Journal of Posthumanism

2025
Volume: 5, No: 6, pp. 3103–3121
ISSN: 2634-3576 (Print) | ISSN 2634-3584 (Online)
posthumanism.co.uk

DOI: https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i6.2434

Factors Associated with Drug Use in Urban and Rural Adolescents Attending School in the Canton of Milagro-Ecuador

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Abstract

The issue of substance abuse among adolescents in both urban and rural regions of Latin America has emerged as a pressing concern on a global scale. This phenomenon is driven by a complex interplay of psychosocial and economic factors, which have profound ramifications on individuals, communities, and societies. This study aims to examine the consumption of both licit and illicit substances among adolescents enrolled in educational institutions in both rural and urban areas of Milagro, Ecuador. The research employs a quantitative descriptive study design, enabling the comprehensive identification of social, economic, and psychological factors associated with drug abuse, both licit and illicit, among adolescents aged 12 to 18 years. A structured survey was validated by expert judgment and used as the information collection technique. The consumption patterns observed differed depending on the substance: 48.3% of the sample reported using cannabis and 48.3% heroin; in urban areas, drug use began at an early age of 15-16 years, except for cocaine, which was used at a later age: 16-17 years (64.6%). A comprehensive analysis reveals that drug use among school-going adolescents exhibits notable disparities between rural and urban regions. These variations are influenced by a multitude of factors, including drug availability, peer influence, risk perception, and accessibility to treatment resources. Addressing these disparities necessitates a comprehensive approach, entailing the formulation of prevention and treatment strategies that are tailored to the unique characteristics of each setting.

Keywords: *Risk Factors, Drugs, Consumption, Adolescents, Urban and Rural Areas.*

Introduction

The use of drugs among adolescents in both urban and rural areas who are enrolled in school carries with it significant psychosocial and economic risks that can have a detrimental impact on both individuals and their respective communities. Psychosocially, substance experimentation can lead to the onset of disorders such as anxiety, depression, or personality problems, thereby increasing the emotional vulnerability of young people, particularly in rural areas where mental health resources are scarce (1). This consumption also impacts social and family relationships, and in rural areas, where community ties are closer, stigma can be more marked, generating isolation and tensions within families and communities.

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Economically, substance use imposes a substantial financial strain, particularly in communities with constrained incomes (2). Furthermore, substance use has been associated with school absenteeism and diminished academic performance, which, in the long term, can lead to limited educational and employment opportunities, thereby perpetuating a cycle of economic disadvantage. The dearth of access to adequate health services and prevention programs further exacerbates these risks, particularly in rural areas where medical care and preventive resources are scarce.

The global reach of this phenomenon is evident, affecting both urban and rural communities worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 8.8% of adolescents have used drugs at least once in their lives, with rates varying depending on the region and socioeconomic context (3). In Latin America, for instance, there is a striking prevalence of drug use among adolescents in rural areas. For example, estimates indicate that between 20% and 30% of rural adolescents in countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and Peru have experimented with drugs (4). This phenomenon underscores the need to address underlying factors such as limited educational and employment opportunities, inadequate healthcare services, and economic disadvantages, which contribute to drug use as a means of escape (5) and social exclusion (6).

Moreover, substance use has been demonstrated to have profound consequences for mental health, with anxiety and depression being particularly prevalent among affected populations. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to developing psychological disorders, including anxiety and depression, which can be attributed to the neurochemical effects of substances as well as the stress associated with substance use (7). In more severe cases, drug use can lead to the development of psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia, and personality problems (8). The social stigma associated with drug use contributes to these problems, making it difficult to seek help and increasing social isolation (9). In Ecuador, for instance, approximately 25% of adolescents face mental health problems related to drug use, with anxiety and depression being the most common disorders (10).

To address this issue, a multifaceted approach is necessary that incorporates prevention, access to mental health services, and community support. Key steps in this approach include drug education, early detection of mental health issues, and the elimination of stigma. Ensuring equitable access to health services and educational opportunities is also crucial, especially in rural and marginalized communities.

Methodology

The present study employs quantitative, descriptive, and correlational research design. These methodologies enable the comprehensive identification of social, economic, and psychological factors associated with drug abuse, encompassing both licit and illicit substances, across two distinct sectors: urban and rural. The study's primary focus is on adolescent students between the ages of 12 and 18, with the objective of examining the relationship between variables that influence consumer behavior.

A survey was conducted using a virtual link created in Google Forms and aimed at adolescent students residing in rural and urban areas of the canton of Milagro - Province of Guayas in Ecuador. The survey comprised 15 questions designed to elicit detailed information regarding the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of adolescents concerning substance use.

The instrument's description is provided below.

The questions are classified to collect information for four objectives: prevalence of drug use, sociodemographic factors, identification of licit and illicit drugs, and analysis of consumption in urban and rural sectors. The instrument was designed by the researchers and validated by expert judgment. Sufficiency, clarity, relevance, and coherence are determined.

Drug use among urban and rural adolescents in school entails psychosocial and economic risks that affect both individuals and their communities. Psychosocially, substance experimentation can lead to disorders such as anxiety, depression, or personality problems, increasing the emotional vulnerability of young people, especially in rural areas where mental health resources are limited (1). This consumption also impacts social and family relationships. In rural areas, where community ties are closer, stigma can be more pronounced, generating isolation and tensions within families and communities.

