

STUDENTS WHO USE DRUGS: WHAT TEACHERS THINK AND HOW THEY HANDLE THE SITUATION

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ABSTRACT

In order to describe and analyze teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding the use of alcohol/drugs (AD) by High School students from public schools in Águas Lindas-GO/Brazil, this mixed study was carried out in 11 schools, with 91 teachers, using a sociodemographic questionnaire, a semi-structured interview about the perception of AD use by students, and questions about the judgment of those who use it. Most (57%) were male, average age 37.2 years; most participants believed that students who use AD are morally weak (51%), a danger to society (47%), and may commit crimes in their own families (98%); on the other hand, they consider them as important as anyone else (98%). They claim that they do not feel qualified to address the DA theme, nor to deal with students who use it. The study reveals and reinforces that health education should form part of teacher training for a preventive and welcoming approach.

Keywords: students; drugs; perception; stigma; teachers

Estudiantes que usan drogas: cómo profesores lidian y piensan sobre ellos

RESUMEN

Describir y analizar percepciones y actitudes de profesores relacionadas el uso de alcohol/drogas (AD) por estudiantes de la enseñanza secundaria de escuelas públicas de Aguas Lindas-GO/Brasil. Estudio mixto realizado en 11 escuelas, con 91 profesores, por intermedio de cuestionario sociodemográfico, entrevista semiestructurada sobre la percepción con relación al uso de AD por estudiantes, y cuestiones sobre el juzgamiento de aquellos que hacen uso. La mayoría (el 57%) era del sexo masculino, edad media 37,2 años; cree que alumnos que hacen uso de AD son moralmente débiles (el 51%), un peligro para la sociedad (el 47%) y pueden cometer delitos en la propia familia (el 98%); en contrapartida los consideran tan importantes cuanto cualquier otra persona (el 98%). Afirman que no se sienten capacitados para abordar el tema AD, tampoco para lidiar con alumnos que usan. El estudio revela y refuerza que la educación en salud debería componer la formación de los profesores para un abordaje preventiva e de acogimiento.

Palabras clave: estudiantes; drogas; percepción; estigma; profesores

Estudantes que usam drogas: como professores lidam e pensam sobre eles

RESUMO

Descrever e analisar percepções e atitudes de professores quanto ao uso de álcool/drogas (AD) por estudantes do Ensino Médio de escolas públicas de Águas Lindas-GO/Brasil. Estudo misto realizado em 11 escolas, com 91 professores, por meio de questionário sociodemográfico, entrevista semiestructurada sobre a percepção em relação ao uso de AD por estudantes, e questões sobre o julgamento daqueles que fazem uso. A maioria (57%) era do sexo masculino, idade média 37,2 anos; acredita que alunos que fazem uso de AD são moralmente fracos (51%), um perigo para a sociedade (47%) e podem cometer delitos na própria família (98%); em contrapartida os consideram tão importantes quanto qualquer outra pessoa (98%). Afirmando que não se sentem capacitados para abordar o tema AD, tampouco para lidar com alunos que usam. O estudo revela e reforça que a educação em saúde deveria compor a formação dos professores para uma abordagem preventiva e de acolhimento.

Palavras-chave: estudantes; drogas; percepção; estigma; professores

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INTRODUCTION

The use of alcohol and drugs among adolescents leads to problems that can be social as well as health-related (Andrade et al., 2017). All over the world, over one fourth (27%) of all adolescents aged between 15 and 19 drink alcohol. Alcohol drinking rates are higher among young people from 15 to 19 years of age in Europe (44%), followed by the Americas (38%), and the western Pacific (38%), and educational research works that indicate that, in many countries, children start drinking alcohol before they even turn 15, with very small differences between boys and girls (World Health Organization, 2018). According to the “II Levantamento Nacional de Álcool e Drogas”, or “Second National Survey on Drugs and Alcohol” (Laranjeira, 2014), when it comes to adolescent participants, it was possible to observe a significant fall in the number of boys that drink over five shots on regular occasions – which is considered a risky behavior – and surpassing 31% in 2006, and then back to 24% in 2012; on the other hand, it is possible to observe expressive growth in the number of girls in the same condition, surpassing 11% in 2006 and 20% in 2012.

