THE CONSUMPTION IN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF MATO GROSSO DO SUL

O CONSUMO DE DROGAS NO AMBIENTE ACADÊMICO DA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MATO GROSSO DO SUL

EL CONSUMO DE DROGAS EN EL ÁMBITO ACADÉMICO DE LA UNIVERSIDAD FEDERAL DE MATO GROSSO DO SUL

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ABSTRACT: The use of drugs causes several disastrous effects on the body and social life, which can seriously affect the health of the user and at the same time cause addiction. The objective of this study is to investigate the use of drugs among students at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, taking into account that students have easy access to impediments at the university and their use is justified by social acceptance due to escaping from Reality or me. tie to get good grades. The investigation revealed that most exposures occurred with men and over 18 years old. As the time spent at university, the percentage of use increases, with use being for leisure time, or during test week/end of semester. However, many never wanted to use drugs for the sole purpose of boosting their grades.

KEYWORDS: Drugs. Students. University.

***RESUMO**: O uso de drogas causa diversos efeitos funestos ao organismo e à vida social, podendo afetar gravemente a saúde do usuário e causar até mesmo dependência. O objetivo deste estudo, é investigar o consumo de drogas entre os discentes da Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul, atentando ao fato de que os estudantes têm fácil acesso a entorpecentes na universidade e tem seu uso justificado desde a aceitação social até a fuga da realidade ou até mesmo para conseguir boas notas. A pesquisa revelou que a maioria das exposições ocorreu com homens e com maiores de 18 anos. A medida do tempo que o aluno está na universidade, aumenta o seu percentual de uso, sendo que o uso era para momentos de lazer, ou em momentos de semana de prova/final de semestre. Entretanto, muitos já tiveram vontade de usar drogas com o único objetivo de aumentar suas notas.*

***PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Drogas. Discentes. Universidade.*

***RESUMEN**: El uso de drogas provoca varios efectos desastrosos en el organismo y la vida social, que pueden afectar gravemente la salud del usuario y al mismo tiempo causar adicción. El objetivo de este estudio es investigar el uso de drogas entre los estudiantes de la Universidad Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul, teniendo en cuenta que los estudiantes tienen fácil acceso a los impedimentos en la universidad y su uso se justifica por la aceptación social debido a la fuga de la Realidad o yo empate para sacar buenas notas. La investigación reveló que la mayoría de las exposiciones ocurrieron con hombres y mayores de 18 años. A medida que se pasa el tiempo en la universidad, el porcentaje de uso aumenta, siendo el uso para el tiempo libre, o durante la semana de exámenes/fin de semestre. Sin embargo, muchos nunca quisieron usar drogas con el único propósito de mejorar sus calificaciones.*

***PALABRAS CLAVE**: Drogas. Estudiantes. Universidad.*

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Introduction

It is common knowledge that the use of drugs causes various harmful effects on the body and social life, potentially severely impacting the user's health and even leading to addiction. The consumption of licit and illicit drugs, also known as psychoactive substances, dates back to ancient times. However, over time, this consumption has become a problem of a social nature. According to research, 40% of young people no longer see drugs as harmful, resulting in a significant increase in consumption in recent years, particularly among young people and university students, as evidenced by Medeiros (2012) and Zeferino (2015).

In the current scenario, licit and illicit substance consumption is becoming a public health issue as its use continues to rise, especially among young people. There are indications of substance use from early school years, but the highest rates are observed among university students. Based on data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, it was found that 5.6% of the global population between 15 and 64 years old consumed illegal substances at least once in the year 2016 (BARBOSA; MARQUES; MACIEL, 2012).

In general, drugs are substances that are not synthesized by the body and, when consumed, promote alterations in their functions, resulting in various effects. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that these substances are not inherently harmful as long as they are used appropriately and with a medical prescription, as with medications (BATISTA et al., 2021). However, there are other substances known as psychotropic drugs, whose purpose lies in seeking a state of evasion from reality, affecting the emotions and behavior of the individual. These substances are the most alarming due to their ability to induce dependence and cause severe consequences to the body, sometimes acting as toxic agents. It is worth noting that alcohol consumption is also detrimental (CARNEIRO *et al.,* 2014).