Economically, substance use imposes a substantial financial strain, particularly in communities with limited incomes (2). Furthermore, substance use has been associated with school absenteeism and diminished academic performance, which, in the long term, can lead to limited educational and employment opportunities, thereby perpetuating a cycle of economic disadvantage. The dearth of access to adequate health services and prevention programs further exacerbates these risks, particularly in rural areas where medical care and preventive resources are scarce.

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	SUFFICIENCY				CLARITY		PERTINENCE				COHERENCE				
	S1	S2	S3	S4	C1	C2	C3	C4	P1	P2	P3	P4	CO1	CO2	CO3	CO4
EXP1				12			3	1			1	11			1	12
EXP2			1	14			2	12			1	13			2	7
EXP3		2	2	11			3	11		1	6	2		1	3	12
EXP4				14		1		13			12	1		4	9	1
EXP5			2	11			2	12			1	11			1	14
EXP6				7				14				13				15
EXP7				12				14				14				12
EXP8		1	7	7		1	7	13		1	4	12		2	3	11
EXP9			4	11			9	15			5	12			4	7
EXP10			4	12			6	12			1	11			1	6
EXP11			4	11			8	7			1	7			1	7
EXP12			4	12			7	12			3	14			2	13

Table 1. Expert Judgment Validation

As indicated in Table 1, experts 1, 4, 6, and 7 assert that the 15 items are adequate for detecting consumption, type, and differences in the sectors.

Remarks: With regard to the category of clarity, experts 6 and 7 asserted that all items are clear and precise. Conversely, experts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 posited that items 7, 11, 12, and 14 require modification, and items 3 and 4 need to incorporate literals and reorganize to align with the semantic structure of the items. The literal of question 3 suggests its elimination from the questionnaire. Experts 6 and 7 indicated that the questionnaire demonstrated a high level of relevance, while experts 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 stated that it was relevant but required a revision of the subparagraphs of responses. Expert 4 suggested eliminating the category of relevance since it already contains this indicator in sufficiency. This was not previously considered, as the categories were taken as a reference for the analysis. Regarding the category of coherence of the items that are part of this questionnaire, experts 6, 7, 10, and 11 were of the opinion that the questionnaire presents a high level of coherence, while the other experts suggest explicit semantic modifications.

Results

To fulfill the objective of ascertaining the prevalence of both licit and illicit substances among adolescents enrolled in educational institutions in both urban and rural regions, tabular representations have been meticulously prepared (see Tables 2-6).

Table 2 presents the prevalence according to the type of licit substances consumed. The prevalence data reveals a general high prevalence in both urban and rural areas, with values greater than 80%. However, a statistically significant difference was observed in relation to cigarette consumption (p: 0.00) with higher prevalence in urban areas (91%) and alcohol (p: 0.05) in rural areas (93.0%).

LICIT SUBSTANCE	URBAN AREAS (N: 600) Number %		RURAL AREAS (N:186) Number %		CHI2 (P: 95%)
Coffee and substances that Contain					
Yes	594		184		
No	6	99 1		2	
Cigarettes					
Yes	546	91	151		13,6
No	54	9	35	81 19	(0,00)
Alcohol					
Yes	528	88	173	93	3,69
No	72	12	13	7	(0,05)

Table 2. Prevalence of the Consumption of Licit Substances According To the Area Of Origin Canton Milagro

FI: SURVEY,

YES Corresponds to the answers: Always, Almost always, Sometimes, Almost never; No: Corresponds to the answers never

As indicated in Table 2, elevated prevalences of illicit substances were observed, with percentages exceeding 50%, exhibiting variations according to geographical location. The consumption of heroin (p: 0.000) and cocaine (p: 0.01) exhibited a predominance in urban areas, with both substances demonstrating comparable frequencies of consumption, with the exception of cannabis, which exhibited an 80% frequency of consumption.

Type of substance	Category		Urban areas (n: 600)		Rural areas (n:186)		WH^2 (P: 95%)
			n		n		
%	%						
Yes	480	80	149	80	0,01		
Cannabis	No		120	20	37	20	(0.97)
Yes	480	80	102	55	46.7		
Heroin							
No	120	20	84	45	(0,00)		
Yes	390	80	102	55	6,26		
Cocaine							
No	210	20	84	45	(0,01)		

Table 3. Prevalence of Illicit Substance Use According to the Area of Origin.

FI: SURVEY,

YES Corresponds to the answers: Always, Almost always, Sometimes, Almost never No: Corresponds to the answers never

Another aspect of prevalence included was age (Tables 3 and 4). In this particular table, the focus is exclusively on consumers, who are selected from the total population according to the age of the student. These consumers are then grouped into two categories: 15-16 years and 17-18 years and identifying consumption by geographical area.

Table 4 presents a comprehensive overview of consumers of licit substances, categorized according to age group and geographical area. In relation to licit drugs, the highest consumption of coffee and its derivatives was found in the youngest ages (15-16); 79% in urban areas and 60% in rural areas. These differences were significant at 95% confidence when applying the Chi2 test (p: 0.00). In contrast, alcohol and cigarette consumption began at a later age, at approximately 17 and 18 years of age, respectively, and was observed in both urban and rural areas. The proportion of consumers of alcohol and cigarettes was 75% and 72%, respectively, in the 17-18 age group. The Chi-square test revealed no significant differences in consumption by urban or rural geographic area, according to age (p>0.05).