Among adolescents, the use of alcohol and other drugs is classified as one major factor leading to wasted years, to disabilities, or early death, according to the DALY Classification (*Disability Adjusted Life Years / Anos de Vida Perdidos Ajustados por Incapacidade*; Gore et al., 2011). The “Pesquisa Nacional de Saúde do Escolar” 2019 (PeNSE), or “National Research on School Students’ Health”, published by the “Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística” (IBGE), or Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics”, brings us alarming data on the habits of Brazilian teenagers. The survey was realized with students that were concluding the 9th year, aged between 13 and 17 years, at public and private schools all over the country. The results show that the percentage of students that have tried alcoholic beverages is 63,3%, but this percentage, unlike the one from PeNSE 2015, became higher among women (66,9%) in comparison with men (56,6%). In addition, researchers’ attention was drawn to the precocious exposure to alcohol; 34,6% of those who had tried the first drink before the age of 14, and 15,7% of the students reported having had problems with family or friends, missed classes, or gotten into fights as a consequence of their alcohol drinking. In both parameters – precocious initiation and consequences of alcohol drinking – the percentages were higher for the sample of women (36,8% and 17,1%, respectively) than for the sample of men (32,3% and 14%, respectively). In this sense, the percentage of those who have already used some type of illegal drug rose from 12% in 2015 to 13% in 2019 (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2021).

With the intention to provide guidelines to programs, policies, and actions, international regulations for the prevention of the use of illegal drugs are not limited to

inhibiting its early use, but it also extends itself to the task of delaying or postponing such initiation, in addition to the benefit of avoiding the development of resulting disorders. The document indicates some protection factors that should be strengthened such as social and personal skills in adolescence, psychological well-being, strong and positive relationships with parents that really care, and with schools and communities that are well structured and supported (UNODC, 2013).

Schools are regarded as agents for change. When schools are not capable of playing that role, which is associated to the students’ family affairs, and how easy it is for them to have access to alcohol and other drugs, there is an alignment of factors that expose the students to the use of such substances. That is, depending on their organization, schools can operate as risk or protection factors. Every adult, family member, health professional, teacher, or community representative plays an important role when it comes to providing guidelines to adolescents by giving them opportunities for the acquisition of information, and contributions to make these students more skilled and more able to lead a quality life (Elicker, Palazzo, Aerts, Alves, & Câmara, 2015). A study that verified differences in moral judgment regarding people that do drugs according to the level of education of the participants identified that the participants with higher level of education tend to have more positive, less stigmatizing attitudes regarding drug users, which reinforces the role played by teachers as fundamental in the support provided and the change in the ways to approach adolescent students that use illegal substances (Gallassi, Oliveira, Silva, Machado, & Wagner, 2021).

Many of the problems faced by the teachers come as a result of their difficulty to understand the context outside the school, the personal backgrounds, and the lifestyles of the students. Consequently, it becomes necessary to listen to the teenage students by means of their social condition, and to identify what role the school plays in the lives of the students, in addition to explanations for the way they behave at the institutions. It is also an important challenge to promote a dialogue between the experiences of the students and educational knowledge.

In this sense, this study aimed at describing and analyzing perceptions and actions about the teachers regarding the use of alcohol and other illegal drugs by high school students in public schools at a municipality in the region around the Brazilian Distrito Federal (DF).

METHOD

This research work consists of a mixed study, with the quantitative and qualitative approach, realized in state high schools in the municipality of Águas Lindas de Goiás – A region around the Brazilian DF. The municipality is provided with 17 schools, but during the gathering of signatures for the consent terms so that students could participate in the research works, 6 directors did not

agree to participate, and the final total number was 11 participating schools.