Several studies have been conducted at many universities regarding university students' use of psychoactive substances (BEZERRA *et al.,* 2011; MACHADO; MOURA; ALMEIDA, 2015; JUNQUEIRA; ANTUNES; OLIVEIRA, 2016; ARAUJO; VIEIRA; MASCARENHAS, 2018; GONÇALVES *et al.,* 2019; RABELO *et al.,* 2020; HOLGUÍN *et al.,* 2020; ABREU *et al.,* 2021). When analyzing 27 Brazilian capitals in a survey titled "I Levantamento Nacional sobre o Uso de Álcool, Tabaco e Outras Drogas", which used data obtained from a survey conducted in 2009, it was observed that the most frequently used drugs were alcohol and tobacco. However, in the 30 days before the survey, the most commonly used drugs were: alcohol (60.5%), tobacco (21.6%), marijuana (9.1%), amphetamines (8.7%), tranquilizers (5.8%), inhalants (2.9%), and hallucinogens (2.8%). This survey also found that nearly half of

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the university students (48.7%) have consumed some illicit drug at least once in their lifetime, and just over one-third (35.8%) have used it in the past 12 months.

There is considerable discourse surrounding the significance of engaging in a thorough study and open dialogue on drugs, encompassing both the utilization and misuse of narcotics and the ensuing ramifications experienced by individuals. Through such endeavors, a heightened understanding is disseminated regarding the impact of drugs on the human body, their potential adverse effects, and their potential to influence diverse aspects in either a detrimental or advantageous manner. This process fosters improved comprehension and awareness of the subject matter while simultaneously fostering consciousness surrounding addiction and the unwise practice of self-medication.

According to Abreu et al. (2021), it is believed that the autonomy that many students acquire when entering university is a factor that influences the initiation of drug use. The higher use among this population is linked to emotional factors such as anxiety disorders, depression, low self-esteem, the feeling of not belonging, living far from parents, and frustration with academic performance. Therefore, they end up seeing drugs as a way to escape reality.

Research has shed light on the pursuit of medications renowned for their potential to enhance concentration and alleviate anxiety, such as Ritalin and Diazepam (JUNQUEIRA; ANTUNES; OLIVEIRA, 2016). Numerous studies have revealed a notable prevalence of self-medication practices among university students, particularly during periods of heightened academic pressure, such as examination weeks and the culmination of semesters. It is during these times that students resort to medications in the hopes of augmenting their academic performance.

Ritalin is a medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or hyperkinetic disorder. The active ingredient in Ritalin is a central nervous system stimulant. As Silva et al. (2023) pointed out, the medication demonstrates its effectiveness by enhancing the activities of specific areas of the brain that exhibit reduced activity levels. Similarly, there are other medications with a similar purpose, and students turn to such substances due to their ability to enhance focus, increase concentration, and consequently improve academic performance. When these medications are not administered correctly, and without a medical prescription, they pose numerous health risks. According to Schuind, Menezes, and Abreu (2021), the consequences of the misuse of Ritalin® are primarily related to mental health, such as anxiety, panic syndrome, insomnia, and loss of appetite. They can also cause cardiovascular problems, such as increased blood pressure, respiratory changes, and heart rate alterations.

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Therefore, consuming psychoactive substances does not always result in the users' expectations and can lead to dependency. As a result, individuals tend to gradually increase the doses used as the body does not respond in the same way as before. Comparing data from a national survey conducted in 2009 with other studies, it is possible to observe that the use of psychotropic substances is more prevalent among university students than in the general population, and research suggests a correlation between drug use by these students and their academic performance. Therefore, the importance of providing psychological and educational support to guide students facing difficulties in this area is emphasized.

To understand the motivations and consequences of drug use among individuals, a more in-depth study of this phenomenon in the academic environment is sought by gathering the opinions of various students. The purpose of this research is to examine the inclination toward the use of drugs during the undergraduate period students, considering the ease of access to such substances within university institutions, as well as the justifications for their use, which can range from seeking social acceptance to escaping from reality or even aspiring to achieve satisfactory academic performance.

Methodology

The study was conducted at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS), Parauapebas campus, between May and June 2022. The methodology consisted of a questionnaire with closed-ended questions employing a quantitative approach. The target population comprised the students of the university campus. The questionnaires were distributed to 123 students from various courses at the university. The inclusion criteria were the students' agreement to participate in the research anonymously and their active enrollment in an undergraduate program at UFMS.