TYPE OF SUBSTANCE	**URBAN AREAS Number**	**%**	**RURAL AREAS Number**	**%**	**CHI_2 (P: 95%)**
Coffee and other substances containing it	(n: 594)		(n: 184)		
15-16 years	474	80	111	60	28.5
17-18 years	120	20	73	40	(0.00)
Cigarettes	(n: 546)		(n: 151)		
15-16 years	196	36	42	28	3.43
17-18 years	350	64	109	72	(0.06)
Alcohol	(n: 528)		(n: 528)		
15-16 years	130	25	31	18	3.30
17-18 years	398	75	142	82	(0.06)

Table 4. Consumers of Licit Substances According to the Age Group and Area of Origin. Canton Milagro

With respect to illicit substances (Table 4); a different pattern of consumption was observed; since cannabis (48%) and heroin (48%); it begins its consumption at an early age, 15-16 years in urban areas, except for cocaine, whose onset of consumption is later: 17-18 years (65%); On the other hand, in rural areas the three illicit substances begin to be consumed at the ages of 17-18 years: cannabis (37%), heroin (59%) and cocaine (66%).

In turn, differences in consumption were found according to geographical areas in the three illicit substances, with greater consumption of cannabis in urban areas at an early age (48%) vs. greater consumption of heroin (59%) and cocaine (65%) at older ages (17-18 years), in rural areas.

TYPE OF SUBSTANCE	**URBAN AREAS Number**	**%**	**RURAL AREAS Number**	**%**	**CHI_2 (P: 95%)**
CANNABIS:	(n: 480)			(n: 149)	
		16		19	
15-16 YEARS	232	48	60	37	
17-18 YEARS	222		73	**44**	29,86

LOST DATA	46 26 5					(0,000)
HEROIN: **15-16 YEARS** **17-18 YEARS** **LOST DATA**	(n: 480) 232 222 26	48 46 6		16 60 26	(n: 102)	16 **59** 25	136 (0,000)
COCAINE: **15-16 YEARS** **17-18 YEARS** **LOST DATA**	(n: 390) 112 252 26	29 65 6		9 67 26		9 66 25	8.28 (0.004)

Table 5. Consumers of Illicit Substances According to Age Group and Area of Origin Canton Milagro

F.I SURVEY

Another indicator included in the prevalence was the frequency of consumption of those students who truly "YES" consume some type of substance (licit or illicit). This aspect can be seen in tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 shows the frequency of consumption by type of substance. It is observed that consumption on weekends predominates both in urban areas (coffee and derivatives: 46%, cigarettes:

54%, alcohol: 78%) and rural (coffee and derivatives: 56%, cigarettes: 56%, alcohol: 49%).

	Urban area					
Frequency	**Coffee and others substances that the Contain Number %**		**Cigarette Number %**		**Alcohol Number %**	
Daily	180	30	174	32	60	11
Weekend	270	46	294	54	408	78
Occasionally	144	24	**78**	14	60	11
Total	**594**	**100**	**546**	**100**	**528**	**100**
		Rural area				
Daily	78	42	67	44	58	33
Weekend	102	56	84	56	84	49
Occasionally	4	2	0	0	31	18
Total	**184**	**100**	**151**	**100**	**173**	**100**

Table 6. Frequency of Consumption of Licit Substances According to Area of Origin. Canton Milagro

In a similar way, Table 6 enables the differentiation of the frequency of illicit substance consumption according to the area of origin. In this case, a divergent consumption pattern is observed, with the "occasionally" option predominating in all substances, both in urban areas (cannabis: 55%; cocaine: 52%; heroin: 53%) and rural areas (cannabis: 67%; cocaine: 62%; heroin: 49%).

	Urban area					
Frequency	**Cannabis**			**Cocaine**	**Heroin**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Daily	12	2	12	3	12	2
Weekend	204	43	174	45	216	45
Occasionally	264	55	204	52	252	53
Total	**480**	**100**	**390**	**100**	**480**	**100**

Daily	3	4	4
Weekend	30	34	47
Occasionally	67	62	49
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Rural Area

It is imperative to acknowledge the contemporary significance of drug use as a pervasive social phenomenon, particularly its impact on adolescents. The prevalence of substance use and abuse during adolescence and early adulthood is significant, as evidenced by the findings of the present study. In this regard, (17) have noted a considerable increase in drug use in recent years, which has had detrimental consequences, affecting adolescents in various domains, including increased school failure, a higher prevalence of mental disorders, and worse psychosocial adjustment. The extant data demonstrates a high prevalence of comorbidity between substance use disorders and mental disorders in adolescents, ranging from 65% to 75%.

The prevalence of tobacco consumption was identified at 30%, with the average age of initiation being 13.4 years, which is younger than the age groups included in this research. The prevalence of tobacco consumption was found to be 33%. The prevalence of drug use was documented to be 24.4%. The substances most commonly used were cannabis (16%), followed by inhalants (6%) and cocaine (3%). These results differ from those of this study with respect to the prevalence of consumption; however, the consumption patterns were similar in terms of the preferred illicit substances, although they place it at an earlier onset (15).

