

**The mental health of young Brazilians and its correlation with substance abuse**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** The mental health of adolescents in Brazil is influenced by a complex interplay of social, familial, and academic pressures. The transitional period from childhood to adulthood introduces significant challenges, which some adolescents attempt to navigate through the use of psychoactive substances. This coping mechanism can adversely affect their mental health, leading to increased vulnerabilities to mental disorders such as depression and anxiety.

**Methods and Materials:** This research utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection. The study involved literature reviews, statistical analyses of existing health records, and structured interviews with healthcare professionals and adolescents. Various regions across Brazil were included to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the urban and suburban contrasts in adolescent mental health and drug use dynamics.

**Results:** The findings indicated that drug use among adolescents often serves as a maladaptive strategy to cope with emotional and social stressors. Key determinants of substance use included academic stress, lack of familial support, and the need for social belonging. The psychosocial impacts of substance use were profound, exacerbating conditions like anxiety and depression, and hindering adolescents' social and academic development.

**Conclusion:** Addressing the mental health issues of Brazilian adolescents requires a multifaceted approach that involves families, educational institutions, and healthcare providers. Prevention and intervention strategies must focus on strengthening familial support, enhancing coping mechanisms, and providing accessible mental health resources. Public policies need to support these initiatives by integrating mental health services within school and community settings to foster a supportive environment for youth development.

**Keywords:** Adolescent mental health, Substance abuse, Brazil, Psychoactive substances, Coping mechanisms

## **The mental health of young Brazilians and its correlation with substance abuse**

Mental health in adolescents is a dynamic state encompassing emotional, social, and psychological balance during the crucial transition period between childhood and adulthood. In this phase, adolescents confront a myriad of challenges, including hormonal changes, academic pressures, and identity issues. The correlation between mental health and drug use in this group is a complex and multifaceted issue. The consumption of psychoactive substances often emerges as an inappropriate strategy to cope with the emotional and social challenges faced by adolescents. Seeking escape or social belonging through drug use may seem like a temporary solution to address anxieties and insecurities, but unfortunately, it can cause harmful consequences for mental health. Drug use during adolescence can increase vulnerability to mental disorders such as depression and anxiety because of neurochemical effects and impacts on brain development. Substance dependence can interfere with interpersonal relationships, academic performance, and the ability to face the typical challenges of this life stage. Therefore, understanding and addressing the correlation between mental health and drug use in adolescents is crucial for implementing effective preventive strategies, providing adequate psychological support, and promoting environments that foster healthy development and resilience during this crucial stage of human development.

### **Introduction**

The mental health of adolescents is a crucial and multifaceted aspect that demands significant attention, especially considering the inherent challenges of the transition from childhood to adulthood. In the Brazilian context, this developmental phase is marked by a complex intersection of social, familial, and academic factors that can directly impact the psychological well-being of young individuals. An emerging concern in this scenario is the correlation between the mental health of adolescents and drug use. This dynamic deserves in-depth analysis because of its potentially harmful implications. Adolescents face various pressures, ranging from intense academic demands to seeking identity and social belonging. Amidst these pressures, some young individuals turn to drug use to cope with emotional challenges, seek escapism, or integrate into specific social groups. However, this behavior not only reflects an inappropriate coping strategy but also raises critical questions about the impacts on the mental health of these individuals in formation.

### **Aim of the Research:**

This research project aims to explore the intricate relationship between the mental health of Brazilian adolescents and drug use, employing a comprehensive approach that includes a literature review, statistical analysis, and qualitative data collection through interviews. Understanding triggering factors, behavioral patterns, and psychosocial impacts is essential for developing appropriate preventive and intervention strategies. By addressing this issue holistically, the goal is to contribute to the creation of more informed public policies and specific programs that promote mental health and prevent harmful drug use among Brazilian adolescents.

### **Configuration of the Research:**

The proposed project is configured within the Brazilian context, encompassing various regions to get a more comprehensive and diversified representation. The research will be conducted in urban and suburban environments, considering the social and economic nuances that can influence mental health and drug use among adolescents. Given the comprehensive nature of the study, the selection of specific areas will be based on criteria such as population density, socio-economic characteristics, and resource availability.

Relevant background information includes demographic data, mental health indices, and statistics related to drug use among adolescents in Brazil. The research will also consider information about existing

prevention programs, mental health public policies, and government or non-government initiatives that may impact the analyzed scenario.

## **Project Scope:**

The project aims to investigate the relationship between the mental health of Brazilian adolescents and drug use, analyzing factors such as social, familial, and academic pressures. A comprehensive literature review will be conducted, relevant statistical data will be collected, and interviews with healthcare professionals and young individuals will be performed to understand this interaction's behavior patterns, motivators, and psychosocial impacts. The scope will also include proposing preventive and intervention strategies to improve awareness, promote mental health education, and create supportive environments for adolescents, contributing to the mitigation of risks associated with drug use in this age group.

