Risk factors in teenagers of the Telesecundaria in Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca, México: A screening study

Factores de riesgo en jóvenes de la Telesecundaria en Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca, México: Un estudio de tamizaje

Fatores de risco em jovens da Telesecundária em Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca, México: Um estudo de triagem

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Abstract

Introduction: Since the pandemic, the use of substances has increased exponentially, and during adolescence, teenagers tend to experiment with different substances that put their health at risk. For this reason, institutions have created programs for the prevention of drug use in adolescents. However, there are communities where, due to sociodemographic conditions, teenagers may incur certain health risks. **Objective:** To identify the students of the Santa Teresa Telesecundaria who are at risk of drug use and other associated factors, through screening with the support of the UNEME-CAPA Huajuapan unit. **Methodology:** A descriptive quantitative approach was used by applying the Problem Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers (POSIT) test, which evaluates seven risk areas in teenagers: Substance Use-Abuse, Mental Health, Family Relationships, Relationships with Friends, Educational Level, Work Interest, and Aggressive/Criminal Behavior. **Results:** Students incur in various risk factors, mainly in mental health and relationships with friends. **Conclusions:** The large number of teenagers with risk factors highlights the need for quality psychological care and the availability of material and human resources to provide this type of service to the entire population that requires.

Keywords: Addiction; Adolescent psychology; Coeducational schools; Education; Psychological effects.

Resumen

Introducción: El consumo de sustancias ha aumentado exponencialmente desde la pandemia, y durante la adolescencia los jóvenes suelen experimentar con diversas sustancias que ponen en riesgo su salud. Aunque se han establecido programas de prevención del consumo de drogas para adolescentes, existen comunidades donde las condiciones sociodemográficas pueden propiciar ciertos factores de riesgo. **Objetivo:** Identificar si los alumnos de la Telesecundaria de Santa Teresa que se encuentran en riesgo de consumo de drogas y otros factores, mediante un tamizaje con apoyo de la unidad UNEME-CAPA Huajuapan. **Metodología:** Se empleó un enfoque cuantitativo descriptivo mediante la aplicación de la prueba *Problem Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers (POSIT),* la cual evalúa 7 áreas de riesgo en adolescentes: Uso-Abuso de sustancias, Salud mental, Relaciones familiares, Relaciones con amigos, Nivel educativo, Interés laboral y Conducta agresiva/Delictiva. **Resultados:** Los estudiantes incurren en diversos factores de riesgo, destacando principalmente las áreas de salud mental y relación con amigos. **Conclusiones:** La alta prevalencia de jóvenes con factores de riesgo subrayan la necesidad de atención psicológica de calidad y la disponibilidad de recursos materiales y humanos para brindar servicio a la población que lo requiera.

Palabras clave: Adicción; Psicología del adolescente; Escuelas mixtas; Educación; Efectos psicológicos.

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Resumo

Introdução: Desde a pandemia, o uso de substâncias aumentou exponencialmente e, durante a adolescência, os jovens tendem a experimentar diferentes substâncias que colocam sua saúde em risco. Por esse motivo, as instituições criaram programas para a prevenção do uso de drogas em adolescentes. No entanto, existem comunidades onde, devido às condições sociodemográficas, os adolescentes podem incorrer em certos riscos à saúde. **Objetivo:** Identificar os alunos da Telesecundária Santa Teresa que estão em risco de uso de drogas e outros fatores associados, por meio de triagem com o apoio da unidade UNEME-CAPA Huajuapan. **Metodologia:** Foi utilizada uma abordagem quantitativa descritiva, aplicando o teste *POSIT (Problem Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers),* que avalia sete áreas de risco em adolescentes: uso e abuso de substâncias, saúde mental, relações familiares, relações com amigos, nível educacional, interesse pelo trabalho e comportamento agressivo/criminoso. **Resultados:** Os alunos apresentam vários fatores de risco, principalmente em saúde mental e relações com amigos. **Conclusões:** O grande número de adolescentes com fatores de risco destaca a necessidade de atendimento psicológico de qualidade e a disponibilidade de recursos materiais e humanos para prestar esse tipo de serviço a toda a população que necessita.