The municipality has a population of approximately 217 thousand inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2020) and presents a 0,45 Gini Coefficient (Brasil, 2010). Such index measures the degree of income concentration, of which the value ranges from zero (complete equality) to one (complete inequality). In addition, the municipality also presents an “Index of Juvenile Vulnerability to Violence”, or “Índice de Vulnerabilidade Juvenil à Violência”, of 0,409. It also ranges from 0 (no vulnerability) up to 1 (maximum vulnerability; Brasil, 2017). The socioeconomic conditions of the population led the municipality to configure itself as one of the most violent places and the state of Goiás, with a homicide rate of 43,8 (Cerqueira et. al, 2019).

The eligibility criterion for participation was that teachers were supposed to have been hired by means of a public tender, to have temporary contracts of at least one year at the institution/state of Goiás, or to be in a position of management within the school. Teachers who had been removed from their positions, who were on leave, or who were on vacation, were excluded. Out of the total number of 193 teachers who worked in the participating schools, 91 (47,15%) fit into the inclusion criterion.

The data were collected during the months of August, September, and October of 2018, by means of two stages: Stage I: recruitment of participants was realized by means of onsite meetings in order to explain the objectives of the project on dates that had been

previously set up with the school administration. Stage II: all teachers that fit into the profile and were willing to participate in the study signed the term of free informed consent and were submitted to the semi structured script interview. The interviews were realized individually in a room in the school with a duration of approximately 30 minutes on days and times that were convenient to the teachers.¹

The instrument for data gathering was produced by means of a review of literature and is divided into three parts. The first one is made-up of objective questions regarding the participants socio demographic data, such as age, gender, time of experience in high school education, time of contract or date of tender in the state of Goiás, administered discipline and academic formation, time of professional practice in high school, and the family income profile. The second part was a semi structured interview with guiding questions on the teacher’s perception regarding the use of drugs among the students. They are described on Box 1. The third and last one was made-up of five objective questions, subsequent to the guiding questions, in order to identify the opinions of teachers on students who used drugs and alcohol, with the answers of the Likert type with the following options: (0) probably yes, (1) I am not sure and (2) probably no.

The quantitative data were presented by means of

¹ This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Ceilândia Faculty of the University of Brasília (UnB) under CAAE number 86530818.8.0000.8093/2018.

Box 1 - Guiding questions for the semi structured interview.

1. During your formation as a teacher, did you take any capacitation courses in order to learn how to deal with the students who used alcohol and other drugs?
2. During your professional life as a teacher, have you ever had students who used alcohol and other drugs? If your answer is yes, what was your attitude towards this student, or these students? Did you approach the student, or the students, in order to have a conversation?
3. In your opinion, what are the factors (motivations, causes, reasons) that lead students to use alcohol and other drugs?
4. In your opinion, what are the students really looking for when they use alcohol and other drugs?
5. Would you be able to identify (by name, type, and effect in the central nervous system) the drugs, including alcohol, that your students have used or still use just by observing their behavior? If your answer is yes, what are the symptoms that made you reach that conclusion?
6. In your opinion, do you believe that students who use alcohol and other drugs will be addicted to those substances in the future?
7. Do you believe that the behavior of students who use alcohol and other drugs is different from the behavior of the other students within the context of pedagogical practice? How did you reach that conclusion?
8. In the classroom practice, what is your perception on the students who use alcohol and other drugs?
9. Here in your school, what actions have been realized or are realized for the prevention of abuse of alcohol and other drugs?
10. When a student is identified as a user of alcohol or other drugs, what is your behavior regarding that student?
11. Do you feel able when it comes to having conversations with students who use alcohol and other drugs?

summary measures (average, and regular, absolute, and relative attendance) and dispersion measures (minimum and maximum standard deviation), assessed with the help of the SPSS software, version 23.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and identified by means of an alphanumeric code in order to protect the participants' identities. The participating school units were numbered from 1 to 11 and identified by the letter "E". Teachers were numbered from 1 to 91 in the order of realization of the interviews, and represented by the letter "P". For analysis of the qualitative data, researchers chose the method of content analysis oriented by Bardin, following the three phases: pre analysis of the material, exploration phase, and the result treatment phase, the inference phase, and the interpretation phase based on the theoretical referential (Bardin, 2011). This technique made it possible to realize the fluctuating reading of the whole body of research, while data were codified and grouped up thematically into categories in order to facilitate inferential interpretations.

