

## A Concept Paper: Risk and Protective Factors as a Substance Abuse Prevention Approach

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### Abstract

This article discusses the concept of prevention in drug abuse and explores the identification of risk and protective factors as crucial elements in addressing this pervasive issue. Drug abuse poses a significant threat to individuals, families, and communities, demanding comprehensive measures in response. Despite ongoing efforts, the problem persists, particularly among young people. The ever-increasing number of new and recurring cases necessitates a holistic approach to prevention. A key aspect is recognising the risks and protective factors that shape the effectiveness of these prevention programmes. These factors encompass various domains, including individual, peer, school, family, and community influences. Identifying and understanding these factors will assist social service practitioners, substance abuse counsellors, and researchers in developing targeted prevention programmes for drug and substance abuse, with a specific focus on youth.

**Keywords:** Prevention, Drug Abuse, Substance Abuse, Risk Factors, Protective Factors, Youth

### Introduction

Drug abuse has become a significant worldwide challenge. The prevalence of drug use globally has remained high, with data from 2021 indicating that around 1 in every 17 people

aged between 15 and 64 years had used drugs in the previous year. The total number of drug users increased from 240 million in 2011 to 296 million in 2021, which represents 5.8% of the global population within this age bracket (UNODC, 2023). In Malaysia, the statistics for substance abuse escalated from 123,139 cases in 2021 to 137,176 in 2022, despite the country declaring war on drugs on February 19, 1983. The repercussions of substance abuse are profound, affecting individuals' physical and biological health, as well as their social relationships, professional lives, and mental well-being (NADA, 2022).

Numerous entities, encompassing governmental, private sectors, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), have undertaken extensive efforts to address drug-related issues. According to the National Anti-Drug Agency (2022), a total of 879 prevention programs have been implemented, spanning eight different types, including Family on Alert (FOA), Kem Pintar, Kem SHIELDS (Sayangi Hidup Elak Derita Selamanya), Tomorrow Leader, Tekad Awam, Tekad Swasta, Tekad Agronomi, and Kem SMART (Sukses, Matang, Aktif, Rasional dan Tanggungjawab). Despite numerous initiatives being implemented diligently, it has been observed that the incidence of drug abuse is still on the rise daily. (NADA, 2022).

Substance abuse is a persistent and recurrent ailment that impacts individuals irrespective of age, gender, or socioeconomic status. In 2021, global statistics indicated that around 13.5 million young adult had participated in drug and substance consumption in the year prior, (UNODC, 2023). In Malaysia, the situation appears particularly dire among the youth, with individuals between 19 to 39 years old being majorly affected, representing 65.9% of all reported cases of drug and substance misuse (NADA, 2022). Starting drug use at a young age is known to hasten the development of addiction, posing long-term issues well into adulthood. This trend is alarming, especially since these young people are expected to be the driving force behind the nation's progress. The continuation of this pattern not only jeopardizes their personal health and prospects but also has the potential to significantly hinder national development and societal well-being.

Typically, youths at increased risk of substance abuse often display behaviors such as engaging in socially or legally inappropriate activities, disregarding norms, and living in environments where drug use is prevalent, which makes them particularly vulnerable to the lure of substance abuse (Ismail et al., 2015). These young individuals, especially those in high-risk areas characterized by widespread drug activity and limited socio-economic opportunities, face compounded risks. The normalization of drug use in these communities, coupled with easy access to substances, heightens their exposure to the dangers associated with substance abuse, including dependency, health issues, and criminal involvement. According to Ismail et al. (2017), addressing the complex issue of youth substance abuse effectively requires interventions that tackle both individual behaviors and the environmental factors that contribute to the increased susceptibility of young people in these environments.

The significance of both risk and protective factors is crucial in the field of drug prevention research. According to the principles of the National Anti-Drug Agency's (NADA) prevention programs, targeting these factors within specific communities is fundamental for the efficacy of these initiatives (Zakaria et al., 2020). Protective factors are deemed highly effective in diminishing the extensive costs tied to the treatment of substance abuse (Arip et al., 2015). On the other hand, prevention programs that lack quality may lead to an increase

in addiction rates, which in turn, heightens the financial burden of rehabilitation treatments (Arip et al., 2015). NADA has been proactive in executing a variety of drug prevention strategies aimed at enhancing awareness, particularly among youth (Zakaria et al., 2020). Nonetheless, there appears to be a gap in the statistical data concerning the effectiveness of these programs. Acknowledging the critical role that protective and risk factors play in prevention could significantly contribute to the creation of improved and more effective drug prevention modules. This research endeavors to pinpoint such factors, particularly among youths living in areas deemed high-risk, with the objective of strengthening and refining drug prevention efforts in Malaysia.