Conversely, a study (9) revealed that 85% of university students consume alcohol, 27% are smokers, 13% have used illegal drugs in the last month, and 24% during the last year. Furthermore, 36% of the students surveyed reported having used an illicit drug at least once in their lifetime, with cannabis being the most commonly used illegal drug. The study concluded that a significant proportion of the student population consumes alcohol, which increases the risk of using illegal drugs (OR = 2.64; 95% CI: 1.22 – 5.73). In this order of ideas, the present study under scrutiny highlights a high prevalence in general, both in urban and rural areas, with

values greater than 80%, highlighting differences in the consumption of cigarettes (p: 0.00) and alcohol (p: 0.05), with greater consumption of cigarettes in urban areas and in rural areas of alcohol; in turn, illegal substances occupy a lower frequency of consumption, as in this study, accentuating in both cases, the consumption of cannabis. Coffee is a legal substance that is consumed at high rates in both urban and rural areas (99%), according to a study (12). This study found that coffee consumption is higher than alcohol and cigarette consumption, but lower than the 64% observed in another study.

A study (19) indicates that caffeine, an alkaloid naturally found in coffee, can have adverse effects on health when consumed during adolescence. Synthetically produced and used as an additive in certain food products, the study found that 86% of the population studied consuming coffee, up to two cups a day (74%). The onset of consumption occurred at an early age, under 10 years of age (52%), and the main influence for consumption is parents (94%) and siblings (80%). The present study has concluded that coffee consumption is a prevalent practice among adolescents, necessitating careful consideration to avert its potential role as an inappropriately encouraged family habit. These results align with the findings of this study in several respects: the early onset of consumption, albeit among older age groups (15-16 years), and the impact of family habits on the development of this habit among adolescents.

An increasing trend in drug use has been observed among secondary school adolescents in Peru (18). The same author notes a decline in the age of onset of consumption from 13.4 to 13 years on average for both legal and illegal types of drugs since 200717, that the average age of onset of drug use varies according to the type of substance; thus, they observed that in tobacco, the age of onset was 14.5 years; for alcohol consumption, it was 14.6, while the age of onset of illicit drug use (including medical drugs) was 16.3 years. This finding aligns with the results of the present study, which indicated that the consumption of illicit substances typically occurs at later ages, around 17 to 18 years.

The research underscores the significance of understanding the early onset of drug use, as it can potentially lead to adverse consequences for adolescents, including poor academic performance, familial or social conflicts, and an increased frequency of absenteeism from school. Contrary to the findings of the preceding study, the present study revealed a consumption of licit substances at a younger age (15-16 years) and a heightened consumption of illicit substances at older ages (17-18 years), with specific patterns contingent on geographical area. In urban areas, cannabis was predominantly consumed at an early age (48%), while in rural areas, heroin (59%) and cocaine (66%) were more commonly consumed at older ages (17-18 years). In light of the prevailing patterns of substance use in rural areas, it is noteworthy that coffee (99%) and alcohol (93%) are the predominant substances.

Conversely, research paper (25, 26) substantiates the elevated prevalence of substance use in adolescents based on their geographical location, emphasizing that residing in urban areas is associated with a 3% increase in alcohol consumption, which corresponds to a threefold increase in the probability of alcohol use. This stands in contrast to the findings of this study, which documented higher alcohol consumption in rural areas (93%) compared to urban areas (88%).

Concerning the frequency of consumption, the predominant pattern observed was sporadic consumption among schoolchildren, with 80% reporting consumption of 1 to 3 drinks per month. In the case of tobacco, consumption is also sporadic (73%), although a notable proportion of adolescent smoke regularly. With regard to cannabis consumption, 74% of respondents reported using it monthly (1-3 units) and 10% weekly. Notably, legal substances are predominantly

consumed on weekends. Alcohol is consumed most often in urban areas (77%) and cigarettes in rural areas (56%), while illicit drugs are primarily used during social gatherings, particularly cannabis in both areas (55% in urban areas and 68% in rural areas) (27, 28).

The subsequent analysis will describe the social, economic, and psychological characteristics of adolescents in school that favor the consumption of licit and illicit drugs in urban and rural areas. The following tables were prepared. It should be noted that the response of all the adolescents surveyed, whether or not they are consumers of licit or illicit drugs, is analyzed. The purpose is to investigate in this population with a high risk of consumption all the factors that may favor the use.

Table 7 facilitates the evaluation of the social aspects of adolescents in school that favor the consumption of licit and illicit drugs in urban and rural areas, considering the following dimensions: social environment, substance availability, leisure and free time of the adolescent, and economic factors. For each aspect, the mean scores on the scale are compared across geographical areas to identify potential differences. The student t-test is employed for independent samples, with a 95% confidence level to demonstrate statistical significance.

Table 7 reveals that the social aspects that demonstrate disparities according to geographical area correspond to the following indicators: Availability of drugs (urban area: 1.40 ± 0.57 vs. rural area: 2.30; $p < 0.05$), availability in rural areas, "almost never" vs. "never" in urban areas.