Palavras-chave: Dependência química; Psicologia do adolescente; Escolas mistas; Educação; Efeitos psicológicos.

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INTRODUCTION

Psychoactive substance use is one of the most important problems in Mexico. During the third communiqué from the Comisión Nacional contra las Adicciones (CONACID), the decriminalization of substance use was sought to address the problem from the public health area, with the objective of avoiding the segmentation of this vulnerable group and establishing strategies to generate quality primary mental health care, as there is an important link between the two to address (Comisión Nacional contra las Adicciones, 2022). However, it has been reported that since the pandemic, drug use increased by 15% in the country, and an additional 11% is estimated for the year 2030 (Branded Content, 2022). Furthermore, approximately 40% of adolescents worldwide do not perceive cannabis use as harmful, which has led to 36 million people suffering from a substance use disorder in Mexico during 2022.

This is alarming because many adolescents view substance use, such as cannabis, as normal and do not consider the various harms that drug use can cause; not only physical, but also social and psychological (Comisión Nacional contra las Adicciones, 2022). These harms include family problems, problems with friends, sexually transmitted diseases, aggressive/criminal behaviors, among others.

The definition of a drug has had various meanings over time, but currently, it is considered any substance that modifies the body's various processes through chemical substances (World Health Organization, 1994). There are various classifications of drugs, but this work will focus on the differentiation of legal and illegal drugs.

Legal drugs are those available in stores with a prescription or whose sale is permitted without one. Some examples include medications, alcoholic beverages, and tobacco (Barreto Bedoya et al., 2015). Illegal or illicit drugs are substances that are produced, distributed, and commercialized outside the legal frameworks of countries (Sánchez-Sosa et al., 2014). Specifically, in Mexico, illegal drugs include marijuana, cocaine, crystal meth, heroin, methamphetamines, etc.

Substance abuse is characterized by the repetitive use of a specific drug (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, 2023). This causes physical, legal, psychological, economic, social, and other problems. On the other hand, substance dependence involves the constant use of a drug, making it difficult for the individual to stop (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, 2023). If a period passes without consumption, the body enters something called withdrawal syndrome.

The prevention of substance use in adolescents has been a priority in Mexico for several years. During Felipe Calderón Hinojosa's presidential term (2006-2012), specifically in 2011, units called UNEME-CAPA or Nueva Vida Centers were founded. These operate as public centers responsible for primary care in addictions. Their objective is to generate timely detection to prevent the use of all types of substances and, at the same time, through a brief outpatient treatment, generate changes in people who decide to stop their use through accessible and quality treatment (Secretaría de Salud, 2015). However, it can be identified that substance use in the population between 12 and 18 years old is 10.3% (Comisión Nacional contra las Adicciones, 2021), resulting in approximately 2.5 million adolescents having consumed some type of drug in their lifetime.

Within this unit, a risk screening test for adolescents called the Problem Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers (POSIT) is used. This test consists of 81 items that inquire about seven possible risk

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factors that can generate complications in adolescents, which are: substance use-abuse, mental health, family relationships, relationships with friends, educational level, work interest, and aggressive/criminal behavior (Mariño et al., 1998b). For the global scale, the maximum possible score is 81 points, a score of 34 indicates the possible presence of risk, and the higher the score, the greater the risk for young people to initiate or increase their substance use.

Similarly, education is a high priority area. However, there are localities in much of the world where it is not easy to provide this service due to sociodemographic conditions. Faced with this problem, Mexico decided 55 years ago to create a program called Telesecundarias, which represents the union of digital and face-to-face models, thereby facilitating that people who are attending secondary school in communities with a high degree of marginalization can continue their studies (Gobierno de México, 2020). This program is an alternative that allows students greater educational coverage throughout the country regardless of demographic limitations.

Today there are several communities within Mexico where the only option to continue studies is through the Telesecundaria program. One in five students continues their studies after primary school thanks to this study model. In addition to being 48% of all secondary schools in the country, it generally serves students between 12 and 15 years old. However, there are occasions when young people and adults who decide to resume their studies after a period are accepted (Gobierno de México, 2020). One of the objectives of all Telesecundarias is to ensure that their students acquire knowledge that allows them to develop their learning through information technologies, in addition to collaborative work inside and outside the classroom.