The used categorization criterion was semantic. This process leads to the possibility of putting together a significant amount of information organized into two stages, (i) inventory (where common elements get isolated): at this moment researchers grouped up the answers using theme as registration unit, and (ii) classification (where elements get divided and organization is established): here the initial groupings were refined and regrouped in order to reach the categories (Bardin, 2011).

RESULTS

According to what is presented on Table 1, the sample was made up of 91 teachers, while 57% were male and the average age was 37.2 years (DP ±9 years). Out of the total number of teachers, 47% were only graduates

but there was a minority (7%) of participants with a mastering/doctoring degree; 76% reported that they have a temporary contract with the school. 44% of the family monthly income all the teachers gravitated around 1 to 4 minimum wages, and above 8 minimum wages for 24%, the same percentage for teachers with permanent employment relationships.

Regarding the distribution of teachers by discipline, most of them ministered more than one discipline at the same school. The justification behind that distribution was that the areas were similar in the initial formation. The discipline ministered by most teachers was Portuguese (29%) and the discipline ministered by the least number of teachers was arts (3%).

The perception of the teachers regarding the use of alcohol and other drugs among the students was analyzed by means of a semi structured interview with guiding questions and the collective data were grouped up into six theme categories.

Teacher Capacitation

The reports demonstrate difficulties for a formation that is focused on the work with adolescents and their peculiarities. In the discourses, there were frequent manifestations of the absence of capacitation courses for teachers during their formation process: *no there was no specific discipline, but there were generic disciplines but approached the subject briefly.* (E01P04).

What we generally learn in the capacitation courses does not give you a notion of how to work with students with drug and alcohol-related problems. The course gives you ideas that you have to develop yourself in your everyday practice and close proximity with these students. (E07P62)

not necessarily, but I took a course on how to work with children with disorders, But I never took any

Table 1 - Social demographic data in terms of attendance and percentage of participants in the study (N = 91).

		total number of participants (%)	average ± standard deviation	medium
Gender	Male	52 (57%)		
	Female	39 (43%)		
Age			37 (±9)	36
School education level	Graduation	43 (47%)		
	Specialization	42 (46%)		
	Mastering/Doctoring	6 (7%)		
Employment Relationship	Temporary	69 (76%)		
	Tender	22 (24%)		
Time of practice in high school (years)			9 (±6,8)	9
Time of contract/tender (years)			7 (±5,9)	5
Family Monthly Income (Brazilian minimum wage ~US\$200.00*)	From 1 to 4	40 (44%)		
	From 4 to 8	29 (32%)		
	Over 8	22 (24%)		

courses on how to work with students who use alcohol and other drugs. That is a serious problem for adolescents and it has negative effects on their cognition. (E09P80)

Motivations

In the perception of some teachers, idleness, too much free time, scarcity of leisure time spaces in the city, and the influence of friends are among major reasons that lead students to use alcohol and other drugs, according to the following descriptions:

I believe it has to do with situations in which students do not have anything to spend their time with, it is about something they lack, and then they end up going for things that are not good for them [...]. (E1P15).

we do not have fun activities to do, we do not have places for them to go, and there is friendship right? And all those influences outside the school, all those things lead to students using drugs [...]. (E2P24)

Among the speeches, once again discourses present the socioeconomic and family condition as reasons that lead students into alcohol and other drugs. To the teachers, the lack of motivation and lack of perspectives that the vulnerable environment presents are determining factors towards the use of drugs:

[...] Many of our students, especially in this community, are very poor. So many students find themselves alone, or hungry, or have parents who had gone through the same situation or that still use drugs or are in prison. The context of their own lives ends up leading them into that situation [...].