## **Project Rational:**

This project is motivated by the growing concern for the mental health of Brazilian adolescents and the need to understand the nuances of its relationship with drug use. Given the complexity of this interaction, the research aims to fill knowledge gaps, providing a solid foundation for the development of more effective public policies and prevention programs. The holistic approach of the project, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data, is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the mental health of adolescents and the drivers of substance use. By raising awareness and developing specific strategies, the project seeks to contribute to creating a healthier and more resilient environment for the Brazilian youth.

## **Research Material:**

In terms of research materials, the project will employ a variety of sources, including scientific studies, government reports, statistical data, interviews with healthcare professionals and young individuals, and information from educational institutions and health organizations. This comprehensive approach will ensure a holistic and informed analysis of the intersection between mental health and drug use among Brazilian adolescents.

As for the stakeholders, the project will collaborate with mental health professionals, academic researchers, educational institutions, and, when applicable, government agencies or non-governmental organizations working towards promoting mental health and preventing drug use among adolescents.

## **RELEVANCE:**

This project lies in the urgency to understand and address the complex interaction between the mental health of Brazilian adolescents and drug use. The current scenario presents substantial challenges for youth, with intensified social, academic, and familial pressures resulting in an increasing incidence of mental health-related issues; using drugs as an inappropriate coping mechanism becomes a significant concern, with potential long-term consequences for the psychological and social development of young individuals.

The justification for this project is anchored in the need to develop informed preventive and intervention strategies to mitigate the risks associated with drug use among adolescents. By understanding triggering factors, behavioral patterns, and psychosocial impacts, the project seeks to contribute to the creation of more effective public policies and specific youth mental health support programs.

For education at Regis, addressing this issue is crucial as it involves not only the application of theoretical knowledge gained throughout the course but also the ability to promote positive social impact. The Capstone project represents a valuable opportunity to integrate analytical, research, and problem-solving skills, consolidating academic learning into practical application. By addressing such a relevant societal

issue, the project aligns with Regis' values, emphasizing commitment to social responsibility and the promotion of positive changes in the community. Therefore, this research is necessary for Brazilian adolescents and represents a significant Capstone project for my education at Regis, providing an opportunity to contribute to a positive and tangible impact on society.

## Objective and Methodology

### Analyzing Determining Factors:

- Investigate and analyze the social, academic, and familial factors influencing the mental health of Brazilian adolescents, highlighting elements that may be correlated with drug use.
- Exploring Behavioral Patterns:
  - Identify specific behavioral patterns related to drug use among adolescents, considering different contexts and social groups, to understand underlying motivations.
- Evaluating Psychosocial Impacts:
  - Assess the psychosocial impacts of drug use on the mental health of adolescents, examining possible short and long-term consequences, including the development of mental disorders.
- Proposing Prevention Strategies:
  - Develop and propose specific preventive strategies based on research results to mitigate the risks of drug-related issues among Brazilian adolescents.
- Contributing to Public Policies:
  - Present data and conclusions that can inform the creation or enhancement of public policies related to mental health and the prevention of drug use among adolescents.

### Promoting Awareness:

- Raise awareness about the importance of mental health in adolescence and the risks associated with drug use, aiming to reduce stigma and increase understanding in society.

### Producing Detailed Report:

- Compile a comprehensive report documenting the research findings, highlighting proposed strategies, and providing recommendations for future interventions.

These specific objectives provide a clear framework for project execution, allowing for the attainment of tangible and measurable results that will contribute to the effective understanding and approach to the intersection between the mental health of adolescents and drug use in the Brazilian context

## Project Methodology

The project will employ a comprehensive approach involving quantitative and qualitative research methods to achieve the outlined objectives. The main strategies and planned steps are detailed below:

### Literature Review:

- Identify studies addressing determining factors, behavioral patterns, and relevant psychosocial impacts.

### Quantitative Data Collection:

- Use existing statistical data from reliable sources such as health institutions and government agencies to analyze trends and patterns related to mental health and drug use.

### Interviews with Healthcare Professionals and Youth:

- Interview with mental health professionals, psychologists, educators, and youth, seeking specialized perspectives and personal experiences related to the topic.

## **Qualitative Data Analysis:**

- Analyze qualitative data from interviews to identify deep insights into motivations, challenges, and coping strategies related to mental health and drug use.

## **Development of Preventive Strategies:**

- Based on research findings, specific preventive strategies should be developed, considering potential effectiveness and adaptability to the Brazilian cultural context.

## **Collaboration with Health and Education Institutions:**

- Establish partnerships with health and education institutions to implement and test preventive strategies in a practical setting, ensuring the real-world applicability of proposed interventions.

## **Project Evaluation**

The success of the project will be assessed through specific indicators, such as the perceived effectiveness of preventive strategies, changes in mental health and drug use statistics among adolescents, and positive feedback from healthcare professionals and involved youth, a project's contribution to informing public policies will be considered a key indicator of positive impact on society, and an evaluation process will involve both self-perception and expert analysis, ensuring a comprehensive and objective assessment of the project's success.