The Theory of Protective Factors and Risk Factors, as introduced by Hogan et al. (2003), suggests that the complexity of drug prevention extends beyond the scope of a single theoretical framework. This approach emphasizes the importance of reducing risk factors while enhancing protective factors in prevention strategies, an idea that builds upon the foundational work of David Hawkins and colleagues in 1992. Hawkins et al. (1992) explored the dynamic relationship between protective and risk factors in the context of adolescent substance abuse and delinquency, proposing that protective factors serve to mitigate risks through a variety of mechanisms. These factors are organized into three main categories: individual characteristics, bonding, and the establishment of healthy beliefs and clear standards. Individual characteristics include innate traits such as gender, resilience, and intelligence, which, although may not directly prevent substance abuse, can play a crucial role in averting other adverse outcomes like academic failure and delinquent behavior. Bonding encompasses the development of positive relationships with family, peers, educational institutions, and the broader community, acting as a buffer against the allure of social vices. Finally, the promotion of healthy beliefs and clear standards involves influential adults in a child's life setting and maintaining explicit expectations for behavior, thereby instilling a sense of right and wrong. This comprehensive approach underscores the multifaceted nature of prevention efforts necessary to address the issue of drug abuse effectively.

Hogan et al (2003) emphasized the categorization of studies on protective and risk factors into four main domains: individual or peer, school, family and community. This study introduces two fundamental questions; first, what are the risk factors that contribute to youth involvement in drug abuse? Second, what are the protective factors that prevent youth from engaging in drug addiction? Consequently, the primary aim of this paper is to identify both risk and protective factors as a framework for implementing a collective prevention strategy geared towards shielding future generations from drug addiction.

This endeavor ultimately seeks to ensure the prosperity and well-being of the country in the years to come. Besides, by shedding light on the utility and effectiveness of identifying risk and protective factors in drug abuse prevention, this research aims to empower communities, policymakers, substance abuse counsellors and social service practitioners to develop evidence-based interventions that address the root causes of substance abuse and promote the well-being of future generations. Through collective action and strategic investment in prevention initiatives, we can work towards building a society where all individuals have the opportunity to thrive, free from the devastating effects of drug misuse.

### **Problem Statement**

The escalating challenge of drug abuse presents a significant concern globally and particularly in Malaysia, where recent statistics highlight a troubling trend among the youth. Despite concerted efforts by various sectors, the prevalence of drug use continues to rise, underscoring the complexity of combating this issue. The National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) reports an increase in substance abuse cases, with a notable surge among individuals aged 19 to 39, representing a substantial portion of Malaysia's demographic. This age group's vulnerability to drug addiction, especially when drug use begins at an early age, poses severe implications for their health, social relationships, and future contributions to society. The persistence of drug abuse despite numerous prevention programs indicates a critical need for a reevaluation of current strategies. Research underscores the importance of addressing both individual behaviors and the broader environmental factors contributing to the susceptibility of youth to drug abuse. Protective and risk factors emerge as pivotal elements in the discourse on drug prevention, with effective interventions necessitating a comprehensive approach that encompasses these aspects. The literature suggests that enhancing protective factors while mitigating risk factors can significantly influence the effectiveness of drug prevention efforts. This paper aims to scrutinize the interplay of risk and protective factors in the context of youth substance abuse, particularly in high-risk environments. By identifying these factors, the study seeks to contribute to the development of more refined and impactful drug prevention strategies, ultimately aiming to safeguard the well-being of future generations and ensure the nation's prosperity.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study holds significant importance in addressing the escalating challenge of drug abuse, particularly among the youth in Malaysia, a concern mirrored globally. With drug use prevalence alarmingly high and the number of users continuing to rise, the repercussions of substance abuse extend far beyond individual health, impacting societal well-being and national development. The youth, representing a substantial portion of this demographic, are at a critical juncture, with their potential for contributing to the country's future at risk due to the early initiation of drug use and the ensuing challenges of addiction and its associated harms.