Due to its standardized responses, this type of questionnaire facilitates statistical data analysis (GIL, 1999). The construction of the questionnaire was based on instruments used to gather the necessary information from these students.

The data was collected through an anonymous self-administered questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section, concerning personal information, comprised variables such as age, gender, undergraduate course, and academic semester. The second section pertained to knowledge and consumption of legal and illegal drugs. The variable "drug use or non-use" was categorized for data analysis.

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The collected data were interpreted using a percentage analysis of each item presented in graphs and tables. Statistical analysis was performed using the Excel 2010 and R (2020) software programs.

Results and Discussion

As presented in Table 1, most students who filled out the form are of legal age (above 18 years old), representing a percentage of 91.87%. Furthermore, it can be observed that among legal-age students, over 40% reported having used some form of drugs at least once. This percentage is 10% among minors. There was a significant difference (p-value = 0.004) in the proportions of drug use between legal-age and underage students.

Table 1 - Percentage of students who have used and have never used drugs, according to some characteristics

Age	%	Never used	Already used
18 or older	91.87	59.29	40.71
Under 18	8.13	90.00	10.00
Gender			
Female	41.46	66.67	33.33
Male	55.28	57.35	42.65
No answer	3.25	75.00	25.00
Year in college			
First	40.65	70.00	30.00
Second	30.08	59.46	40.54
Third	15.45	52.63	47.37
Fourth	9.76	41.67	58.33
Fifth	4.07	80.00	20.00

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Additionally, the gender with the highest number of participants is male, representing 55.28% of the total. Next, we have the female gender with 41.46%. Some participants identified as non-binary, gender-fluid, and agender. The highest percentage of individuals who reported having used some drug is among males, with 42.65%, while among females, this percentage is 33.33%. Although there is a percentage difference, no significant difference was found between the two proportions, as indicated by the p-value of the two-proportion test, which was 0.296.

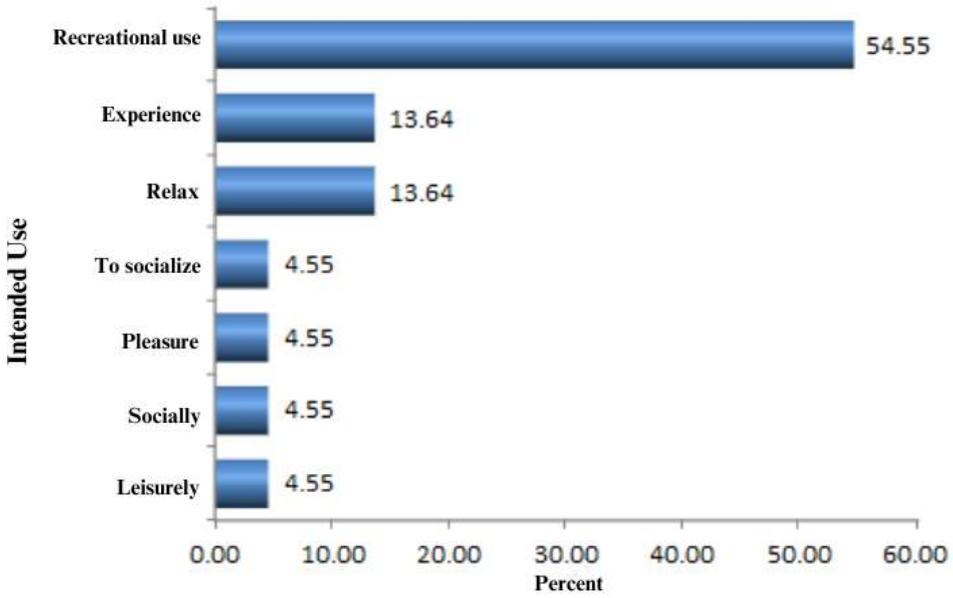
This predominance of male students was expected, as most participants are enrolled in engineering courses, which are still predominantly male in various universities, as observed in Reis (2021).

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It can also be observed that drug use increases as the student progresses in their years of undergraduate studies. Among first-year students, 30.00% reported having used some drug. This percentage increases to 40.54% among second-year students and to 47.37% and 58.33% among third and fourth-year students, respectively.

Furthermore, it is noticeable that students in more advanced periods have a greater knowledge of the effects and different types of narcotics. This fact was also observed in the study by Abreu *et al.* (2021), which investigated drug use and knowledge of its consequences among Dentistry students.

