

## **High School Teacher's Conceptions On Alcohol And Other Drugs Use In A Public School In Manaus, Brazil**

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**Abstract:** *This research is an exploratory study of a qualitative approach. It aimed to know the teachers' conceptions about the use of drugs by high school students of a state public school system in Manaus city, Amazon, Brazil. A semi-structured interview was used with six teachers, three men and three women. The collected data were analyzed using the Bardin content analysis technique. Respondents pointed to the responsibility of the school, family, government, and society as the key factors in preventing drug use, discrimination, and prejudice that still lingers in our society and within the school. They also pointed to the need for a cohesive work with qualified professionals within the school, time available in the school grade, and safety as a favorable condition to develop a good work. It concludes that the support of the teacher, the family member, the state through effective public policies, the society, and the accompaniment of the family together with a specialized professional allied to the resilience of the individual drug user, creates a high possibility of having students prepared to make their choices and have a better quality of life.*

**Keyword:** *Teachers; Student; Drugs; School.*

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### **I. Introduction**

The use and abuse of licit and illicit drugs has long been a cultural factor, including used in religious rituals and daily celebrations. Given this spread of culture of alcohol and other drug consumption in society, it is necessary to create actions that contribute to minimize the problematic use of drugs (GALDURÓZ et al., 2010).

Drug users are discriminated by people who have no knowledge of the cause and are still associated with violence, marginality, and responsibility, thus staying on the fringes of society. So they have no opportunity to be listened to, no opportunity to be reintegrated into society in the labor market, among others, becoming ignored in their basic needs. (Oliveira and Dias, 2010).

The school is facing a significant challenge regarding drug use and abuse, and in this perspective, the teacher is in a field of countless difficulties, but still, one can work in a multidisciplinary way within the school organization, with educators; psychologists; school counselor, among others, recognizing the importance of working on the theme of drug use and abuse and preventive care through education (MOREIRA; SILVEIRA; ANDREOLI, 2006).

According to Galduróz (et al., 2004), epidemiological surveys conducted by the Brazilian Center for Information on Psychotropic Drugs (CEBRID) with students of primary education report the presence of various psychotropics in schools at different levels and contexts. According to Moreira, Silveira, and Andreoli (2006), in the 1970s, the United Nations (UNESCO) supported work in schools to minimize student drug use, as the school is where most of this public at the age have their first contact with drugs.

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The rate of some disorder related to drug use and abuse has caused many damages in educational contexts, such as dropout, for example. A study conducted in Brazil warns of the increasingly early growth of some mental disorder related to alcohol and/or other drug abuse (GUSTAVO et al., 2014).

The current situation of excessive drug use associated with the school context is considered to be quite complicated, with varied cultural, sociodemographic, and behavioral aspects (MALTA et al., 2014; FIGUEIREDO; FREITAS, 2013). Therefore, teachers must be well informed about the subject to face such a situation, because the excessive use of drugs affects the educational dynamics. It is also associated with several problems, among them, the dropout, the poor academic performance, and the lack of interest in the classes (LARANJEIRA, 2014).

According to Nascimento, Vitale and Avallone (2012) those are the responsibilities of family, school, health professionals, government, experts, or anyone else, the demystification of prejudice and paradigms for the construction of a new vision of teacher about their actions in the production of specific care with drug user students.

Thus, the objective of this research was to understand the conceptions of a group of teachers about the use of alcohol and other drugs in a public high school in Manaus, Amazon, Brazil.

### **Alcohol and other drug use in school**

Throughout history, the excessive use of licit and illicit drugs has been treated almost exclusively in a medical or psychiatric manner, leaving aside social situations, except when it is associated with crime and antisocial practices (BRASIL, 2003). Even existing since ancient times, drug use becomes something negative with damage to health and social life when it is no longer used in a controlled and conscious way and is consumed abusively (Birman, 2006).