Students who attend Telesecundarias are typically in adolescence. This stage is characterized by offering the possibility to learn and develop various strengths that will be of great support during adult life, in addition to generating various changes at physical, social, and psychological levels (UNICEF, 2020). In this stage of human development, various factors can cause adolescents to lose their integral health. These are known as risk factors (Herrera, 1999). They are identified by altering, damaging, or diminishing some of the person's spheres, including substance use, family problems, school difficulties, economic problems, poorly oriented sexuality, among others. However, timely detection can anticipate adequate attention to the individual's needs and thus prevent possible future risks.

Specifically in the Heroica Ciudad de Huajuapan de León, located in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, Mexico, there are various risk factors that can lead adolescents to initiate substance use. These include a 40% unemployment rate of the population. In addition, most of its economic activities are informal and include commerce, accommodation services, and food and beverage preparation. Furthermore, at the end of 2022, remittances registered an amount of US$50.6 million (Data México, 2022), indicating migration by the population of this community.

Regarding education, it can be identified that the main academic levels of the population are secondary school with 29% of the total population, followed by primary school with 24.6% and high school or baccalaureate with 21.1% of the population. This means that only 14.8% of the people in this city have a university degree (Data México, 2022). The remaining percentages cover technical studies at both secondary and high school levels, as well as specialties and postgraduate degrees.

In March 2023, the UNEME-CAPA Huajuapan unit carried out a screening of all students at the Santa Teresa Telesecundaria, located in the Heroica Ciudad de Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca, Mexico, to identify

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possible risk factors to which adolescents in this institution are exposed. A total of 106 students were evaluated, of whom 56 were women and 50 were men. The screening allowed the identification of potential individuals who might tend to consume alcohol or other psychoactive substances (Connors & Volk, 2003). Thanks to this information, an action plan can be generated to prevent or reduce substance use in adolescents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Adolescent Development Theory

During adolescence, individuals seek their identity and the role they will play in society. It is during this stage that the identity crisis arises, along with the development of a sense of belonging and personal growth in relation to societal expectations and the surrounding context. On the other hand, society is constantly changing, which makes it more difficult for adolescents to establish their personal and social identity and define their role within their environment (Erikson, 1968).

According to the search for identity, adolescents must find a balance between the values, beliefs, and roles presented in their context, thus finding their own sense of identity. The differences in groups presented in society provide an opportunity for adolescents to find a sense of belonging (Erikson, 1968). Family, educational institutions, and social groups are of great importance in this process of identity search. If a sense of meaning is not found at this stage of development, adolescents will experience confusion of social roles.

Early Intervention Theory

Early intervention in adolescents who are at risk is essential for preventing criminal and delinquent behavior among young people. There are various risk factors that can lead to such behaviors, including family problems, behavioral issues, or academic difficulties (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Engaging in delinquent activities at an early age promotes a high rate of continued criminal behavior into adulthood. It is important to intervene with adolescents by first recognizing these risk factors.

The involvement of professionals in the presence of risk factors has a significant impact on changing adolescent behavior. There are several methods to intervene with adolescents from their family and educational contexts. However, strategies must be developed to address the various factors affecting the adolescent (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Intervening in the development process of at-risk youth is necessary to improve different areas of their lives and promote proper adolescent development within the society in which they live.

METHODOLOGY

APPROACH AND TYPE OF STUDY

The present study adopts a quantitative and descriptive-cross-sectional approach. Its purpose is to

identify and describe the prevalence of various risk factors in a specific adolescent population at a given moment.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The study population consisted of all students from the Santa Teresa Telesecundaria, located in the Heroica Ciudad de Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca. A total of 106 students were evaluated, of whom 50 were men and 56 were women, with ages ranging between 12 and 15 years. The sample is census-based, as it included all students present at the institution at the time of evaluation.