Figure 1 - Purposes of use among research participants



Source: Elaborated by the authors

Additionally, it was found that students who use drugs have different purposes. More than 50.00% of the surveyed individuals who use drugs do so for recreational purposes, as illustrated in Figure 1. Only 13.64% of the respondents use drugs to relax or experiment. It is worth noting that approximately 5.00% of people use drugs solely to fit in with their friends.

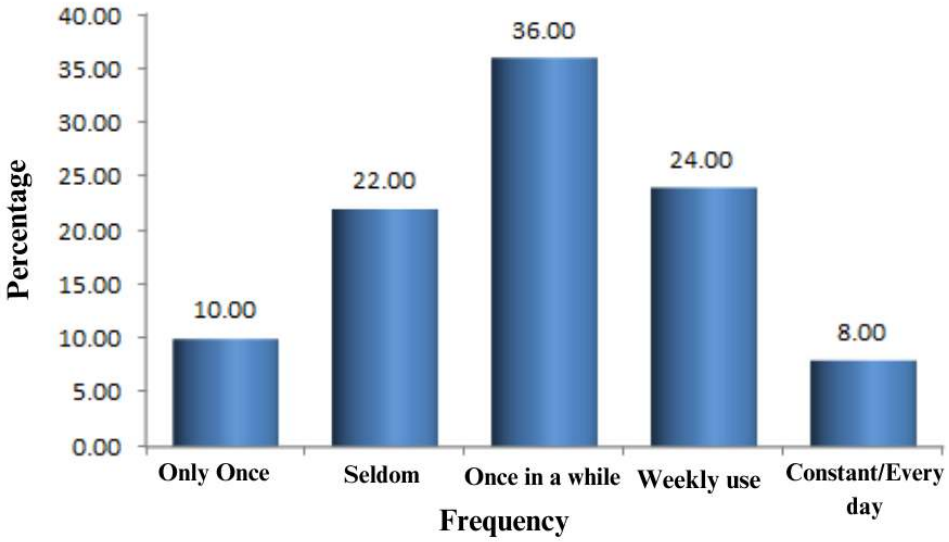
It is also observed that although drug use serves various purposes, a significant portion (31.70%) stated that they wanted to use drugs, such as anxiolytics and stimulants, solely to improve their grades in their undergraduate studies.

Through the analysis of the data and with the aid of Figure 2, it has been determined that the usage frequency among students can be categorized as follows: frequent usage (8.00%), weekly usage (24.00%), occasional usage (36.00%), rare usage (22.00%), and one-time usage

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(10.00%). These findings indicate that the majority of students who engage in drug use do so intermittently rather than consistently.

Figure 2 – Frequency of drug use from the survey

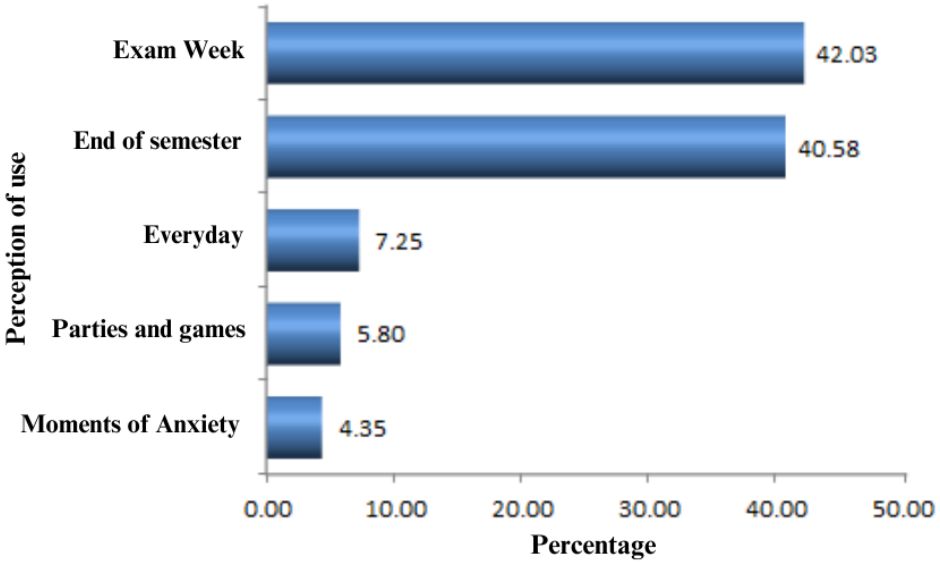


Source: Elaborated by the authors

In addition to this information, participants were also asked about their knowledge or perception of the increased use of these substances at any point during their university experience. The majority of students interviewed (42.03%) reported perceiving a higher drug consumption during exam weeks, followed by the end of the semester (40.58%). Figure 3 graphically presents this information.