They need to be seen. If we had a support network by means of which we could help them, but unfortunately, we do not have access to that. We come across situations in which parents don't even stay home, they don't even know what their children are doing or whether they have come to school. They do not care much about the kind of work we do. Conditions are very precarious. (E08P73)

Teachers' attitudes

Concerning the attitude of the teachers regarding students under the effect of alcohol and other drugs, some of them took on an embracing approach, in order to get closer and establish a bond with the students, in order to earn their trust and so that the students could express their feelings and ideas and the things they were going through: *"nowadays the students that use narcotics and alcohol should not be directly confronted by teachers. Teachers should reach out to these students and make themselves available for friendly non-judgmental conversations". (E01P08)*

Yes I have approached them but it was a friendly conversation. The students have this image of us as the distant figure of the teacher but we have to make ourselves

available for friendship and solidarity. I approached the students in a friendly manner in order to try and help them become aware of the seriousness of their situation. Such approaches should avoid aggression, and the objective should always be friendship (E01P40)

For 19 of the 91 interviewed teachers, these students are people who are susceptible to humor oscillations and, therefore, they would rather not approach students because they are afraid of negative reverberations, especially when they live in the municipality where they work and how easy it is to find them anywhere around the school environment: *"at the moment, I'd rather not because it's dangerous and I don't even know what the person's reaction would be." (E01P07)*

In general, when students show up in the classroom under the effect of drugs, we really avoid personal direct confrontation, we only ask them to keep quiet and pay attention. When they don't want to stay in the classroom we just let them go so that they can go outside and get some fresh air and maybe get back later. (E1P12)

Some other teachers, although they do provide their students with guidance, believe that the causes of drug abuse are related to the absence of financial resources, or of decent homes. In other words, they are connected to the social inequality in which these students are inserted:

Well, I have been talking to them and they talk a lot about social inequality right?! There is a lot of social inequality especially in the municipality of Águas Lindas. And nothing seems to be done about that. So we always end up in a situation in which students just don't have the motivation to be successful and overcome the world of drugs. [...]. (E03P38)

[...] So I talked to them and told them that education is the most important thing. They believe in education and stuff like that but they put a lot of the blame on social inequality, and they always argue that because their parents use it so why not. That is such a sad reality. [...]. (E02P19)

Types of drug

Concerning the identification of the type of drug that students have used, the discourse showed that most of the teachers did not have much knowledge on the theme. A few teachers mentioned signs and symptoms such as red eyes, excessive sweating, excessive thirst, dilated pupils, and the smell of alcohol:

[...] Yes, at least two of them, alcohol and weed that's for sure. Alcohol makes them sleepy, and their voices slur and they lose balance and everything. Weed gives them red eyes, and their talking kind of slows down and their mouths get dry and they feel like drinking water all the time. Some of them just put their heads down and fall asleep like babies. It's quite easy to notice[...]. (E01P13)

Sometimes they get very sleepy because they are drunk, oh they get too blissful because they used something strong so they won't listen to you, they won't follow your orders, and they will confront you just to test your limits and their own limits, and the red eyes, it all becomes very evident [...]. (E02P27)

School performance

To the teachers, the use of alcohol and other drugs compromises school performance. The frequency of intake is associated to an increase in risks of addiction and violent behavior, according to what has been observed in the following reports:

you hardly ever come across students who use drugs and get good grades and behave well, so there is an influence in the pedagogical part undoubtedly (E1P09)

[...] They do not have the perspective they cannot grab content. They did not behave like the other students that did not use drugs. Yes, it does make a difference. (E01P15).

Because when students use a substance, depending on the substance, they might get aloof, or hyperactive, or dry mouthed, or having to go to the bathroom all the time. Their performance does get compromised [...]. (E01P08).