INFORMATION COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The Problem Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers (POSIT) was used. This questionnaire was developed and validated in the United States in 1991 by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institutes of Health. Its original version had 139 items integrating 10 risk areas for adolescents (Rahdert, 1991). However, after validation by the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 1997, the Mexican version of this test has 81 items that identify seven risk areas for adolescents aged 11 to 19 with any schooling and occupation (Mariño et al., 1998a). It can be applied individually or collectively using an answer sheet and a question booklet. Evaluated individuals must fill in the bubbles affirmatively or negatively depending on certain situations they have identified in their daily lives.

This test has been used in various public health institutions in Mexico since 2008 because its application and interpretation allow identifying the possible level of risk an adolescent has in the seven areas explored, in addition to providing information that can be explored in depth during interviews conducted by health personnel (Guerrero & León, 2008). The objective of using this test is to identify the risk young people have of initiating or increasing substance use, regardless of their sex, socioeconomic level, educational level, or occupation.

PROCEDURE

The instrument was applied in groups with 2 supervisors overseeing the evaluated group. Each participant was given an answer sheet. It was explained that the information was confidential, and participants were asked to be as honest as possible when answering the test. Students were asked to fill in their full name, age, sex, school name, and the date of the test application in the personal data section.

Subsequently, the number of questions on the test was explained, and the two possible response options (Yes, No) were indicated. Students marked their answers based on their opinion. Then, one of the evaluators began reading the questions, ensuring there were no doubts about the meaning or interpretation of the questions. The estimated time was 15 to 30 minutes. Upon finishing the reading, students were asked if there were any doubts or unanswered items, and if the answer was affirmative, the indicated question was read again.

To conclude the application, the questionnaires from each student were collected without reviewing personal data or answers. The students' time and availability were thanked, and it was announced that information would be delivered, establishing mutual agreements and commitments with both the student body and teaching staff.

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The collective application was carried out by grades in the institution. The first application was to groups 1st "A" and 1st "B," totaling 36 students, 17 of whom were men and 19 were women. The second application was to groups 2nd "A" and 2nd "B," with a total of 34 students, 15 of whom were men and 19 women. The last application was to groups 3rd "A" and 3rd "B," totaling 36 students, 18 of whom were men and 18 women, giving a total of 106 screened students aged between 12 and 16 years.

INFORMATION ANALYSIS

An Excel program was used for scoring and interpreting the test. The responses of each student were entered to generate a database of all evaluated students and another identifying their grade and group (Araujo et al., 2018). A score of 34 or higher was considered "at risk," indicating that the higher the student's score, the greater the existing risk.

RESULTS

To determine whether a teenager is at overall risk, the scores obtained in each of the assessed risk areas were summed. If the total score was equal or greater than 34, the student was at total risk. Conversely, if the score was equal or less than 33, the student was considered not at risk. After scoring and interpreting the responses given by all screened students, it was found that 66 students were at total risk, representing 62.26% of the student community, while the remaining 40 students, equivalent to 37.74%, were not at risk. This indicates that most of the students at this institution fall into the total risk category.

Among the 66 students identified as being at total risk, 37 were male, accounting for 56.06% of those at risk, while the remaining 29, equivalent to 43.93%, were female. Thus, the majority of those showing total risk scores were male. In contrast, among the 40 students not at risk, 13 were male, representing 32.5% of the non-risk group, while the remaining 27, equivalent to 67.5%, were female. Therefore, most female students showed scores placing them outside the risk category (Table 1).

Table 1
Overall results for risk and non-risk among students at the Telesecundaria de Santa Teresa, Huajuapan de León

	Males		Females		
Ages	12-14	15-17	12-14	15-17	**Total**
Total risk	34	3	27	2	66
No risk	9	4	27	0	40

Note: Prepared by the authors based on test results.

Regarding each specific risk factor assessed by the POSIT, the results for the student community are as follows:

Substance Use/Abuse

For this area, any student who obtained a score equal to or greater than 1 was considered at risk. Of

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the 106 students evaluated with the POSIT, a total of 33 were found to be at risk in this area, representing 31.13% of those screened. Based on these results, it was identified that 21 of the students at risk for substance use/abuse were male, accounting for 63.64% of the risk in this area, while the remaining 12, representing 36.36%, were female (Table 2).