Another indicator where a difference is seen corresponds to leisure and free time (urban area: 3.05 ± 1.31 vs. rural area: 2.83 ± 1.18; p: <0.05), resulting in more free time "sometimes" in the urban area, compared to "almost never" in the rural area.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that numerous social factors contribute to the vulnerability of young individuals to substance use, irrespective of whether the substances are categorized as licit or illicit. This vulnerability is the culmination of a series of factors that can positively or negatively moderate such consumption and may be linked to the social, cultural, political, and economic changes that are being perceived around the world, leading to the adoption of different behaviors and risk attitudes (29).

In the context of the social environment, it is evident that drug use has become increasingly entrenched in contemporary society, often becoming a component of social acceptance. This phenomenon is exemplified by the observation that illicit drugs are frequently consumed during social gatherings and family celebrations, as highlighted in this study. These social gatherings, characterized by the occasional consumption of these substances, can potentially lead to the abuse of these drugs during adolescence and into adulthood. This is particularly pronounced when an individual is still in the process of consolidating their identity, as social pressures to consume can be more significant.

Once individuals initiate the consumption of alcohol and/or drugs, peer imitation becomes the predominant form of social influence. This, in turn, favors the selection of companions who reinforce the adolescent's newly established norms and behaviors.

The availability of substances to adolescents is another salient factor in the context of drug use, as evidenced by this study, which found that adolescents "sometimes" have access to both licit (coffee, alcohol, cigarettes) and illicit substances (cannabis, heroin, cocaine). However, geographical areas are a significant predictor of substance availability, with rural areas exhibiting higher levels of access.

In relation to this aspect, a study shows that the perception of ease of obtaining illegal drugs increases the probability (OR= 4.58, 95% CI: 4.47–4.69) of starting to use illegal drugs by 4 to 5 times, compared to schoolchildren who believe that it would be difficult or impossible to obtain the substances21. The present research found that students can acquire both licit and illicit drugs "almost always," observing greater availability to alcohol, without difference by geographical area: urban (3.79 ± 0.96) and rural (3.84 ± 1.10). It is noteworthy that the analyses conducted reveal a correlation between the variables of social influence, family environment, and alcohol and drug consumption (22, 23, 24).

In relation to the media used by the adolescent for entertainment, whether interactive or non-interactive, he is defined as a negative moderator in the consumption of drugs. It is evident that, by this means, various advertising messages are directed that may seduce the consumption of a drug or that encourage the participation of the young person in social activities where some psychoactive substance may be present. In this study, leisure and entertainment were found to differ according to geographical location, with urban areas exhibiting a higher propensity for substance use (3.05 ± 1.31 vs. 2.83 ± 1.18; p = 0.00) (14).

Conversely, Leal-López's findings indicated that students with more leisure time exhibited a threefold elevated risk of substance use, particularly among those who frequently attended social events. These findings prompt further consideration of the collected data, particularly because the study's sample of educated adolescents "almost never" engage in recreational and social activities that promote enjoyment, either for themselves or within their community. This observation underscores the need to reduce drug use. Geographically, the study revealed that urban areas had a mean score of 2.42 ± 1.25, while rural areas had a mean score of 2.17 ± 1.07. This finding indicates that these activities are less prevalent in rural settings.

		Media±DE	**Media±DE**	**independent (95%)**
Environment	4-9	3,48±1,26	3,40±1,22	0,06
Drug availability	12-15	1,40±0,57	2,30±1,02	0.00
Leisure and free time	16-18	3,05±1,31	2,83±1,18	0.00
Economic	22-23	2,77±1,31	2,87±1,27	0,21

Table 8

Social aspects that favor the consumption of licit and illicit substances according to the area of origin. Canton Milagro

Conversely, Table 8 presents a comparative analysis of the psychological factors that propel the consumption of both licit and illicit substances, categorized according to geographical origin. The following indicators are included: Risk perception, family structure and habits, and personal conflicts. The average scores on the scale are compared across geographical areas for each aspect. The student t technique is applied to demonstrate differences, with independent samples at 95% confidence. The results indicate significant disparities in the "family conflicts" indicator

according to geographical location, with students in urban areas demonstrating higher levels of impact (urban area: 3.03±1.5 vs. rural area: 2.74±1.49; p:<0.05). The data suggests that "sometimes" conflicts occur in urban areas, while in rural areas, the response is "almost never."

Another psychological aspect that exhibited a significant difference was the perception of risk according to the area. However, this perception was found to be at the limit of the hypothesis's acceptance level (urban area: 3.39±1.30 vs. rural area: 3.27±1.25; p=0.05). That is to say, the perception of risk was reported "sometimes" in both areas, but with a greater tendency in the urban area.

ASPECTS	**ITEMS**	**Urban area (n: 600) Media±DE**	**Rural area (n:186) Media±DE**	**T Student for Samples Independent (95%)**
Risk perception	24-26	3.39±1.30	3.27±1.25	0,05
Family structure and habits	28-30	3.09±1.39	2.99±1.44	0.16
Personal conflicts	31-32	3.03±1.5	2.74±1.49	0,001

Table 9.

Psychological aspects that favor the consumption of licit and illicit substances according to area of origin, canton of Milagro

F.I SURVEY; 5: always, 4: almost always, 3: sometimes, 2: almost never.

The attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of young people regarding drug use are influenced by the perception that adults consume psychoactive drugs in significant quantities. However, adolescents themselves may be aware of the potential dangers of such substance use, as evidenced by the findings of this study, where the adolescent "sometimes" perceives such risk. Despite this awareness, there is a high prevalence of substance consumption, both licit and illicit, among adolescents.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that a negative family climate, characterized by rejection and stress, frequent family conflicts, ineffective communication, and limited support among family members, as well as a lower educational level of the parents, can lead an adolescent to consume psychoactive substances. This is due to the fact that such a climate undermines self-esteem, self-concept, and the development of a healthy identity. The findings of this study substantiate this assertion, particularly in light of the observed disparities in family conflict levels between urban and rural areas. Specifically, the data reveals that family conflicts are more prevalent in urban areas (3.09 ± 1.39) compared to rural areas (2.74 ± 1.49). Moreover, a statistically significant difference was identified between the two geographical areas (p = 0.001).

The family environment has been identified as a primary catalyst and facilitator for the onset and perpetuation of alcohol use disorder (AUD). This phenomenon is influenced by both the

nuclear family (comprising parents and siblings) with 19.4%, and the extended family (including cousins, uncles, etc.) with 17.1%, yielding a combined contribution of 36.5%. In this regard, in this research, when asking: Does the fact that any of your relatives consume any legal or illegal substance induce in you the curiosity to consume such substances? The adolescent's answer tends to be located between "almost always" in urban (3.60 ± 1.45) and rural (3.58 ± 1.52) areas, demonstrating the importance of the family in modeling drug use. When families lack good communication, i.e., a poor parent-child relationship, adolescents turn to illicit drugs as a means of comfort and a reason to encourage and demonstrate that problems can be prevented with it. The result of a society with personal or other problems, stressful situations, or conflicts that have not been overcome, is the trigger for illicit drug use because it allows temporary relief from these situations.

Substance use disorders represent a significant social concern, characterized as a dependence on substances that impact the central nervous system and brain functions, resulting in alterations in behavior, perception, judgment, and emotions. The effects of drugs are diverse, depending on the type of drugs and the amount or frequency with which they are consumed.

Adolescence is a period of heightened vulnerability to substance use due to the immaturity of the brain regions responsible for regulating behavior. This vulnerability is not due to a lack of cognitive ability but rather results from the incomplete development of these regions during adolescence. This study sought to address this question: The question posed to the participants, "Do you think that personal conflicts are sufficient reason to consume a legal or illegal substance?" The response to this question was "sometimes," with no significant difference observed in geographical areas, with a mean of 2.57 ± 1.55 in urban areas and 2.66 ± 1.56 in rural areas. Similarly, in the emotional dimension, when the question was posed: Can the abandonment of some of your parents or problems at home induce you to consume socially accepted drugs? The obtained answers indicated a predominant response of "almost always," exhibiting disparities according to the region with a higher prevalence among adolescents in urban areas (3.48 ± 1.31) compared to rural areas (2.82 ± 1.41).A multitude of studies underscores the necessity to concentrate research endeavors on drug utilization patterns by geographical location or other pertinent categories, given the discernible variations in the manifestations of addiction-related concerns. In this research, disparities were observed by region, thereby validating this approach.

The findings revealed inequalities in the prevalence of consumption, by the type of substance consumed, in the social, economic, and emotional influence as diverse and specific risk factors in each region. The long-term projection of this problem indicates an extensive cycle of drug consumption that appears to have reached its zenith. This is due to the adaptation of society to drugs, which is leading to an increase in drug acceptance, particularly among young people.

Notwithstanding the limitations associated with data collection during the period of the pandemic, the use of electronic mail as a medium for data collection and correction, including the collection of specific data elements such as sex, was employed. This approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of the adolescent's perception of risk factors that promote substance use and, consequently, the escalation of this societal problem.

To address the overarching objective, Table 9 was formulated, which elucidates the disparities by geographical area concerning the principal social and psychological factors in relation to the adolescent's perception of the factors that favor drug use.

Urban area	**Rural area**	**t student for Factors**	**ÍTEMS**	**(n: 600)**
		Media±DE	**Media±DE**	
		SOCIAL		
Drug availability	12-15	1,40±0,57	2,30±1,02	0.00
Leisure and free time	16-18	3,05±1,31	2,83±1,18	0.00
		PSYCHOLOGIC		
Personal conflicts	31-32	3,03±1,5	2.74±1,49	0,001

Table 10. Main Factors That Favor the Consumption of Licit and Illicit Substances According to the Area of Origin. Canton Milagro.

F.I SURVEY; 5: always, 4: almost always, 3: sometimes, 2: almost never.

Table 10 presents a comprehensive overview of the key factors that contribute to drug use in urban areas. Among the social aspects, leisure and free time emerged as significant contributors (3.05 ± 1.31). Within the psychological domain, personal conflicts were identified as a prominent factor (3.03 ± 1.5). In contrast, rural areas are characterized by a distinct set of factors, with the most salient one being the availability of drugs (2.30 ± 1.02). In this regard, it was observed that the young subjects in the study frequently engaged in social and recreational activities during their leisure time, including socializing with friends and attending bars, discos, and parties, which created an environment conducive to the consumption of both licit and illicit substances among adolescents. Conversely, the findings underscore that familial dysfunction acts as a risk factor for adolescent drug addiction, particularly in circumstances characterized by inadequate parental authority or supervision. Conversely, factors such as familial support and the dispersion phase have been identified as protective elements against substance abuse. In this study, it was observed, particularly in urban areas, that adolescents recognize family conflicts as a risk factor that favors substance use.