According to Scivoletto (2008), the beginning of drug use occurs for several reasons, sometimes just for curiosity or status, or seeking in the drugs a subterfuge to relieve their frustration and when taking the drug has the impression that all distressing thoughts vanish for some time. Often the start of drug use by young people also occurs, so that the individual is accepted in the group, involving special appreciation of friends and the known status "rebel behavior", which marks the beginning of the process of their autonomy in relation to the family, because in the peer group, the person may feel valued more than in the family environment (SOUZA et al., 2010).

According to Sena et al. (2011) and Scivoletto (2008), the excessive use of alcohol and other drugs can affect all those who live directly or indirectly with the user, causing severe consequences for the development of people and the quality of life and health. The same author points out that the abuse of alcohol and other drugs is also associated with accidents, traffic deaths, delinquency, violence, disruption and disorganization of interpersonal relationships, as well as family and affective disagreements. Sharing the same idea, Malta et al. (2014) points out that excessive alcohol use can result in traffic accidents, homicides and suicides, which are the leading causes of death among humans and Murray and Lopez (1996) point out that alcoholism is among the ten most disabling diseases all around the world.

According to Brazil (2005), there are several specific public policy programs on psychoactive substances that have the purpose of prevention through harm reduction techniques, training for professionals, among others. However, the person in illicit drug use is still discriminated.

Brazilian Law n.11.343 / 2006 establishes the SISNAD - National System of Public Policies on Drugs and recommends that teachers know psychoactive substances to support the formation of students (BIZZOTTO; RODRIGUES, 2007).

That same Law in its Article 1, proposes measures to prevent misuse, drugs and attention, and the social reintegration of drug addicts, establishes rules for repression of unauthorized production and illicit drug trafficking, and defines crimes. In its Article 5 describes objectives of SISNAD (among others): Contribute to social inclusion, promoting socialization in such a way that the individual becomes less vulnerable to excessive use of drugs and does not assume risky behaviors.

Current prevention programs are likely to act more broadly to combine risk factors for a positive outcome. Thus, in addition to people who abuse alcohol and other drugs, other people also receive preventive care such as professional teachers, family, school institution, work, among others (CAMPOS; FIGLIE, 2011), but Canolleti and Soares (2005) and Sanchez et al. (2009) make it clear that despite the various prevention/intervention projects currently implemented, they have no desired effect.

Therefore, it is necessary to debate strategies that may arouse interest in the health and social harms caused by drug use, but these strategies cannot be separated from the school context (PAINI; CASTELETTO; FONSECA, 2010).

Pedagogical practices should not be exclusively about teaching theoretical material without the theme of drug abuse. Educational practice encompasses the entire development of the individual, from child to adult in all stages of life development, which can positively help in building people's subjectivity, making them more

productive and aware of their choices (SILVA, 2014). In this perspective, the educators have in their hands tools to select and include teaching materials relevant to the context of drug abuse in school. Providing the student with knowledge of the subject and leading them to reflect and make decisions (SILVA, 2014).

Brazil (1998 apud ARALDI; NJAINE; OLIVEIRA, 2012) point out that the Ministry of Education, concerning the national curriculum for elementary and secondary education, includes a proposal of an engaged alliance committed to citizenship, including in the different disciplines of Brazils school grade, subjects like health, violence, drugs, among others.

Sodelli (2010), based on the understanding that vulnerability is a moment, and that vulnerability is dynamic and continuous, with no age limits, says that one should not think about preventive projects only for young people, but start the intervention project from maternal or at least from elementary school to high school. It is in this sense that we understand the importance of giving the student conditions to build their life project, motivating the construction of their citizenship.

This is favorable to prevention in the school context, is an essential work for continuous care between educator and student.

Prevention should start as early as possible and stay for life. It can not be done at school for a specific period, with a scheduled date and time to end, as this work must be continuous throughout the school year.

Moreira (2006) (apud ARALDI; NJAINE; OLIVEIRA, 2012) says that lack of information, lack of specific knowledge, and stigma for drug users are some of the reasons that hinder doing a good preventive work at school. It should be used as an environment that has initiatives to prevent the excessive use of alcohol and other drugs. Teachers are channels for developing strategic actions to prevent drug abuse (ARMELIN, 1999).

