

ICCP/SL/OP/068

Social and behavioral change (SBC) strategies used in drug abuse prevention programs targeting children: Analyzing effectiveness and practical applications

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Background: Drug abuse among at-risk children is a critical child protection issue, requiring evidence-based prevention strategies. This study explores the psychological basis of Social and Behavioral Change (SBC) strategies in drug abuse prevention, focusing on theories such as Social Cognitive Theory, Theory of Planned Behavior, Self-Determination Theory, and Behavioral Economics. The aim is to analyze the impact of these theories on shaping effective preventive interventions.

Method: A secondary data analysis approach was used, synthesizing peer-reviewed journals and academic books in psychology and social sciences published between 2010-2024. The literature search employed keywords including “drug abuse prevention,” “children,” “social cognitive theory,” “theory of planned behavior,” “self-determination theory,” “behavioral economics,” “social and behavioral change,” “self-efficacy,” and “social learning”. Thematic and comparative analyses were employed to explore psychological mechanisms in SBC strategies and assess the effectiveness of various theoretical models in preventing drug abuse.

Results: The findings of this study emphasize the psychological foundations of SBC strategies in drug abuse prevention programs for at-risk children. Effective strategies incorporate key psychological mechanisms that support sustainable behavior change. Social learning processes are crucial, as children adopt positive behaviors through observational learning, reinforcement, and role modeling. Attitude modification, guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior, shapes perceptions of drug use and reduces susceptibility to peer influence. Strengthening self-efficacy through skills-based interventions empowers children to make independent, drug-free choices. Additionally, fostering intrinsic motivation by addressing autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhances long-term behavioral commitment. Behavioral economics principles-such as reframing immediate rewards and emphasizing long-term consequences-aid in better decision-making and risk assessment. These findings highlight the necessity of integrating psychological theories into SBC strategies to optimize their effectiveness. By addressing cognitive, social, and motivational factors, prevention programs can better equip at-risk children with the skills and resilience needed to avoid drug use and sustain positive behavioral outcomes.

Conclusion: The study underscores the importance of integrating psychological theories into SBC strategies to improve drug abuse prevention among at-risk children. Combining multiple theoretical perspectives strengthens the effectiveness and practical application of these interventions.

Keywords: Children, drug abuse prevention, self-efficacy, social and behavioral change, social learning.