Table 2

Overall risk results for Substance Use/Abuse

	Substance Use/Abuse				
	Males		Females		
Ages	12-14	15-17	12-14	15-17	**Total**
Risk	19	2	10	2	33

Note: Prepared by the authors based on test results.

From these findings, it was determined that fewer than half of the 106 screened students are at risk for substance use/abuse. However, males showed a higher percentage than females, which was also the area with the fewest students at risk. The presence of risk does not necessarily mean that they are using or abusing a substance; it may also indicate that they are surrounded by a family member, friend, neighbor, or acquaintance who consumes substances nearby or has offered them some at some point.

Mental Health

For this scale, any student who scored 5 or higher was considered at risk. In this area, 95 students were identified as at risk, representing 89.22% of the total student body. Of these, 46 students at risk were male, accounting for 48.42% of the risk, while the remaining 49 students, representing 51.58%, were female (Table 3).

Table 3

Overall risk results for Mental Health

	Mental Health				
	Males		Females		
Ages	12-14	15-17	12-14	15-17	**Total**
Risk	39	7	47	2	95

Note: Prepared by the authors based on test results

These findings indicate that more than half of the 106 screened students are at risk in this area, with a higher percentage among females than males. Additionally, this was the second area with the highest number of students at risk. Adolescents at risk in this scale may exhibit difficulties in managing anxiety, frustration, and stress, as well as symptoms associated with depression. Adolescence is a period full of changes; therefore, adolescents often obtain high scores in this area (Papalia et al., 2009), as they are surrounded by stimuli that may overwhelm them, and they may lack the necessary tools to cope with these situations.

Family Relationships

In this area, a teenager was considered at risk if they scored 3 or higher. Of the 106 students screened,

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66 were found to be at risk in their family relationships, equivalent to 62.26% of the total student community. Specifically, 42 of these students were male, accounting for 63.63% of those at risk in this area, while the remaining 24, representing 36.36%, were female (Table 4).

Table 4

Overall risk results for Family Relationships

	Family Relationships				
	Males		**Females**		
Ages	12-14	15-17	12-14	15-17	**Total**
Risk	36	6	22	2	66

Note: Prepared by the authors based on test results.

This indicates that more than half of the 106 students evaluated with the POSIT are at risk in this area, with a higher percentage among males than females. Although this is one of the areas with fewer adolescents at risk, it is significant. The family relationships scale identifies how adolescents relate to their authority figures at home—specifically, whether there is trust, how problems are solved, whether the adolescent feels their parent or guardian knows who they are, and the communication patterns within the household (Jaramillo Paladinez, 2018). Understanding the characteristics of the relationship between the adolescent and their guardian allows us to identify certain behaviors in the adolescent's social circles.

Peer Relationships

In this area, a teenager was considered at risk if they scored 1 or higher. Of the 106 students screened, 98 were found to be at risk, equivalent to 92.45% of the total student population. Specifically, 49 of these were male, representing 50% of those at risk, and the other 49 were female, thus completing the total of students evaluated (Table 5).

Table 5

Overall risk results for Peer Relationships

	Peer Relationships				
	Males		**Females**		
Ages	12-14	15-17	12-14	15-17	**Total**
Risk	42	7	47	2	98

Note: Prepared by the authors based on test results.

From this, it was determined that more than half of the 106 students evaluated with the POSIT are at risk in their relationships with peers. This is the only area where results were equal between males and females, and it was also the area with the highest number of students at risk. This risk area focuses primarily on how adolescents relate to their peers, as well as their sense of belonging to social groups, especially among friends. Peer relationships in adolescence can lead young people to adopt certain behavioral patterns to feel part of a social group (Ángeles Páramo, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial to identify how adolescents manage their relationships with their peers.

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Educational Level

In this area, a teenager was considered at risk if they scored 5 or higher. Of the total students screened, 82 were found to be at risk in this scale, representing 77.35% of the school's students. Of this total, 48 of the students at risk were male, corresponding to 58.53% of the total, while the remaining 34, representing 41.46%, were female (Table 6).