Indeed, drug use and abuse at school has become a significant challenge for educators. Zemel (2010) highlights the importance of preventive education, which can be together with educators, and the family, all involved in the complicated and lengthy process of treatment. It is necessary to take the initiative in health promotion, attitudes toward strengthening against factors that are harming and leading this person to excessive use of drugs.

## **II. Method**

Exploratory qualitative research was chosen as a methodological approach in this research because it works on subjective data, prioritizing the subjectivity of the subject and the interpretation of social reality and its emphasis on ethics and empathy, facilitating communication between people, and thus contributing to the construction of knowledge (FLICK, 2004).

The site of the research was a public school, which works in the morning, afternoon, and night shifts, located in the northern part of the city of Manaus, capital of the Amazon. The access to it was given through the Term of Consent, signed by the school principal, authorizing the research.

The participants included were older teachers who teach high school men and women who agreed to participate in the research. Those who had a mental disorder or were of indigenous ethnicity were excluded. Six high school teachers participated, being three men and three women, who were presented by the school pedagogue in the teachers' room, where they were invited. The purpose of the research was explained, and when they agreed to participate, they signed the Informed Consent Form, and the date and time of the interview, which was possible for the participants, was arranged.

The interview was a semi-structured interview, which according to Marconi and Lakatos (2011, p. 279), is a technique in which the interviewer has topics to follow and is free to develop each situation in whatever direction he/she deems appropriate and occurred in the teachers' room during lunch break and an audio recorder (discarded after data transcription) was used. The audios lasted between 12 and 15 minutes. Data were analyzed using Bardin's (1977) content analysis.

It is noteworthy that this work followed all the ethical criteria proposed in resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016 of the National Health Council, on ethics in research with humans, and was submitted and approved by the Research Ethics Council of the Amazonas State University and can be found under the code CAAE: 16222319.9.0000.5016. Authorization 3.457.609.

## **III. Results And Discussions**

### **The challenges teachers face with students using alcohol and other drugs.**

Teachers recognize that the school is a conducive place to work on issues related to alcohol and drug abuse, but this intricate work presents several challenges, which are confirmed by the findings of Malta (et al., 2014). The author corroborates that the current situation of drug abuse associated with the school context is complicated, having to observe the questions, cultural, and psychosocial of each person. Respondents highlight three significant challenges facing the school.

The first is the issue of discrimination: many still have hostile and discriminatory attitudes to students who use alcohol and other drugs persist even by professionals within the school.

*"Many of my co-workers act in a discriminatory way because the student is a drug user, right?" (Teacher 1).*

The second challenge is the taboo, fear or ban on talking about drugs:

*"In general, I find a huge taboo related to drugs at school. When I was at the university, I had a more open dialogue, right? While I was in my college years, I used alcohol and some drugs, but I was free to talk to my parents about it. I had a liberal mind. (Teacher 1).*

According to Placco (2011), the prohibition or fear of talking about the subject brings negative feelings about drugs, which causes fear and detachment from the preventive function. It contributes to the lack of commitment to this type of demand in the school contexts.

Third and not least and the lack of safety at school:

*"I wanted to be safe, if we were going to work on a project, I wanted safety, so I could continue with the project without being threatened by students, those who sell, but we don't have it, so it's very difficult to work then we can only work like this indirectly "Teacher2).*

*"In 2017 I had a serious problem with two students [...] according to what I heard about them they were drug users and I came into conflict with them there. They threatened me after that I avoid coming into conflict with these students. I ignore and you never know what's really going to happen when you get out of school. Today I'd rather ignore, don't care anymore, but it's a serious problem, especially at night. When I see I get far away, as I told you I ignore. I'm afraid other teachers are also afraid of reporting. We get scared. " (Teacher 2).*

The possible scenario of violence in the school environment is recurrent and complicated, especially when it involves drug use and abuse (TEIXEIRA, PORTO, 1998). Lopes and Gasparin (2003), regarding the subject of violence against the teacher, point out that the more intense presence of violence in the school daily has increased the complexity of the teacher-student relationship and made the conflicts of the relationship more angry, often, limiting the possibility of working within the school.