The research emphasizes the necessity of understanding and intervening in the interplay of risk and protective factors in the context of substance abuse among youth, especially those in high-risk environments. By identifying these factors, the study seeks to inform and enhance drug prevention strategies, making them more effective and tailored to the needs of vulnerable populations. The National Anti-Drug Agency's (NADA) emphasis on addressing these factors aligns with the research's objectives, underscoring the potential for protective factors to reduce treatment costs and the importance of quality in prevention programs to prevent an increase in addiction rates.

Furthermore, the study builds upon the foundational Theory of Protective Factors and Risk Factors, advocating for a comprehensive approach to drug prevention that encompasses reducing risks and bolstering protective mechanisms. By categorizing risk and protective factors across individual, peer, school, family, and community domains, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of drug abuse prevention.

Ultimately, the significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the development of robust, evidence-based prevention strategies that can mitigate the impact of drug abuse on youth and, by extension, on society as a whole. By identifying key risk and protective factors, the research aims to pave the way for more effective interventions that can protect future generations from the pitfalls of drug addiction, ensuring their well-being and the prosperity of the country.

### **Literature Review**

The authors refer to the existing literature related to risk factors that influence a person's tendency to get caught up with drug abuse and identify protective factors that can be a bulwark for individuals from getting caught up with the issue of drug abuse as a whole.

#### **i. Individual Risk Factors**

Drug abuse is a significant public health concern that affects individuals, families, and communities. According to Hawkins et al (1992), several individual risk factors can increase the likelihood of substance use and abuse among youth. Rebellion is one such risk factor that can contribute to drug abuse among adolescents. Individuals facing conflicts within the family, lacking support, and feeling alienated from society, frequently violating rules, and lacking motivation for achievement may develop a rebellious attitude towards societal norms (Azmawati et al., 2021; Lafrenière, 2013). This can drive them to seek alternative ways to express dissatisfaction or experiment with behaviours that provide immediate pleasure. Consequently, they may reject societal norms and seek to assert their freedom, potentially leading them to engage in immoral activities such as substance and drug abuse.

Additionally, early involvement in problematic social behaviours at a young age contributes to risk factors that can increase the likelihood of substance use and abuse among teenagers and youth (Arcadio and Trujillo, 2023). Factors such as negative peer influence and social skills deficiencies among this youth demographics contribute to their involvement in social issues. This makes individuals more susceptible to engaging in problematic social behaviours such as truancy or dropping out of school, involvement in fights, or criminal activities, thereby increasing the risk of drug abuse (Arthur et al., 2002). Addressing these risk factors requires the implementation of comprehensive interventions that not only address the problematic social behaviours but also focus on enhancing social skills and fostering positive peer influences.

Lastly, mental health symptoms are closely related to an increased risk of drug abuse among young people. Individuals experiencing mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety, are prone to engaging in drug abuse as a coping mechanism to alleviate the emotional and mental pain they experience due to depression (Azmawati et al., 2021). Furthermore, Alves et al. (2020) revealed that individuals with untreated mental health disorders often turn to drugs to self-medicate or alleviate their mental symptoms, leading to greater vulnerability to drug abuse. This can result in them becoming trapped in a cycle of drug use without receiving effective treatment.

**ii. Individual Protective Factors**

Protective factors for individuals play a crucial role in preventing drug abuse among adolescents and youth. Several researchers have emphasised various factors, including the adoption of spiritual values, self-control, social competence, and effective problem-solving skills, as shields against risks associated with drug use. Understanding these protective factors enables the development of effective prevention strategies to support individuals in making healthier decisions.

Individuals who adopt spiritual values can serve as a protective factor against social behaviours such as drug abuse (Grim and Grim, 2019; Miller, 1998; Móró et al., 2011). Spiritual factors often play a significant role in shaping an individual's values, ethics, and behaviours (Quinn, 2023). This is supported by Coppola et al. (2021), who stated that individuals with strong spiritual strength are better equipped to cope with life's pressures and challenges without resorting to the wrong path. Therefore, aligning spiritual elements within individuals can provide crucial emotional support and mental stability, helping individuals better cope with challenges and imperfections in their lives.