## **Project Timeline:**

### **Week 1-2: Initial Preparation**

- Refine the project proposal based on initial feedback.
- Establish contact with potential collaborators and experts for future interviews.
- Start a literature review on the mental health of adolescents and drug use.

### **Week 3-4: Research and Quantitative Data Collection**

- Deepen the literature review, identifying key sources.
- Collect and analyze statistical data on mental health and drug use among adolescents in Brazil.

### **Week 5-6: Interviews and Qualitative Data Collection**

- Begin interviews with mental health professionals, psychologists, and educators.
- Explore personal experiences of youth related to mental health and drug use.

### **Week 7-8: Data Analysis and Development of Strategies**

- Analyze quantitative and qualitative data to identify patterns and insights.
- Start the development of preventive strategies based on findings.

### **Week 9-10: Collaboration with Institutions**

- Establish partnerships with health and education institutions for the practical implementation of strategies.
- Refine strategies based on feedback from professionals and educators.

## Week 11-12: Implementation and Evaluation

- Begin implementing preventive strategies in collaboration with institutions.
- Initiate continuous evaluation of the impact of interventions in the practical environment.

## Week 13-14: Final Analysis and Report

- Conclude data collection and evaluation.
- Conducted a final analysis of results and completed the detailed project report.

## Week 15: Review and Finalization

- Review and edit the final project report.
- Prepare a presentation of results for delivery.

## Week 16: Presentation and Conclusion

- Present the project results.
- Finalize any pending tasks and conclude the Capstone project successfully.

## Results

The research results have revealed a complex correlation between the mental health of adolescents and drug use in the Brazilian context. Here are some key findings:

### Determining Factors:

- Identification of social factors, such as academic pressures and cultural patterns, as significant influences on the mental health of Brazilian adolescents.
- Lack of family support and exposure to traumatic events was associated with increased vulnerability to poor mental health.

### Behavioral Patterns Related to Drug Use:

- Drug use was often found to function as an inappropriate coping strategy for dealing with stress and anxiety.
- Youth reported the use of psychoactive substances as a means of escapism and to integrate into specific social groups.

### Psychosocial Impacts:

- Drug use showed significant adverse impacts on the mental health of adolescents, exacerbating anxiety and depression.
- Chemical dependency emerged as a risk factor for the development of long-term mental disorders.

These results highlight the need for an integrated approach that combines drug use prevention with support for the mental health of adolescents. The proposed strategies have the potential to offer significant benefits, not only in mitigating harmful drug use but also in promoting healthier and more supportive environments for Brazilian youth

## Discussion

The final discussion on the correlation between the mental health of adolescents and drug use emphasizes the importance of comprehensive approaches involving families, individuals, healthcare professionals,

and the government. Effectively addressing this complex scenario requires coordinated collaboration and specific strategies at each level.

## **Family**

### **Education and Communication:**

- Promote open and educational communication within families about the challenges of adolescence and the risks associated with drug use.
- Create supportive family environments where adolescents feel comfortable discussing mental health-related issues.

### **Active Participation:**

- Active involvement of parents in activities and significant moments in the lives of adolescents promotes a sense of belonging and emotional support.

## **Individual**

### **Coping Skills Development:**

- Promote the teaching of effective coping skills to deal with stress and anxiety, reducing the likelihood of resorting to substance use as an escape mechanism.

### **Access to Mental Health Resources:**

- Ensure adolescents have easy access to mental health resources, such as counseling services, psychologists, and support hotlines.

## **Healthcare Professionals**

### **Early Intervention:**

- Implement early intervention programs in schools and communities to identify early signs of mental health issues and offer immediate support.

### **Specialized Training:**

- Provide specialized training for healthcare professionals dealing directly with adolescents, empowering them to recognize and address mental health-related issues.

## **Government**

### **Mental Health Policies:**

- Develop and strengthen mental health policies that integrate preventive programs in schools and communities.

### **Access to Treatment:**

- Ensure equitable access to treatment services for adolescents facing significant mental health challenges, including rehabilitation programs and ongoing support.

## **Conclusion and Preventive Measures**

The collaborative approach to families, individuals, healthcare professionals, and the government is essential to create an effective support and prevention environment. Promoting mental health from an early age, easy access to specialized resources, and awareness are crucial elements to build a solid foundation that can prevent harmful drug use and promote the overall well-being of Brazilian adolescents. Implementing these strategies requires ongoing and coordinated commitment from all parties to ensure a positive long-term impact.

### **Preventive Strategies:**

Based on the results, preventive strategies were proposed that focused on mental health promotion, including emotional support programs in schools and the integration of educational psychologists. The importance of holistic approaches was emphasized, covering drug use prevention and the promotion of psychological well-being.

### **Practical Implementation and Impact Evaluation:**

During the practical implementation of preventive strategies in collaboration with institutions, a perceived improvement in awareness and support for mental health among adolescents was observed. Initial assessments showed a marginal reduction in drug use among participants in the intervention.



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