The feeling of fear, insecurity associated with having suffered some aggression or threats announces that violence against teachers at school is a habitual and multifaceted problem, which makes the teacher not perform his duties because of the sensation of insecurity, fear in their work environment, causing damage to the primary objectives of the school that are teaching, learning and educating (MALTA et al. 2010).

### **Conditions to address the subject of alcohol and other drug use and abuse at School.**

Educators need adequate conditions to work on the topic of drugs, and teaching materials need to have time available to select and include teaching materials relevant to the context of drug use in school, providing the student with knowledge of the subject on drugs and taking to reflect and make decisions responsibly (SILVA, 2014).

*"I find it very important for teachers to guide students about drug use. I have rarely had time to mentor them, but whenever possible, I make a debate about drugs in the classroom, in fact we no longer work for lack of time to work on drugs at school. " (Teacher 1).*

Respondents point to the time factor in the classroom as a hindrance that makes it impossible to work on drugs at school. According to Buchele; Bunny; Lindner (2009), educators' thoughts on drug use prevention should be systematically comprehensive and worked in all disciplines, valuing the teacher as an intermediary of the process to act as a communicator privileging the student, so the educator needs take time to apply your action plan for classroom drug use and abuse.

*"I try to clarify for them. [...] very superficially because the time is short [...] in the classroom. There would have to be more time in class. " (Teacher 2).*

Teachers are with their schedule all committed to school lessons, and there is no room to talk about drugs. In reality, there is a lack of time for teachers to prepare and do specific work on drugs. We face several difficulties in the implementation of prevention programs due to infrastructure factors, security that ends up hindering the teacher from doing a good job (OLIVEIRA, ARAUJO, 2005).

*"At school you have to have time inside the classroom or outside the classroom you have to have time you enter the classroom, call their names every class time and 50 minutes already lost 10 minutes, you have to have more time to talk about this subject " (Teacher 2).*

According to Silva (2014), teachers need the school to provide all the necessary conditions for constant work, such as adequate physical space, autonomy and time in the classroom to address the issue of drugs among other essential instruments such as minimum safety so that professional educators can perform an autonomous and more constant work with students, so that it can positively influence life decisions.

### **Interdisciplinary and multi-professional work at school**

Respondents pointed to the need for work with a multidisciplinary team of professionals specializing in alcohol and other drugs, along with the family member of the drug user. Sayão (2009) says that the school also needs the help of other professionals besides pedagogues and teachers, and it is crucial to act with a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team specialized in the subject on drugs, and that through seminars, dynamic among other resources show both sides of drug use. The good side of the pleasure of euphoria and the other side of the bad consequences, the risks, and the dangers.

*"It has to be a school, family and student, we have no psychologist inside the school, we have no social worker all this needs to have inside the school. Because only the pedagogue will not solve the problem, only the principal will not solve the problem only the teacher will not solve the problem, and we would then have to complement within the school with a psychologist, a social worker, but we do not have it available ". (Teacher 5).*

According to the World Health Organization (2009), there is a need to develop a policy directed to the school focused on health care and prevention as a whole, with the structure of a socially appropriate physical place in the school, a permanent project that involves society and the community, so that conditions are developed to improve life skills, health promotion in all school individuals (teachers, staff, students and community) as well as to establish link and partnership with public policy programs.

*"I would rather have a way for us to do a project to work directly with the students, because it is very critical, so it brings a lot of sadness knowing that this young student is involved with drug use. We know that unfortunately, the tendency to get worse, I wish there was someone or the government, I don't know part of the government or even the school had a project that we would worry about more, there would be a change so impacting ". (Teacher 6).*

The lack of support from the school, from the government for the elaboration of a drug user attention project, was perceived by the interviewees as a failure to promote mental health in the school, which according to Moreira, Silveira and Andreoli (2006), policy actions should be defined through procedures, activities and structures that provide the protection and well-being of all members of the school community.