Additionally, self-control, or the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviours against negative temptations and influences from others, plays a vital role in preventing drug abuse (Allahverdipour et al., 2006; Pokhrel et al., 2007; Rollins and Crandall, 2021). Good self-control is associated with clear values and beliefs about what is considered right or wrong, serving as an internal guide for an individual's choices and actions (Malouf, 2014). Self-control can also act as a moral compass that helps individuals resist the temptation to engage in drug use (Longshore et al., 2004). Self-control can be further strengthened through reinforcement of ongoing values and beliefs, education about the risks and consequences of drug use, and social support. In short, when someone has confidence in what is right or wrong, it can positively influence their self-control, making them less likely to engage in drug use.

Furthermore, individuals with strong social skills and positive interpersonal relationships with peers can reduce the risk of engaging in problematic behaviours including drug and substance abuse (Abbasi and Muhammad, 2022; Amini and Zeinab, 2020; Botvin, 2000). Social skills play a crucial role in promoting healthy behaviour and creating a supportive social environment (Larrosa and Palomo, 2012). When someone possesses social competence, they are adept at communication, efficient decision-making, and forming meaningful relationships with people in their environment (Griffin and Botvin, 2010). Therefore, they are more likely to have a supportive network of peers and engage in positive peer interactions. These positive relationships can create a conducive environment that is free from drug abuse activities.

Overall, protective factors such as the adoption of spiritual values, self-control, social competence, and effective problem-solving skills play a crucial role in preventing drug abuse among adolescents and youth. A deep understanding of these factors allows us to develop effective prevention strategies to support individuals in leading drug-free lives.

**iii. Peer Risk Factors**

Peer groups are more likely to influence an individual's beliefs, values, and behaviours. According to Hawkins et al (1992), individuals who associate with peers engaged in risky delinquent behaviour are at a higher risk of involvement in drug and substance abuse. This is because peer pressure, the desire to fit in, and the fear of being ostracised or humiliated can lead adolescents and youth to engage in drug use (Mustafa et al., 2022). Consequently, when they are in an environment filled with peers involved in drug abuse, they are also at risk of trying it and eventually falling into drug abuse problems.

Furthermore, Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller (1992) found that adolescents and youth who have friends using drugs are more likely to initiate drug use themselves. This is supported by Otten et al (2017), who emphasised the normalisation and social acceptance of illicit substance use within peer groups as a contributing factor to increased vulnerability. Past research by Nawi et al (2021) also indicates that adolescents who associate with peers involved in drug and substance use are more likely to adopt such behaviours. This suggests that socialising with peers involved in drug addiction is a risk factor contributing to drug and substance abuse among young people.

Finally, lack of social skills. Social skills encompass various abilities such as effective communication, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and building healthy relationships. Masten et al. (2017) stated that adolescents with weak social skills find it challenging to resist peer pressures involving drug use. Therefore, it is crucial to instil and reinforce social skills in adolescents, including the ability to resist unhealthy peer influences, to help them cope with social pressures and steer clear of drug use.

**iv. Peer Protective Factors**

Several past studies have emphasised the importance of various protective factors in preventing drug and substance abuse from peer influence. One crucial protective factor is building a positive peer group. Kim et al (2015) found that adolescents with a supportive and positive peer group are more likely to engage in healthy behaviours and resist negative peer influences. This indicates that positive peer relationships can serve as a defence against getting involved in drug and substance abuse activities.

Another essential protective factor is the strengthening of social skills. Individuals with effective social skills, such as awareness, strong internal locus of control, and self-assertiveness, are more prepared to face social situations and make healthier choices (La Greca and Harrison, 2018). This suggests that social skills can enhance adolescents' ability to resist negative peer pressure and engage in risk-free behaviour.

Furthermore, good problem-solving skills have also been identified as a protective factor. According to Zimmerman et al (2020), adolescents with good problem-solving skills are more likely to use constructive strategies when facing challenges related to peer influences, reducing their vulnerability to risky behaviours including substance use. Therefore, by addressing these peer-level factors, prevention efforts can help foster a supportive and positive peer environment that encourages healthy choices and discourages risky behaviours.

