



ORIGINAL

Consumption of psychoactive substances and depression in adolescents in the municipality of Aracataca, Magdalena, Colombia

Consumo de sustancias psicoactivas y depresión en adolescentes en el municipio de Aracataca Magdalena, Colombia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to identify a possible relationship between the consumption of psychoactive substances and depression in a group of lower secondary education adolescents at a state educational institution in the municipality of Aracataca, Magdalena, Colombia. The methodology employed was quantitative, through a descriptive-correlational study. The sample consisted of 106 intentionally selected students, comprising 57 girls and 51 boys. The age range was 13 to 17 years, belonging to socioeconomic stratum 1, and they were in the 9th grade. The CDS questionnaire was applied to assess the presence of depression, and the abbreviated DUSI-R to determine the consumption of psychoactive substances. The research revealed a significant correlation between the consumption of psychoactive substances and the presence of depressive symptoms in adolescents, a finding that illuminates the complexity of the factors influencing mental health in this population. This discovery underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach in the care of adolescents, addressing both substance use and mental health problems comprehensively. The interrelationship between these two factors suggests that they can mutually influence each other, highlighting the need for interventions that address both aspects simultaneously and in coordination. By adopting a comprehensive and proactive approach—including prevention and treatment—it is possible to promote the overall well-being of adolescents and reduce the negative impact of these factors on their development and quality of life.

Keywords: Group Behavior; Adolescent Psychology; Developmental Psychology; Psychometrics.

RESUMEN

El propósito de la presente investigación fue identificar una posible relación entre el consumo de sustancias psicoactivas y la depresión en un grupo de adolescentes de educación secundaria básica en una institución educativa estatal del municipio de Aracataca, Magdalena, Colombia. La metodología empleada fue de enfoque cuantitativo, llevando a cabo un estudio descriptivo-correlacional. La muestra consistió en 106 estudiantes seleccionados de manera intencional, distribuidos en 57 niñas y 51 niños. El rango de edades abarcó desde los 13 hasta los 17 años, pertenecientes al estrato socioeconómico 1 y cursando el grado 9°. Se aplicaron el cuestionario CDS para evaluar la presencia de depresión y el DUSI-R abreviado para determinar el consumo de sustancias psicoactivas. La investigación reveló una correlación significativa entre el consumo de sustancias psicoactivas y la presencia de síntomas depresivos en adolescentes, un hallazgo que arroja luz

sobre la complejidad de los factores que influyen en la salud mental de esta población. Este descubrimiento subraya la importancia de adoptar un enfoque holístico en la atención a los adolescentes, abordando tanto el consumo de sustancias como los problemas de salud mental de manera integral. La interrelación entre estos dos factores sugiere que pueden influirse mutuamente, lo que destaca la necesidad de intervenciones que atiendan ambos aspectos de manera simultánea y coordinada. Al adoptar un enfoque integral y proactivo, que incluya tanto la prevención como el tratamiento, puede promover el bienestar integral de los adolescentes y reducir el impacto negativo de estos factores en su desarrollo y calidad de vida.

Palabras clave: Comportamiento de Grupo; Psicología del Adolescente; Psicología del Desarrollo; Psicometría.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary educational context, it is common to observe young people in adolescence who show signs of depression. These symptoms often result from a variety of emotional, domestic, environmental, and social challenges. These obstacles frequently lead them to adopt “avoidance” behaviors such as the use of psychoactive drugs, placing them as the third group with the highest prevalence of prohibited substance use at the national and district levels.^(1,2,3)

The family environment plays a crucial role in the development of adolescents’ social skills and, consequently, in their decision-making regarding the use of psychoactive substances.⁽⁴⁾ The lack of parental attention can be a determining factor in the use of these substances. The work commitments of adults often require them to be away from home for extended periods, leaving adolescents unsupervised. This isolation can lead young people to use their free time to experiment with psychoactive substances.^(5,6)

Young people who lack emotional support and are overwhelmed by personal problems find immediate relief for their daily distress in psychoactive substances, reinforcing the consumption behavior.^(7,8) Depression stands out as one of the main reasons that lead adolescents to consume psychoactive substances. However, it is important to note that depression can also be an effect of the consumption of these substances, thus establishing a bidirectional relationship.^(9,10) This represents one of the greatest public health challenges in contemporary societies.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the possible correlation between the consumption of psychoactive substances and depression in adolescents aged 1 to 17 years from an educational institution in the municipality of Aracataca, Magdalena, Colombia.

METHOD

The objective is to detail the characteristics of the variables in question (depression and consumption) and independently evaluate the factors associated with them. The goal is to determine the level of correlation between these two variables in a specific context and among the same subjects, through the analysis of internal consistency and test validity.⁽¹¹⁾

Participants

The sample consisted of 106 adolescent students, aged between 1 and 17 years, in basic secondary education at a public educational institution in the municipality of Aracataca, Magdalena, Colombia, in the Caribbean region.