In the context of drug availability in rural areas, it is noteworthy that this relationship is associated with the experiences of rural adolescents and their cultural preferences, including the fashionable music listened to by adolescents in urban areas. This exposure to urban cultural influences can lead to the adoption of urban behaviors and habits.

Discussion

Table 1. The prevalence of substance use can be determined by identifying the types of substances consumed. With regard to licit substances (cigarettes and alcohol), a high prevalence was observed in general, both in urban and rural areas, with values greater than 80%, highlighting differences in the consumption of cigarettes (p: 0.00) and alcohol (p: 0.05), with greater consumption in urban areas.

In contrast, the consumption patterns of illicit substances (see Table 2) exhibited a divergent trend. For instance, cannabis (48.3%) and heroin (48.3%) were initiated at an early age, specifically 15-16 years in urban areas, except for cocaine, which demonstrated a later onset of

consumption, typically between 16-17 years (64.6%). Conversely, in rural areas, the three illicit substances under scrutiny exhibited a comparable initiation age of 16-17 years: cannabis (40.3%), heroin (58.8%), and cocaine (65.5%). In turn, differences in consumption were found according to geographical area in the three illicit substances included in the study, with greater consumption of cannabis in urban areas at an early age (48.3%) vs. greater consumption of heroin (58.8%) and cocaine (65.7%) at older ages (17-18 years), in rural areas. Research conducted in Peru indicates that alcohol consumption exhibits a high prevalence among secondary and high school students. In secondary school, 40% of students reported alcohol consumption in the previous year, which increased to 55% in high school. The monthly frequency of alcohol consumption is also noteworthy, with 25% of secondary school students and 45% of high school students reporting consumption within the past month. This indicates that as students progress through their education, the likelihood and frequency of alcohol use increases significantly (30, 31).

In contrast, the consumption patterns of illicit substances exhibit distinct characteristics. The highest rates of consumption occur predominantly among individuals who use substances in the context of social gatherings, particularly among those residing in urban areas (cannabis: 55%, heroin: 52.5%, cocaine: 52.3%) and rural areas (cannabis: 67%, heroin: 49.0%, cocaine: 61.8%). However, a chi-squared test reveals significant disparities in the consumption patterns according to the substance and geographical area. Specifically, disparities were identified between urban and rural regions, with cigarette consumption recorded at 53.8% and 55.6%, alcohol at 77.3% and 55.6%, and cannabis at 55.0% and 67.8%, respectively. The findings from studies conducted in both urban and rural settings (31, 32) have revealed substantial disparities between these two regions. Specifically, alcohol and tobacco use show a higher prevalence and frequency in urban areas compared to rural ones. For instance, 60% of high school students in urban areas report having consumed alcohol in the last year, compared to 50% in rural areas. A similar trend is observed in tobacco consumption, with 35% of high school students in urban areas reporting tobacco use compared to 25% in rural areas. Regarding illicit substances, cannabis exhibits a higher prevalence in urban areas in both secondary (15%) and high school (25%) settings compared to rural areas (10% in secondary school and 15% in high school). Evidence of differences in cocaine and ecstasy use between urban and rural areas is also apparent, though less pronounced.

The findings underscore the salient questions: "Do the media (social networks, television, magazines, music) promote the use of legal drugs (cigarettes, alcohol) or illegal drugs (cannabis, heroin, cocaine, other)?;" and, in the case that the answer is affirmative, "Where does the media's promotion of drug use originate? "The results indicate a mean of "almost always" (3.94 ± 1.06 in urban areas and 3.79 in rural areas), with no differences by area when applying the Student T-test hypothesis.

In urban areas, the predominant trend is between "sometimes" and "almost always" for licit substances (3.54 ± 1.26) and alcohol (3.46 ± 1.32). In rural areas: In rural areas, the predominant responses were "almost always" and "sometimes" for cigarettes (3.53 ± 1.25) and alcohol (3.45 ± 1.33). With regard to illicit substances, in urban areas, cannabis (2.72 ± 1.22) and heroin (2.75 ± 1.12) predominate "sometimes," while in rural areas, "sometimes" is most prevalent for cannabis (2.90 ± 1.3) and cocaine (2.67 ± 1.16). Significant differences were found in the consumption of the type of substance according to the geographical area ($p < 0.05$). When applying the statistical test, the T-Student for independent samples was used.

With regard to the aspect of availability (see Table 6), the investigation employs a set of four questions to assess this dimension, emphasizing the prevalence of the response "almost always" in the inquiry: "Alcohol is readily available to me and my partner." This observation was recorded in both urban (3.79 ± 0.96) and rural (3.84 ± 1.0) regions. A statistically significant discrepancy was identified through the implementation of a Student's t-test for independent samples, with a confidence level of 95% ($p = 0.006$).

In addressing the role of leisure and unstructured time in substance use, Table 7 presents a set of three questions. The responses "almost always" and "sometimes" to the question "I have a lot of time to be with my friends" were highlighted, both in urban (3.63 ± 1.12) and rural (3.34 ± 1.11) areas. A significant difference between these areas was identified ($p = 0.002$) when applying Student's t-test for independent samples, indicating that urban adolescents have more free time than rural ones.