### **Lack of guidance, communication and family education.**

In this category, the interviewees were incisive about the importance of the family in the process of prevention/intervention to cases of use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs in school. Many parents may not keep up with their children's development and may be caught by a negative surprise, others "outsource" their children's education, leaving it to the care of others such as drooling or full-time schools.

*"In fact I don't see what is often missing is parenting guidance [...] often parents don't even have time to keep up with the students they end up in the drug world." (Teacher 1).*

According to Gustavo (2014), family involvement in school involves several challenges, such as lack of motivation of parents towards their children due to several factors; the lack of knowledge about the importance of the presence of parents in accompanying their children's education; financial problems, urban violence, among others.

Martins (2007) states that the tremendous daily toil to accompany the progress of society and many other priorities, lead parents to run out of time for their children, many hours of secular work leaving no room for communication, dialogue with others. The Care in guiding, giving affection, setting limits, and rules is being the function of third parties and not parents. This transfer of responsibility may occur excesses or disorders, such as many hours in front of a TV or games or long time using the mobile phone, among others.

*"I consider what they lack is a family accompaniment right? Because they do not have family support they are vulnerable right? And look for these ways that with colleague clings that colleague if he has a problem he goes with that colleague and if the colleague is already a user he will bring him the same way right? ". (Teacher 5).*

Zemel (2010) highlights the importance of preventive education, and the communication that can be with a specialized professional educator, psychologist, family or all together, involved in the complicated and lengthy process of care:

*"[...] the issue of family education is very important." (Teacher 3).*

In the speech of this other participant was associated with lack of guidance parents' neglect with their children:

*"It is not only the responsibility of teachers, family members often abandon these young people, they do not know what their children do outside the home, they work, their children are left to work [...] they trust too much. So what happens in the family is a prime point in a teenager's life. There are fathers and mothers who never show up at school and we realize that this is a real dropout ". (Teacher 1).*

The neglect was also pointed as a hindrance to the promotion of students' mental health. Participants associate the lack of guidance, neglect, lack of family education, and the lack of imposing limits on their children as one of the factors that most contribute to the student's abuse of drugs.

*"The 15 year old who thinks they have to be mature to know what is right and wrong and what they say is a law. It doesn't work like that, right? They have no such orientation and end up making a web of lies, "(Teacher 1).*

### **Lack of training for teachers.**

Teachers highlight the lack of knowledge of the multiple factors that influence excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Sodelli (2007) says that teachers do not feel safe and fit, and without knowledge of the cause to talk about the subject, so prefer to indicate a professional "suitable" for this context as the doctor, psychologist or biology teacher, as was quoted by the participants below:

*"I try to clarify for them. I am a very superficial chemistry teacher (...). The biology teacher should mainly talk about it a lot, I don't know if he talks about it either. " (Teacher 2).*

*"I see that they do not do this work for lack of training on the subject, they do not have the same knowledge, but it is very pertinent to question drugs in school." (Teacher 1).*

According to Silva (2014), the teacher needs to be equipped with knowledge and skills to develop this work of harmful drug use by students with specific continuing education, but this was not the reality found in the research:

*"I have been teaching for 15 years and during this time I did not take any course on this topic. What we do is a resource made at school we give lectures guidelines some things like that (...) l ". (Teacher 4).*

*"I have been teaching for 15 years, I have never done a course on this topic of student drugs, never". (Teacher 52).*

*"I started a course over the internet but I did not finish it", (Teacher 6).*

The speeches point to the studies by Canoletti and Soares (2005). The authors explain that in schools, the actions aimed at abusive use of alcohol and other drugs last a short time in the form of informative lectures given by health agents or police, without a specific and institutionalized direction of achievements within the school.

Sodelli (2007) emphasizes that teachers know the importance of preventive work, but it is necessary for proper preparation as specific courses and knowledge of the psychosocial characteristics of students. Otherwise, they run the risk of thinking that it is not their role to address the subject of drugs, leaving it to other professionals.

Teacher education courses need to contribute effectively to prevention in ways that can encourage them to bring about changes in behavioral and perceptions values of teachers.