Instruments

The abbreviated version of the Drug Use Screening Inventory (DUSI-R) was used, allowing the identification of psychosocial disorders associated with the use of psychoactive substances that can be modified through preventive or therapeutic interventions. The DUSI-R is based on a list of 83 binary responses (Yes/No) questions designed to assess the severity of disorders in eight domains: behavior, emotional state, social behavior, family, education, peers, recreation, and drug use.^(12,13,14)

Procedure

At the beginning of each application session, the research, its objectives, methodology, and ethical considerations were presented to the students. Subsequently, a questionnaire was handed out to each student, with the CDS being the first instrument applied. The second part of the application involved responding to the abbreviated DUSI-R questionnaire. Once the application was completed, each student was asked to ensure that they had not left any questions unanswered. For data analysis, the statistical software Stata was employed.⁽¹⁵⁾

Ethical considerations

In accordance with the provisions of Article 25 of Colombia’s Law 1090, permission was sought from the

institution's administration to apply both instruments after obtaining informed consent.

RESULTS

A descriptive analysis of each variable was conducted, the internal consistency of the instruments was determined, and the obtained from the application of the CDS and abbreviated DUSI-R questionnaires were correlated.⁽¹⁶⁾ The tables displaying the descriptive analyses performed are presented below.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of the variable age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
13	11	10,37
14	84	83,01
15	10	9,4
16	0	0
17	1	0,94
Total	106	100,0

Reliability of instruments

The coefficient of internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) obtained when using the CDS was 0,914, indicating that the results are reliable and support the use of this instrument.⁽¹⁷⁾

The frequency distribution of scores on the abbreviated DUSI-R indicates a "high risk" of consumption in 24 students and a "very high risk" of consumption in 11 participants, representing 33,01 % of the sample. Additionally, 52,8 % are at a medium risk, equivalent to a total of 56 students. Therefore, it can be inferred that 85 % of the population is at a medium, high, or very high risk of consuming psychoactive substances.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the scores of the DUSI-R Abbreviated

Distribution	Frequency	Percentage
Low risk	15	14,15 %
Medium risk	56	52,8 %
High risk	24	22,64
Very high risk	11	10,37
Total	106	100

Regarding the initiation of psychoactive substance consumption, it was found that 42 % of adolescents have consumed some type of these substances. Cigarettes are the substance with which the majority of adolescents begin consumption, representing 51,1 % of cases. It is important to note that the number of females starting with cigarettes is twice that of males.

Alcohol is the second substance with which adolescents typically initiate consumption, accounting for 38,7 % of cases. Alcohol consumption begin most frequently in age 14, for both males and females, with a percentage of 45,5 % for females and 54,4 % for males. According to the scores obtained by the students and the mean comparison analysis, there is no significant difference between the two gender groups, indicating that both sexes present the same level of risk for substance consumption.

Table 3. Risk of consumption by sex

Genre	Media	DE	P
Male	29,01	11,89	0,21
Female	32,18	10,07	0,21

According to the comparison of the means of the two groups presented in Table 4, it is evident that women exhibit higher levels of depression than men. This difference is statistically significant.

Table 4. CDS scores by sex

Total depressive	Gender	Media	DE	P
	Male	136,41	25,632	0,0
	Female	151,11	21,895	0,0

According to the data collected in the correlation between the scores of the two instruments, abbreviated DUSI-R and CDS, a value of $r = 0,58$ ($p = 0,01$) was obtained. This indicates a positive and statistically significant correlation.⁽¹⁸⁾

DISCUSSION

Several theories aim to explain the connection between depression and substance use in adolescents. One of these theories is the self-medication hypothesis, which suggests that some adolescents may turn to psychoactive substances as a means of alleviating depressive symptoms.⁽¹⁹⁾ Another theory is the susceptibility hypothesis, which proposes that depression could increase adolescents' inclination towards substance use.^(20,21)

Additionally, studies have revealed that depression and substance use often coexist in adolescents.⁽²²⁾ In other words, adolescents with depression are more likely to use psychoactive substances, and vice versa. This bidirectional relationship can lead to a harmful cycle, where depression promotes substance use, which in turn can intensify depressive symptoms.^(23,24)

It is crucial to emphasize that the connection between depression and substance use in adolescents is complex and may be influenced by various factors, including genetic, environmental, psychological, and social elements.⁽²⁵⁾ Therefore, it is essential for mental health professionals to be vigilant for signs of depression and substance use in adolescents and provide appropriate interventions to help these young people manage these problems.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

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