**v. Risk Factors at School**

Drug abuse among students raises concerns with far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, and society. To effectively address this issue, it is crucial to understand the risk factors contributing to drug abuse in schools. One significant risk factor for drug abuse in schools is a low level of commitment to education (Hawkins et al., 1992). Students lacking motivation, interest, or academic goals are more susceptible to negative behaviours including involvement in drug and substance abuse. A study by Chao-Kai et al. (2023) found that a low commitment to education and high rates of school absenteeism contribute to the risk factors of drug and substance use among young people. This is due to feelings of withdrawal, leading students to seek alternative ways of satisfaction, such as drug use. Therefore, effective risk assessment and protective factor identification can provide information for the development and implementation of successful prevention programmes.

Academic failure is closely related to an increased risk of drug abuse among young individuals (Bugbee et al., 2019; Crosnoe, 2006; Hawkins et al., 1992; Patrick et al., 2016; Abelman, 2017). According to Abelman (2017), students facing difficulties in academics, such as low exam scores, frequent school absenteeism, or dropping out, are at risk of engaging in immoral activities. As a result, they are easily exposed to negative influences, including peer pressure and exposure to peers involved in drug abuse activities (Chao-Kai et al., 2023). This indicates that academic failure significantly impacts the self-esteem, motivation, and overall well-being of young individuals, thereby increasing their chances of interacting with peers involved in immoral activities such as drug abuse.

**vi. Protective Factors at School**

Protective factors at the school level are crucial in efforts to prevent drug and substance abuse among students. One area that requires attention is student involvement in co-curricular or community activities in school (Arcadio and Trujillo, 2023). Engaging in activities such as volunteering, participating in community service, or joining clubs and organisations can foster a sense of belonging in community relationships. When young individuals actively participate in these positive and productive activities, they are inclined to avoid risky behaviours such as drug abuse (Elizabeth et al., 2015). Involvement in such activities provides opportunities for young people to contribute their time, energy, and talents to self-development, skill-building, and overall well-being (Alfirević et al., 2023). Therefore, young people are encouraged to actively engage in activities that are beneficial to reduce the risk of becoming involved in immoral activities.

Schools should also intensify awareness programmes such as the Effective Drug Prevention Program (PPDa) to enhance protective factors in schools (AADK, 2021). By implementing comprehensive awareness campaigns, schools can raise students' awareness about the physical, emotional, and social consequences of drug and substance abuse, emphasising the importance of resisting peer pressure, developing resilience, and seeking social support (Wan Anor et al., 2020). By integrating drug education into the curriculum, schools can ensure that students receive consistent and accurate information about drug abuse.

Therefore, opportunities for involvement in co-curricular activities and enhancement of prevention programmes in schools are crucial protective factors at the school level to reduce

the risk of drug abuse and other problematic behaviours among students. Risk assessment and protective factors in drug abuse provide information for the development and implementation of effective prevention programmes.

**vii. Risk Factors in the Family**

Family members, especially parents, play a significant role as influential behaviour models for children. However, family system weaknesses can become risk factors for drug abuse among children (Lee et al., 2023). Weaknesses in parenting management in shaping children's personalities contribute to the risk factors for drug abuse among children and adolescents. Low levels of parental control and monitoring, lack of supervision, and overly lenient disciplinary control can negatively impact a child's development, pushing them towards engaging in deviant behaviour (Liu et al., 2022). Children lacking supervision and monitoring from parents may experience feelings of isolation and distance from parental affection, contributing to the risk of associating with immoral peers. Without proper guidance and monitoring, children may be more susceptible to peer pressure and drug use.

Moreover, an authoritarian parenting style, overly strict discipline, and parents frequently administering harsh punishments for minor offences can also increase the risk of children engaging in negative behaviour (Brezina, 2010). Children subjected to harsh punishments or experiencing abuse are prone to confusion, hatred, or rebellion, which can drive them to seek an escape for freedom or relief from the pressure they experience (Mariana et al., 2019). Furthermore, Mariana et al (2019) argue that a lack of open communication and emotional support within the family system causes children to feel alienated and unable to express their thoughts and emotions. When seeking freedom and attention from parents, they may turn to associating with peers who can pose a risk of drug abuse.

Additionally, harsh punishment by parents can have a traumatic impact on children. A history of child abuse, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, tends to manifest behavioural and emotional problems, including aggression, impulsivity, and low self-esteem (Rebekah et al., 2023). They become more vulnerable to drug abuse later in life. Svingen et al. (2016) found a strong connexion between a history of child abuse and drug abuse in adulthood. Trauma, emotional stress, and attachment disturbances caused by abusive treatment can lead individuals to self-soothe through the use of illicit substances to cope with the psychological effects of their early negative experiences.

