

Article

The role of family education in protecting children from drug harm

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CITATION

Al shaabkeh, L. (2025). The role of family education in protecting children from drug harm. *Intercontinental Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(2), 67-79. <https://doi.org/10.62583/2sffdm30>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 2 Sep 2024
Accepted: 27 Mar 2025

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Abstract: The study aimed to explore the role of family education in protecting children from the dangers of drug use. It employed a descriptive research approach and included a sample of 30 male and female students from Al Ain University. Data was collected using a questionnaire comprising nine items. The findings revealed that the overall mean score for the role of family education in safeguarding children from drug-related harm was 3.58, indicating a moderate level. Additionally, the study found that the overall mean score for proposed measures to enhance the role of family education in this context was 4.05, reflecting a high level of agreement. Moreover, the results indicated no significant differences in perceptions of the role of family education based on gender.

Keywords: Family education, Drug prevention, Child protection, Parental role, Substance abuse awareness

1. Introduction

Few studies have explored the social and economic problems associated with drug abuse among lower-class communities. With increasing poverty and unemployment in developing countries, social values have shifted, leading to the emergence of various social problems, including drug abuse. The issue of drug abuse is widely discussed on social networking sites and in the media. For example, in the United Kingdom, drug addiction is regarded as one of the most widespread societal issues today. According to modern liberal theories, drug abuse contributes to family disintegration, as well as increased crime and violence rates. Although drug use is

often associated with impoverished areas in many countries, research shows that heroin use is predominantly found in the most deprived and economically disadvantaged regions (Abdul Wahab, 2022).

On the other hand, limited studies have examined drug abuse in wealthy Gulf countries, particularly in the United Arab Emirates, due to the region's strong social welfare system. Researchers tend to focus on drug-related issues in low-income countries or areas with high unemployment rates, leaving a gap in research on substance abuse within affluent societies.

Drug abuse creates severe socio-economic problems. In addition to causing serious health issues, both physically and psychologically, addiction affects an individual's productivity and ability to work, thereby impacting economic stability. Moreover, drug dependence often leads to an increase in criminal behaviour, as addicts may engage in illegal activities to obtain money for purchasing drugs. Furthermore, drug abuse contributes to the deterioration of social institutions, particularly the family unit (Al-Sabai, 2017).

To combat this phenomenon and limit its spread, comprehensive efforts are required across all sectors of society, including families, schools, universities, workplaces, and broader social environments. Additionally, policymakers and legislators must play an active role in formulating and enforcing laws that regulate and control drug-related activities. Addressing drug abuse necessitates a unified approach, as this issue threatens the well-being and future of youth—who represent the future of society as a whole (Al-Hawrasha, 2012).

The socialization process is a critical stage in a child's life, during which they adopt behaviours, values, and social norms that shape their personality. Neglecting children or failing to supervise them from an early age may lead to deviance or exposure to negative influences, including peers involved in drug abuse or other harmful behaviours. This neglect can result in deterioration of both their physical and psychological health. Social stability and control are crucial in safeguarding children from exploitation. However,

the rise of social media has complicated the process, making parental supervision more challenging. Failing to monitor children's online activities and interactions may increase their susceptibility to delinquency, addiction, depression, or mental illness, all of which heighten the risk of substance abuse. Drug use negatively impacts cognitive development, leading to learning difficulties, concentration problems, and academic failure, ultimately limiting future opportunities (Suef, 2019; Abdul Ghani, 2018).

The family is the fundamental institution responsible for raising and nurturing future generations, who, in turn, contribute to the development and progress of society. An individual's personality is shaped during early childhood through parental guidance and reinforcement. Family members engage in continuous interaction, build relationships with one another, acquire values and habits, and internalise social norms. Through this process, they begin to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. As a result, children develop essential skills that guide them towards making responsible life choices and sound decisions (Omar, 2016; Al-Rashidi, 2020; Farid, 2021).

