



Prevalence and Patterns of Substance Use Among School-Going Adolescents in Malaysia

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Abstract

Drug addiction remains a significant global public health concern, with millions of individuals worldwide affected by drug use disorders and in need of treatment services. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable due to developmental, psychological, and social influences that increase their susceptibility to experimentation and substance misuse. In Malaysia, recent reports indicate that the majority of drug users are young people, particularly adolescents, and this troubling trend has increasingly extended into school settings, with reported cases rising annually. However, national statistics primarily rely on enforcement data such as arrest records and operational reports, which may underestimate the true magnitude of substance use among students. Moreover, there is a lack of recent nationwide data specifically examining the prevalence of drug and substance abuse among school-going adolescents in Malaysia. This study therefore aimed to determine the current prevalence of drug abuse among secondary school students through a nationwide representative survey conducted in identified hotspot areas. A total of 3,038 students were selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected via face-to-face interviews using the Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST) and analyzed descriptively using SPSS. The findings revealed an overall prevalence of 7.3%, with kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*), hallucinogens, and cannabis being the most commonly reported substances. Most users were male, and the mean initiation age was 16 years. These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted prevention and intervention strategies in Malaysian schools and communities.

Keywords: drug addiction; students; substance abuse; kratom; hotspot areas