Prevention actions

To the interviewed teachers, actions associated to the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse have always been present in the teaching practice by means of activities named "projects", in addition to interventions by the military police, by means of the educational program of resistance to drugs and violence, or "Programa Educacional de Resistência às Drogas e à Violência" (PROERD):

[...] lectures, last year, we had the PROERD, there was a lecture on drugs, and teachers work on the theme a lot in the classroom [...]. (E10P84)

[...] We have been developing projects that deal exactly with themes such as families and the school, conversations with parents, theater productions. We take these students to places where they can learn something and we can show them reality, so we are always engaging the community and the students so that we can detect problems and fix them [...]. (E10P84)

The third and last part of the instrument was constituted by five objective questions on the teachers' assessment regarding students who use alcohol and drugs. Most of the participants (62%) believe that students who use alcohol and other drugs do not have a disease, that they are morally weak (51%), they are a danger to society (47%) and could commit small crimes in their family (98%). On the other hand, most of the teachers believe that the students who use alcohol and other illegal drugs are just as important as any other person (98%), according to Table 2.

DISCUSSION

The school census of 2020 (Brasil, 2021), published by the Ministry of Education, pointed out that approximately 58% of the teachers that work in high school are female. These data are different from what was found in the

Table 2 - The teachers' assessment regarding students who use alcohol and other drugs (N = 91).

	Probably yes	I am not sure	Probably no
	Total (%)	Total (%)	Total (%)
Do you believe that students who use alcohol and other drugs have a disease?	18 (20%)	17 (20%)	56 (61%)
Do you believe that students who use alcohol and drugs are morally weak?	46 (51%)	14 (15%)	31 (34%)
Do you believe that students who use alcohol and other drugs are a danger to society?	43 (47%)	26 (29%)	21 (23%)
Do you believe that students who use alcohol or any other drugs are just as important as any other person?	89 (98%)	2 (22%)	0
Do you believe that students who use alcohol or any other drugs could commit small crimes in their families?	89 (98%)	2 (22%)	0

present research, in which most of the participants were male. This difference can be related to a regional characteristic, because in other studies realized in public schools of the Distrito Federal, most of the teachers were male (Santos et al., 2016; Grande, 2009).

Most of the participants reported that, during their formation, they did not have any specific approaches on alcohol or other drugs. The little knowledge they have in this theme, which was also reported in other studies (Moreira, Silveira, & Andreoli, 2009; L. F. S. de Oliveira e cols., 2018) is a preoccupying fact because knowledge on drugs is a basic requisite for the efficacy of preventive actions. This is a piece of information that draws our attention if we consider that these themes are not adequately approached during graduation, neither do we have capacitation courses although schools are considered privileged spaces for prevention actions and that teachers can be the most important mediators and the actors in this process (Faggiano, Minozzi, Versino, & Buscemi, 2014). As a consequence, many teachers end up building stigmatizing perceptions on people who use drugs, which makes dialogue on the theme difficult between school and family and vice versa, and also end up influencing the construction of resistances between teachers, students, and the family members, when it comes to discussing the problem in an open, comprehensive way, while turning the topic into taboo due to the everyday reality of schools (Silva et al., 2018).

The indication of the participants of the study that idleness, lack of leisure time activities, the influence of friends, family conditions, and social inequality are related to the use of alcohol and of the drugs among students, finds support in literature. Such facts indicate that major risk factors towards the use of drugs, and small crimes in the family environment, can be the lack of connection with school and community, steep social inequalities, peer pressure, degraded environments, and favorable social norms. On the other hand, characteristics related to the family, such as affection and strong parental connection, acceptance and engagement, parents that are involved in the children's education, schools and communities that are healthy and engaged, are important factors for protection against the use of alcohol and other drugs by teenagers (Jacomini, Alves, & Camargo, 2016).

Although they understand the complexity of the phenomenon by listing risk factors that contribute to the use of alcohol and other drugs, the teachers still perceive students who use drugs as "morally weak", "a danger to society" and that "they could commit small crimes in their families". Such situation could be characterized as stigma, understood as a social construction, which attributes to its beholder a status of devaluation by other members of society (Gallassi et al., 2021). These situations take place when individuals are identified and related to some undesirable characteristic that they

possess, and because of that, they get discriminated and underrated by society.