Accordingly, this study was conducted to examine the role of the family in addressing the issue of drug abuse in the United Arab Emirates, with a particular emphasis on the educational dimension of parenting. The significance of the study also stems from the limited number of research efforts that have explored this topic within the region. As such, the study seeks to answer the following question: *What role does the educational level of parents play in protecting children from drug abuse within Emirati families?*

1.1. Problem

Drug abuse remains one of the most urgent issues requiring continued research and investigation. Numerous studies have highlighted a strong link between inadequate socialisation and substance abuse, indicating that young people are less likely to engage in drug use when they are brought up in a supportive and well-structured environment (Abdul Wahab, 2022; Farid, 2021; Saqr, 2000). Parents play a crucial role in teaching good behaviour,

instilling moral values, and fostering positive habits and traditions. Beyond emotional and psychological support, families provide children with security, stability, and proper nutrition, ensuring their overall well-being. Unlike schools, where students interact with peers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, families offer consistent guidance and supervision that help prevent exposure to risky behaviours (Omar, 2016).

Although the UAE maintains strict drug regulations and has effectively controlled the spread of drug abuse, the country's cultural diversity and large expatriate workforce introduce potential challenges. Many foreign workers enter the region for employment but may find themselves unemployed due to contract terminations. Some of these individuals remain in the country illegally and may resort to illicit activities, including drug manufacturing and trafficking.

Given these concerns, it is essential to continuously educate children about the dangers of drug abuse and its psychological, mental, and financial consequences. Encouraging participation in alternative activities, such as sports and extracurricular programs, fosters a healthy lifestyle and helps children develop decision-making skills. These efforts ultimately reduce their likelihood of engaging in drug-related behaviours (Al-Rashidi, 2020; Abdul Wahab, 2022; Farid, 2021; Saqr, 2000). Based on the identified problem, this study seeks to answer the following central question: What is the role of the family in protecting children from drug abuse?

1.2. Objectives

- 1) To examine the role of family education in safeguarding children from the dangers of drug abuse.
- 2) To explore proposals for enhancing the effectiveness of family education in protecting children from drug-related harm.
- 3) To determine whether there is a statistically significant impact of family education on protecting children from drug abuse, based on gender differences (male vs. female)

1.3. Research Questions

- 1) What is the role of family education in protecting children from drug-related harm?

- 2) What are the proposed measures to enhance the role of family education in safeguarding children from drug abuse?

H0. There are no statistically significant differences (at the level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the use of AI at Al Ain University based on gender.

1.5. Literature review

This section presents an overview of previous studies relevant to the current research topic. The most notable studies are as follows:

Bakr (2022) conducted a study titled *The Role of Education in Preventing Students from Drug Use*, utilizing a descriptive analytical approach. The study was applied to a sample of 108 students, revealing that economic and social factors significantly contribute to students' drug addiction. The study emphasized the importance of parental supervision, including monitoring their children's social circles and free-time activities. Rustam (2022) examined *Educational Planning to Address the Phenomenon of Addiction Among Pre-University Students* using a descriptive analytical approach. The study involved 90 social education mentors and found two opposing perspectives: one group opposed integrating drug-related topics into curricula, while the other supported incorporating them into educational activities and awareness programs. The study recommended focusing on preventive awareness strategies.

In his study on the role of secondary education in addressing the drug problem, Nasser (2022) conducted a social survey on a sample of 14 students. The findings revealed differences between males and females in terms of awareness of drugs and their usage. Similarly, Wahba (2022) examined the role of media in providing role models for university youth by surveying 180 students. The majority of participants emphasized the media's significant influence on shaping behaviour and its role in protecting individuals from deviation and risky behaviours. Al-Zahrani (2022) investigated the relationship between the psychological family climate and children's drug addiction using a survey of 143 heroin addicts. The results indicated a strong relationship between weak social cohesion resulting from social upbringing and the phenomenon of drug use.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive approach using a social survey conducted on a representative sample, as this method is well-suited for such research and offers efficiency in terms of time and effort. This method is widely employed in social, humanitarian, and natural sciences, as it allows researchers to identify the characteristics of phenomena and analyze the relationships between them without influencing their natural progression.

