physically, psychologically, and socially.

3.6 Phases of treating the use substance disorder for the schoolchildren:

The treatment starts with three phases intertwined with many therapeutic programs that help understand the nature of the patient. Many people take part of this treatment to help the patient overcome the addiction. In case of treating children, the family plays an important role because the medical team needs them to help the child recover. These phases are:

- * **The phase of the withdrawal symptoms:** It is a full medical phase where the focus is on retrieving the poisons from the body. The symptoms during this phase are physical because the body needs 07 to 20 days to get rid of the poisons.
- * **The phase of the psychological habilitation of the patient:** It is the longest phase because the behavior of the patient is completely modified through the psychological and behavioral habilitation and, then, the cognitive-behavioral treatment to increase motivation.
- * **The phase of social integration:** It is the last step and needs the family help. The patient needs a new positive environment where he can focus on study, sport, and good diet to avoid the relapse.

Second: The status-quo and causes of using substances by schoolchildren in Algeria:

1. The status-quo of using substances by schoolchildren in Algeria:

Recently, Algeria witnessed a record increase in the using and dealing of drugs because of social, economic, geographic, and demographic factors. Therefore, Algeria faces hard challenges regarding the provision of exact data about the production, trade, and the substance use. Despite the lack of data about this issue in Algeria, some statistics by the National Office against Drugs and Addiction show that 9576 cases of drugs were considered in 2023. Regarding the confiscated amounts of drugs in 2023, the big share was for cannabis with 2900.40 grams (this confirms the UN report that states that cannabis is the most widely consumed drug in the world), cocaine with 8531.31 grams, heroin with 141.72 grams, and the psychotropic substances with 1155524 pills.

Many factors show a record increase in the number of children and adolescents who take these poisons in schools. However, there are no clear modern statistics for the researches to make their prevention and awareness programs, except some information we got from the director of the national office against drugs and addiction. In this regard, he confirmed that the number is 54000 students; 518 of them were younger over 16years old received therapy. Besides, the findings of the study made by the national center for studies and analyses of population and growth in 2016 showed that the children who drop out schools and some delinquent students inside the school deal with the drugs gangs to promote for drugs in schools in the form of candies. Thus, students become addicted and cause thefts and aggressions against their peers and teachers (Ben Achi, p. 129).

As for the most using substances as follows:

Substance	Type	Secret name in Algeria	Effect
Cannabis	Plant	Zatla or Chira	Elation, increased sexual desire, severe stress, horror after taking, distortion in the recognition of the space and place
Lyrica	Pill	Saroukh	Euphoria, somnolence
Artane	Pill	Madame courage	Feeling of invulnerability and strong power, amnesia
Ecstasy	Pill	Halwa	Euphoria, enpathogeous and entactogenous effects, reduces the need for sleep
Alvotril	Pill	Hamra	Somnolence, anxiety, confusion of ideas, hallucination
Xylazine	Veterinary anesthesia	Zombie traq	Irritation, practice of violence, suicidal

			attempts
Cocaine	Alkaloid	Bayda	More energy and self-confidence, strong feeling of happiness, temporary decrease of the need for food and sleep, agitation, muscular spasms, reflexes of rapid over jumping

Table 02: the most consumed substances by U-18 children

2. Causes of use substance by schoolchildren:

This phenomenon has many causes, mainly in the 1st phase of adolescence due to its specificity. Many scholars made studies to discover these causes starting from scientific theories and bases about childhood and adolescence. We shall mention the most common causes that we believe relate to the phenomenon in Algeria:

- * The abundance of the drugs, mainly recently, as the dealers started promoting for the drugs in schools since children are the best clients and the most easily influenced and convinced.
- * One of the parents or siblings consumes the drugs (a milieu that paves the way for consumption).
- * The vital role of the friends and bad peers in pushing the child towards the consumption.
- * Familial issues and instability (Ibrahim, 217, pp. 146-147).
- * The increasing feeling of children of the loyalty to their groups of peers more than their loyalty to the family (Al Aissaoui, 2000, p. 234).
- * The influence of children in the 1st phase of adolescence by the popular songs that are full of implicit reference to the drugs (Deghbar, 2019, p. 516).
- * Psychological crises in adolescence.
- * Severe depression that children cannot overcome.
- * Love of experience and discovery.
- * Strong desire of the fake euphoria and joy.
- * The absence of the parental control.