Table 8 demonstrates the impact of the social environment on the consumption of licit and illicit substances. Alcohol (3.35 ± 1.09 in urban areas compared to 3.77 ± 0.9 in rural areas) and cigarettes (3.03 ± 1.22 in urban areas compared to 3.25 ± 1.23 in rural areas) were identified as substances with greater environmental influence, both in urban and rural areas. Significant differences in mean scores ($p < 0.05$) were observed between areas, with values obtained in rural areas being higher than those in urban areas for both substances.

In relation to illicit substances, the same table 9 shows the purchase of cannabis with parents' money in both urban and rural areas (2.43 ± 1.19 vs. 2.50 ± 1.19), with "sometimes" higher consumption in rural areas. When the hypothesis test was applied to demonstrate differences in the means of response by substances and area, applying the student t-technique for independent samples, it was possible to demonstrate significant differences, at 95% confidence, in relation to the purchase of substances by geographical area, cigarette consumption (3.28 ± 1.2 vs. 3.52 ± 1.26).

In a similar vein, Table 10 delves into the economic dimension through two inquiries. The initial inquiry posed to the respondents was whether they would purchase specific substances, including cigarettes and alcoholic beverages, if they possessed additional income sources beyond that received from their parents or guardians. The responses, both from urban (2.96 ± 1.29) and rural (3.11 ± 1.32) regions, indicate a tendency to "sometimes" purchase these substances. The second question posed is whether individuals would purchase substances like cannabis, heroin, cocaine, or other illicit substances if they had additional income sources beyond that received from their parents or guardians. In this case, the responses were "sometimes" in both urban areas (2.58 ± 1.29) and rural (2.62 ± 1.18) areas, with no significant differences between the groups.

Table 11 presents the adolescent's perception of risk in relation to the consumption of illicit/licit substances. To measure this dimension, three questions were included: The following question was included: Can the consumption of psychoactive substances cause physical or psychological injuries? It was observed that students identified the risk "almost always" in urban (4.09±0.95) and rural (3.6±1.11) areas, but with higher scores in urban areas. These differences were found to be significant, as demonstrated by hypothesis testing using the T Student technique for independent samples (p: 0.008).

To measure the influence of family habits on the consumption of licit and illicit substances, Table 12 was prepared. Among the licit substances, cigarettes exhibited a more pronounced

influence of family habits (3.32 ± 1.44 in urban areas vs. 3.21 ± 1.47 in rural areas), though this variation was not statistically significant by geographical area. In the context of illicit substances, the strongest correlation with family habits is evident in the case of cannabis consumption, with estimates of 2.82 ± 1.22 in urban areas and 2.84 ± 1.18 in rural areas. Conversely, studies on alcohol consumption indicate that 60% of students who consume alcohol have parents who also consume alcohol, underscoring the direct influence of the family environment on this behavior (33). This phenomenon is further evidenced by the impact observed in other substance use patterns, such as tobacco and cannabis, where parental and older sibling examples appear to exert a substantial influence on the decision to consume these substances (34, 35).

Table 13 presents the influence of family structure and habits on the consumption of licit and illicit substances. This analysis utilizes three questions whose average scores range from "almost never" to "almost always," with no significant descriptive differences observed across both urban and rural areas. The response "almost always" to the question is noteworthy: The question, "Does the fact that one of your relatives consumes a legal or illegal substance induce in you the curiosity to consume these substances?" elicited responses with mean scores of 3.60±1.45 in urban areas and 3.58±1.52 in rural areas (36, 37).

To illustrate the impact of family discord on the consumption of licit and illicit substances, Table 14 was formulated. It presents two questions, highlighting the differences according to the area in the question: The first question inquires whether the abandonment of one of the parents or domestic issues might motivate the use of socially acceptable substances. The response trend was "almost always" in urban areas (3.48 ± 1.31) and "sometimes" in rural areas (2.82 ± 1.41).

Conclusion

The use of psychoactive substances, both licit and illicit, among adolescents in educational institutions exhibits notable disparities between rural and urban regions. These disparities are influenced by a number of social, economic, and cultural factors that affect the perception and availability of drugs in each setting. A comprehensive understanding of these variations is imperative for the formulation of efficacious strategies to address and treat adolescent drug use.

In urban areas, the increased population density and the presence of locations where drugs are sold and consumed facilitate easier access to licit and illicit substances. Furthermore, the influence of peers and media content may be more significant in urban environments, potentially contributing to increased experimentation and drug use among adolescents.

Conversely, in rural areas, access to drugs may be more limited due to the reduced availability of places of sale and lower population density. However, the influence of factors such as cultural tradition, limited leisure opportunities, and peer pressure can also contribute to drug use in these areas.

The relationship between drug use and risk perception, as well as social norms, may vary across rural and urban contexts. In certain instances, drug use may be perceived as a means of evading or navigating challenging circumstances, particularly in rural regions where stress levels and social isolation may be more pronounced.

Furthermore, disparities in the resources allocated for the prevention and treatment of substance abuse can influence the prevalence of substance use in both rural and urban regions. Urban areas often have greater availability of mental health and addiction services, which can facilitate access to treatment for adolescents who use drugs. Conversely, the dearth of health services in

rural areas can impede the treatment of substance use.

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