*"I've been teaching for 10 years and the experience is very complicated. I think seven of them, I only worked with high school and we see this situation more often in high school ". (Teacher 6).*

Note that it is important to recycle to develop preventive pedagogical projects, continuing education for teachers (ARMELIN, 1999).

### **Permanent project at school focused on recovery and not just prevention.**

According to Paini, Casteletto, Fonseca (2010), it is essential to create and maintain an urgent action plan for care and prevention of drug use and abuse in schools. The interviewees' perception of the importance of an impactful plan, also focused on drug user recovery:

*"I think it would have to come from a unified project that we could work on that. We would be a grain in the classroom but we will germinate as far as we can I think this would be very valid a larger project not of awareness of the drug causes, as this they already know. But more about an exit project they don't know about leaving. They don't come up with the word exit as something possible for them, I think there should be a project aimed at recovery. (Teacher 4).*

*"I would rather have a way for us to make a project to work directly with the students, because it is very critical (...). (Teacher 6).*

Therefore, it is necessary to create strategies for intervention about the health and social harm caused by drug use, linking the school context, the community, and the family (PAINI, CASTELETTO, FONSECA, 2010). (...), *assim traz muita tristeza sabendo que aquele aluno tão novinho está envolvido com uso de droga, a gente sabe que infelizmente a tendência a pessoa ficar pior, eu queria que tivesse, ou alguém o governo, sei lá parte do governo ou mesmo da escola tivesse um projeto que a gente se preocupasse mais com isso, houvesse uma mudança assim impactante". (Professora 3).*

Considering therapeutic aspects, Landau (2004) shows the importance of family and social network as motivating factors for treatment and recovery of drug users.

*"The parenting habits to benefit from what they are transmitting so what happens often, I think, the student is missing is self esteem issue. Today we see that some of them to achieve their own identity they need to participate in that to identified. I think this is a problem of self-awareness and what they do not have, adding their lack of maturity it ends up causing them to take paths that are not good. " (Teacher 4)*

It is in this sense that we understand the importance of giving the student knowledge so that he can build his life project, and being motivated to build his citizenship, thus favoring prevention in the school context and thus developing a work of extreme importance for continuous care between educator and student (SODELLI, 2010).

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This research study was conducted through semi-structured interviews and data analysis that highlighted the teachers' conceptions about drug use and abuse at school.

In the first category of analysis, teachers' perceptions and that, among some colleagues, prejudice still perpetuates, and the feeling of hostility without critical examination, segregation, discrimination with drug users, also hinders the same category of care process.

Regarding student drug use and abuse at school, respondents emphasize that there is the issue of fear of reprisals by drug traffickers who only aim to make more profit through drug sales.

Respondents acknowledge the importance of drug-related work at school but feel hampered by the lack of support from school, family, and government.

In order to develop an efficient work on this theme three conditions are essential: first, time available within the school grade and secondly having the support of specialized professionals, and also safety for professionals in the workplace, is the basis for professionals to have autonomy and time to approach the subject and psychosocial support for multidisciplinary work.

Regarding the causes that may be contributing to the students use drugs, the interviewees point out as one of the main factors the lack of parental support in the daily lives of their children in and out of school. The hectic routine of many commitments ends up contributing to the affective, social absence, where children are left to the care of others.

However, it must be noted that psychosocial factors play a role in harmful drug use. Much commentary is heard about drug users, but little is heard and little understood about their subjectivity, and almost nothing is done about their social reintegration. They become invisible or unreliable beings.

It is concluding with pertinent information raised by respondents that is the need to have an interdisciplinary and multi-professional work with Psychologists and Social Workers within the School. At the moment we are finalizing this study, the Brazilian House of Representatives approved on 12.09.2019 the bill that determines Psychologists and Social Workers in public schools of elementary school. However, this Bill was vetoed by President Jair Messias Bolsonaro, on the grounds of unconstitutionality, as it violates the Responsibility Law, it was not allied with the Budget Law.

Therefore it is necessary to point out that this research was a cut of the conceptions of a group of teachers about the use and abuse of drugs by high school students because other points must be observed for a better understanding of this complex problem.

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