High levels of conflict within the family system increase the likelihood of drug abuse among children. According to Edwards et al. (2018), family conflicts such as fights and divorce can be driving factors for children to engage in drug and substance abuse. Instability within the family often has a negative impact on children, such as a lack of affection and increased feelings of pressure. Consequently, they may seek a way out to overcome these negative feelings, leading them to become involved in drug abuse.

Furthermore, family members' involvement in drug abuse creates complex and concerning dynamics, as it can increase the risk of drug abuse for individuals within that family unit. Johannessen et al. (2022) argued that the drug abuse behaviours displayed by parents towards their children will influence their children's attitudes towards drugs. Drug abuse

within the family can normalise drug use, making it more accessible and stimulating other family members, especially children and adolescents, to experiment with drugs. This is an unacceptable situation within the family environment because the family should ideally be a haven for children to grow up well.

In summary, weaknesses in the family system, such as drug abuse by family members, unbalanced parenting styles, high levels of conflict, and a history of child abuse, can increase the risk of drug abuse among children and adolescents. These are crucial issues that need to be considered by society and authorities when planning interventions and prevention programmes. By addressing these risk factors and providing appropriate support to young individuals and their families, we can help reduce the likelihood of drug abuse and build healthier and more resilient lives for future generations.

#### **viii. Protective Factors in the Family**

Family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping protective factors among individuals, especially children and adolescents. Parents should be aware of their roles and responsibilities in disciplining teenagers. Through strong and positive relationships among family members, a protective factor against drug abuse among adolescents can be established (Littell et al., 2023). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory also clearly states that love and acceptance from parents, friends, spouses, and the community are individual needs for achieving self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). When family members have close and affectionate relationships, they create intimacy and support, acting as a buffer against engaging in risky behaviours such as drug abuse (Edwards et al., 2018). This emphasises the crucial role of positive family relationships in preventing substance abuse among teenagers.

Effective and open communication between parents and children is vital for preventing drug abuse. When families implement effective communication strategies and problem-solving techniques, they can enhance their ability to handle conflicts well (Miller, 2008). According to Pettigrew et al. (2018), open communication allows parents to understand the challenges and pressures faced by their children, leading to increased trust and reduced likelihood of turning to drugs as an escape. Therefore, fostering open and honest communication within the family can serve as a protective factor against drug abuse.

Furthermore, parents must implement proper supervision and control within the family system. Yamamoto (2004) emphasised the importance of parental supervision in preventing drug abuse among teenagers. By setting clear boundaries and monitoring their children's activities, parents can actively prevent involvement in drug abuse. Meanwhile, in the study by Chang et al (2023), a caring and harmonious family structure was found to play a role in providing the necessary supervision and control. When parents actively engage in their children's lives, showing interest and concern, it can reduce the chances of engaging in risky behaviours such as drug abuse.

Establishing social support within the family environment has been linked to a lower likelihood of adolescent drug abuse. Miller (2008) found that adolescents who receive support from their families have reduced drug use rates. Emotional and practical support enhances feelings of security, connectedness, and resilience, reducing the need for adolescents to seek satisfaction through substance abuse. Similarly, Letourneau et al. (2023)

showed that family support acts as a protective factor, shielding adolescents from the influence of peers involved in drug use.

In conclusion, building strong bonds among family members, encouraging open communication, implementing supervision and control, and providing social support are crucial strategies for establishing protective factors against drug abuse. These strategies are supported by various scholars who emphasise the role of the family in preventing drug abuse among adolescents. By implementing these practises families can cultivate a supportive and nurturing environment that reduces the risk of drug abuse and promotes the well-being of their members.

#### **ix. Risk Factors in the Community**

Drug and substance abuse within the community is a serious and complex issue that affects individuals, families, and society as a whole. Consistent availability of drugs in the community has been identified as a significant risk factor. Communities with high drug availability increase the likelihood of adolescents being exposed to and experimenting with these illicit substances (Arcadio and Trujillo, 2023). When access to drugs and illicit substances is readily available or easily obtained, it enhances an individual's desire and opportunities to engage in drug abuse (Larrosa and Palomo, 2012). Consequently, individuals may be more inclined to engage in drug abuse, viewing it as an option to cope with stress, adapt, or seek pleasure.