Table 6
Overall risk results for Educational Level

	Educational Level				
	Males		Females		
Ages	12-14	15-17	12-14	15-17	**Total**
Risk	41	7	32	2	82

Note: Prepared by the authors based on test results.

This data shows that more than half of the school's student body is at risk in terms of educational level. This was the third highest scale in the entire evaluation and had a higher number of males at risk within this scale.

Occupational Interest

In this area, adolescents were considered at risk if they scored 3 or higher. Of the total students screened, 35 were found to be at risk in this scale, representing 33.01% of the student body. Of this total, 25 were male, representing 71.42% of those at risk, while the remaining 10, representing 28.57%, were female (Table 7).

Table 7.
Overall risk results for Occupational Interest

	Occupational Interest				
	Males		Females		
Ages	12-14	15-17	12-14	15-17	**Total**
Risk	22	3	10	0	35

Note: Prepared by the authors based on test results.

From these figures, it was identified that less than half of the student body is at risk in occupational interest. However, there were significantly more male students at risk in this scale compared to females. This was the second scale with the fewest adolescents at risk. High scores in this area are mainly characterized by how the adolescent functions in a formal job, including earning a salary and managing job responsibilities and obligations. It is important to note that some young people have not yet started their working life; therefore, those students are marked as not at risk in this area because, in the absence of any prior experience, they are directly considered outside the scope of labor-related risk.

Aggressive/Delinquent Behavior

In this scale, a teenager needed to score 5 or higher to be considered at risk. Of the 106 students evalua-

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ted using the POSIT, 73 were found to be at risk, representing 68.86%. Among these students, 37 were male, representing 50.68% of those at risk, while the remaining 36, representing 49.31%, were female (Table 8).

Table 8

Overall risk results for Aggressive/Delinquent Behavior

	Aggressive/Delinquent Behavior				
	Males		Females		
Ages	12-14	15-17	12-14	15-17	Total
Risk	31	6	35	1	73

Source: Prepared by the authors based on test results

From these results, it was determined that more than half of the student body is at risk in this area. There was a slightly higher number of males than females at risk, although the difference was minimal—just one student. This risk area focuses mainly on identifying how students adapt to following social rules and whether they have close contacts, whether friends, family, or classmates, who regularly break rules or laws. Such behaviors can cause problems in the future (Córdoba, 2014), including difficulties in social adaptation and the possibility of these behaviors escalating into minor criminal acts.

Table 9

Overall results obtained from the screening of the Telesecundaria de Santa Teresa

Risk Area	Males		Females		Total
	Ages				
	12-14	15-17	12-14	15-17	
Substances Use/Abuse	19	2	10	2	33
Mental Health	39	7	47	2	95
Family Relationships	36	6	22	2	66
Peer Relationships	42	7	47	2	98
Educational Level	41	7	32	2	82
Occupational Interest	22	3	10	0	35
Aggressive/Delinquent Behavior	31	6	35	1	73
Total Risk	34	3	27	2	66
No Risk	9	4	27	0	40
Total Students Screened	43	7	54	2	106

Note: Prepared by the authors based on test results.

From all the information presented above, it was determined that most students at the Telesecundaria de Santa Teresa are at total risk. It was found that, in most areas, males are more likely to be at risk, except in Mental Health, where females exceed males. In peer relationships, both sexes showed equal numbers of students at risk.

The areas with the highest number of students at risk were Peer Relationships with 98 students,

followed by Mental Health with 95, and Educational Level with 82 students at risk. Conversely, the areas with the fewest students at risk were Substance Use/Abuse with 33 students, followed by Occupational Interest with 35, and Family Relationships with 66 students at risk.

Based on all the screening results obtained, the next phase of the process will involve inviting the parents and/or guardians of students identified as being at total risk to the UNEME-CAPA Huajuapan unit. The goal is to offer accessible, high-quality psychological counseling and to develop a work plan involving both teaching staff and students to provide them with tools to address various issues related to the risk areas previously identified.