Concerning alcohol and other drugs, stigma gets more serious when people fail to understand the phenomenon in its complexity and multi causality, because "the fact that drugs are considered evil by themselves, there is a stigmatization of users as dangerous and potentially violent" (Tatmatsu, Alves, & Camargo 2020, p.03). This automatic association of drug users as dangerous and violent can be understood as one of the many deleterious effects of policies of "the war against drugs", North American model of military confrontation against the use of drugs that has been copied from several countries, including Brazil, in which drugs have become a great scourge to be confronted by the state (Kerr & Jackson, 2016). In practice, the war against drugs consists of a war against the people who use and/or sell drugs, and the people who receive a social representation as undesirable and criminal and confrontation with weapons is seen as the suitable manner by which the state should handle these matters (Khenti, 2014). As a consequence, the stigma that falls over people is associated to psychological discomfort and can be a major barrier between people and treatment (Kulesza, Teachman, Werntz, Gasser, & Lindgren, 2015); access to health services becomes even more challenging when professional themselves attribute the stereotypes of demotivation, violence, and the manipulation of users of alcohol and other drugs (Meyers et. al., 2021).

A study realized in the DF Pointed out that right after the student got caught with some type of drug, the principal and teachers got together with the students in a conversation round table and discussed the case, and thus they believed it was possible to develop some educational practice that was meaningful and not imposed, and appreciated opinions and experiences from everyone, including administrators, teachers, and students (Chagas et al., 2017). These comprehensive attitudes can benefit the construction of a stronger connection with the students, which is understood as a factor of protection against the use of drugs, and this collaborates to the construction of a school environment that is healthier, more tolerant, and more receptive, while promoting a strengthening of the relationship between the students and the educational institution (Oliveira et al., 2018).

On the other hand, some teachers reported that they never realized any approach because they were afraid of bad consequences. The same argument seems to be present in two other studies in which, although the teachers had presented in most of the reported situations, the willingness towards more positive embracing attitudes, when the situation involved students getting caught using or selling drugs, there is a tendency towards neutrality (Moreira, Alves, & Camargo 2009; Oliveira et al., 2018). This no commitment stand

by the teachers regarding situations and discussions on drugs contradicts the national policies on drugs (Brasil, 2019), which points at that need for inclusion of content into curricula related to prevention, with the emphasis on the promotion of health, social skills, and life. In addition, a context of ambiguity is created in which, at the same time, the teachers recognize school and its educating role as fundamental in the formation of students and the execution of prevention programs, but they would rather not assume such tasks, and pass them down to professionals that they believed to be more qualified, such as professionals from the health area – a fact that, in practice has been impossible, since this students' demands to learn about the topic fall on the teachers' hands (Ferreira, Sanchez, Ribeiro, Oliveira, & Nappo, 2010).

The fact that they do not feel prepared to approach the topic with the students can be related to the little formation and/or information on the effects of alcohol and other drugs, or to too much work, or to the taboo that is part of the theme, and to the fear of negative consequences involving drug dealers (Oliveira, 2018). We also wish to highlight the fact that the theme of drugs should not restrict itself to the teachers responsibility to approach it in the classroom, where they already have too much to do. School administrations need to support the promotion of curricular adaptations in order to insert extra content that approach the prevention against the use of alcohol and other drugs (Ferreira, Sanchez, Ribeiro, Oliveira, & Nappo, 2010).

The policies of prevention against the use of alcohol and other drugs among students aim at, among other things, restricting access and exposure to drug use because the increase in excess to such substances is associated with higher rates of drug use by adolescents (Porath-Waller, Beasley, & Beirness, 2010). The preoccupation with the well-being of students is fundamental for effective preventive actions, as well as strategies to avoid the risk factors in practice with specific programs for each age group or class. A positive fact in the present study that might benefit such actions is the fact that almost all the teachers (98%), even lacking in capacitation or specific formation, believe that students who use drugs are just as important as any other person.