High crime and violence rates in the community can increase the risk of drug abuse among individuals living in those areas (Piquero et al., 2014). The relationship between crime, violence, and drug abuse is a complex matter influenced by various closely related factors. This situation creates a socially disordered environment, leading to an increase in crime rates, such as drug distribution, theft to fund drug habits, and involvement in illicit drug trade (Reidy et al., 2020). Exposure to these criminal activities increases the likelihood of individuals getting involved in drug abuse, either as people who use drugs or engaging in drug distribution activities.

Furthermore, extreme economic factors leading to high poverty rates can contribute to crime issues such as involvement in drug abuse (Edwards et al., 2020). Individuals or families facing poverty, unemployment, or financial instability often experience increased stress and a sense of hopelessness. Additionally, Martín (2013) stated that a lack of opportunities for education, employment, and economic progress can lead to the risk of drug abuse. This is because individuals may feel trapped and seek quick solutions to escape or cope with challenging difficulties.

Moreover, a lack of community connexions and social bonds can increase the risk of drug abuse among individuals (Lambe and Craig, 2017). According to Schaefer (2018), when someone feels alienated or disconnected from the local community, they may lose a sense of belonging and social support within the community. This feeling can lead to a sense of isolation and increased vulnerability to negative influences, including drug abuse. Without strong ties to the community, individuals find it challenging to seek positive relationships, engage in community activities, or find support within the community. As a result, they may turn to drugs to fill the void or escape their feelings of disconnection.

In conclusion, drug and substance abuse within the community is a serious issue that involves factors such as drug availability, crime rates, challenging economics, and a lack of social bonds. High drug availability can increase the chances of individuals trying drugs, whereas crime and violence can heighten the risk of drug abuse. Poor economic conditions can also contribute to drug abuse as a coping mechanism for stress and difficulties. Furthermore, a lack of social relationships in the community can make individuals more vulnerable to drug abuse. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to addressing this issue should consider all these factors to have a more positive impact on individuals, families, and society as a whole.

**x. Protective Factors in the Community**

One of the protective factors in preventing drug abuse within the community is the establishment of a strong social support network. Hawkins et al (2019) indicated that communities with a stable social support system, including strong family and community relationships, can act as a shield against substance use. Additionally, access to quality education and health care services needs to be enhanced in the effort to prevent drug abuse in the community. Resnick et al (2020) revealed that communities with comprehensive education and health care systems offer the necessary resources and support to individuals to prevent them from engaging in negative behaviours. This clearly demonstrates that a robust social support system can build resilient communities that are free from the threat of drugs.

Furthermore, involvement in community activities plays a crucial role in reducing the risk of drug abuse within the community. Individuals engaged in activities such as volunteer programmes or social services within the community can create a drug-free community atmosphere. According to Griffin et al. (2018), actively participating in community activities makes individuals more likely to develop personal goals and engage in healthier behaviours. Providing various opportunities for involvement in community activities can help individuals use their time, energy, and talents more effectively. This not only reduces involvement in drug-related behaviours but also helps shape a strong community and build a social support network that protects against drug abuse.

In conclusion, protective factors in preventing drug abuse within the community include a strong social support network, access to quality education, and comprehensive health care services. Involvement in community activities also plays a crucial role in creating a drug-free community. By fostering robust social support, providing educational opportunities, and encouraging engagement in positive activities, we can shape healthier, more resilient communities that are better equipped to withstand the threat of drugs.

**Domain of Risk and Protective Factors**

As a result of discussions from past studies, researchers have been able to identify various risk and protective factors for substance abuse. The table below shows the domains and subdomains of the results of previous studies on risk factors and protectors of substance abuse

Table 1

*Domain and sub-domain for risk and protective factors measures in preventing substance abuse*