2.2. Participants

The study population consists of all AAU students for the academic year 2024-2025. The study sample comprised 30 AAU students, selected using a simple random sampling method.

Table (1): Distribution of the study sample according to personal variables

Variable	Category	Sample Size	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	14	46.7%
	Female	16	53.3%
Total		30	100%
Age	20 - 24 years	7	23.3%
	25 - 29 years	9	30.0%
	30 - 34 years	8	26.7%
	35 years and above	6	20.0%
Total		30	100%
Employment Sector	Government Employee	18	60.0%
	Private Sector Employee	8	26.0%
	Self-Employed	4	14.0%
Total		30	100%
Family Size	Less than 4 members	5	16.7%
	5 – 8 members	15	50.0%
	9 – 12 members	4	13.3%
	More than 12 members	6	20.0%
Total		30	100%

The results presented in Table (1) indicate that the majority of the study sample were females, representing 53.3%, while males accounted for 46.7%. Regarding age distribution, 30% of the participants fell within the 25-29 years age group, followed by 26.7% in the 30-34 years group, 23.3% in the 20-24 years group, and the lowest percentage (20%) in the 35 years and above category. In terms of employment, public sector employees constituted the highest proportion at 60%, while freelancers represented the smallest category at 14%.

2.3 Data Collection

The first section focuses on the demographic characteristics of the study sample, including gender, age, educational status, employment status, monthly income, and family size. The second section consists of questionnaire items designed to address the study's research questions and objectives. This section includes 10 items, distributed across two main sections: The first section examines the role of family education in protecting children from drug harm and consists of five items: (1) democratic parenting helps protect children from drug harm, (2) the absence of family violence reduces the risk of drug use, (3) fostering open communication between parents and children protects them from drug harm, (4) family education encourages children to seek parental guidance when faced with drug-related situations, and (5) early parental awareness programs help educate children about the dangers of drugs. The second section of the study focused on proposed strategies for drug prevention and included the following items: (1) monitoring and guiding children, (2) raising their awareness, (3) observing and assessing their behaviour, (4) applying a balanced approach to discipline and supervision, and (5) engaging in open dialogue to encourage discussion and persuasion. To assess responses, the study utilised a five-point Likert scale with the following values: 5 (Very High), 4 (High), 3 (Moderate), 2 (Low), and 1 (Very Low).

To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, it was initially reviewed by the study supervisor, who assessed the clarity of meaning, linguistic accuracy, and relevance to the research field, suggesting any necessary modifications. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient was used to measure the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire, as presented in Table (2).

Table (2): Internal Consistency Reliability Values

Tool	Internal Consistency Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)
Questionnaire	0.87

2.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. The analysis included: Descriptive statistics to summarize participant characteristics and overall trends. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to evaluate responses, while t-tests were used to assess differences based on personal variables

3. Results

3.1. Results of the First Question: What is the Role of Family Education in Protecting a Child from Drug Damage?

To answer the first question of the study, arithmetic averages and standard deviations were calculated to assess the role of family education in protecting children from drug harm, as shown in **Table (3)**.

Table (3): Arithmetic Averages and Standard Deviations of the Role of Family Education in Protecting a Child from Drug Damage

Rank	No.	Skill	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Approval Level
1	4	Family education helps the child seek parental guidance when offered a narcotic substance.	4.12	0.92	High
2	2	The absence of family violence protects the child from drugs and their harm.	4.00	1.66	High
3	5	The family educates children from an early age about the dangers of drugs.	3.64	1.69	Moderate
4	1	Democratic parenting helps protect the child from drug harm.	2.80	1.93	Moderate
5	3	Open communication between parents and children protects them from drugs and their harm.	2.29	1.96	Low
Overall Score	-	-	3.58	0.968	Moderate

It is evident from Table (3) that the overall arithmetic mean for the role of family education in protecting children from drug harm is 3.58, indicating a moderate level. The arithmetic means for individual items ranged between 2.29 and 4.12. The table also shows that two items received a high approval rating, with the highest being item (4): *"Family education helps the child seek parental guidance when offered a narcotic substance,"* which had an arithmetic mean of 4.12.

