

USE AND ABUSE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NORTH-CENTRAL GOIÁS

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ABSTRACT

When entering university, individuals face various challenges, changes, and conflicts, which can cause stress and psychological distress, leading to vulnerability and the risk of psychoactive substance and alcohol use and abuse during their academic years. The present study aims to identify and outline the profile of psychoactive substance users among students at a university in north-central Goiás. This is a descriptive cross-sectional field study with quantitative data analysis, conducted at the Evangelical University of Goiás – Ceres Campus. It is based on the “umbrella” method, with questionnaires for students aged 18 to 40 enrolled at the institution who agreed to participate in the study. The data obtained will be statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science for Windows (SPSS) to survey the prevalence of psychoactive substance and alcohol use among university students, as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression. It will also contribute to a better understanding of the topic, identify consumption patterns and socioeconomic factors, and support preventive reflections on drug and alcohol use during the academic phase.

Keywords: psychoactive substances; alcohol; university.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of psychoactive substance use and abuse among young people has become a significant health problem in adolescence, with an alarming increase in the number of users across the country (ANGHEL *et al.*, 2023). With the use of psychoactive substances in adolescence, individuals are more likely to develop addiction in adulthood. At this stage, the brain is still developing, which makes adolescents more prone to the effects of these substances (VIEIRA, 2023).

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This has become a public health problem, with adults more susceptible to developing diseases and premature death.

These substances have a number of effects on the human body, including behavioral, biochemical, cognitive, and toxicological effects. The use of tobacco, cocaine, crack, cannabis, alcohol, and other licit and illicit drugs during adolescence impairs neurological development and growth (ROCHA et al., 2022).

When individuals enter university, they become more vulnerable to starting the use of various substances. This moment not only represents a milestone for most young people who manage to pass the entrance exams, but also becomes a critical period of psychosocial transition. Students become more independent from parental supervision, take on responsibilities, and make decisions about their own lives, which can sometimes lead to insecurity and instability (SANTOS; PEREIRA; SIQUEIRA, 2013).

University students go through several phases during their studies, such as a new place, responsibilities, academic rigor, living away from family, psychological pressures, stress, financial difficulties, and apprehension about their professional future. As such, they are vulnerable to psychoactive substance use (BARBOSA; ASFORA; MOURA, 2020).

When it comes to young university students, it is important to emphasize that choosing a degree is a significant step for the individual. Consequently, the university environment is also associated with increased consumption of substances that are harmful to physical and psychological health, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs among university students. This scenario occurs due to the possibility of purchase, lack of parental control, academic independence, and encouragement from peers who facilitate the consumption of legal and illegal drugs (SIMPLÍCIO *et al.*, 2021).

This factor can lead to various academic problems, with students performing poorly in class and on assessments, frequent absences, and tardiness or late assignments. In addition, students who consume alcohol

are more likely to engage in dangerous behaviors, such as the use and abuse of psychoactive substances (NASUI *et al.*, 2021).

Universities have opportunities to develop research and prevention initiatives regarding the use of psychoactive substances and alcohol among students, establishing benchmarks and providing support to other research groups. Thus, this study can contribute to identifying the profiles of students and courses that require more attention from teachers, coordinators, and administrators at the institution. This is in an attempt to reduce or abolish consumption among university students (SIMPLÍCIO *et al.*, 2021).

Another relevant point is the health problems related to drug use, especially electronic cigarettes. Nicotine raises heart rate and diastolic blood pressure (DBP), which increases the chances of myocardial infarction and stroke. In addition to exacerbating asthma, wheezing, and cases of chronic bronchitis, continued nicotine use also contributes to carcinogenic risks to the lungs, larynx, and mouth (CAO *et al.*, 2020).

METHODS

This is a field study of a descriptive cross-sectional nature, with quantitative data analysis, conducted at the Evangelical University of Goiás – Ceres Campus. It is a cross-sectional study, with questionnaires for students aged 18 to 40, enrolled at the institution who agree to participate in the research and sign the TCLE term. The data obtained will be statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science for Windows (SPSS) to survey the prevalence of psychoactive substance and alcohol use among university students, in addition to symptoms of anxiety and depression.

The study population consists of students from Unievangélica – Ceres Campus, enrolled in Nursing, Biomedicine, Physical Therapy, Pharmacy, Law, Physical Education, Software Engineering, Aesthetics, Administration, and Radiology courses. The sample has 95% reliability and 5% sampling error, with 1,163 students and 289 research participants in the study. All administered questionnaires are validated, namely: Alcohol (ASSIST); Sociodemographic questionnaire; Quality of Life (WHOQOL - BREF); Tobacco (QTF); Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and Tension (DASS-21). The data will be tabulated and analyzed by the researchers, ensuring the preservation and confidentiality of the information.

RESULTS

The research is expected to contribute to a greater understanding of the problem of drug and alcohol use and abuse in the academic environment, thereby broadening the debate and encouraging further research on the subject. In addition to identifying related factors such as the most commonly used substances and the courses with the highest rates of use, the study will outline the profile of students who use psychoactive substances and alcohol, in order to contribute to further reflection and possible means of helping them break free from addiction.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected for this research project, it can be concluded that the university environment is related to the increased use of psychoactive substances, due to the changes and new challenges that students may face. Furthermore, current studies are primarily focused on public universities and are concentrated in health-related courses, particularly medicine.

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