No	Domain	Sub-domain	Source
i.	Individual risk factors	Rebellion	Azmawati et al., 2021; Lafreniere, 2013
		Early involvement in social problem behavior	Arcadio & Trujillo, 2023; Arthur et al., 2002
		Mental health symptoms	Azmawati et al., 2021; Alves et al., 2020
ii.	Individual protective factors	The value of spirituality within	Grim & Grim, 2019; Miller, 1998; Móró et al., 2011; Quinn, 2023; Coppola et al., 2021
		Self-control, or the ability to control thoughts, emotions, and behavior	Allahverdipour et al., 2006; Pokhrel et al., 2007; Rollins & Crandall, 2021
		Well-established social skills	Abbasi & Muhammad, 2022; Amini & Zeinab, 2020; Botvin, 2000
iii.	Peer risk factors	Delinquent behavior	Mustafa et al., 2022; Hawkins et al. 1992
		Friends who are involved in drug abuse	Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Otten et al. 2017; Nawi et al. 2021
		Lack of social skills	Masten et al. (2017)
iv.	Peer protective factors	Creating a positive peer group	Kim et al. (2015)
		Strengthening social skills	La Greca & Harrison, 2018
		Problem solving skills	Zimmerman et al. 2020
v.	Risk factors at school	Low level of commitment to education	Hawkins et al., 1992; Chao-Kai et al. 2023
		Academic failure	Bugbee et al., 2019; Crosnoe, 2006; Hawkins et al., 1992; Patrick et al., 2016; Abelman, 2017; Chao-Kai et al., 2023
vi.	Protective factors at school	Student participation in co-curricular or community activities	Alfirević et al., 2023; Arcadio & Trujillo, 2023; Elizabeth et al., 2015
		Intensifying awareness programs	Wan Anor et al., 2020
vii.	Risk factors in the family	Weaknesses in the family system	Lee et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022
		Unbalanced parenting style	Brezina, 2010; Mariana et al., 2019
		History of child abuse	Rebekah et al., 2023; Svingen et al., 2016

		High level of conflict	Edwards et al. 2018
		Involvement of family members in drug abuse	Johannessen et al. 2022
viii.	Protective factors in the family	Build a strong bond among family members	Littell et al., 2023; Edwards et al., 2018
		Encourage open communication	Miller, 2008; Pettigrew et al., 2018
		Implement supervision and control	Yamamoto, 2004; Chang et al., 2023
		Creating social support for children	Miller, 2008; Letourneau et al., 2023
ix.	Risk factors in the community	Availability of drugs in the community	Arcadio & Trujillo, 2023; Larrosa & Palomo, 2012
		High rates of crime and violence	Piquero et al., 2014; Reidy et al., 2020
		Extreme economic factors	Edwards et al., 2020; Martín 2013
		Lack of relationships and social ties	Lambe & Craig, 2017; Schaefer 2018
x.	Protective factors in the community	Creating a strong social support network	Hawkins et al. 2019; Resnick et al. 2020
		Involvement of community activities	Griffin et al. 2018

The table above has identified the domains and sub-domains of substance abuse prevention approaches. Among them are the domains of risk and protective factors to individuals, peers, at school, in families and local communities. By identifying these domains and sub-domains, we will be able to empower more effective and productive substance abuse prevention programs. Identifying these risk and protective factors can help in curbing cases of substance abuse that are increasingly prevalent throughout the world, especially in Malaysia.

### Limitation and Recommendation

The limitation of the study is that the researchers only focused on sources from previous studies by identifying the concept of risk factors and protective against individuals, peers, at school, in the family and in the local community. Therefore, for future researchers, it is proposed to expand the scope of this study to more effective prevention strategies such as enhancing awareness, spirituality values, enhancing self-locus of control and self-assertiveness skills as a prevention strategy for substance abuse.

### Conclusion

We acknowledge that the issue of drug abuse is a global crisis that continues to evolve, adversely affecting individuals, families, and communities worldwide. A preventive approach is the key to combating the problem of substance abuse and drugs before it becomes more widespread and difficult to control. By recognising and understanding the risk and protective factors, we can design more effective interventions to protect the younger generation from the dangers of substance abuse. Risk factors such as peer pressure, family instability, and lack

of community support can increase the likelihood of young people engaging in drug abuse. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to these elements and take appropriate steps to reduce risks. In the context of preventing substance abuse and drug addiction, a holistic approach involving various stakeholders, such as families, schools, communities, and law enforcement agencies, is the key to success. Through collaborative efforts to identify and mitigate risk factors while strengthening protective factors, we can build a brighter and drug-free future for the younger generation. This is a significant investment in their well-being and success, contributing to the overall development of the nation.

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