Additionally, two items received a moderate approval rating, with arithmetic means ranging between 2.80 and 3.64. The highest among them was item (5): *"The family educates children from an early age about the dangers of drugs,"* with an arithmetic mean of 3.64. Meanwhile, one item received a low approval rating, namely item (3): *"The dominance of dialogue between parents and children protects children from drugs and their harms,"* which had an arithmetic mean of 2.29.

3.2. Results of the Second Question: What Are the Proposals to Enhance the Role of Family Education in Protecting Children from Drug Harm?

To address the second research question, arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for the proposals aimed at strengthening the role of family education in protecting children from drug harm. The results are presented in Table (4).

Table 4. Arithmetic Averages and Standard Deviations of Proposals to Enhance the Role of Family Education in Protecting Children from Drug Harm.

Rank	No.	Proposal	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Approval Level
1	5	Developing a spirit of dialogue between parents and children, encouraging the discussion of personal issues within the family to find the best solutions.	4.55	0.72	High
2	1	Setting a good example through parents' correct behaviors, such as avoiding smoking and drug use.	4.46	0.88	High
3	4	Following a balanced parenting approach—neither being too strict nor overly indulgent.	4.28	1.67	High
4	3	Raising parents' awareness of the severity and prevalence of addiction in society.	3.63	1.86	Moderate

Rank	No.	Proposal	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Approval Level
5	2	Monitoring children's behavior at home and outside, correcting and guiding them as needed.	2.32	1.90	Low
Overall Score	-	-	4.05	0.841	High

It is evident from Table (4) that the overall arithmetic mean for the proposals to enhance the role of family education in protecting children from drug harm is 4.05, indicating a high approval level. The arithmetic means for individual items ranged between 2.32 and 4.55. The table shows that three items received a high approval rating, with the highest being item (5): *"Developing a spirit of dialogue between parents and children, encouraging the discussion of personal issues within the family to reach the best solutions,"* which had an arithmetic mean of 4.55. One item received a moderate approval rating, namely item (3): *"Raising parents' awareness of the severity and prevalence of addiction in society,"* with an arithmetic mean of 3.64. Meanwhile, one item received a low approval rating, which was item (2): *"Monitoring children's behaviour at home and outside, correcting and guiding them as needed,"* with an arithmetic mean of 2.32.

3.3. Results of the Hypothesis

The study tested the hypothesis stating that *there is no statistically significant effect at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) of the role of family education in protecting children from drug harm, attributable to gender differences (male vs. female).*

To determine whether significant differences exist at the 0.05 significance level in the responses of the study sample regarding the role of family education in protecting children from drug harm based on gender, an independent samples T-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table (5).

Table (5): Results of the Independent Samples T-test for Gender Differences

Gender	Sample Size (N)	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	T-value	Significance Level (p-value)
Male	14	4.0440	0.82446	-0.791	0.431
Female	16	4.2333	0.22697		

Table (5) shows that there is no relationship between family education and protecting children from drug abuse according to gender.

4. Discussion

The previous section of the study's findings revealed that awareness plays a vital role in preventing children from becoming involved in drug use. The results also highlighted the importance of family supervision in safeguarding children from the risks associated with drug abuse. These findings are consistent with the results of studies by Bakr (2022), Al-Zahrani (2022), and Al-Mashaan (2022), all of which emphasised the importance of social upbringing and family supervision in protecting children from engaging in undesirable behaviours, including drug abuse. Based on these findings, parents in Emirati families should prioritise attentive and consistent monitoring of their children, educate them about the dangers of drug use, reinforce positive social behaviour, and encourage participation in sports and social activities. Family upbringing is a vital process through which children learn to navigate social life, develop the skills to interact effectively with others, face potential challenges, and choose healthy friendships. This is best achieved through democratic parenting that encourages open dialogue, mutual respect, and the exchange of ideas within the family.

Funding Statement: The author received no financial support for the research.

Ethics Statement: Informed consent and assent were obtained from the participating students, prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided by the participants were ensured.

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