- * The fake belief that the drugs help forget the problems.
- * The lack of awareness about the dangers of drugs.
- * The spread of delinquency in schools.
- * The abundance of money and its bad management.
- * The severe poverty.

Third: suggesting therapeutic and preventive methods to limit or reduce the phenomenon of use substance in schools:

Despite the big efforts made by the Algerian state to fight the issue through the security bodies and the national office against drugs and addiction, the rate of the substance use is still high. This may be due to the deterrent nature of the measures that consider drug takers as criminals instead of victims. Thus, it is necessary to think about a clear method to prevent and treat the causes of the issue and guide the victims. Therefore, before setting any policy or preventive program with scientific bases, there must be a change in understanding the concept of use substance in schools and its social, cultural, ad economic effects.

Through this paper, we shall suggest some mechanisms based on scientific principles as follows:

1. The preventive mechanisms against use substance in schools:

- * It is necessary to plan for a clear national policy against the phenomenon where all he national institutions that care for the child shall be involved.
- * The researchers and experts should make studies about the contexts and causes that make children take drugs.
- * The Ministry of Education must make awareness campaigns for children about the dangers of the substance use and how to avoid them.
- * The mosques should help educate children and fight drugs.
- * The families with low educational levels must be informed about the dangers of the issue
- * It is necessary to incorporate the subject of drugs risks in the educational curriculum.
- * Leisure and cultural spaces must be established to absorb the negative energy of children and change it into good work.
- * The ministries of education, higher education, health, internal affairs, and defense must coordinate and exchange data that help interventions.

- * The psychological counsellors must be employed in schools to guide and care for children.
- * The role of the city associations and parents associations must be promoted to raise awareness of children who consume drugs about their dangers.
- * It is necessary to raise the social awareness about the drugs consumption by children and how to fight it using media and social media.
- * It is necessary to launch a university minor on use substance and disorder.

2. The preventive penal mechanisms against the issue:

The Algerian judicial system (police, security, court, and prisons) make huge efforts against the phenomenon. Nevertheless, there are some gaps as follows:

- * The victims are treated as criminals.
- * The using substance by children is dealt with as by the adults with deterrence and jail.
- * There is no research for the solutions to treat the causes.
- * The psychological, physical, and economic effects coming from children blackmailing and threatening by the dealers on children are not treated.

From these gaps, we suggest:

- * Enacting a new legislation that provides for referring children who take drugs to the therapy centers.
- * Enacting stringent laws against the big drug dealers who exploit children.
- * Establishing police cells in schools where the issue is widespread to protect children from the dealers.
- * Making awareness campaigns in schools to inform children and their parents about the dangers of drugs.

3. Therapeutic methods of substance use disorder:

The number of patients in the therapeutic centers reached 8658 in the 1st term of 2023. 6927 are males and 1731 are females. The U-15 children are 518 and those more than 25 years old are 3790. We must point that these statistics do not reflect the real consumption of drugs because:

- * There is no efficient number of therapeutic centers in all the Wilayas. In this context, there are only 35 centers and some other healthcare centers. It is a small number for Algeria.
- * The fear of the social vision.

- * The fear of the Algerian authorities.
- * The parent's concealment to protect their children.
- * The misperception that the use substances is not a disease, and that it can be overcome individually.

Therefore, we suggest:

- * Establishing therapeutic centers in most of the states, mainly the big ones. The therapy must follow the international health protocol against use substance by children and respect the specificity of children.
- * Training the experts on dealing with use substance and equipping them with high skills in the field.
- * Rehabilitating the patients and encouraging them to make sport.
- * Promoting for the therapy centers and correctly treating the issue.
- * Setting health sessions in schools to diagnose the disorder and suggest the suitable treatment.
- * Renaming the centers with names that do not give negative feelings to the patient, for instance "the sane life center".

Conclusion:

The phenomenon of use substance by children in schools has widely spread worldwide. Therefore, international cooperation is needed. Algeria is one of the victims of this issue due to the young population and its geographic position that is between the production, transit, and consumption states. None can deny the efforts of the Algerian authority against this issue. Nevertheless, its efforts are not enough to reach the target goals. Thus, the experts must work hard to reduce the phenomenon for children. In this regard, the researchers, academics, and experts have to provide the authorities with the scientific bases of the therapeutic and preventive programs. In addition, the high authorities must improve the social, health, and educational conditions for the child to get rid of the negative energy that may push them towards drugs. Moreover, the role of the family and the school must shift towards educating children correctly to shape good citizens in a world free of scourges and diseases.

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