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Figure 3 - Perception of Drug Use in the Study



Source: Elaborated by the authors

The use of Ritalin in university settings is also common among students to improve focus, learning, and expected academic performance. Participants in the survey were asked about their knowledge of these medications, and as a result, it was found that 25.00% of respondents stated that they were not familiar with them, while 75.00% claimed to be familiar. They were also asked if they ever wanted to use medication to improve their grades. Consequently, 67.70% of respondents affirmed that they had never felt the urge to experiment, while 32.30% stated they had.

Regarding the participants' opinions on drug use in university, it was observed that many students consider it detrimental to health. Some comments pointed out that drug use can be a form of escapism from reality but can ultimately lead to dependence, worsening the individual's condition instead of helping. Some comments highlighted that using these drugs when properly monitored can benefit many, while others consider it unnecessary. All of these responses were analyzed and were essential for the final development of the study.

As young people enter university, they see life from a new perspective. Many leave their parents' homes, gain greater independence, make new friendships, and seek ways to integrate and cope with academic life. This new reality influences the lives of these young individuals, leading them, at times, to seek both legal and illegal substances as a means of relaxation, enjoyment, or academic enhancement.

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Considering these characteristics, the present study found that the prevalence of drug use among students is 40.71%. Among the students, the highest percentage of users is observed in the years following university admission, with 47.37% and 58.33% (third and fourth year of undergraduate studies). This percentage differs from a study conducted with students from a university in Florianópolis — SC (IMAI; COELHO; BASTOS, 2014), where the highest number of users is found in the early years, with 24.8% and 30%. This difference can be attributed to the variation in the target audience during the research. In the same study, it is observed that 30.4% of the respondents use marijuana, a lower percentage compared to the current study, even considering that the study conducted at the university in Florianópolis — SC covers a wider range of illicit drugs used.

During the research, 54.55% of students said they use drugs for recreational purposes. In terms of frequency of use, the percentage was lower, with 8% reporting constant use. This proportion is comparable to a study conducted by the Federal University of Goiás — UFG (CANUTO; FERREIRA; GUIMARÃES, 2006) with first-year medical students, where a percentage of 1.6% for constant use was recorded. Comparisons can be made between these studies. While the UFG study reveals that 7.7% of students use anxiolytics, this number is similar to the use of stimulant medications reported by medical students at the Federal University of Minas Gerais — UFMG (PETROIANU et al., 2010), which is 7.5% of the interviewed students. However, 12% of UFMG students report the use of anxiolytics. When asked if they had ever wanted to try these stimulant medications, only 32.30% of the respondents in this study affirmed that they had.

The consumption of these drugs mainly occurs during exam weeks, the end of semesters, and university parties, which are situations conducive to their use. Therefore, the university needs to be capable of combating drug use, aiming at the well-being and health of its students. Involving students in health prevention policies is essential to promote a better understanding of the current situation.

Conclusion

University life is a period that provides new experiences but can also be considered critical and more vulnerable. It is common for young people to experiment with illicit and licit drugs during this period. However, in the long run, it can become an addiction that hinders academic and professional performance and interferes with other areas of personal life.

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In order to better understand the predisposition to drug use in the academic environment of higher education, a study was conducted covering different courses. The research revealed a predominant profile of cases where the majority of exposures occurred among the male population and those over 18 years of age. Additionally, it was possible to observe that the length of time spent at university is related to increased drug use.

Students who used drugs shared that their consumption was not frequent but for leisure purposes or during exam weeks/finals. A significant percentage stated that they wanted to use drugs solely to improve their grades in their degree program.

Therefore, it is important to emphasize the relevance of the university in combating drug use for the well-being of the students. Furthermore, it is essential to involve the students in data collection for a better understanding of the current situation and in implementing health prevention policies.

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