Thus, it is important to observe that there are no reports of systematic actions of prevention in the schools where the participants work. Search information contradicts recent discoveries that point at the fact that prevention against the use of drugs in Brazilian schools takes place sporadically and without regularity, which was something already observed during the 1980s. It is important to highlight the fact that these actions are done mostly by the military police (Pereira & Sanchez, 2020), which is a fact that was also reported by teachers who were interviewed and mentioned the PROERD as a strategy for prevention, which is the Brazilian

adaptation of the North American program named *Drug Abuse Resistance Education* – DARE, created in 1983. The program, based on the prohibition model, aims at training towards resistance against the availability of drugs. On the other hand, studies have demonstrated the inefficiency of the DARE as well as of the PROERD, due to the fear approach that they use, the lack of data that corroborate their efficacy, and the fragility of the program curriculum (Sanchez et al., 2021; Valente e Sanchez, 2021). Nevertheless, the PROERD has been widely used in schools since 1992.

The program confronts, therefore, the premise that drug use by adolescents should be understood by education professionals as a symptom of personal and/or social vulnerability, and its prevention would take place not by force, but by the reduction of the risk factors and the strengthening of the protection factors (Souza, Bottechia, Martins, Lessa, & Watanabe 2015). Thus, the proposal of intervention must be ruled by the promotion of health, indicating “[...] Strategies that emphasize the transformation of life and/or work conditions that confront the structure that leads to health problems, demanding an intersectorial approach” (Brasil, 2014, p. 138).

School plays a fundamental role in the formation of values, habits, and lifestyles by adolescents because it is seen as a space for socialization and learning where students spend most of their time. In this sense, it is considered a promising environment for preventive interventions because it reaches a large number of adolescents at the same time (Marshall-Lévesque, Castellanos-Ryan, Vitaro, & Séguin, 2014). In addition, the prevention against the use of drugs in the school environment can, effectively, complement social, economic, and political initiatives and preventive policies, while not being an isolated action.

Thus, it becomes necessary that educators, in collaboration with schools, take action by means of a sensibilization process, while promoting information, knowledge, guidance, reflection by teachers, the development of critical thinking, the acquisition of values and experience for life, and the formation of citizens who are critical, reflexive, aware and responsible for their actions (Cardoso & Malbergier, 2014).

In addition to the inclusion of the themes related to drug use in the formation of teachers (from graduation to permanent, continued education), while searching for a respectful, embracing approach that is free from prejudice and stigma and based on specific knowledge, which is fundamental for the reorganization of pedagogical political projects and curricula that are integrated with the community and family, considering the specificities of each territory. Knowing and recognizing local reality benefits the challenging mission of engaging parents and/or legal guardians, as well as intersectorial partnerships that are essential in the approach of multi-factorial,

complex themes, such as drug use. In this perspective, schools can operate as change factors by potentializing protection aspects while increasing commitment with the school, its participation, and its positive connection with the students and the community (UNODC, 2013; Pereira & Sanchez, 2020).

As a limitation to the study, it was not possible to collect data from all 17 state schools of the municipality, which was the initial objective. Even after the approval by the Regional Suboffice of Education, the directors of 6 schools refused the entrance of the researchers by alleging that the elections were near and it made things complicated for the administration. Therefore, they would not like to get committed to the realization of research at the moment where they would no longer be in charge.

As a conclusion, the findings demonstrate that the teachers present knowledge on risk factors for the use of alcohol and other drugs, tend towards more positive, embracing attitudes regarding students who use alcohol and other drugs with the creation of a connection and opportunities for listening, have little knowledge on drugs, never had any formation in the area, did not participate in prevention programs and, also, did not feel prepared for these actions.

The absence of practices related to the approach and the prevention against the use of alcohol and other drugs reported by the participants regarding their professional formation, made it possible to consider that these are the means to potentialize the integrality of educational actions at schools. Such practices, therefore, should be developed with the use of methodologies based on education, they share knowledge, amplify comprehension of the social and cultural in the territory where the students live, while creating further possibilities for the development of processes of critical awareness of reality.

In this sense, the study reveals and reinforces the fact that health education as a state policy should be present in the professional formation process for teachers, while contributing to responsible education on the theme, from a preventive approach with the school community all the way to support to the most vulnerable ones. Thus, new studies are desirable so that going deep into this theme will lead to better education policies.

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