DISCUSSION

Screening is an activity carried out by the UNEME-CAPA unit since its founding in 2011, with the purpose of identifying students who are prone to starting or increasing substance use. Since the start of the pandemic, this activity was set aside due to the transition to virtual classes; however, beginning in mid-2022, it was gradually resumed. This study is characterized by collecting information based on the real-life experiences of the students rather than solely from documentary sources. For this reason, it is closely aligned with the reality experienced by the students.

Since the pandemic, several studies have indicated that substance use among adolescents has increased exponentially worldwide (Branded Content, 2022), estimating an increase in drug use of approximately 11% by 2030. It has also been mentioned that synthetic drugs have shown a rise both in distribution and in purchase/sale among adolescents, suggesting that this may be a result of situations that have generated anxiety in young people.

In the specific case of the Telesecundaria de Santa Teresa, screening was conducted in March 2023, following the guidelines for administering the POSIT test to adolescents (Guerrero & León, 2008). It was identified that a large portion of the school community is at total risk, and that males exceed females in most risk areas. However, in mental health area, females showed higher risk levels than males.

The results obtained for Substance Use/Abuse are entirely different from those reported in various media sources, as this area had the lowest number of students at risk. Nevertheless, the existence of high risk in students' mental health may lead them to seek relief from discomforting situations, and one of the ways adolescents often do this is through substance use (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2022). There is a close relationship between mental health and substance use, and, in the specific case of the results obtained from this institution's screening, it was identified that a large part of the student body is at risk in this area. Therefore, although currently a minority of students are at risk for substance use/abuse, if the issues in the other high-risk areas are not addressed, there could be an increase in substance use in the future.

It is important to mention that the Aggressive/Delinquent Behavior area identifies adolescents with a tendency toward breaking social norms. Given that there are substances that are illegal in Mexico, it is crucial to pay attention to this area. Moreover, although males scored higher than females, the difference was only one student. Therefore, in general terms, sex does not necessarily determine whether an adolescent may exhibit tendencies toward breaking norms.

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These results allow us to understand the general condition of the adolescents attending this institution and to design strategies not only for the student body but also for teachers and the parents or guardians of the students. Such activities include preventive talks, high-quality psychological counseling for students, health fairs addressing high-risk areas, and the search for institutions that can support young people in situations beyond the capacity of the Telesecundaria or the UNEME-CAPA unit.

Specifically, the limitation of this research is that the screening and analysis of results were conducted only in one institution in the entire city of Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca. Additionally, this institution has a student body of only 106 students. Therefore, it is essential to continue conducting these activities to identify whether this situation is present in other secondary schools, high schools, or universities, or whether this is an isolated case within this community.

For all these reasons, the work carried out by the UNEME-CAPA Huajuapan unit is of great importance. However, the reality is that it does not have enough staff to perform preventive activities outside the unit while simultaneously providing psychological counseling services within the unit. Moreover, there is a lack of materials necessary to meet all the work requests from both public and private institutions. Thus, the question arises: if the government is truly interested in preventing psychoactive substance use, why do units like these not have the personnel or resources necessary to carry out this essential work?

CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained from the screening conducted at the Telesecundaria of Santa Teresa in the city of Huajuapan de León, Oaxaca, indicated that students are at risk in various areas, but especially in mental health and peer relationships. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to how young people respond to external stimuli, as the aforementioned areas could lead students to initiate or increase drug use.

It is important to mention that the areas of Substance Use/Abuse and Occupational Interest showed fewer students at risk. This suggests that, for the moment, most of the student body is not at risk of substance use. However, due to the social context in which these adolescents are immersed, they could develop substance-related problems in the future.

For this reason, the UNEME-CAPA Huajuapan unit will offer free psychological counseling to students who have been identified as at total risk, as well as to those who scored high in the Substance Use/Abuse area, even if they did not reach the minimum 34 points required to be considered at risk. The goal is to provide them with tools to help them recognize the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual consequences associated with drug use.

However, considering the context of the city of Huajuapan de León, it must be acknowledged that the UNEME-CAPA unit is not able to meet all the demands related to risk factors and the number of people seeking high-quality treatment. There is also a lack of staff and materials to work in the institutions that request support.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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